

WRITERS' RESPONSES 2008

I just want to say to you how much I appreciated the festival and all the people I have met in Berlin. I will keep a very special place in my mind for these sunny and exciting days with all of you! I hope we can meet each other somewhere in the future...

Anne-Laure Bondoux, France

It is much easier to love literature than to love its writers, who are generally considered to be an eccentric or even difficult species (I hesitate to use the word human), narcissistic, miserly and ungrateful. But this is exactly what Ulrich Schreiber does year after year through personal initiative, accepting sleepless nights, debt, envy, disfavour, and criticism in order to find and invite lecturers and poets from far away lands to come to Berlin and read a few sentences of works, which, since published, quite possibly no longer even interest their authors.

"A writer is a person, who convinces themselves of the illusion, that further works are to be expected from them": This definition of literary activity comes from the prematurely deceased Reinhard Lettau, and it has the advantage of not only being funny, but also accurate. Out of reasons of self-preservation, it is better to distance oneself when dealing with this group of people (Plato was not alone in wanting to exclude poets from his state). Disregarding this advice, my friend Uli Schreiber gives of himself not just sporadically, but restlessly throughout the entire year, in order, for a few autumn days in Berlin, to invite and meet these writers. In doing so, he unknowingly follows in the steps of Hans Werner Richter, founding father of Group 47; Walter Höllerer, initiator of the Literary Colloquium; and Paul Engle, founder and overseer of the International Writer's Workshop of Iowa: Three legendary institutions, whose fruition coincided with the personal commitment of its leaders. He is entitled to acknowledgment and thanks, because without Ulrich Schreiber and his friendly team there would be no International Literature Festival in Berlin.

Hans Christoph Buch, Germany

I would like to thank you once more for the festival. It was really a great time there. I am missing the tent and the friends. In my opinion the festival was perfectly organised and the staff carried a tremendous work being busy from morning until night. I cannot remember any case where something went wrong. We in Albania have an expression: precise like a German.

So much people were involved in the festival: children, parents, teachers, translators, writers, literature-lovers, volunteers, so we writers thought some time that were the centre of this literary world. I was deeply touched by the interest of the German children concerning the literature of other countries. Reading in public was a new experience for me and I will try to do it in my country also.

Also I am very grateful to the volunteering staff for paving our way everywhere. The idea of the tent close to the main venue was fantastic. It created a romantic atmosphere. Drinking a glass of wine and debating on literature in a tent is really romantic. I love it because the writers are a little bit like gypsies. They like wild nature and tents where you are not under the pressure of huge buildings and turmoil. And the people serving at the tent so kindly came to light a candle in your table.

Viktor Canosinaj, Albania

The festival was wonderful. I was especially happy to meet fascinating writers like Nancy Huston, Amitav Ghosh and Nuruddin Farah and to discover new ones like Grada Kilomba. It was a great moment of communication and joy.

Maryse Condé, Guadeloupe/France/USA

Once in a while an opportunity such as this comes along for a writer. The doors it opens are felt both immediately and in the future. Berlin for me was one such opportunity. I had two great readings. I met a wonderful readership. I interacted with a lot of fantastic people in the industry. I had the rare opportunity of witnessing first hand your Director in a pair of green trousers (please edit that) and finally, I am sure I set a record... I broke my tooth during the festival. Absolutely unique. Thanks for inviting me and making me a part of the 2008 festival.

Amma Darko, Ghana

Bravo – it was a very successful festival. I am very glad to have taken part, and meeting the team and the other authors was a great experience. I would like to thank Mr. Ulrich Schreiber for the invitation, his confidence and the friendly welcome to Berlin.

Fatou Diome, Senegal/France

Germans are known for their organising talents, but at the International Literature Festival they are more than *gründlich*. The people there are awfully nice, they really care for their authors. And the audience is great too.

Adriaan van Dis, Netherlands

Thanks to all the team of the festival. I'm back safely at Nantes. And I keep vivid memories of moments I lived, and people I've met.

Kossi Efoui, Togo/France

Never, really never, have I had a better, more fulfilling experience at a similar large festival, as I did at the International Literature Festival in Berlin. To describe Miriam Möllers' organisation as simply perfect would not be enough. Every small detail was taken seriously, and I really had the feeling that I was making friends whose only desire was to wholeheartedly support me. In addition to the actual purpose for my attendance, I was also treated to a wonderful time in Berlin. I have previously attended other such exhibitions catering to younger audiences, and was impressed, as well as the other authors, at how well the young guests at this festival were engaged and interested. This can only be accomplished when contact between the festival management and local schools is a priority. It would greatly calm my fears concerning youth literacy when this example would be followed by all.

Wolf Erlbruch, Germany

This week – a celebration of books and of reading – will always remain an important memory to me. The meeting of such diverse people, which I was able to do with little Tobie Lolness, the perfect events, the hospitality, the organisation, the friendliness of all the volunteers, the energy with which the Children and Youth Programme was lead: all of these things were absolutely unrivalled. Particularly, my visit to the Berlin ballet school has left me with a lasting impression. The young dancers performed whole sections of my book onstage, and the readings with my translator, interpreter and friend Tobias Schäffel made it possible to carry out an incredibly rich dialog. The fact that he could attend was a true enjoyment and indulgence... I hope that our collaboration will continue in the future! I already travelled around a lot with my new novel, but my time at the Berlin Literature Festival will still mean a lot to me in the future and leave its traces in my work.

Timothée de Fombelle, France

I had a great stay in Berlin. I met with friends who live there, had some great food, some nice whisky in the tent, met the nice people from the festival, nice journalists and photographers, had some nice walks around town, and a reading that went well, everything was fine. So thanks to the festival for inviting me.

Jon Fosse, Norway

Ilb is one of the few literary festivals which gather real literary lions in a human-size ambient. Under the tent in the cosy back yard of the Berliner Festspiele, you can meet face to face and talk naturally to authors that were only books to you. And the discovery for me this year were the new poets from Africa.

Georgi Gospodinov, Bulgaria

Dear Miriam, Thank you so much for your hospitality in Berlin! John and I both had a wonderful time, and the festival was a great success. I hope you've had a chance to unwind a bit now that it is over. [...] Best regards, Sarah (wife of John Green)

John Green, USA

Some weeks have already past since I left Berlin. I would just like to thank every member of the team so much for inviting me to be part of a very special and professional event. It would definitely be one of the most memorable events in my career as picture book illustrator.

The contact with the fellow illustrators, the German public, especially the children, has been very special and very valuable in getting to know myself as an illustrator and lecturer. I hope that I have added something to the children's book environment in your city.

I simply have to congratulate you, and especially Miriam and her team of capable and friendly young people, for doing everything possible to make the events run smoothly.

Thank you for your innovative thinking in organising events. I have, all the time, been very aware of really hard work and hours of dedication of the staff. Miriam's enthusiasm and constant professionalism comes to my mind again and again. I must also refer to the well organised logistics in connection with my travel and accommodation. I had a good time, a comfortable stay and felt at home.

I appreciate this opportunity to could have been part of an important international festival and getting to know the exciting city of Berlin.

All the best for the future and be assured of my ongoing support of a splendid event. I hope to spread the word and be a worthy ambassador of your festival!

Piet Grobler, South Africa

I am back safely and still savouring memories from the festival. My impressions from the festival are all positive ones, I must say. The organisation was perfect, the audience was polite and interested and full of questions. I am really glad I went, and you can be sure I'll come back any time I am invited. Thanks so much for having me.

Helon Habila, Nigeria/USA

I would like to thank you with all my heart for a very special time in Berlin, and for an excellent festival. So far I have not attended any festival so well prepared and organized as yours. I hope you will continue to work with literature for children and youths in one way or another, or else it will be a great loss.

Stian Hole, Norway

Thank you for a wonderful experience at the ilb last weekend. Your hospitality and generosity are unequalled! I've been to many festivals in the past few years – this was the best, by far. Thank you again.

Leonie Joubert, South Africa

This is first to thank you so much for the wonderful time at the festival and please thank everybody for such a wonderful, wonderful time. I am in absolute awe of your energy, efficiency, kindness and I can't exhaust all. I really had a wonderful time. I must thank you so much for making sure I felt at home.

I cannot believe the interest people showed in our work at the festival.

Susan Kiguli, Uganda

Hi, Berlin was wonderful, the festival was wonderful, and you were wonderful. Thank you. Now, my emails will be more frequent, and maybe a little bit longer. I am now in Amsterdam, and will board my flight in an hour and a half. [...] Strange as it sounds, I miss you! Joseph

Joseph Lemasolai Lekuton, Kenya

The festival was organized in the best way and took place in the House of the Berliner Festspiele, in rooms which left nothing more to desire acoustically. The presentation of the evening readings, just like the personal support, was first-class.

Michael Lentz, Germany

Just a short email to say thanks for making my stay in Berlin so very enjoyable. Everything about it was good: good food, good wine, good company. And everything running so smoothly. When I left my hotel for Tegel the car was scheduled to pick me up at 11.25 – it actually arrived at 11.24! In UK, not many festivals have cars, let alone ones that arrive so punctually. So thanks, for all of it. I enjoyed every second.

Tim Liardet, UK

I am very happy to have taken part in the festival, the wonderful audience present at my reading remains in my thoughts still.

Irina Liebmann, Germany

I had a lovely time. I especially was impressed by the devotion of the entire "crew". Hopefully we'll meet again in the near future!

Ted van Lieshout, Netherlands

The Festival was a wonderful event in my European tour. I think that the Festival in Berlin is a very important meeting for writers of the whole world. Berlin is a nice place and the Festival's team work to a very high level. Thank you again.

Vasyl Machno, Ukraine/USA

Locations in towns where authors can meet other authors don't really exist any more. Only festivals, fairs and conferences remain. One of the nicest of these is most certainly the International Festival in Berlin. Such opportunities to celebrate books are welcomed, to avoid losing track of their importance or forgetting that we are part of a community with good reasons to discuss and to make decisions for the good of everyone (however usually we are people who work alone and in solitude).

Dacia Maraini, Italy

As for the Festival, I loved the atmosphere, found the organization perfect and the staff very pleasant. I had the opportunity to talk quickly to Malorie Blackman, whose books I hope to be able to publish, and I got to know Piet Grobler and Joseph Lekuton, very pleasant people in very different ways. So it was all very useful for my job as well, although I liked so much to be pampered just as a writer for a handful of days... The hotel was very good indeed. And the timing of the events was enough not to get too tired – you know, talking about oneself can be very tiring.

Beatrice Masini, Italy

The International Literature Festival is one of the most important festivals I know. The quality of the authors invited, of the events and the whole organisation is stunning, especially because the atmosphere is both professional and warm.

Marie NDiaye, France

The Berlin Literature Festival was one of the most interesting experiences I have lived in children's literature. You work really well. Congratulations for everything. I only can celebrate the high level of the festival and suggest to continue in the same way. The possibility to meet readers is really good. I find the way to present texts from other cultures interesting and original – really nice. I have also found the contact with the students who assisted you interesting. They are really wonderful people, so kind, so open and disposed to help in every moment.

Xosé Antonio Neira Cruz, Spain

What an amazing four days – I loved it all: the tent, the other writers (and illustrators!), the readings, the city, and of course you and your wonderful team. I can't remember a festival where I felt so well-taken-care-of, and I arrived back in London full of ideas and cross-fertilization and a burning desire to come back to Berlin. Thank you doesn't begin to express all that I want to say, but it will have to do for now.

Meg Rosoff, USA/UK

Thanks for your hospitality in Berlin. Now I have a good memory of Berlin and your festival. Your group of volunteers was so nice and friendly. I miss them and I am thinking about them almost every day.

Farshid Shafiee, Iran

In the train back home I already missed the festival. It was strange not to have at all times ten volunteers at my disposal queueing up ready to fulfill any wish I might have. I miss the non-stop fanning of my ego. So it is a big omission of the festival: after-care to help people to pick up their own lives again. So if I turn to drugs and alcohol, and I someday find myself lying in the gutter you are to blame...

The things I was involved in were perfectly prepared and organized and I enjoyed them immensely. And I am so sorry I completely forgot to thank the two volunteers that assisted me. Perhaps you will say that to them.

What amazed me was the relaxed atmosphere of the festival. You would associate a big festival as this was with frayed nerved people hectically scurrying to and from, sporting tense faces, with blue bags under their eyes, shouting orders, answering questions while running. But nothing of it, I frequently saw the ones responsible for the welfare of the festival chatting and strolling around as if they had not one worry in the world. For me, there really was not one thing to worry about, because everything was organized in an impeccable manner and my tiniest wishes were satisfied almost before I could utter them. If I did not know better I would have thought I was the only person that mattered during the whole festival. And there was this lady, this Miriam Möllers who seemed to never forget anything and remember everything you ever said to her (she should

donate her brains to science). And no doubt it is thanks to her also all the volunteers who had to attend to me were perfectly trained and knew all about my work, they could without hesitation produce my name correctly at any given time (no mean feat this!). And I would like to thank Manon Scheffel for her fantastic interpreting.

What impressed me of the readings, was how well prepared they were. The organizers really took their job seriously and I am sure they have not only “read” my books in advance, they must have been “studying” them. And I think the pupils were much more civilized and better mannered than the children over here in Holland.

Do I have any suggestions for the festival next year? Yes, I have: Don't change one thing.

Thé Tjong-Khing, Indonesia/Netherlands

Let me thank you so much for the opportunity you and your colleagues have given me to meet with such nice and clever people. The festival is really a wonderful cultural event that you can be very proud of. Thank you all for your hospitality. I learnt a lot from the events which I attended.

Ibrahima Thioub, Senegal

Once more I would like to say thank you for the wonderful time in Berlin. The impressions were so diverse, the people so genuine and open, and the support and organization perfect. I count myself lucky to have been allowed to take part this year.

Einar Turkowski, Germany

I would just like to thank you once again for your tremendous support and assistance in Berlin. Thanks to your thorough planning of every detail. The event was a fabulous experience for me. I am so grateful for everything.

Nahoko Uehashi, Japan

I had a wonderfully interesting time in Berlin. The Festival was superbly organised and it was a pleasure to encounter such lively and attentive audiences. My thanks to you and your colleagues for all your kindness and generosity during my stay.

Ivan Vladislavić, South Africa

The Berlin experience was a very good and stimulating one. That goes for everything, not only the stimulating readings: the initial contacts, the planning, the hotel and the very good feeling of being taken care of with attendant followers to the readings, the waiting car etc. All in all – I enjoyed the Berlin days tremendously.

Mats Wahl, Sweden

I saw Alberto Manguel in Paris last week and I told him what a marvellous time I'd had in Berlin and how sensitively and courteously you arranged things. I meant to write before to tell you how relieved I was that my session seemed to go well, and to thank you for all you did to help it.

Marina Warner, UK