



The Festival Experience

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BEING INVITED TO APPEAR at a literary festival is a truly enjoyable aspect of the writer's life. Yes, it's flattering to be asked, but these events represent much more than an ego boost. Festivals connect us to readers and fellow authors, they help us sell books and increase our reach...and they can also be something of a lifeline.

If that statement sounds dramatic, think about it. As writers, we spend our time holed up at our desks, in our offices, sheds, beds...wherever we feel most comfortable crafting our work. And to those of you who felt a pang of recognition at the word 'beds': there is no judgment here. Whatever works.

We need solitude because it allows time to stand still, giving ideas space to appear. However, we, as humans and as writers (and I'm not suggesting the two are mutually exclusive) we also need faces, new spaces and places — and not just for networking or research. The online world fools us into thinking we can have it all without leaving our screens, but we can't, and festivals reintroduce us to the outside world after a long period of creating magic in the dark. They are *yang* to the *yin* of writing life. And, while it may feel strange as you emerge, squinting as the sunshine of publicity beams down upon you, it is good, it is healthy and your books — and you — deserve it.

It's also a gift to be in the company of your readers, talking to them directly, hearing their thoughts. Some of your audience may have been with you since the beginning, some might have just discovered you because...well,



here you are. They'd bought tickets because Ian Rankin was appearing, wandered into your talk to kill time and, lo and behold, you've won some new fans. They might even buy your book at the post-talk signing.

This is one of the great things about all festivals, not just literary ones. I've lost count of the number of artists I've seen live and become a fan of because I was saving my spot in the crowd for another band I liked. It's similar at the book festival. The force of a writer's personality, and the life they give to their characters during a reading, can attract an army of followers who wouldn't otherwise have discovered your work — there is so much out there, after all.

Finally, festivals connect us with contemporaries, publishers and editors in an informal way, far preferable to a cold email or a meeting at a trade fair where pressure is high. You get out what you put in though, so go to events, listen to your peers. We all learn from each other, no matter the genre. Whether over coffee or something stronger in the green room or at a fellow writer's talk, we can widen and strengthen the network of writers nationwide and beyond. Festivals give us the ideal opportunity to support each other, and support each other we must.