

Tuesday 21 August 2012

FOR IMMEDIATE USE

***“THE NOVEL IS TENACIOUS AS A COCKROACH”***  
**EDINBURGH ELEMENT OF**  
**2012 EDINBURGH WORLD WRITERS' CONFERENCE**  
**CLOSES WITH AVOWAL OF THE STAYING POWER OF THE NOVEL**

At the fifth and final day of the 2012 Edinburgh World Writers' Conference author China Miéville led a passionate debate about the future of the novel. “The novel is tenacious as a cockroach” he asserted; “We can hope for a good novel – created by whatever means – decry bad ones, and observe with a shrug that in total they endure.”

In his keynote address Miéville made the provocative point that as more and more texts become available online, readers will begin to alter books digitally, producing new ‘mash-up’ versions of published books: “Anyone who wants to shove their hands into a book and grub about in its innards, add to and subtract from it, and pass it on, will, in this age of distributed text, be able to do so without much difficulty, and some are already starting.”

He expressed a cautious optimism that after last year's “Booker Middlebrowmaggdon” the prize's judges are beginning once more to engage with more experimental fiction and suggested that one way of safeguarding the future of writing might be a minimum wage for authors: “For the great majority of people who write, it would mean an improvement in their situation, an ability to write full-time. For a few it would mean an income cut, but you know what? It was a good run.”

The Edinburgh World Writers' Conference is a major programming partnership between the Edinburgh International Book Festival and the British Council and is supported by The Scottish Government's Edinburgh Festivals Expo Fund, Creative Scotland, the City of Edinburgh Council and EventScotland. It will continue at the Berlin International Literature Festival on 15 and 16 September with contributions from John Burnside and Tim Parks and a keynote speech from Georg Klein on ‘The Future of the Novel’. A week

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later, the Open Book festival in Cape Town will see South African writers Antjie Krog and Njabulo Ndebele address 'Should Literature be Political?', UK based writer Anjali Joseph 'A National Literature' and Scottish writer Keith Gray, 'Censorship Today'.

Later in the Edinburgh debate author Ben Okri affirmed his belief that "writing is an infinite craft" and John Calder, originator of the 1962 World Writers Conference concurred stating "As long as there is life there is art." Thirty seconds of silence were held for writers in parts of the world who were unable to travel to Edinburgh for political reasons and Okri delivered a statement from the participating writers condemning a law recently passed in Arizona, outlawing the dissemination in public schools of literature specific to ethnic groups.

The debate was broadcast live over the internet, and was viewed in over 40 countries around the world. The discussion, for the fifth consecutive day, was trending on twitter. To view the whole debate at today's conference, visit [www.edinburghworldwritersconference.org](http://www.edinburghworldwritersconference.org)

Nick Barley, Director of the Edinburgh International Book Festival, said "It has been an extraordinary week. We have started something here in Edinburgh that will reverberate around the world, both in the formal Edinburgh World Writers' Conference sessions at other Book Festivals, but also in conversations on every occasion that writers gather together. 1962 was a seminal event and while the mood in Edinburgh this year has been more collaborative than confrontational, we have already seen some definitive actions from the participating writers. We look forward with great interest to continuing the debate in Berlin and then Cape Town as the Conference starts its journey around the world before returning to Edinburgh next August."

Susie Nicklin, Director Literature British Council, said "So many of the themes discussed 50 years ago have had great resonance for audiences and authors in 2012. Replacing the adversarial spirit of 1962 has been a sprit of togetherness and collegiality addressing the key issues facing writers and readers today and it will be fascinating to see how these conversations develop as the Conference travels around the world."

The Edinburgh World Writers' Conference discussion will continue at literary festivals in 16 countries around the world, starting with the International Festival of Literature in Berlin in September. Follow the international events over the next 12 months on [www.edinburghworldwritersconference.org](http://www.edinburghworldwritersconference.org).

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#### Editors Notes:

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#### Edinburgh World Writers' Conference Delegates:

Scottish Delegates: Alan Bissett, Theresa Breslin, John Burnside, Sophie Cooke, Keith Gray, Kirsty Gunn, Kapka Kassabova, Jackie Kay, Aonghas MacNeacail, Denise Mina, Nicola Morgan, Ewan Morrison, Ian Rankin, James Robertson, Ali Smith, Irvine Welsh.

Other UK delegates: Melvin Burgess, Alan Gibbons, Nick Laird, Patrick Ness, China Miéville, Ben Okri, Owen Sheers.

International Delegates: Andrei Astvatsurov, Bernardo Atxaga, Xi Chuan, Junot Díaz, Nathan Englander, Carlos Gamerro, Xiaolu Guo, Manu Joseph, Margo Lanagan, Michel Le Bris, Yiyun Li, Garth Nix, Joyce Carol Oates, Elliot Perlman, Matthias Politycki, Jose Rodrigues dos Santos, Preeta Samarasan, Elif Shafak, Kamila Shamsie, Kyung-Sook Shin, Dag Solstad, Ahdaf Soueif, Janne Teller, Kim Thuy, Chika Unigwe and Samar Yazbek.

#### International Events:

The Edinburgh World Writers' Conference will travel to Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Malaysia, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, Trinidad & Tobago and Turkey.



2012-2013 EDINBURGH WORLD WRITERS' CONFERENCE

NEWS RELEASE

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**1962 Writers' Conference**

The format of the 2012-2013 Edinburgh World Writers' Conference mirrors the notorious event that took place 50 years ago in 1962. That year, the radical publisher John Calder worked with the impresario Jim Haynes to bring some 70 authors to Edinburgh. The guests included US authors Norman Mailer and Henry Miller alongside Scottish writers Hugh MacDiarmid and Muriel Spark, and several lesser-known authors, including William S. Burroughs, who would become famous as a result of the Conference. John Calder argued at the time that 'the novel enriches mankind by its ability to rouse the senses, to stimulate the intellect and to excite the imagination'. The 2012 Writers' Conference takes as its starting point the same five topics that were discussed in 1962.

