

Sunday 19 August 2012  
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## Irvine Welsh criticises globalisation at Edinburgh World Writers' Conference

On the third day of the Edinburgh World Writers' Conference Ian Rankin and Irvine Welsh led a discussion about the impact of national identity on the novel titled 'A National Literature?' Rankin kicked off proceedings by alluding to the original 1962 conference when enfant terrible Alexander Trocchi nearly sparked a brawl with Hugh MacDiarmid by attacking Scottish literature. Welsh followed with an eloquent treatise on the dangers of corporatisation.

Welsh argued that the "current era of globalization has, in some ways, strained the relationship between a national-cultural identity and a nation state". This he feared is leading to the prevalence of an anodyne "mono-cultural British nationalism". He praised Scottish authors including Alan Warner, James Kelman, Jenni Fagan, Ewan Morrison, John Niven and Doug Johnstone, stating that their books "clearly could not have been written by non-Scots". However, he expressed the fear that the publishing industry is getting blander and that if written in 2012 *Trainspotting* would be unlikely to be published by a recognised publisher.

Referring to the "'British' literary paradigm", which he argued exists to "negotiate against difference" he was heavily critical of the literary establishment pointing out that "Only one Scottish novel has won the highly imperialist-orientated Booker Prize, routinely chosen by a largely upper middle-class English panel, and alternating around fifty-fifty between largely upper-middle-class English writers and citizens of the former colonies, presumably to stamp legitimacy on this 'global accolade.'"

The Edinburgh events of this worldwide conference, which is an ambitious programming partnership between the Edinburgh International Book Festival and the British Council, involve 50 delegates from 25 different countries discussing and debating the role of fiction in society with a public audience. It takes place 50 years after Edinburgh hosted a legendary conference, credited as the world's first literature festival.

Welsh ended on a twofold call to arms embracing multiplicity: "Firstly, let's have a look around, it's a big world, and if bits of it move you, don't be afraid to write about it. Second, be bold, and proud of who are and where you come from."

Edinburgh World Writers Conference Sessions at the Edinburgh International Book Festival run from 3.00pm to 5.00pm daily until Tuesday 21 August. Tomorrow Patrick Ness will deliver a keynote speech on Censorship today in a session chaired by Chika Unigwe and to close the Edinburgh element of the Writers' Conference on Monday China Miéville will speak on The Future of the Novel, chaired by Janne Teller. Tickets, priced at £10 (£8 concessions) are available from [www.edbookfest.co.uk](http://www.edbookfest.co.uk) or through the Box Office on 0845 373 5888. Each session will also be broadcast live on-line on [www.edinburghworldwritersconference.org](http://www.edinburghworldwritersconference.org).

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For further information please contact:  
Frances Sutton, Press Manager, Edinburgh International Book Festival  
0131 718 5654 or 07841 579481 or [frances@edbookfest.co.uk](mailto:frances@edbookfest.co.uk)  
or  
Alex Bratt, Senior Press Officer, British Council  
020 7389 4872 or [Alex.Bratt@britishcouncil.org](mailto:Alex.Bratt@britishcouncil.org)

#### Editors Notes:

**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.

#### 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, Hari Kunzru, Nick Laird, Patrick Ness, China Miéville, Ben Okri, Owen Sheers.

**International Delegates:** Andrei Astvatsaturov, 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.

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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.