

24 August 2008

GROUND-BREAKING DIALOGUE BETWEEN TWO CITIES OF LITERATURE, A WORLD APART

This morning saw a live audio-visual satellite broadcast link the two UNESCO Cities of Literature, with events beamed from opposite ends of the globe, as a reading and interview with Vietnamese writer Nam Le was beamed from the Melbourne Writer's Festival into Charlotte Square Gardens in Edinburgh, with audience and chair questions from both Edinburgh and Melbourne. Soon after, Salman Rushdie, speaking at the Edinburgh International Book Festival, appeared on screens in Melbourne's central square, and answered his first question from Australian novelist Rodney Hall in Melbourne.

It was announced just two days ago that Melbourne has followed Edinburgh to become the second City of Literature, as part of the UNESCO Creative Cities network.

Nam Le read from his stunning prose work *The Boat*, before answering questions from the watching Edinburgh audience. Soon to have his work published in the UK for the first time by Edinburgh press Canongate Books, Le spoke about a sense of place and identity infiltrating his work. Born in Vietnam but raised in Australia, Le said of Melbourne, "this is a city that is just absolutely steeped in letters and literature".

Catherine Lockerbie then introduced the three times Booker Prize winner and 2008 nominee Salman Rushdie to packed audiences in both Edinburgh and Melbourne, saying "Words will whizz in some magical manner across thousands of miles". He read from his latest novel, *The Enchantress of Florence*, before answering questions from Australian and Edinburgh audiences in turn. Rushdie spoke of restoring stories to the centre of literary fiction, inspired by the storytelling culture of his Indian childhood. He commended the comic book genre for retelling the same stories today, and teaching narratives to a new generation.

Jan McGuinness, director of the Melbourne festival, remarked to Catherine Lockerbie, "We've always regarded your festival as an older sister."

Ali Bowden, manager of Edinburgh's City of Literature team, chaired the Edinburgh end of the Nam Lee event. She remarked, "It is fantastic that we can have this live link, in the same week that Melbourne has become the second City of Literature. Communication is essential to what we want to achieve as promoters of literacy in our own cities, and internationally."

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9 - 25 August 2008, Charlotte Square Gardens, Edinburgh.

www.edbookfest.co.uk

The Edinburgh International Book Festival ends on Monday 25 August, however there will be an autumn event with award winning Australian writer, David Malouf on Tuesday 23 September at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh. Tickets can be booked on-line on www.edbookfest.co.uk or over the phone 0845 373 5888.

Full details of all the events can be found on www.edbookfest.co.uk.

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