

Saturday 19 August 2012
FOR IMMEDIATE USE

Fifty shades of opinion: “Whip Lit”, Ulysses and the future of the novel dominate second day of Writers Conference

Keynote speaker Ali Smith opened the second debate of the Edinburgh World Writers' Conference with an exhortation to the audience and delegates to “Fight! fight! fight!” and a fierce debate ensued about the place of fiction in the modern world and the impact that bestsellers like *Fifty Shades of Grey* have on the writers' profession.

Smith gave a passionate and well-received meditation on the “Style versus Content”, defending *Ulysses* “in the style corner” against recent criticism by Brazilian writer Paulo Coelho; opining that “Joyce would've made a really good tweeter”; and concluding that “all of us (all seven billion of us here now in the world, not forgetting all the people in the future, and the past) with all our individualities, all our struggles, all our means of expression, will find ourselves, one way and another, when it comes to the novel, content.”

Portuguese author Jose Rodrigues dos Santos then defended Coelho, who in an interview earlier this month claimed that “Stripped down, Ulysses is a twit”, arguing that in Portuguese translation the seminal work had perhaps lost some of its resonance. The debate continued with a discussion about what writing means in different countries with German author Matthias Politycki stating that “In Germany, if you are unreadable everyone thinks you are a genius.” The debate hinged on the impact that EL James' work is having on its readers with poet Nick Laird arguing that “EL James is fucking dangerous” whilst author Patrick Ness pointed out that “She has the ear of more people than everyone in this room put together.” Alan Bissett argued that it is the content not the style of the bestseller that makes it “dangerous.”

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, and evoking the spirit of GK Van Het Reve's defence of homosexuality, Scottish novelist Jackie Kay got a warm round of applause when she stood up and said “I am a lesbian.”

Members of the public sitting in the audience expressed a hope that great literature would continue to emerge across all genres. The Writers' Conference trended on Twitter for the second day running, and the live streaming of the event was viewed in over 43 countries around the world.

Edinburgh World Writers' Conference Sessions at the Edinburgh International Book Festival run from 3.00pm to 5.00pm daily until Tuesday 21 August. Tickets, priced at £10 (£8 concessions) are available from 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.

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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.

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



2012-2013 EDINBURGH WORLD WRITERS' CONFERENCE

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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.

