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For Immediate Release

EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL BOOK FESTIVAL'S OUTRIDERS

TAKE FIVE JOURNEYS ACROSS THE AMERICAS

Organisers of the Edinburgh International Book Festival today announced details of **Outriders**, an exciting new project where five writers from Scotland will undertake five extraordinary journeys across the Americas. Supported by the Scottish Government's Edinburgh Festivals Expo Fund through Creative Scotland, Outriders explores the idea that in turbulent and shifting times writers can contribute immeasurably to our understanding of the world, revealing untold stories and offering an entirely new perspective on places and events.

Harry Giles, Jenni Fagan, Malachy Tallack, Stef Smith and Kevin MacNeil will each travel along predetermined routes in Canada, the USA, Mexico and Argentina respectively, each accompanied by a local writer exploring the idea that two people can share the same experience, yet produce entirely different creative responses. Outriders has been developed with the support of the British Council and audiences can follow each journey through blogs, podcasts and social media activity channelled through the Book Festival website - www.edbookfest.co.uk - and on the authors' own social media accounts. All ten writers will appear at the Edinburgh International Book Festival in August to discuss the experiences and insights generated by each journey.

Nick Barley, director of the Edinburgh International Book Festival said: "The Scottish Government's EXPO fund has given the Book Festival extraordinary opportunities to try out new ways of working with writers, and to forge new partnerships. Outriders is one of our most ambitious EXPO initiatives to date. It offers five Scottish writers priceless experiences and material for their writing, and it will give Scottish audiences new perspectives on America at a time of great political change across the continent. But there's more: Outriders will generate long-term Transatlantic partnerships between the writers as well as opportunities to present their work in Canada, the USA, Mexico and Argentina. I can't wait to hear about each writer's

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The Edinburgh International Book Festival Ltd is a Scottish charity (SC010120) and a limited company (registered in Scotland no 79939) and has its registered office at 5A Charlotte Square, Edinburgh, EH2 4DR.

American odyssey, and this project also looks set to have an impact long after the journeys themselves are over.”

Culture Secretary Fiona Hyslop said: “Outriders is great opportunity for our writers to explore pertinent and thought-provoking themes as they journey across the two continents. It will be particularly interesting to compare their insights and experiences with those of the local writers accompanying them. We’re proud to support this initiative through £100,000 from the Scottish Government’s EXPO fund, and look forward to hearing about their series of talks and events at the Edinburgh International Book Festival.”

Harry Giles, a performer and writer from Orkney who is based in Edinburgh, will undertake the first journey across northern Canada looking at minority and regional languages and the cultures that grow around them. Giles is also looking to confront Scotland’s legacy as a colonising country, especially the role that Orkney migrants played in the colonisation of Hudson Bay. Giles will be accompanied by Governor General’s Award Winning Metis writer Katherena Vermette.

Jenni Fagan is a novelist, poet and screenwriter, and in 2013 was named as one of the Granta Best of Young British Novelists. She will travel across the USA from the Rust Belt to Silicon Valley asking questions on the nature of truth. Fagan will be joined by fiction writer Bonnie Jo Campbell. Malachy Tallack is the author of two books exploring the idea of place. His journey will take him from the north to the south of the USA from North Dakota to Louisiana listening to voices in lost and disenfranchised communities and exploring how a sense of place and belonging is helping to shape change. Tallack will be joined by American novelist and short story writer Jennifer Haigh.

Olivier Award-winning theatre writer Stef Smith will travel through Mexico from the US border in the north to the Guatemala border in the South via three of the country’s major cities – Tijuana, Mexico City and Oaxaca. Mexico is a nation with a rich cultural heritage and a vivid history, the bridge between an ancient continent and an adolescent nation. Smith is looking behind the apparently singular narrative of Mexico – one of a population desperate to flee north in search of a better life – and exploring the stories of those who choose to stay. She will be joined by Gabriela Jauregi, a Mexican poet and the founder of the Sur+ publishing collective.

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The final journey will be undertaken by Kevin MacNeil in Argentina. MacNeil, an award-winning author, poet, screenwriter and playwright, will spend time cycling around Buenos Aires on a physical, literary and spiritual homage to Jorge Luis Borges, accompanied by Mariana Enriquez. Borges and his great friend, the acclaimed author Adolfo Bioy Casares were devoted fans of Robert Louis Stevenson and this journey will shed light on the connections between Scotland and Argentina's shared literary heritage. MacNeil will be accompanied by the Argentinian journalist, writer and editor Mariana Enriquez.

Outriders is supported by the Scottish Government's Edinburgh Festivals Expo Fund. Harry Giles departs in mid-April, the other four writers will travel in early May. Details of each journey, and each writer, can be found at www.edbookfest.co.uk and each author will be providing updates through blogs, podcasts, videos and social media posts throughout their trips. A special Gala event will be scheduled in the Edinburgh International Book Festival in August, and further details of this, together with all the events in the 2017 Edinburgh International Book Festival Programme, will be announced on Thursday 8 June 2017.

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Notes to Editors:

Authors:

Harry Giles is a writer and performer from Orkney, based in Edinburgh. Giles' latest publication is *Tonguit* from Freight Books, shortlisted for the 2014 Edwin Morgan Poetry Award and the 2016 Forward Prize for Best First Collection, and they were the 2009 BBC Scotland slam champion. Giles founded Inky Fingers Spoken Word and co-directs the performance platform ANATOMY; their participatory theatre has toured festivals across Europe, including Forest Fringe (UK), NTI (Latvia) and CrisisArt (Italy); and their performance *What We Owe* was picked by the Guardian's best-of-the-Fringe 2013 roundup - in the "But Is It Art?" category.

"I'm so looking forward to this journey -- it's going to push and pull me to all sorts of new and interesting places and connections. Katherena and I have a shared passion for investigating history and language, so we're already getting very geeky about the sites we'll visit and people we'll talk to. At a time when Scotland is re-examining its place in the world, I think it's vital for us to confront our past as a colonising nation, with all its complexity. I grew up hearing stories of Orkneymen travelling to Hudson Bay, and I very much want to hear what stories come back in the other direction now."

Jenni Fagan is a novelist, poet and screenwriter. Her debut novel *The Panopticon* is published in 8 languages, is currently being adapted by Sixteen Films and saw Fagan selected as one of the Granta Best of Young British Novelists, a once in a decade accolade.

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Her second novel *The Sunlight Pilgrims* received critical acclaim including being selected as Scottish Author of the Year 2016 by the Culture Awards.

Malachy Tallack is a writer, editor and singer-songwriter from Shetland, currently based in Glasgow. His two previous books – *Sixty Degrees North* and *The Un-Discovered Islands* – have both explored ideas of place, and he received a New Writers Award from the Scottish Book Trust in 2014 and the Robert Louis Stevenson Fellowship in 2015. Tallack is contributing Editor of *The Island Review* and was previously editor of *Shetland Life Magazine*.

Stef Smith is an Olivier-award winning theatre writer who has worked as both an individual artist and with other theatre makers. Her work is predominately political seeking to unearth unheard stories and it always aims to examine both the lightness and darkness of life. Smith has also led creative writing groups for young people, ran writing workshops in Brazil and given lectures at Glasgow University. Most notably in 2012 Stef won an Olivier for the show *RoadKill*. In 2013 she was invited for a residency to the Banff Centre in Alberta, Canada and in 2015 Smith was also made an Associate Artist at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh. She also appeared on *The Lists Top 100 Cultural Contributors* for 2015 and was named by the *Independent* as a part of a 'new generation of British playwrights who will dominate 2017'.

Stef Smith said: "I am keeping my mind open about what I will achieve, learn and experience during this journey. Ultimately for me it is about unearthing unheard stories, narratives and perspectives. I am looking forward to learning more about the specifics of Mexican politics and I'm desperate to go beyond the tired Hollywood narrative that we all know of people wanting to escape poverty by heading to America. I am hoping to spend time talking, but mostly listening, to as many people as possible in the hopes that I might be able to look beyond the headlines in a more informed way. During my journey I will maintain a daily blog, capture part of my travels on film and also aim for this will then feed into both new and ongoing work about what it means to live in a world where sometimes the future can seem very bleak."

Kevin MacNeil is an award-winning author. His latest critically acclaimed novel, 'The Brilliant & Forever', was shortlisted for the Saltire Fiction of the Year Award. He is also a poet, screenwriter, playwright and editor. Born and raised in the Outer Hebrides, MacNeil lectures on the prestigious Creative Writing course at the University of Stirling. He has previously taught at Uppsala University, Kingston University and the University of Edinburgh. He has written five books and edited a similar number. His work is published internationally.

Kevin MacNeil said "Writing, 'said Borges,' is nothing more than a guided dream.' Perhaps we can say the same about reality, if indeed reality is, as Borges asserted, 'not always probable, or likely.' I hope to dream well and meet reality's unlikeliness's with imagination and awareness."

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