

The Edinburgh International Book Festival 13-29 August 2011

17 days of homage to books and authors starts today in Charlotte Square.

We have to hope that the rain will not have turned the garden into Edinburgh's answer to Glastonbury, and are sure that the organisers will have taken appropriate steps, but stout footwear might still be in order.

The Book Festival has invited four Guest Selectors to curate individual strands of the programme. BBC Special Correspondent Allan Little, who has reported from almost every international conflict in the last 20 years, will explore Revolution in the 21st Century – political and technological – inviting world class authors, including Hisham Matar, Kamila Shamsie and Chan Koonchung to provide unrivalled insights into our fast changing planet.

Audrey Niffenegger will be joined by Chris Adrian, Neil Gaiman and Kelly Link, writers unique in their genre-defying, boundary-crossing writing, to examine Writing Without Boundaries.

Joan Bakewell will investigate Key Ideas of the 21st Century with a selection of renowned speakers including Michael Symmons Roberts, Julian Baggini, Olivia Laing and Ian Stewart.

The new Children's Laureate, Julia Donaldson MBE, is the Guest Selector for the RBS Children's Programme in 2011 and will explore new ways to engage children in books and reading. She will also look at the importance of illustration with Nick Sharratt, the Book Festival's Illustrator in Residence.

Packed into the 17 days are almost 800 authors from over 40 countries around the world including the exiled Chinese Nobel Laureate, Gao Xingjian, who will discuss his life and recent work, the giant of American literary postmodernism, Robert Coover, and Sapphire, who will reveal her long-awaited follow-up to Push. Tobias Wolff, author of This Boy's Life – a milestone in American letters – will discuss his life and work with Kirsty Wark while Scotland's First Minister, Alex Salmond will chair an event with Iain Banks. Tom Devine, Sebastian Barry, John Burnside, Tam Dalyell, Michael Ondaatje and Dava Sobel will launch their new books while A S Byatt, Bettany Hughes, Jonathan Lynn and Janice Galloway will give a sneak preview of their books which launch in September.

In addition to great Scottish writers such as Ali Smith, William McIlvanney, Alan Warner, Candia McWilliam, Andrew O'Hagan, Don Paterson, A L Kennedy, Louise Welsh, Ian Rankin, Alexander McCall Smith and Robin Robertson, some of the country's leading scientific minds, including Keith Campbell and Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell, will be touching on the culture of enlightenment and innovation and looking at how Scotland plays a key role in global scientific advancement.

Nick Barley, Director of the Edinburgh International Book Festival said "In this, the year that the new Europe comes of age, popular uprisings across North Africa and the Middle East are challenging life long regimes and the world is in a state of change, we will examine the theme of Revolution. From Libya to China, India to Iran, the USA ten years after 9/11 and the recent controversies involving Twitter and Wikileaks, audiences and authors in Charlotte Square Gardens will explore the power of the written word to provide a compelling commentary on the world around us."

"We will also be celebrating some legends of modern literature. 2011 sees the centenary of the birth of two great poets from opposite ends of Europe – Sorley MacLean and Czeslaw Milosz – and thirty years since the publication of

Alasdair Gray's Lanark. We are delighted that Alasdair will be joining us, not only to open the Book Festival but also on the final evening with a full-length performed reading of his latest work, Fleck, in what is perhaps the most ambitious event we have ever attempted: a world premiere featuring a stellar cast including Liz Lochhead, Will Self, A L Kennedy, Ian Rankin and Alasdair himself. We are very grateful for the support of the Scottish Government's Edinburgh Festivals Expo Fund which has allowed us to stage this special event, and to develop a wider programme of performance events in our free Unbound programme. "

Three major literary prizes will be awarded at the Book Festival this year. The Edwin Morgan International Poetry Prize will take place on the first anniversary of the poet's death on Wednesday 17 August. The James Tait Black Prize, in association with the University of Edinburgh, is the world's oldest literary prize and will take place on Friday 19 August, and this year, for the first time, the prestigious Scottish Mortgage Investment Trust Book of the Year Award, in partnership with Creative Scotland, will be awarded in Charlotte Square Gardens on Friday 26 August

You may still be able to book tickets online 24hrs at www.edbookfest.co.uk or by calling the Box Office on 0845 373 5888

A neat trick is to try and get a ticket for one of the more popular events by going along to the gardens and queuing for a returned ticket – there are usually at least a few for each event.

Sat 13 Aug to Mon 29 Aug: 09.30 – 20.30 daily