

Push the Boat Out at Edinburgh's new poetry festival this weekend

Get in the boat, *compañeros*.

A poetry festival such as Edinburgh has never seen before will take place at Summerhall this weekend (15-17 October) Push the Boat Out has been masterminded by director Jenny Niven, former head of literature at Creative Scotland, and co-founder Kevin Williamson, writer, publisher and co-founder of *Neu! Reekie!*

The festival's aim is not only to give contemporary poetry a new platform, but to encourage all forms of it – from hip hop to film, music, dance, debate and much more – to grow, evolve and maybe even collide.

Inspired by *At Eighty*, the work of the late Edwin Morgan, whose centenary falls this year, around 60 poets will perform live over this three day event, whose themes include social justice and representation, climate crisis and ecopoetics, healing and recovery, and virtual and other realities.

Morgan's poem encapsulates his persistent, indefatigable

curiosity for the unknown, and resonates loudly with our current unpredictable and unsettling times.



'Push the Boat Out' Festival launch, The Watershed, Union Canal, Edinburgh, 8 September 2021 © 2021 J.L. Preece

Each day of the festival is packed with events; you can hear Alec Finlay introduce a *Manifesto for Urban Crofts* and Sean Wai Keung talk about *The Poetry Food Exchange*, discuss the point of poetry in modern times with poets Don Paterson, Malika Booker and Kate Fox, or consider whether, and if so how, poetry has the power to heal, with poets Billy Letford, John Glenday, Clare Pollard and Tawona Sithole.





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Jenny Niven and Kevin Williamson © 2021 John Preece

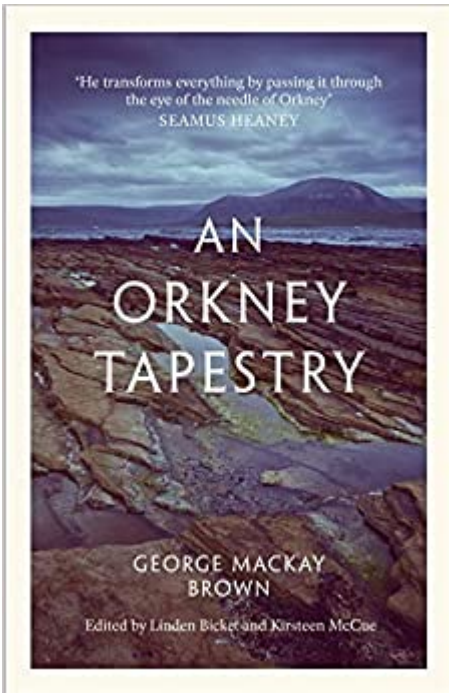
There'll be workshops too – you can try bookbinding, or take a

look at the shape a poem makes. You might like to have a go at writing about your own childhood memories through fantasy, silliness and play in Clare Pollard's session on *The Language of Childhood*. And in one of several Takeovers, sci-fi magazine *Shoreline of Infinity* will let you explore poems about video games and alternate timelines, augmented reality and parallel universes, with poetry readings from Stephen Sexton, Rachel Plummer, Elspeth Wilson and Jeda Pearl.



Jenny Niven and Kevin Williamson © 2021 Louise Montgomery
Another writer with a centenary this year is giant of Scottish letters George Mackay Brown. Malini Paul, Linden Bicket, Malachy Tallach, George Gunn, Gerry Cambridge and Roddy Womble will discuss Mackay Brown's musicality, his blending of fable and realism, and his placement of Orkney at the centre of his world.

Want to get outside? *Push the Boat Out* is offering self-led poetry walks: *A Poetry Mile* is a free web app-based spoken word series which encourage users to experience their city differently, filtered through the eyes and ears of some of our finest poets. If you don't like those one-size-fits-all audioguides, here's something much better – each route is individually generated according to user needs and preferences, and presents a personalised series of poems tailored to these specifics, which accompany the walker on their custom-created map.





Clare Pollard

Fancy a podcast or two? The festival website has links to fifteen of them, in which, as part of the *Breaking the Waves*

series, individual poets such as Kathleen Jamie, Harry Josephine Giles, Rachel McCrum and Kevin McNeil will each read a poem that speaks to them.

And of course every day will be filled with exciting live performances, including the *Big Saturday Night Headliner*, at which you can expect 'rhythmic excitations, deft flow, sharp social observations and maybe even some dancing.'



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Full details of all events, together with information on how to book. can be found on the festival's [website](#) and you can also follow the festival on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Some events will also be available as livestreams, or online after the festival.

And if you're still wondering about that boat...

'Push the boat out, *compañeros*,
push the boat out, whatever the sea.
Who says we cannot guide ourselves
through the boiling reefs, black as they are,
the enemy of us all makes sure of it!'

Edwin Morgan *At Eighty* from *Cathures: New Poems 1997-2001* (Carcenet Press Ltd, 2002): Scottish Poetry Library.

[Summerhall](#) 1 Summerhall, Newington, just east of The Meadows.

