

Edinburgh's Radical Book Fair –history and future

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The radical book fair, with prominent examples run in Atlanta, Leipzig, Derry and London, is a space where trade publishing meets politics. It provides opportunities for connection and organising, learning and discussion, while also being a retail space. This paper presents a history and future outlook of Edinburgh's radical book fair.

First organised in 1996 by Word Power Books, the fair started as the Edinburgh Independent and Radical Book Fair, also dubbed by its organiser as "the alternative international book festival" ('Word Power Books | Edinburgh Independent Radical Book Fair 2015'2016). When Word Power's owner Elaine Henry retired in 2017, the shop was sold to Mairi Oliver and became Lighthouse Bookshop, who continue the tradition of organising what is now called Edinburgh's Radical Book Fair.

While some research exists on feminist and radical bookshops (Hogan 2016, Kinder 2021, Thomas 2024) and book, zine and art fairs (Preston 2022), this paper adds a vital dimension to discussions on radical publishing and bookselling, building on a history of radical fairs such as London's International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books (1982-1995) (Enisuoh 2002).

Radical book fairs assume the same shape as any trade fair, but their title selection and programming is distinctive in its revolutionary aim. Through this case study, including auto-ethnographic observations as one of Lighthouse Bookshop's booksellers, interviews with organisers, and analysis of 5 years of programming, this paper not only records a piece of radical history, it also aims to inform and inspire future booksellers, writers, readers, and publishers. The paper concludes with an exploration on what 'radical' has come to mean in the context of this book fair, over its 28-year history.

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