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News Release

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Acclaimed duo win oldest book prizes with tales of love and loss

A novel exploring an unlikely relationship between two actors and a biography that opens a window on the world of fine art have tonight (Monday, 14 August) won Britain's oldest literary awards.

Acclaimed authors Eimear McBride and Laura Cumming join the distinguished list of writers who have won the James Tait Black Prizes, awarded annually by the University of Edinburgh.

The winners of the £10,000 prizes were announced by broadcaster Sally Magnusson at the Edinburgh International Book Festival.

Eimear McBride's winning book in the fiction prize traces a love affair between an 18-year-old drama student and an older actor and is set in mid-nineties-London. *The Lesser Bohemians* (Faber and Faber) is her second novel.

An award winning writer who grew up in the west of Ireland, Eimear McBride studied acting at Drama Centre London.

Laura Cumming's winning entry in the biography prize focuses on the great Spanish court painter Diego Velázquez and a Victorian bookseller, John Snare, who thought he had found a lost painting of the celebrated artist.

The Vanishing Man: In Pursuit of Velazquez (Chatto and Windus) is Laura Cumming's first biography.

Laura Cumming has been the art critic of *The Observer* since 1999. Previously she was a presenter of *Nightwaves* on Radio 3, arts producer for the BBC World Service and arts editor of the *New Statesman*.

The James Tait Black Prizes are distinctive in the way that they are judged. Each year more than 400 novels are submitted for the Prizes. The books for the shortlist are nominated by academics and postgraduate students from the University of Edinburgh.

Ranked among the top universities in the world

Two prizes are awarded annually by the University of Edinburgh's School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures for books published during the previous year – one for the best work of fiction and the other for the best biography.

Laura Cumming's book was chosen for the £10,000 biography prize from a shortlist that featured *A Life Discarded: 148 Diaries Found in a Skip* by Alexander Masters (4th Estate), *A Stain in the Blood: The Remarkable Voyage of Sir Kenelm Digby* by Joe Moshenska (William Heinemann) and *Rasputin* by Douglas Smith (Pan Macmillan).

Eimear McBride's novel topped a shortlist with three other writers competing for the £10,000 fiction prize that included: *A Country Road, A Tree* by Jo Baker, (Doubleday); *What Belongs to You* by Garth Greenwell (Picador); and *The Sport of Kings* by C. E. Morgan, (4th Estate).

Biography judge Dr Jonathan Wild, of the University of Edinburgh, said of the winning entry: "The Vanishing Man is a real gem of a book which fully deserves its place among the winners of this prize."

Fiction Judge of the James Tait Black Prize Dr Alex Lawrie, of the University of Edinburgh, said of the winning book: "Eimear McBride's astonishing second novel is full of wit, energy and nerve, an extraordinary rendering of a young woman's consciousness as she eagerly embarks on a new life in London."

The James Tait Black Awards were founded in 1919 by Janet Coats, the widow of publisher James Tait Black, to commemorate her husband's love of good books. This year's authors join the roll call of past fiction winners which includes Angela Carter, Graham Greene, DH Lawrence, Cormac McCarthy, Ian McEwan, Muriel Spark and Evelyn Waugh.

This year's shortlist featured in a free online course launched by The University of Edinburgh and Edinburgh International Book Festival to help book lovers get the best out of their reading.

The free course, *How to Read a Novel*, draws on an array of texts, from the classics to contemporary works.

The Massive Open Online Course, or MOOC, takes readers on an insightful journey giving them the tools to appreciate works of fiction, and examine what makes a good novel.

More than 12,000 people signed up for the four week course via the FutureLearn website. The 2018 course will be open for sign-ups in Spring next year.

The Book Festival hosted two additional events linked to the course content featuring three of the fiction contenders for the James Tait Black Prizes – one with Jo Baker and another featuring Garth Greenwell and Eimear McBride.

For further details please go to: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/james-tait-black>

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