

Edinburgh International Book Festival 2020 – what's on today

There is a lot to see and hear today, but it was exciting yesterday when the winners of the James Tait Black Prizes were announced.

A memoir by poet George Szirtes whose mother was a survivor of the Holocaust and Lucy Ellman's novel told entirely via the internal monologue of an Ohio mother of four have won the UK's longest-running literary awards. Szirtes and Ellman join the illustrious list of authors who have won the James Tait Black Prizes, awarded annually by the University of Edinburgh.

George Szirtes' winning book in the £10,000 biography prize is a fascinating exploration of the life of his mother, Magda. *The Photographer at Sixteen: The Death and Life of a Fighter* (MacLehose Press) uses photographs and memories to trace her life, while introducing the reader to tales of suffering and survival. Budapest-born Szirtes came to the UK as a refugee in the 1950s. His poetry has received numerous accolades including the TS Eliot prize in 2004.

George Szirtes, said: "I am delighted, grateful and astonished to be awarded the James Tait Black Prize, especially given such a marvellous short list. I am a poet and the book is written much as a poet would write it, not so much a straight story as a set of mysteries in reverse time order, starting from my mother's suicide in 1975, through concentration camps

and refugee status, ending with a set of studio photographs of her early childhood in Transylvania. She died before she saw any of my books in print. *The Photographer at Sixteen* is an attempt to bring her to life.”

Lucy Ellmann’s winning book in the fiction prize, *Ducks, Newburyport* (Galley Beggar Press), is a complex novel based around the ruminations of an Ohio housewife. Much of it is written in one sentence, beginning with, “The fact that...” The award-winning author is an American-born British novelist based in Edinburgh, Scotland. Previous accolades include the Goldsmiths Prize and a shortlisting for the Booker Prize.

Lucy Ellmann, said: “Amid the daily assaults on our lives and intelligence, it is really cheering to receive this prize. My father won the James Tait Black in 1982 (for his biography of James Joyce), so it feels like quite an Oedipal coup for me to get one! And I liked the international flavour of the shortlist. English literature exists and thrives way beyond the boundaries of England. If it didn’t, there’d be little hope for it.”

The prizes are for the best work of fiction and biography during the previous 12 months. They are the only major British book awards judged by literature scholars and students. Prizes are awarded by the University of Edinburgh’s English Literature department, which is the oldest in the world.



Nick Barley Director of Edinburgh International Book Festival in an otherwise empty Charlotte Square PHOTO © John Preece

Programme for today: Saturday 22 August

10:00am Why Plastic isn’t Fantastic: Dapo Adeola & Nathan Bryon

To watch this event – click [here](#)

11:30am Liz Hyder: In the Jaws of Bearmouth

To watch this event – click [here](#)

1:00pm Fire Front: First Nations Poetry and Power

To watch this event –click [here](#)

2:30pm Sophie Hughes & Fernanda Melchor: Another Mexico

To watch this event – click [here](#)

4:00pm Cassandra Clare: All that Glitters is Not Gold

To watch this event – click [here](#)

5.30pm Isabel Wilkerson: America's Unspoken Caste System

To watch this event – click [here](#)

7:00pm Edwidge Danticat: 'Death Cannot Write Its Own Story'

To watch this event – click [here](#)

8:30pm Bernardine Evaristo with Nicola Sturgeon: The Triumph of Girl, Woman, Other

To watch this event – click [here](#)

Programme for tomorrow: Sunday 23 August

10:00am Polly Dunbar & Michael Morpurgo – Owl or Pussycat?

Join one of Britain's best loved story-makers for an insightful event around the inspiration for his new book *Owl or Pussycat?* This extra special storytime event includes a full reading of the book by Michael and live illustrations by Polly Dunbar created in front of your very eyes.

This event is part of the Baillie Gifford Children's Programme

To watch this event – click [here](#)

11:30am Sarah Moss: Unhappy Campers

Picking at the scabs of Britain's fraught social contract with sly humour and characteristic elegance, in *Summerwater Moss* builds a claustrophobic portrait of a makeshift community in which people are pulled apart by a toxic mix of proximity and isolation. Who could possibly relate?

This event is supported by the Hawthornden Literary Retreat

To watch this event – click [here](#)

1:00pm Joshua Wong: Hong Kong's Champion for Democracy

Wong has been arrested by the Chinese state numerous times for his protesting and activism and has served more than 100 days in jail. In early July, he announced he would be running for Hong Kong legislature on 9 September. This is a campaign that puts him firmly in view of Beijing, even as some of his compatriots have left the island, faced with the possibility of extradition to mainland China. In this very special event, Joshua Wong joins us live from Hong Kong with an urgent call for all of us to defend democracy.

To watch this event – click [here](#)

2:30pm Gavin Francis & Kapka Kassabova: The Lie of the Land

In *To the Lake: A Balkan Journey of War and Peace*, Kassabova delves into a difficult family history inextricably tied to the fading footprints by two ancient lakes that served as the hallowed meeting point of a divided region. Back with another astonishing journey of his own, Gavin Francis presents more than a fantastic travelogue in *Island Dreams*; it's a paean to the influence of islands and what they represent on our minds and cultures, beacons of independence and even loneliness in an overwhelmingly connected world.

This event is supported by the Hawthornden Literary Retreat

To watch this event – click [here](#)

4:00pm Representation Matters with Hannah Lee & Jessica Love

Join acclaimed authors Jessica Love and Hannah Lee for readings and live discussion on the importance of children seeing themselves represented in the picture books they read.

This event is part of the Baillie Gifford Children's Programme

To watch this event – click [here](#)

5:30pm Working with Words: Inside the New York Times Crossword

Pour yourself a drink and gather with The New York Times's digital crossword editor Joel Fagliano to discover in real time how a crossword is made, how the team works, and you'll get to take part in a live mini crossword-making session. Joining him in this event is Adrienne Raphel, author of *Thinking Inside the Box: Adventures with Crosswords and the Puzzling People Who Can't Live Without Them*.

This event is sponsored by the New York Times

To watch this event – click [here](#)

7:00pm Anne Enright with Vicky Featherstone: Mothers and Daughters

Actress is a portrait of life in the theatre, of one woman's rise to fame and her subsequent decline, with all the challenges that women on stage faced in the years before the #MeToo movement shone light on them. But this novel is also a tender examination of the relationship between mother and daughter – the reconstruction of an emotional landscape in which fame has left a trail of newspaper articles, photographs and public performances.

This event is supported by the Hawthornden Literary Retreat

To watch this event – click [here](#)