

Laura Cumming wins Book of the Year for Thunderclap at Scotland's National Book Awards

Laura Cumming took the Book of the Year this evening (Thursday 28th November) for *Thunderclap*, a memoir on the art of the Dutch Golden Age, as The Saltire Society presented Scotland's National Book Awards, one of the oldest literary prizes in the UK.

The prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award went to James Kelman, multi-award-winning Scottish novelist, short story writer, essayist and playwright.

Recognising exceptional talent across Scotland's contemporary literary scene and celebrating the breadth of style, subject and individual flair on offer, other Awards included: for Fiction, *What Doesn't Kill Us* by Ajay Close; for Poetry, John Burnside's final collection, *Ruin, Blossom*; for First Book, Jen Stout's memoir *Night Train to Odesa*; and for Research, *England's Insular Imagining* by Lorna Hutson, an exploration of the Tudor marginalisation of Scotland.

At an exclusive ceremony held in Edinburgh's Central Hall, supported by Waterstones and hosted by Coinneach MacLeod – otherwise known as The Hebridean Baker – well-known faces from the worlds of publishing, bookselling and journalism gathered to pay tribute to all the shortlisted authors as selected by the teams of judges in each category, and to honour the winners.

On celebrating with this year's winners, Mairi Kidd, Director of The Saltire Society, said: "In their deliberations, the

judges returned again and again to the words 'unexpected' and 'surprising'.

2As overall winner, Thunderclap perfectly embodies this sense of freshness, of opening the pages on a completely new reading experience. It is a luminous book that deftly guides its reader through time, across borders and up close with art.

"We recognise that there is, of course, a particular poignancy in the posthumous award of Poetry Book of the Year to John Burnside for *Ruin, Blossom*.

"As well as his own work, John Burnside was the backbone of Creative Writing at St Andrew's University and helped launch the careers of many novelists, poets, memoirists and others.

"We wish he could have been with us to see the marvellous spread of work to win the individual awards."

Of *Thunderclap* – which also took Non-Fiction Book of the Year and which explores the relationship between art and life, interweaving reflections on Laura Cumming's own life, on that of her late father the Scottish painter James Cumming RSA, and the great artists of the Dutch Golden Age – the judges said:

"On first reading, we found it elegantly detached; on reading again we were struck by the human stories at its core. We knew it would stay on our bookshelves and we would return to it again and again."

The Fiction Book of the Year, *What Doesn't Kill Us* by Ajay Close is a police-procedural-meets-feminist-reimagining set around Leeds and Bradford in the late 1970s and early 80s, based on the case of the Yorkshire Ripper Peter Sutcliffe who terrorised Ajay Close's native Yorkshire at that time.

The judges called the novel, "Superb, evocative and enraging, with brilliant characterisation, humour, and a huge sense of tension from the ever-present threat of violence."

The First Book of the Year, sponsored by Creative Scotland, identifies rising stars as their talent continues to develop and was this year awarded to Night Train to Odesa by journalist Jen Stout, which was praised by the judges as an “accomplished and beautiful work, blending journalism, memoir, history, art” as it conveys the very human horrors of Russian aggression in Ukraine in a profound debut which moves seamlessly between the epic and the intimate.

The Poetry Book of the Year was awarded posthumously to John Burnside for Ruin, Blossom, which was published in April of this year, only a month before Burnside’s death. The judges called the collection “impeccable”, adding:

“A tremendously good, mature, sustained volume, exploring ageing, mortality, environmental crisis and wellbeing, mourning that which is lost while recognising hope.”

The Award for Research Book of the Year went to England’s Insular Imagining by Lorna Hutson.

The volume explores Tudor efforts to justify an attempted Scottish conquest by remaking Scotland’s nationhood in service of an Anglo-imperial view of history. It will be, the judges said, “a landmark text across multiple disciplines.”