



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

in association with the Playwrights' Studio, Scotland
and the Traverse Theatre

News Release

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UNDER STRICT EMBARGO UNTIL 20.00 BST MONDAY, 22 AUGUST

Modern take on tragic Greek tale wins leading drama prize

A Greek tragedy reimagined in modern-day Cardiff has tonight (Monday, 22 August) won one of the UK's most distinguished literary awards, the James Tait Black Prize for Drama.

Gary Owen's one-woman monologue, *Iphigenia in Splott*, is the fourth play to win the £10,000 prize. The accolade is awarded annually by the University of Edinburgh in association with Playwrights' Studio, Scotland and the Traverse Theatre.

The news was announced by playwright and director David Greig at an award ceremony in Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre.

The winning drama was first produced by Sherman Theatre in May 2015, when it received critical acclaim. Welsh playwright Gary Owen drew his inspiration from a Greek myth, in which King Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter, Iphigenia, to allow his ships to sail to Troy.

Iphigenia in Splott centres on Effie, a foul-mouthed, aggressive young woman living in Cardiff, who drinks excessively and lives for nights out. Throughout the monologue, she tells the story of her meeting an ex-soldier and how that led her life to unravel.

Effie's vulnerability is revealed as she becomes reliant on an under-resourced National Health Service. The tragedy climaxes with a rallying cry against austerity measures.

Gary Owen's drama topped a shortlist that included two other plays: *People, Places and Things* by Duncan Macmillan and *hang* by Debbie Tucker Green.

Duncan Macmillan's tragi-comedy tells the story of an actress whose life has spun recklessly out of control, while *hang* is set in a near future where victims of crime can decide their perpetrator's punishment.

The accolade was launched in 2012 when Britain's oldest book awards, the James Tait Black Prizes, were extended to include a new category for drama.

Judges seek to celebrate originality in playwriting. The panel includes students and academics from the University of Edinburgh, representatives from the Traverse Theatre, Playwrights' Studio, Scotland and Schaubühne Theatre in Berlin – a major hub of new playwriting in Europe.

Chair of the judging panel, Greg Walker, Regius Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature at the University of Edinburgh, said: “Gary Owen’s *Effie* is wonderfully written: the snarling, fierce and witty young woman makes audiences laugh, cry and stand up to revolt. *Iphigenia in Splott* goes to the heart of what this award aims to do – recognise innovation in playwriting – and I am delighted it won this year’s prize.”

Orla O’Loughlin, Artistic Director at the Traverse Theatre, said: "*Iphigenia in Splott* is a magnificent piece of work that deeply affected everyone who saw it. Gary Owen perfectly hit a moment in time and in *Effie* gave us an epic roar of a character, reflecting back to us the painful reality and legacy of austerity hit Britain. It is a worthy winner from a brilliant and inspirational shortlist."

Previous winners of the James Tait Black Prize for Drama include Gordon Dahlquist’s sci-fi thriller *Tomorrow Come Today* (2015), Rory Mullarkey’s first full-length play, *Cannibals* (2014) and acclaimed drama *The Radicalisation of Bradley Manning* (2013) by Tim Price.

For further information and images please contact:

Kathryn Dunlop, Press and PR Office, tel 0131 651 5587; email kathryn.dunlop@ed.ac.uk