



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

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

News Release

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UNDER STRICT EMBARGO UNTIL 18.00 BST MONDAY, 20 AUGUST

Personal take on India's fight for freedom scoops drama prize

A powerful drama charting the life of an Indian freedom fighter – who was also the playwright's great-uncle – has won a leading prize linked to the UK's oldest literary awards.

Tanika Gupta's *Lions and Tigers* is the sixth play to win the James Tait Black Prize for Drama. The £10,000 accolade is awarded annually by the University of Edinburgh in association with Playwrights' Studio, Scotland and the Traverse Theatre.

The news was announced at an award ceremony this evening (Monday 20 August) in Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre, hosted by television and radio presenter Shereen Nanjiani.

Premiering 70 years after India gained independence, *Lions and Tigers* is based on the true story of Tanika Gupta's great-uncle Dinesh Gupta, a Bengali revolutionary who fought against British colonial rule in the early 1930s.

Letters written by her great-uncle from his prison cell provide the foundation of Tanika Gupta's ambitious and emotive drama, offering fresh insight into Indian independence and the battles between the so-called British lions and the Bengal tigers.

The production premiered in August 2017 at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, as part of Shakespeare's Globe's Festival of Independence. It was directed Pooja Ghai, associate director of Theatre Royal Stratford East.

The impressive shortlist included three other plays: *Anatomy of a Suicide* by Alice Birch; *Glory on Earth* by Linda McLean; and *Locker Room Talk* by Gary McNair.

Alice Birch's *Anatomy of a Suicide* weaves together the stories of three generations of women in a family, all afflicted by depressive thoughts. The experimental play explores the personal trauma of suicide, and questions whether it can run through a family's DNA.

Mary Queen of Scots is at the heart of Linda McLean's *Glory on Earth*. The play examines the relationship between the young Catholic Mary Stuart and the Protestant reformer John Knox – both of whom believe that they have the God-given right to power.

Gary McNair's arresting play *Locker Room Talk* features four women repeating verbatim sexist remarks made by real men in anonymous interviews. The relentless misogyny – often glossed over as banter – highlights a perceived crisis in modern masculinity.

The drama award was launched in 2012, when Britain's oldest literary awards – the James Tait Black Prizes – were extended to include a category to celebrate innovative playwriting.

Each year, the accolade is given to a new play in English, Scots or Gaelic, which demonstrates an original theatrical voice and makes a significant contribution to the art form.

Uniquely, the drama prize is judged by emerging artists, students and established theatre experts, rather than critics.

The panel featured students and academics from the University of Edinburgh, representatives from the Traverse Theatre, Playwrights' Studio, Scotland, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Schaubuhne Theatre, Berlin, and a freelance theatre director.

Chair of the judging panel, Greg Walker, Regius Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature at the University of Edinburgh, said: "The talent and creativity shown by this year's shortlist was astounding. Tanika Gupta's epic drama pushes the boundaries of verbatim theatre, telling an important story in a fresh and authentic way never seen on stage before. It is a rousing piece of work that was a worthy winner for this year's James Tait Black Prize for Drama."

Fiona Sturgeon Shea, Creative Director, Playwrights' Studio, Scotland, said: "It is an enormous privilege to be involved in the James Tait Black Prize for Drama, both personally for me as a judge, but also through our work in further exploring the shortlisted plays with a director and actors from Scotland, as part of the Award ceremony.

"It is always an agonising decision to reach just one winner from such a strong field and an exceptional shortlist. Tanika Gupta's play, *Lions and Tigers*, brings vividly to life a fascinating historical period with a warmth and power that is extraordinarily moving."

Orla O'Loughlin, Artistic Director at the Traverse Theatre, said: "This year's shortlist represents the impressive breadth and depth of innovation that the James Tait Black Prize for Drama seeks to champion. These writers have created vibrant, urgent and provocative new plays which speak deeply to our turbulent times, and we are particularly thrilled that *Locker Room Talk* has been shortlisted. I am delighted for them all and congratulate them on their great success."

Previous winners include: David Ireland's confrontational tragicomedy *Cyprus Avenue* (2017); Gary Owen's one-woman monologue, *Iphigenia in Splott* (2016); Gordon Dahlquist's sci-fi play *Tomorrow Come Today*; Rory Mullarkey's *Cannibals* (2014); and Tim Price's acclaimed drama *The Radicalisation of Bradley Manning* (2013).

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