

At a ceremony at the National Theatre on 30th October 2007 the winner of the 16th Meyer-Whitworth Award for new writing in theatre was announced. The award went to Morna Pearson for her play *Distracted* (Traverse Theatre, 2006).

Nicholas Hytner, Director of the National Theatre, presented the cheque for £10,000 from funds provided by the Royal National Theatre Foundation, as a result of a generous past donation from the Meyer and Whitworth families.

Morna Pearson said: "I am thrilled and honoured to receive the Meyer-Whitworth Award. Being a new playwright involves a constant struggle to balance work and writing and, in this respect, winning the award couldn't have happened at a better time. I am now very excited about the future."

The Meyer-Whitworth Award is intended to help further the careers of UK playwrights who are not yet established. The award is also intended to draw to public attention the importance of writers in contemporary theatre.

The judges for the award this year were Mary Brennan, Arts Journalist and Stuart Mullins, Creative Director of Theatre Is. Julie Ellen, Creative Director of Playwrights' Studio, Scotland chaired the judging meeting.

Stuart Mullins said: "The standard of the six short listed plays was very high. We were looking for a play and a writer that would challenge us to look at the world in a very different way. One play did this, without doubt an exciting and original voice that British theatre must nurture and cherish. The piece is truly theatrical and could be created through no other medium – its visual, visceral, poetical and magical.....it's 'theatre'."

Distracted is the darkly surreal and laugh-out-loud story of Jamie Purdy who finds himself in a run down residential caravan park in Morayshire. Jamie is looking for something. He's looking under the rocks, he's observing the beasties, he's even asked the chicken on the packet of corn. Problem is, he's got no idea what's he's looking for. Out here on the edge he finds George-Michael Skinner and his young mother Bunny. A mother and son partnership whose unconventional view of the world might throw light on the origin of Jamie's species.

Morna says: "I'm very fond of *Distracted*, my first professional play and I'm continually amazed and encouraged by the overall reaction to it. Particularly as it's my portrayal of a small, colourful section of my native North-East Scotland."

The application process for the 17th Meyer-Whitworth Award will commence in December for plays produced between 1st November 2006 and 30th November 2007.

Ends

Notes to editors

1. Morna Pearson

Morna was born in Elgin, Scotland, but now lives in Edinburgh. Morna's earliest play *Untogether* was developed whilst she was part of the Traverse Theatre's Young Writers Group in 2002/03 and was given a public performed reading at the Royal Court Theatre as part of their 2004 Young Writers' Festival, and produced in Sydney by the Australian Theatre for Young People. Her first professional play *Distracted* was commissioned and produced by the Traverse Theatre in November 2006, and was subsequently nominated for Best New Play at the 2006/07 Critics Awards for Theatre in Scotland. In 2006 she co-wrote internet drama *JCN16* with Raindog Productions and won the inaugural Rod Hall Memorial Award, which includes representation by Rod Hall Literary Agency and a commission for Paines Plough. Morna is currently under commission to the Traverse Theatre for a second play, and to BBC Radio Scotland.

2. The Meyer Whitworth Award

The Meyer-Whitworth Award is given annually to a writer whose play shows a developing new talent. The winner embodies Geoffrey Whitworth's dictum that 'drama is important in so far as it reveals the truth about the relationships of human beings with each other and the world at large'.

The award was established in 1991 to commemorate members of the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Committee, which had been set up in 1908 to campaign for a national theatre. The Royal National Theatre Foundation donates the £10,000 prize.

Submissions are accepted from Theatre Companies, Literary Departments and Producers who nominate individual plays. The application process for the 17th Meyer-Whitworth Award will commence in December for plays produced between 1 November 2006 and 30 November 2007, with details on the Playwrights' Studio's website, www.playwrightsstudio.co.uk.

3. The Royal National Theatre Foundation

The Royal National Theatre Foundation is a registered charity, independent of the National Theatre. It has two purposes. One is to help past and present members of the National's staff and company who are in need. For example, it has helped to pay special medical expenses, has made grants in cases of exceptional personal distress, and has assisted in the completion of education and training. The second purpose is to help meet the cost of special projects which would otherwise be beyond the scope of the National's normal budgets.

Registered Charity 271706

4. The Playwrights' Studio, Scotland

The Playwrights' Studio, Scotland aims to directly engage the people of Scotland with new playwriting and raise the standard of plays for presentation to the public.

It celebrates, promotes and develops Scotland's rich and growing culture of writing for live performance; improving and sustaining artistic quality, raising awareness, and increasing access to new playwriting.

By raising the standard and maximising the production of contemporary Scottish plays we aim to enrich the quality of cultural life. Through our work we increase awareness of the wealth of creative talent within Scotland, both at home and internationally.

5. The Traverse Theatre

The Traverse is Scotland's new writing theatre. Founded in 1963 by a group of maverick artists and enthusiasts, it began as an imaginative attempt to capture the spirit of adventure and experimentation of the Edinburgh Festival all year round. Throughout the decades, the Traverse has evolved and grown in artistic output and ambition. It has refined its mission by strengthening its commitment to producing new plays by Scottish and international playwrights and actively nurturing them throughout their careers. Traverse productions have been seen worldwide and tour regularly throughout the UK and overseas.