



Katherine Mendelsohn
Literary Manager of Traverse Theatre

Data

Traverse Theatre

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Traverse Theatre was founded in 1963 by a group of young artists such as the Edinburgh Festival regular Jim Haynes and theatre students. At the time, it was called the Traverse Theatre club and its theatre was built in Lawnmarket, an area of Edinburgh that had formerly been the red-light district. Haynes led a theatre company called the Paperback Bookshop at that time, whose name reflected his strong interest in performing new plays and works of literature.

In 1969, the theatre's center of activities was moved to a theatre built in a renovated warehouse in the of Edinburgh's Grassmarket district. Later it moved again to the theatre's present location at Saltire Court off Cambridge Street. In 1992, the city of Edinburgh built a new purpose-designed theatre complex with a 216-350-seat hall, a 100-seat studio and peripheral facilities such as a bar café, and the organization's management was reorganized as The Traverse Theatre Ltd., Britain's first studio theatre.

Ever since its founding, the Traverse has

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Calling itself Scotland's "new writing theatre," the Traverse commissions new plays from playwrights, holds writing workshops, reviews new plays submitted to its Literary department and conducts rehearsed readings of new works, all with the aim of discovering and nurturing writers for theatre. To find out how the Traverse has become an internationally renowned source of new plays, we spoke with the theatre's Literary Manager, Katherine Mendelsohn. (Interviewed by Takehiko Tanioka, comprised by Hiromi Nakayama)

Can I start the interview by asking you about theatre in Scotland?

Scotland has long had wonderful poets, novelists, philosophers, all sorts of very famous writers and in the 60s we began to see plays emerge where people were starting to write in the voice of the street, in the way people were actually living and speaking rather than in a more literary language. This paralleled a similar UK-wide shift in drama that showed in famous TV shows, like *Cathy Come Home* (see footnotes: *1), which was a very gritty sort of kitchen sink drama on TV about the lives of working-class people. There was a whole shift in the way playwrights were writing. Perhaps Scotland got a somewhat later start in theater compared to England or Ireland, but because of the outstanding literary tradition here the level of plays that have been written is very high and the theatre is also strengthened by having many talented actors and directors.

Part of the historical background in Scottish theatre, is that you had new theatres like the Traverse that were interested in encouraging new creative work and then you had independent companies who exist by touring their work in the Highlands and the islands. Some of the famous companies were (NB 7:84 has just had a large funding-cut) the very political-oriented 7:84 Theatre Company (*2) that took its name from the fact that 7% of the population in Britain controlled 84% of the country's wealth, and more recently Grid Iron Theatre Company (GITC) (*3). Another more recent big event in Scottish theatre is the start of the National Theatre of Scotland (NTS) (*4), which is now in its first year. NTS doesn't have a building, it is a creative organization that works with all of the existing companies and artists in Scotland to do collaborative productions in theatres all over Scotland. For example, in April of 2006 NTS collaborated with GITC and did *Roam*, which was staged in Edinburgh Airport. I think that the establishment of NTS with this kind of program and the active funding of performing arts projects by the Scottish government is going to contribute to many new developments. So, the current situation in Scotland is very positive, partly because of NTS, which has got a great artistic energy, as well as vision.

What kind of role is the Traverse Theatre playing now in Scottish theatre today?

The Traverse is a theatre that works with living playwrights. That is the main part of our identity. From the 80s we began focusing especially on the development of British writers. Since the 90s, the purpose of the Traverse has been very much on

Ever since its founding, the Traverse has been dedicated to the encouragement of new writing in its productions and programming and regularly commissions new works from playwrights in Scotland and abroad. Over the years the Traverse has mounted over 600 world premieres of new plays, including such internationally acclaimed works as Stanley Eveling's *The Balachites* in the 60s, Iain Crichton Smith, John Byrne's *The Slab Boys Trilogy* in the 70s, Liz Lochhead's *Perfect Days* in the 80s and in the 90s David Greig's *Outlying Islands* and David Harrower's *Knives in Hens*. Plays produced at the Traverse's productions are staged around the world and the theatre also mounts tours or productions in Britain and abroad.

Recognized in 2000 by the Scotland Arts Council for its efforts in producing new plays and encouraging new playwrights, the Traverse is now being called Scotland's "new writing theatre." In the 2004/2005 season the theatre has also been actively promoting international projects with countries including Japan, China, France and Portugal to introduce foreign plays. The present artistic director is the director Philip Howard. The new works commissioned by the Traverse are performed by Traverse Theatre Company, which is produced by the Theatre. The Traverse is also actively involved in collaborations with other theatres and companies in Britain and abroad and touring productions.

(*5) Literary Department: This is an important department of the artistic division headed by the Artistic Director. At the Traverse, this department is made up of three people, the Literary Manager, the Literary Development Officer and a Literary Assistant. They work with the Associate Director and the two Producers to commission new works for the Traverse Theatre Company productions and a variety of activities with playwrights.

The Traverse also serves as one of the major venues for the famous Edinburgh Festival during the summer season.

Traverse Theatre 2004 activities

*Income: 1,322,642 (not including bar café sales)

*Expenses: 1,317,486

*Stages for the year: 534

[Traverse productions: 80 / tours: 43 / collaborations: 395 (companies: 66) / others: 16]

*Education programmes: 37

*Support programmes: 10

*Exhibitions: 11

developing new generations of Scottish playwrights, as well as playwrights from outside Scotland. Our aim is serving the writers. We continue to commission the established playwrights for new works but we also focus on discovering new voices. We call ourselves the writers' theatre, which means that the writers all have very, very high status here. Because what you're trying to do is realize the writer's vision, and all the directors who work here work very hard to give that writer's voice full flow and bring it to the audience.

Could you tell us about the examples of these efforts in nurturing young, emerging Scottish playwrights?

At the Traverse we commission from six to eight new works a year. After delivering the first draft of a commissioned play that they've written for the Traverse, each playwright we've commissioned is offered the possibility of individual script-development workshops on their commissions. These development workshops are private, and they may be the first time the writers have actually heard the play. It's very important if you are a playwright that you hear it. It gives you a perfectly different feeling for the length of the piece, the pace, where it's working, where it's not working. All commissioned writers also receive one-to-one dramaturgy from the director who will direct their play, and from the Traverse's literary manager. In these individual sessions the writer is encouraged to discuss and explore the detail and structure of their play. Each playwright is offered personal encouragement and professional critical feedback on their writing. The aim is to try and enable the writer to fulfill the play they are writing and to hone their work.

By the way, when we commission a work we don't give the writer a date that the production will be on, so they can take as long as they like to write that play. But that means that at any one time we have a rolling lot of commissions that come into the theatre. So, at any one time we have writers delivering plays that we can then consider for production. We might also offer new writers a short-play commission, and that may be a step on to a full-length play commission. Other people are lucky enough to get a full-length play commission straightaway. The main point in displaying all these options is that you tailor it to the individual writer every time, and you don't have a system, a formula.

Do you have programs for writers from the general public?

We accept scripts sent to us in the post from writers throughout the UK and also from around the world. These scripts are all read and reported on by an expert panel and we can then give feedback to the writers about their playwriting where it is appropriate. These scripts are sent in by a mixture of first-time playwrights and also professional writers. We prioritise responding to scripts by writers living in Scotland and are most likely to give these the most detailed feedback as we are one of the very few resources these writers will have.

Writers from outside the UK mainly want to know whether or not we will produce their work, so we do not always include detailed feedback for these writers. It is very rare for any of these scripts to be produced by the Traverse, but it is very important for alerting us to writers whose work we are interested in developing.

In the time I have worked here, I think only one unsolicited script made it straight to the stage. But that one turned into one of our most successful plays!

In exceptional cases where we feel an unsolicited writer has real talent, a member of the Literary Department will meet with the writer in person to talk in detail about their play. These individual meetings can be really important to help us better get to understand what the writer wants to achieve with their work, and also to understand their process and where possible to help them along the way.

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Each season we programme two or three Public Playwriting Workshops. These workshops are run for small groups (between 10-15 people) and they are always run by a successful professional playwright who can communicate their own process and approach to playwriting. We also have other workshops aimed at a particular level of skill or experience. The writers who have run these workshops include: Zinnie Harris, David Greig, Douglas Maxwell, and Rona Munro. Very often we choose a writer who has a Traverse production on that season to run the workshop.

We also have our Young Writers Groups run by one of our professional produced Traverse writers. These are fortnightly groups for budding playwrights aged between 15-25 years old. They meet one evening a week to develop their playwriting under the mentorship of the older writer. In the first year the young writers will focus on developing all the elements of playwriting: including dialogue, character, form, plotting, stage directions etc., while they write short plays or scenes. In the second year they will work on writing their first full-length plays and will receive individual dramaturgy from the playwright leading the group.

Do you have any outreach programmes?

The Traverse provides a number of education possibilities, including schools and college visits and workshops, to education packs on our new plays. We also run regular teachers' forums to discuss our coming work. Once a year the Traverse runs CLASS ACT, which is our schools playwriting project. Leading professional playwrights run playwriting workshops in schools over a number of months and work with the children (14-17 years old) to get them to write their own short plays. These plays are then developed and produced with Traverse actors and directors, and staged here in the theatre. All the plays are also published by the Traverse Theatre.

We run public workshops on playwriting in community centres in Edinburgh and around Scotland. These adult workshops are open to the general public from that area, and aim to encourage people to try writing their first plays, and to then develop that work further through some professional help. In certain projects this may result in seeing the work performed at the Traverse by professional actors, in other projects it's a one-off starter workshop on playwriting. Also, once a year we take one of our shows and play it in venues around Scotland, from the Borders in the south to the Highlands, and we will quite often run a writers' workshop to accompany the tour. In these we will work with writers from that region. That's quite often where you begin making contact with new voices.

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*1 *Cathy Come Home*

Broadcast from Dec. 1966 on the BBC1 "Wednesday Drama Series." (Screenplay: Jeremy Sandford; Director: Ken Roach; Producer: Tommy Garnet) The young housewife Cathy lives with her husband and children. When her husband loses his job due to an incident, the family begins its slide into poverty. Filmed in a documentary style, this drama became a major hit with its depiction of the various trials and tribulations of the hand-to-mouth existence of the homeless family, culminating with the children being taken away to a Social Service facility.

*2 7:84 Theatre Company

This company was founded in England amidst the social upheaval of 1971 by John McGrath, a playwright previously associated with Liverpool's Everyman Theatre, with the belief that theater needed to break away from the existing control of the bourgeois. That same year the company presented *Trees In The Wind* at the Edinburgh Festival. This production became a big hit and toured for two years and was strongly received by audiences everywhere. This led McGrath to establish a company in Scotland, with its rich history, culture and tradition of political activism. The result was the founding of the Scottish 7:84 in 1973, based in Glasgow.

The name 7:84 comes from a statistic revealed in the *Economist* that a mere 7% of Britons owned 84% of the country's wealth. The company's policy has been to seek a socio-political role for theatre, to use language that anyone could associate with, to break down the barriers between the audience and the actors, to perform in places besides theatres and to take theatre to people who otherwise would have no opportunity to see it.

Until now the company has received support from the Scotland Arts Council and Glasgow city, but with the decision by the SAC to cut all financial support as of March 2006, they are now involved in a signature petition campaign to regain government funding. The current artistic director since 2003 is Lorenzo Mele.

*3 Grid Iron Theatre Company

The company was formed in 1995 with Edinburgh as its base. They quickly won a reputation for high-quality works after their first production *Clearance* was staged at the Traverse Theatre that same year. Since then they have continued to present successful works, including ones staged in unique non-theatre settings. In 1997 the company produced their first full-scale site-specific production, *The Bloody Chamber*, in underground vaults beneath Edinburgh's historic Royal Mile. In 1999, they presented *Monumental* as a promenade performance using the foyers, back alleys and car parks of The Citizen's Theatre, Glasgow. At the 2003 Edinburgh Festival, their production *Those Eyes, That Mouth* completely sold out and won an unprecedented five awards.

In recent years the company has performed in venues from London and New York to Jordan and Lebanon and has consistently won high acclaim. The company's producer is Judith Doherty and the theatre director is Ben Harrison.

*4 National Theatre of Scotland (NTS)

NTS was founded in 2006 as Scotland's first national theatre. Since it has no theatre facility of its own, budget that would normally go to facility development and maintenance can be directed toward creative work for its own productions, collaborative work with other theatre companies and artists and touring productions. NTS is dedicated to bringing a variety of different types of performances to all parts of Scotland, not only in theaters but also in places like schools and community centers to involve all ages of audience. Through tie-ups with major theatres and collaborations with various companies, productions are now planned for the Royal Lyceum Theatre (Edinburgh), the Glasgow Citizen's Theatre and Troy Theatre (Glasgow). They are also looking ahead to collaborations with overseas companies and overseas tours for their productions. The theatre is also involved in school and community programs that teach expression skills and working with a variety of local organizations to make theatre accessible to more people. Furthermore, the theater aims to work with artists, including playwrights, designers and directors, to pool Scottish talent and to offer unique educational programs for young actors and production just finishing their training.

From the Scottish Arts Council, the theatre has received one million pounds (220 million yen) in funding for 2003-2004 and 7.5 million pounds (1.65 billion yen) for 2004-2006 (Mar.).

The arts director is Vicky Featherstone and the headquarters are in Glasgow.

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*5 See footnote on Traverse Theatre

*6 Playwrights' Studio, Scotland

The organization is a government initiative founded in 2001 aimed at promoting the development of Scottish drama. It was established as a result of long years of lobbying The Scottish Arts Council by director Tom McGrath and the Traverse Theatre. The studio's purpose is to support the development of new plays by Scottish playwrights, living in Scotland or other parts of the UK (including overseas in some cases) for the improvement of the quality of performances.

The studio's programs include "Mentoring" of less experienced playwrights by a selected group of highly qualified and experienced playwrights to help develop their craft or a specific play, an "Evolve" program to hone the skills and cultivate the voices of non-produced and aspiring playwrights at the very start of their playwrighting career through guidance by the Playwrights' Studio together with leading theatre professionals. There is also the "Ignite" program, a national playwrighting competition aiming to find undiscovered voices for the Scottish Stage, and the "Fuse" program, a unique Scotland-wide initiative in which plays received for the general public are read anonymously by a highly skilled professional who provide feedback to help the writers develop their craft while also putting the new plays in front of the artistic directors at the country's top theatre companies. At the 2005 Edinburgh Festival, the Playwrights' Studio collaborated with four theatre companies and BBC Scotland Radio Drama to present a drama reading series.

The Playwrights' Studio Scotland is based in Glasgow. The creative director is Julie Ellen.

www.playwrightsstudio.co.uk

You said the Traverse is the only theatre with a literary department (*5).

Yes that is amazingly still the case. But now there is also a very good organization called The Playwrights' Studio of Scotland (*6), and they have started to read unsolicited scripts like we do. They are not a theatre company, so they won't produce them, but they are giving writers feedback, and mentoring writers. What they are doing is offering to fulfill the 'literary manager' role for many of the theatres in Scotland who would like to work with these writers but don't have the resources to have a literary department. They have also started script-reading this year. The National Theatre of Scotland (NTS) obviously does a lot of work with playwrighting, but what they don't accept is unsolicited scripts, because the writers they are working with tend to be of a higher level.

Does the Traverse work with The Playwrights Studio of Scotland?

When the Scottish Arts Council first launched its initial research project into the feasibility of a Playwrights' Studio for Scotland, the person tasked with that research (Faith Liddell) worked from a base at the Traverse, and our Literary Assistant of the time assisted her in the work. This was largely because at that point the Traverse was (and surprisingly still is) the only theatre in Scotland with a Literary Department, and we had the most experience in and knowledge of working with writers, as well as an extensive database of contacts. So, we made a big contribution there. Furthermore, some of the key initial ideas for the Playwrights' Studio, Scotland, had come from John Tiffany, who at that time was working at the Traverse as our Literary Director.

The *Playwrights' Studio, Scotland* was eventually established as a fully independent entity: not allied to any one theatre, but working for all of Scotland's playwrights, theatres and theatre companies, and subsidized by the Scottish Arts Council. Today, the Traverse links with the Studio only on specific projects where it can be most appropriate or beneficial to an individual writer or to Scotland's playwrights in general. For example, recently we co-funded and co-organised a day-long theatrical event at the Traverse of play-readings and discussion panels marking the 60th birthday one of Scotland's most established stage writers, Tom McGrath. We have also been involved together this year in lobbying the Arts Council to set up a translation bursary fund to provide grants to assist international theatres who seek to translate contemporary plays by Scottish playwrights. And all the Traverse's development events for writers are also advertised through the *Playwrights' Studio's* monthly e-bulletin which is sent out to writers.

The title literary manager is new to us. Could you describe the role of a literary manager?

A literary manager will work for a theater and help the director to find the plays that the theater will program. If it's a theater that does classics, it might be about sourcing exciting plays that haven't been done in a while, or you might do something where you have complementing plays that you put together to make up a season. And if it's a new writers' theater, like Traverse, it is about finding new writers, and commissioning new plays from existing writers.

I think being a literary manager is a job you don't really start early on but one that comes after acquiring skills in a number of areas. There are now some courses at universities on being a dramaturge, which is slightly different. I didn't do any training of that sort, though I now teach on some of those courses! I did English literature, which is very useful because it helped me develop my skills in analyzing

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text, ascertaining why a piece of writing is good or why it is not working. That is very important to the job I do. But I didn't do it to become a literary manager.

The Traverse does a lot of rehearsed readings in your program. Could you talk about what these are?

Rehearsed readings are like a production but without the sets and the costumes. A group of actors will work with the director on the play and they will rehearse the play but for a much shorter time. They will perform it, holding the script in their hand so they can refer to it if they need to. What's amazing is that when using wonderful actors, it's very close to a real production, but with less distraction. And, quite often, our audience response is that it's a much purer experience, both with the play and with the acting.

There is also a very practical side, which is that it's much cheaper than an actual production. Some theatres can't afford to do many productions. You can also do readings as a chance to give your audience access to more plays, which is a very positive reason. Bringing an entire company over from Australia, for example, would be quite expensive, but being able to simply invite a playwright and having your own company do a reading gives you and your audience access to a whole lot of exciting plays without extra cost.

Another reason for the reading can be for the writer—it can be a great chance for the writer to experience the work and see the work with an audience for the first time. Sometimes we do rehearsed readings for plays that we will go on to produce, and it's a great chance for the writer to hear the play when it's in the draft stage.

Do you find it difficult to put foreign works on stage in Scotland?

The Traverse has always been a very good place in terms of putting on foreign works, because our audience and artistic director are both very open to it. One of my passions is international theater, and very often with new writing that involves translation. One of the big areas of my expertise is working with writers on translation of their play, and making sure those translations have as good a quality as the original—that they are not just about translation of the language, that they are about translation of energy, the spirit of the play, the delicacy. Another thing we do is working with international playwrights to translate works that will specifically gear to production, not just play-reading. This program is called Playwrights in Partnership.

What kind of programme is it?

In our Playwrights in Partnership programme we find some foreign-language play that we really want to do and then find a Scottish (or British) playwright who is well suited for translating that play. And, unless our Scottish writer speaks the original language that the play is in, we quite often involve the original international playwright very heavily in the project to make sure we do as good a job as possible. One of the methods we use is to have a 'residency' that we host. In the residency the original playwright works together both with myself as a 'translation dramaturg' and with the Scottish playwright who is working on the text in English for the stage here in the UK. We use the residency to go through the text together in minute detail to uncover points such as this, so that the British writer can then use their skills to make the right choice from all the linguistic options open to them.

We bring the playwrights together to work first on a literal translation of the play—this is just about the language. It's much too rough to perform at this stage and quite often as full of notes as it is with parts of the actual play itself. The most

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important thing is the footnotes. You don't find solutions because it's not the final text. What happens is that the Scottish playwright will find the creative solutions to that translation and produce the final text that you are performing. It's very faithful to the original play—it's not about the Scottish playwright moving in a different direction and making it a different piece. It's about trying to capture the essence of the original play and understanding that that essence is not just about the literal meaning of the language, it's about many other things: style, energy, and rhythm. Many contemporary plays use a lot of colloquial language (such as slang or swearing) for their characters because that is the way many people speak in life. This becomes a vital part of the translation that is quite difficult. So in this instance above, the Scottish playwright or myself would ask the original playwright what they had intended from that moment in the play and what the impact had been in the original play. The original writer always has a clear idea of how their individual character's language worked, so they can then answer whether the mother swears all the time, how strong a swearword she has used (mild or shocking) and whether it is unusual and out of character for her and therefore in this instance is provoked by something else such as the tension in the scene. The Scottish playwright can then make their own choice of which word to use in the English play-text, and it will now be a choice that is closer to achieving the qualities in the original play.

How do you find the right playwright for a particular foreign play?

Deciding which Scottish/British playwright will be the best match for the international playwright in a *Playwrights in Partnership* translation commission is always one of the most exciting parts of the whole translation process.

It depends on understanding those qualities which make the international play unique, and which are at the very essence of its being.

So when I have picked a play that we want to translate and stage, I then think about the texture and character of the language in the original (international) play before deciding which British stage-voice will best be able to get under the skin of that play and truly inhabit it. I ask myself which voice can make this play live and breathe in English – a very different language from that in which the play was originally written? Of course, to answer this question, it's important to have a really good knowledge of the plays of Scottish/British playwrights.

A specific example about choosing a writer is

shown with our latest commission, *STRAWBERRIES IN JANUARY*, which the Traverse produced for this year's Edinburgh Festival. We chose the Scottish playwright Rona Munro to translate this by Québec playwright Evelyne de la Chenelière. Rona read a rough translation of *STRAWBERRIES* and loved the play. Then she, Evelyne and I took part, with a great Canadian dramaturg called Nadine Desrochers, in a 10-day residency in Montreal where we worked on developing Rona's first annotated draft of the translation. We gave Rona's draft of the text a staged play-reading at the Traverse last year, and after this Rona finessed her translation further.

You have also actively pursued exchanges with Japan?

The links with Japan that have happened in my time here began in 2001. I was very interested in contemporary playwriting that was coming from Japan, and feeling that we didn't have a lot of access to it in Britain. There were some translations that were published and done by the Japanese Playwrights Association, which were really our only chance to connect with that work. We were seeing wonderful productions being brought over, largely of classic drama—Kabuki, different forms

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Happy Lads at the Japan in Schottland Reading, Traverse Theatre in June, 2006

*7 Contemporary Japanese Drama Reading Series

As an official part of the large-scale cultural exchange event "Japan 2001" that introduced Japanese culture in the UK in 2001, a reading series of four contemporary Japanese plays was held in July and December at the Bush Theater in London. In July there were readings of the already translated works *Time's Storeroom* by Ai Nagai and *Fireflies* by Toshiro Suzue. In December readings were given of the newly translated works *The Happy Lads* by Hideo Tsuchiya and *Far from the River (Ano Kawa ni Toi Mado)* by Koji Hasegawa.

of traditional theater. But they were the historical forms—we weren't getting contact with contemporary dramatists. Because we were getting contact with contemporary novelists, contemporary filmmakers, I knew there would be very good contemporary playwriting happening in Japan, and I felt very frustrated with not having a connection with it.

We started very small. In 2001, we did a rehearsed reading of Toshiro Suzue's play *Fireflies*. I directed that reading. We used an existing translation that had been commissioned by the Japan Foundation, and it was a wonderful play—we found a real connection with it, and with Suzue as a writer. But because this was a starter project and we didn't have that much funding, we weren't able to bring him over to attend.

Then the Bush Theatre began doing a series of Japanese play readings (*7), and they asked me to do the same reading in London. It was there that I was lucky enough to meet Suzue. I felt a great amount of connection to his writing, and also felt that he was an extremely talented writer. The Traverse Theatre decided that we would like to commission a Playwrights in Partnership translation of Suzue's play *A Happy Morning Under a Tree* with the aim of taking it on to production. These things take years, sadly. Translating Asian languages is actually much more difficult for Europeans.

Because of cultural differences?

It's actually not so much those things. There are fewer people who speak the Asian languages, therefore you are limited as to your translators. We did manage to get a very good literal translation, but even a very good translator will make a lot of mistakes, because plays are very ambiguous, and you always have a choice when you translate about what a particular word could be. One of the difficult things about translating plays is that if you make slightly the wrong choice, you get taken in the wrong direction. That is why Playwrights in Partnership is perfect for working with a Japanese playwright—because it's very important that you have the original playwright there saying "no, no, no, that's not what that means."

When we work with playwrights, we talk through the translation line by line, word by word. It's about learning about the character, not about how you would translate that word. There is a lot of work. The development of the draft, getting the delicacy of the language right has taken a long time.

The good thing about the connection with Suzue was that we then began a bigger relationship through the help of the Japan Foundation, which given us connections with a lot of playwrights in Japan. In 2004, myself and Philip Howard, the Traverse Theatre's artistic director, and two playwrights from Scotland, David Harrower and Nicola McCartney, came out to Japan and staged rehearsed readings at the Setagaya Public Theatre [in Tokyo] and the Ai Hall in Itami, Osaka. And we also did a talk session at the Kyoto Arts Center. We worked in these three different cities and met a huge number of contemporary writers, both very young and more experienced writers. And we had some wonderful conversations where we got to find out about each others work, not just individually but the kind of system of work in the different countries and the way plays were rehearsed, situations for writers in the different countries—it was an incredible visit. It was great fun. It was a huge experience, we learned so much about the detail of each others' work. It was very stimulating and exciting for I think both sides of that dialogue.

After that we invited two Japanese playwrights, Suzue and Masataka Matsuda, to the Traverse, where we did rehearsed readings of their work in translation. Since

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*8 Scottish Drama Readings at Ai Hall, Itami

Since 2004, Ai Hall is engaged in an ongoing "Japan-UK Contemporary Drama Exchange Project" with the Traverse Theatre. Each year one Scottish play is chosen to be translated into Japanese and performed as a rehearsed reading by a director and actors from Japan's Kansai region. In 2004, a reading of David Harrower's *Knives in Hens* was given, followed by *Gagarin Way* by Gregory Burke in 2005 and *Iron* by Rona Munro in 2006. The playwrights are invited to Japan for these readings and give post-performance talks and symposiums. The next reading is planned for March 2007.

then, once a year we have been coming out to Ai Hall for readings (*8) with a different Scottish playwright, having the work translated into Japanese. The works have been incredibly well translated and I think that's really a key to the success of the relationship as well.

Again this year, we brought two more Japanese playwrights back to Scotland, Hideo Tsuchida and Masahiro Iwasaki. For this visit we have tried to do a slightly more in-depth residency. We also invited producers from Japan to have had them meeting different departments of the theater and ask the questions they want to ask about the way we are working, and also tell us about the way they are working. I think for me, the producers' residency has been one of the more exciting things. The playwrights Tsuchida and Iwasaki have met with our young writers, and our young writers loved finding out about Japanese theater, because they knew so little about contemporary Japanese theater. We also performed readings and had panel discussions on contemporary playwriting in Japan. This type of residency has been a great educational experience. It is the best kind of artistic connection, one in which there is a two-way dialogue between the artists.

One more thing I want to say is that we fully intend to continue our work with Japanese playwrights. And each time we do, we have to be very clever, because the costs are greater. But, I will say that we fully intend to bring one of Suzue's plays to full production and we will continue the rehearsed readings too, in order to work with more writers.

I find the quality of the Japanese playwrights' work to be very high, and it is interesting because of how closely connected it is to our own feelings and experiences, and sometimes very different as well.