

Tutor in the running for poetry prize

by **Chris Betteley**

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A TUTOR at Aberystwyth University is in contention for a major literary prize, after being long-listed for the coveted Dylan Thomas Prize with her debut work.

Poet Jemma L King, who teaches literature and creative writing at Aberystwyth University, where she also completed her doctoral thesis, has been nominated for her work, 'The Shape of the Forest'.

The 28-year-old, who lives in Corris after spending her childhood in Llanon, is a previous winner of the Terry Hetherington Young Writer of the Year Award.

Jemma, also a founding member of the Centre for Women, Writing and Literary Culture, said she couldn't believe the news but is honoured to be part of the list.

"I first heard on Thursday night via a few congratulatory messages coming through on social media," Jemma said.

"I couldn't quite believe that my little book, published by an independent, had managed to elbow its way onto an international list for such a prestigious prize.

"I still don't believe it, in fact.

"I had to wait until Saturday night to celebrate, but I made a point of celebrating it because I think it's possibly my biggest achievement to date.

"It means more, in some ways, than my academic achievements because there is no formula, or template, for such things. It was totally unexpected and I feel so honoured to be included."

The Dylan Thomas Prize, now in its seventh year, celebrates the best young writers under 30 from across the world and is one of the richest literary awards, offering £30,000 to the winner.

Originally from Shrewsbury, Jemma moved to Llanon, where she spent her teenage years, before moving to Aberystwyth where she was a pupil at Penglais.

She now lives at the foot of

Cader Idris in Gwynedd. Her work *The Shape of a Forest* is a powerful survey of life and of human experience that spans centuries and the continents exploring desire, loss and revenge.

The final shortlist from the 12 long-listed for the Dylan Thomas Prize will be announced in the autumn, and the winner will be given their cheque, along with a limited-edition bronze cast of Dylan Thomas, at an awards ceremony in Dylan Thomas' birthplace of Swansea in November.

Commenting on this year's long list, chair of the prize, Peter Stead, said: "This year's long-list is an eclectic list of considerable variety.

"Every year of the prize is different from the previous one but this year, the sheer volume of new talent we've discovered leaves me with a feeling that we are going to have an exceptional year.

"These are books that readers will definitely want to get their hands on."

Jemma gave readings from *The Shape of the Forest* in Cardigan last month and is currently working on her unpublished second volume of poems.

The Shape of the Forest was released in June published by Parthian.



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UPDATE

Poet Jemma L. King is flying the flag for Wales in this year's £30,000 Dylan Thomas literary prize after being named one of seven writers shortlisted for the 2013 award.

The 28-year-old, who teaches literature and creative writing at Aberystwyth University, was the winner of the Terry Hetherington Award for young writers in 2011 and has published her creative and academic work internationally.

She began life on the Welsh-English border near Shropshire but moved to Llanon with her Welsh mother, being educated at Ysgol Penglais and then at Aberystwyth University and says she is now happy being termed "the Welsh poet".

Her debut collection of poetry, *The Shape of a Forest* (Parthian Books), deals with desire, loss and revenge.

There has not been a Welsh winner of the world renowned prize commemorating Swansea-born Dylan Thomas since Rhondda writer Rachel Tresize picked up the inaugural award in 2006 with her work *Fresh Apples*. Her successors include Nam Le, a Vietnamese-born writer based in New York, Belfast writer Lucy Caldwell and last year's winner Maggie Shipstead from California.

King said: "Winning the DT Prize would be like winning the lottery. Everybody on the shortlist and indeed on the longlist, will know the chances of succeeding in literature are so slim that to get any sort of major recognition for your work isn't even in the plan.

"Most writers I know (especially first time writers) just cross their fingers and toes that their manuscript will get picked up by a publisher in the first place, so to be shortlisted for a prestigious prize is just blindsiding, but obviously, in the best way possible!

"If I won, it wouldn't just be validating to me as a writer but also to poetry, which rarely scoops the prize. I'm absolutely thrilled by the news."

The other shortlisted writers, also all with debut works, hail from, Africa, India, the USA and England.

The winner, who gets a £30,000 cheque and a limited edition bronze cast of Dylan Thomas will be announced at an awards

ceremony in Swansea in November.

Now in its seventh year, the Dylan Thoms Prize, sponsored by Swansea University, is open to any published author in the English language under 30.

Chairman of the judging panel, Peter Florence, said: "We had such a strong shortlist this year we had to include a seventh title. In all my years on the judging panel of the prize, I've never seen a higher standard of entry."

Professor Peter Stead, the prize's chairman, said: "These are amazing and accomplished books by writers all under 30".

The 2013 judging panel consists of Hay Festival founder, Peter Florence, novelist and columnist Allison Pearson, author, singer and BBC 6 music presenter Cerys Matthews, journalist, author and Western Mail columnist Carolyn Hitt, ex MP, commentator and artist Kim Howells, Guardian Review journalist Nicholas Wroe, poet and English professor at the University of Texas Kurt Heinzelman and Chairman of the Dylan Thomas Prize, Peter Stead.

This year's shortlist:

Novels

Marli Roode, *Call It Dog*
(Atlantic Books)

Majok Tulba, *Beneath the Darkening Sky* (OneWorld)

Short Stories

Claire Vaye Watkins, *Battleborn*
(Granta)

Prajwal Parajuly, *The Gurkha's Daughter* (Quercus)

Poetry

James Brookes, *Sins of the Leopard* (Salt Publishing)

Jemma King, *The Shape of a Forest* (Parthian)