

2011 Dylan Thomas Prize Shortlist Features Three First Time Novelists

The University of Wales Dylan Thomas Prize has revealed this year's shortlist of five writers who are in the running for the £30,000 prize.

The shortlist for the Prize, which is now awarded annually, consists of new and established writers featuring three first-time novelists including the winner of this year's Orange Prize for Fiction, a previously shortlisted writer and a poet.

The shortlisted books are:

- ◆ 'The Meeting Point' by Lucy Caldwell, Faber
- ◆ 'The Evolution of Bruno Littlemore' by Benjamin Hale, Atlantic Books
- ◆ 'Folk' by Jacob McArthur Mooney, McClelland & Stewart
- ◆ 'The Tiger's Wife' by Tea Obreht, Orion
- ◆ 'My Sister Lives on the Mantelpiece' by Annabel Pitcher, Orion

The first timers are Yorkshire-based Annabel Pitcher, New York-based Benjamin Hale and Belgrade-born and New York-based Tea Obreht who was awarded this year's Orange Prize for Fiction.

Joining them on the shortlist are accomplished Canadian poet, blogger and literary critic, Jacob McArthur Mooney and Belfast-born and London-based Lucy Caldwell whose novel 'Where They Were Missed' was previously shortlisted for the Prize in its inaugural year in 2006.

The University of Wales Dylan Thomas Prize is one of the world's highest paying literary awards for young writers in honour of the internationally esteemed work of Dylan Thomas, whose first book of poetry was published when he was 21 years old. The Prize is open to all published authors aged 18 to 30, writing in the English language from anywhere in the world and is open to a variety of genres, including short stories, novels, poetry and plays.

This year's judging panel is chaired by Peter Florence MBE, Director of the Hay Festival. He is joined by a formidable group of writers and literary commentators who had the task of whittling down the entries for this year's Prize to just five titles.

"We are proud and pleased to announce our shortlist for the University of Wales Dylan Thomas Prize 2011," commented Peter Stead, Chair of the Prize. "Our judging meeting continued for

hours with deliberations about the flair and excellence of the books. We had a very different kind of entry this year and this is reflected in a more varied shortlist. The result being a shortlist which combines literary merit with readability which should arouse considerable interest amongst readers. There really is something here to excite and challenge every kind of reader.

“The previous three winners of the Prize, Elyse Fenton in 2010, Nam Le in 2008 and Rachel Trezise in 2006, have really seen their careers take off since receiving the award. We’re looking forward to helping an equally talented writer to do the same. We are, once again, delighted with the international flavour of the shortlist and we look forward to the five writers coming to Wales and talking to students in schools and colleges ahead of the award ceremony in November.”

Professor Marc Clement, President of the University of Wales, said: “This is the university’s third year of supporting the Prize and, once again, the international flavour of its shortlist and the quality of the writing underscores why we are happy to sponsor it. I wish the judges well in the extremely daunting task of choosing the most deserving winner.”

The 2011 University of Wales Dylan Thomas Prize will be awarded on November 9th in an exclusive ceremony in Dylan Thomas’ hometown of Swansea, South Wales.

Judges’ Views on the Shortlist:

‘The Meeting Point’, Lucy Caldwell - *“‘The Meeting Point’ is the story of a Christian minister and his wife moving to Bahrain and becoming caught up in emotional and religious complexities. It is beautifully written and moves towards an exciting resolution.”*

‘The Evolution of Bruno Littlemore’, Benjamin Hale - *“Benjamin Hale has had the enormous courage to tell a story narrated by a chimpanzee. He delivers a hugely amusing, often tragic, and very moving account of a life which invites us to consider the qualities, including that of language, that make us human. His is a very different kind of book but it is totally compelling.”*

‘Folk’, Jacob McArthur Mooney - *“Jacob McArthur Mooney has presented a collection in two halves. In part one of Folk, his poems deal with the 1998 crash of a Swissair flight off the coast of Nova Scotia. In part two his poems reflect the nature of a suburb adjacent to Toronto’s international airport. Throughout the book, short terse poems full of memorable phrases capture a sense of place and the lives of people coming to terms with their identity and communal realities.”*

‘The Tiger’s Wife’, Tea Obreht - “This book has been acclaimed in New York and has already won the 2011 Orange Prize for Fiction. It is a magnificent evocation of the Balkans with mythology, folk stories and the central image of a tiger brilliantly conveying the tensions and pressures that have given the area such a recent tragic history.”

‘My Sister Lives on the Mantelpiece’, Annabel Pitcher - “This is a story that will be enjoyed by adolescents and adults alike. The story of 10 year-old Jamie and his reaction to family bereavement and the separation of his parents is told with considerable humour and with heart-warming scenes. This time it’s a cat that provides an emotional focus.”

Further details on the University of Wales Dylan Thomas Prize can be found at www.dylanthomasprize.com

Ends.

For more information please contact Natasha Fulford at MGB PR on 01792 460200.

Notes to Editors

The judges for the University of Wales Dylan Thomas Prize 2011 are:

- ◆ Peter Florence MBE (Chair) - Director of the Hay Festival and Chair of Judges
- ◆ Professor Kurt Heinzelman - American poet and academic
- ◆ Dr Mererid Hopwood - Acclaimed poet, linguist and television presenter
- ◆ Dr Kim Howells - Former MP, now artist, cultural commentator and television presenter
- ◆ Allison Pearson - Daily Telegraph columnist and television arts commentator
- ◆ Rachel Trezise - Inaugural winner of the Dylan Thomas Prize
- ◆ Professor Peter Stead - Welsh academic, historian and broadcaster and Chair of the Prize

Shortlisted Authors and Books:

The Meeting Point - Lucy Caldwell

Lucy Caldwell was born in Belfast in 1981. She read English at Queen’s College, Cambridge and is a graduate of Goldsmith’s MA in Creative & Life Writing. The Meeting Point is her second novel, and she is also an award-winning playwright, currently under commission to write for the main stage of the Royal Court Theatre.

Compelling, passionate and deeply resonant, *The Meeting Point* is a novel about idealism and innocence, about the unexpected turns life can take and the dangers and chances that await us. When Euan and Ruth set off with their young daughter to live in Bahrain, it is meant to be an experience and adventure they will cherish. But on the night they arrive, Ruth discovers the truth behind the missionary work Euan has planned and feels her world start to crumble. Far from home, and with events spiralling towards war in nearby Iraq, she starts to question her faith - in Euan, in their marriage and in all she has held dear. With Euan so often away, she is confined to their guarded compound with her neighbours and, in particular, Noor, a troubled teenager recently returned to Bahrain to live with her father. Confronted by temptations and doubt, each must make choices that could change their lives forever.

The Evolution of Bruno Littlemore - Benjamin Hale

Benjamin Hale is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where he received a Provost's Fellowship to complete his novel, which also went on to win a Michener-Copernicus Award. He has been a night shift baker, a security guard, a trompe l'oeil painter, a pizza deliverer, a cartoonist, an illustrator and a technical writer. He grew up in Colorado and now lives in New York.

Bruno Littlemore: linguist, artist, philosopher. A life defined by a soaring mind, yet bound by a restrictive body. Born in downtown Chicago, Bruno's precocity pulls him from an unremarkable childhood, and under the tuition of Lydia, his intellect dazzles a watching world. But when he and his mentor fall in love, the world turns on them with outrage: Bruno is striving to be something he is not, and denying everything that he is. For despite his all too human complexities, dreams and frailties, Bruno's hairy body, flattened nose and jutting brow are, undeniably, the features of a chimpanzee. Like its protagonist, this novel is big, abrasive, witty, perverse, earnest and accomplished. *The Evolution of Bruno Littlemore* goes beyond satire by showing us not what it means, but what it feels like to be human - to love and lose, learn, aspire, grasp, and, in the end, to fail.

Folk - Jacob McArthur Mooney

Jacob McArthur Mooney's first book of poetry was *The New Layman's Almanac*. His work has recently received the Banff Centre Bliss Carman Poetry Award. A respected poetry commentator and critic, Mooney is the poetry columnist for Torontoist.com and writes the popular *Vox Populism* blog. A Nova Scotian now living in Toronto, he is a graduate of the MFA in Creative Writing programme at the University of Guelph-Humber.

The two sections in Jacob McArthur Mooney's virtuoso collection - one rural in orientation, one urban - open an intricate conversation. Taking as its inciting incident the 1998 crash of Swissair Flight 111 off the coast of Nova Scotia, and later moving on to the neighbourhoods around Toronto's Pearson International Airport, *Folk* is an elaborately composed inquiry into the human need for frames, edges, and borders, and a passionate probe of contemporary challenges to identity, whether of individuals, neighbourhoods, cities or nations. Mooney examines the fraught desire to align where we live with who we are, and asks how we can be at home on the compromised earth. This is poetry that poses crucial questions and refuses easy answers, as it builds a shimmering verbal structure that ventures "beyond ownership or thought". Mooney's distinctive voice is seriously unsettling, deeply appealing, and answerable to our difficult times.

The Tiger's Wife - Tea Obreht

Tea Obreht was born in 1985 in the former Yugoslavia and was raised in Belgrade. In 1992, her family moved to Cyprus and then to Egypt, where she learned to speak English, eventually emigrating to the United States in 1997. She was the youngest author on *The New Yorker's* Top 20 Writers Under 40 List. Her short story, 'The Laugh', debuted in *The Atlantic Fiction Issue* and was then chosen for *The Best American Short Stories 2010*, while her short story, 'The Sentry', appeared in the *Guardian Summer Fiction Issue*. Her journalism has also appeared in *Harper's*. She lives in Ithaca, New York.

A tiger escapes from the local zoo, padding through ruined streets and onwards, to a ridge above the Balkan village of Galina. His nocturnal visits hold the villagers in terrified thrall. But for one boy, the tiger is a thing of magic - Shere Khan awoken from the pages of *The Jungle Book*. Natalia is the granddaughter of that boy. Now a doctor, she is visiting orphanages after another war has devastated the Balkans. On this journey, she receives word of her beloved grandfather's death, far from their home, in circumstances shrouded in mystery. From fragments of stories her grandfather told her as a child, Natalia realises he may have died searching for the 'deathless man', a vagabond who was said to be immortal. Struggling to understand why a man of science would undertake such a quest, she stumbles upon a clue that will lead her to a tattered copy of *The Jungle Book*, and then to the extraordinary story of the tiger's wife.

My Sister Lives On The Mantelpiece - Annabel Pitcher

Annabel Pitcher graduated from Oxford University with a degree in English Literature and an ambition to be a children's author. She had a variety of jobs before deciding to travel the world and focus on writing. *My Sister Lives On The Mantelpiece* is her debut novel. The idea for it came to her in a youth hostel in Ecuador, and she wrote much of the novel while on the move. Annabel now lives in Yorkshire with her husband and is busy working on her second book.

Ten-year-old Jamie hasn't cried since it happened. He knows he should have - Jasmine cried, Mum cried, Dad still cries. Roger didn't, but then he is just a cat and didn't know Rose that well, really. Everyone kept saying it would get better with time, but that's just one of those lies that grown-ups tell in awkward situations. Five years on, it's worse than ever: Dad drinks, Mum's gone and Jamie's left with questions that he must answer for himself. This is his story, an unflinchingly real yet heart-warming account of a young boy's struggle to make sense of the loss that tore his family apart.