

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales  
Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu / The Culture, Welsh Language and  
Communications Committee  
Independent Review of Support for Publishing and Literature in Wales  
Ymateb gan Tyler Keevil / Evidence from Tyler Keevil

I am a Canadian-born novelist, screenwriter, and short story author, now living in Wales, and I am writing in support of Literature Wales in response to the 'Independent Review of Support for Publishing and Literature in Wales'.

I know you will have received many such letters so I will keep my own contribution concise. I thought it would be worthwhile since, being an ex-pat with experience of arts initiatives and funding in other countries, I may have a somewhat distinct vantage point.

I have worked and collaborated with Literature Wales on a number of initiatives, and have always found the organization to be professional, well-organized, attentive, and focused in its aims. I have seen first-hand the positive effects of its work with young people and readers across Wales. I will briefly outline some of the ways in which Literature Wales has had an important impact on my life, career, and development as a professional author.

As an author that specializes in coming-of-age stories, I was asked to take part in the 'Make Some Noise' initiative sponsored by Literature Wales; over a series of workshops I worked with a group of young carers in an underprivileged area to create a piece of spoken word. I travelled with the group down to Newport for a showcase event, where our group met many other groups from across Wales. The response from the young people was outstanding and one of the youth centre workers who knew them told me she was deeply moved – to the point of tears – by their response to the project, and its positive impact on their confidence.

I have also tutored at Tŷ Newydd, the writing centre that is spoken of so negatively in the report. I saw no evidence of it being a centre for 'retired hobbyists' (as the report claims) and instead my co-tutors and I taught a mix of dedicated, talented, and ambitious writers of all ages – the majority of whom were in their twenties, thirties, and forties. On the course feedback we received, one of the attendees told us it was 'the best thing (she'd) ever done'. She did not mean in terms of her writing: she was referring to all the experiences in her entire life.

My own career has also benefited greatly from the support of Literature Wales. The publicity generated by my nominations for The Wales Book of the Year have helped raise my author profile and bring new readers to my work. Many literary agents also use the award for 'talent-spotting', including Becky Thomas of J&A in London, who now represents me and has negotiated numerous book deals, commissions, contracts, and festival appearances on my behalf. Becky attests to the importance of the prize among agents:

'The Wales Book of the Year has been crucial to my authors and my own engagement with great literary fiction. I first spotted the wonderful Deborah Kay Davies on the long list, and then we signed her, only to see her win the prize and go on to publish two critically acclaimed novels. Likewise, Tyler Keevil's shortlisting and scooping of the People's Prize, has helped gain attention for his writing internationally and increase his cache and exposure as an author. The prize is highly regarded in the literary industry.'

This sentiment is echoed by many London-based editors, including Holly Ainley of The Borough Press, an imprint of HarperCollins; Holly had this to say about the significance of Wales Book of the Year:

'There are many prizes and writing competitions in existence but I am always impressed with the calibre of the nominees for the Wales Book of the Year. With its high profile former winners (such as Owen Sheers, Patrick McGuinness and Deborah Kay Davies) it's certainly a prize I take notice of.'

As a nominated author, I've been fortunate enough to attend two of the Wales Book of the Year ceremonies, and was very impressed by the professionalism with which they were both conducted. As an event and celebration of literature the evenings compared favourably with other award ceremonies I have attended, including The Writers' Trust of Canada Awards Gala (in Toronto) and the Missouri Review Editors' Prize ceremony (in Columbia, Missouri). In all three cases the sense of excitement and enthusiasm was equally evident among the attendees. This is something that Holly also noticed when she attended the ceremony in 2014, accompanying me as my editor:

‘Not only did I meet many incredibly talented authors, editors and publishers but quickly made connections to people involved with other Literature Wales projects, such as Tŷ Newydd writing centre. I felt this atmosphere and sense of inclusion were testament to everyone feeling totally passionate about the work they do and being keen to share that enthusiasm.’

As a mid-career author I have been supported by Literature Wales in other ways. In 2016, I was struggling with the challenges of work and domestic life, as the father of a young family; I applied for a Literature Wales bursary and was fortunate enough to receive a modest but vital amount of support. The bursary enabled me to take valuable time off of work to develop several short creative works, which are part of a forthcoming collection. A number of the pieces have now been published, and among them two in particular stand out: ‘The Search’ and ‘Swarf’. ‘The Search’ appeared in Canada’s *PRISM: International*, which in the past has published authors such as Marquez, Heaney, and Atwood (among others); my story was chosen as one of the magazine’s Pushcart prize nominations. ‘Swarf’ won the prestigious \$5,000 Missouri Review Jeffrey E. Smith Editors’ Prize – a major accolade in America – and was published in the *Missouri Review*, gaining me valuable exposure in the US. So as you can see, the support of the Literature Wales bursary played a key role in my development as an author, and enabled me to achieve important career-goals.

I could go on. But in sum, the point is simply that the various activities and initiatives that Literature Wales oversees *work*: they are effective, important, and make a vital contribution to publishing and literature in Wales, and beyond. Some form of review and quality control is of course expected, and necessary, for bodies that rely on public funding – but the report that has been published in no way reflects the institution that I am accustomed to working with, and believe in.

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