

SPOKEN WORD

HIGHLIGHTS

THE BEAST, THE ANGEL AND THE MADMAN

One hundred years after Dylan Thomas's birth, *Poet in the City* celebrates Wales's greatest poet. Former Welsh Poet Laureate **Gwyneth Lewis**, who appears at the event in February, discusses a misunderstood genius with Helen Wallace



'The charge against Thomas is often that he was drunk on the sound of words,' observes poet Gwyneth Lewis, on the phone from her home on the South Pembrokeshire coast. 'The implication is that there was nothing behind the surface music of his poetry. But the more I've re-read Thomas, the less true that appears: he was not just a great poetic talent, his intellect matched the music.' She, like many of her generation in Wales, was brought up on *A Child's Christmas in Wales*, Richard Burton's mesmerising recording of *Under Milk Wood* and the 'trophy' poems such as *Do not go gentle into that good night*. In her adulthood she's re-discovered the startlingly fine, but lesser-known poems. 'Some of them have taken

me a long time to understand: they're not simple, there's real substance, and some very serious ideas there.' She picks out the short, but hard-hitting lyric about political despotism, *The hand that signed the paper*, and his momentous, inventive birthday poems, reciting lines from *Twenty four years*:

*Twenty-four years remind the tears of my eyes.
(Bury the dead for fear that they walk to the grave in labour.)
In the groin of the natural doorway I crouched like a tailor
Sewing a shroud for a journey
By the light of the meat-eating sun.*