

Recitation 26 or under



The Black Chair of Birkenhead

An Ode to Hedd Wyn (1887- 1917)

Gladys Mary Coles

Not in green Wales, this Eisteddfod,
the National 1917 in soot-dark Birkenhead.
Far from your mountain moors, Trawsfynydd,
the clear streams, sweet river Prysor,
flock, farm and family –
yet not so far as Passchendaele.

That September the trees in the Park
were already leafed in red
when from the stage your name was called,
the heraldic call across the massive tent,
a ritual summons to claim the bardic prize.
Archdruid Dyfed, Lloyd George, Leverhulme, knew
from that audience you would not rise.

The empty Chair enveloped in black,
your absence filling the auditorium
told of Armageddon
as you lay in Flanders, six weeks dead.

Given into your family's keeping
the dark-draped throne on a cart
was processed the long lane to Yr Ysgwrn –
crested with flaring dragons
its fine oak craftsman-carved
by a Belgian refugee of Borough Road.

Hedd Wyn was the Bardic name of Ellis Humphrey Evans of Trawsfynydd, Merionethshire, killed at the Western Front in the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele). The Royal National Eisteddfod, 2–9 September 1917, was held in Birkenhead Park. Hedd Wyn won the Chair with his *awdl* (ode) on the set theme 'The Hero'. The Chair was carved by Mr Van Fleteran of Malines, Belgium, a refugee then living in Borough Road, Birkenhead.