



UCD School of English,  
Drama and Film

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11 September, 2017.

**Re: Welsh Literature and the Poetry of Loss.**  
**For the attention of Culture Committee Chair.**

Dear Bethan Jenkins AS

I am writing to you following the report on the publishing and literature industry in Wales which was commissioned by the *Welsh Government* and published during the summer. One gap in the report was the lack of commentary on the involvement of *Literature Wales* in the *Wales Remembers* programme which, as you know, marks the centenary of the First World War from 2014 onwards. As part of the programme, *Literature Wales* is delivering a project entitled *The Poetry of Loss*, a programme commemorating the First World War and Hedd Wyn, the poet who was killed (along with the Irish poet, Francis Ledwidge) at Passchendaele in 1917. This is a collaborative project with the Flemish Government. I was pleased to hear in Spring 2017 that I had been successful in a keen competition to spend three weeks taking part in a literary residential project in *Passa Porta*, the International House of Literature in Brussels. Full details of this project can be accessed here:

<https://www.llenyddiaethcymru.org/lw-news/nerys-williams-gyflawni-preswyliad-lenyddol-ym-mrwsel/>

I have little interest in analysing political views on how Wales should fund resources for the arts. But I feel *strongly* that it is important for the report to be balanced and fair – especially when there is such an obvious gap. I am not a ‘stakeholder’ and have been living and working in Ireland since 2002. Although I keep a keen eye on developments in Wales, I am not a part of any distinct Welsh faction – whether bureaucratic, academic or political.

In brief, I am writing to the Committee as an author, to describe my experience of working with *Literature Wales*, and the importance of the three weeks to the development of my creative project. Without doubt, the experience – and the connections I made – demonstrate the international objectives of *Literature Wales* and its desire to widen and develop strong artistic links between Wales and Ireland. shows

I am aware that time is short – therefore I shall outline the work produced as a result of the project:



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**During the residency (Monday 8<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> May 2017).**

1. Composed a long poem entitled *Alphabet on Fire* (a series of ten poems) depicting an imagined meeting between Hedd Wyn and the Irish poet Francis Ledwidge. The poem poses relevant questions regarding: nationalism, Europeanism, linguistic inventiveness, as well as the challenge of modernity upon traditional verse forms. The poem asks whether a culture of militarism has grown in post devolutionary Wales and how do I, as a female, bilingual, non-combatant poet, engage with a history of warfare?
2. An evening of poetry, prose, music and discussion on Hedd Wyn and the First World War poets in Passa Porta, the International House of Literature in Brussels on 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2017.  
<http://www.passaporta.be/en/agenda/poetry-of-loss-barddoniaeth-collod>
3. A lecture on 'Poets of the Black Chair: Francis Ledwidge and Hedd Wyn 1887-1917' in the Irish Embassy. Reading Hedd Wyn's poetry in the context of the experience of Francis Ledwidge, the Irish poet, 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 2017.
4. Reading of the draft of *Calendar on Fire* in *Passa Porta* to staff, authors and other involved in the works of the International House of Literature. 17<sup>th</sup> May 2017.
5. 3 blogs
  - 'Brussels Week One' <https://www.llenyddiaethcymru.org/lw-blog/6969/>
  - 'Poetry and Document: Suturing Wales, Ireland and Belgium'  
<http://www.literaturewales.org/lw-blog/poetry-loss-literary-residency-brussels-2-nerys-williams/>
  - 'Border Zones, Bitumen and Boezinghe' <http://www.literaturewales.org/lw-blog/poetry-loss-literary-residency-brussels-3-nerys-williams/>

**Since the residency**

1. Lecture at the *Hinterland Festival* (Kells Co Meath) on Hedd Wyn and War Poetry 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 2017.



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2. A poem, 'Taxing the Bachelors,' from the *Calendar on Fire* series composed in Brussels was broadcast on RTE Radio– *Sunday Miscellany* to commemorate the centenary of the death of Hedd Wyn and Ledwidge, 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2017.
3. An article/short radio script 'Meeting Hedd Wyn in *Le Cirio*, Rue de la Bourse (A Letter)' written in *Passa Porta*, and broadcast on *Sunday Miscellany* on 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2017.  
<http://www.rte.ie/radio1/sunday-miscellany/podcasts/>
4. An article for *Barddas* was published to commemorate the centenary on 31 July 2017. It arose from pieces I wrote in Brussels in response to the 'Empty' Chair created by Mechelen students and given to Wales as a memorial chair.
5. Contribution to a BBC radio programme, *Yr Arwr*, produced by Irfon Jones, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2017  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08zfgcb>
6. Contribution to *O Dan yr Wyneb*, a programme presented by Dylan Iorwerth on Radio Cymru, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2017.
7. New volume of poetry completed entitled *Cabaret* (New Dublin Press) September 2017.  
<http://www.newdublinpress.org/store/cabaret>

### **Commemorative events**

1. An opportunity to take part in Ifor ap Glyn's touring performance, *Y Gadair Wag*, in The Irish Writers' Centre, Dublin (reading original poetry), 13<sup>th</sup> September, 2017.  
<https://irishwriterscentre.ie/products/y-gadair-wag-the-empty-chair-an-chathaoir-fholamh>
2. Represented the 'Welsh' perspective at the national centenary celebrations in Slane (a piece about Ledwidge and Hedd Wyn). *Francis Ledwidge – Poetry and the First World War 1917-2017*, 14<sup>th</sup> October, 2017.

I must note that *Literature Wales* were extremely supportive and professional during the residency, and the experience, without doubt, helped me to develop a useful profile which linked the artistic connections between Ireland and Wales. And, of course, I am very happy to develop anything which could be positive for Wales (during a turbulent political period).



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*Literature Wales* is obviously keen to continue to foster their artistic links with Irish institutions and develop a strong network. During every public broadcast, I have mentioned the importance of the residency and the support of *Literature Wales* and the *Welsh Government*. During the coming years, I am certain that Wales will be looking increasingly towards the strong Welsh diaspora within Europe, and around the world. Of course, being a poet (from Carmarthenshire originally) is not an excuse to be a 'Captain of Industry'. But the development of artistic connections is important to the continued positive image of that which represents Welshness (in my opinion). This is the first Welsh literary bursary for which I have been able to apply – as most of them depend on being a permanent resident. I was very grateful to be given the opportunity.

Finally, I feel that *Literature Wales* are eager to develop the profile and value of the Welsh arts beyond Wales.

I hope this commentary will help fill some of the 'gaps' in the original report in relation to the international objectives of *Literature Wales*.

Yours very sincerely,

Dr Nerys Williams

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Copi hefyd wedi ei ddanfôn drwy e bost at sylw Prif Weinidog Cymru Carwyn Jones