(Abstract)

Bregus

Y Gwpan, Y Capel, Y Cyfan // *The Cup, The Chapel, Everything*

My grandparents presented me with the featured china set a few months ago, as a remnant of their Welsh language chapel in Pembrokeshire, which had recently closed its doors.  This china set has already out-lived the chapel and many of the people to whom it served, despite having the ability to shatter easily.

This china set was the starting point of a Practice as Research enquiry by the ceramic artist, Lowri Davies, and myself. We presented a chapel tea in the vestry of Tabernacl chapel at the National Eisteddfod in Cardiff this year, focusing primarily on the function of Welsh chapel crockery and the role of women in the ritual of serving teas, both within the Welsh chapel and in a broader context. Lowri presented tea crockery for twelve people, re-imagining shape and image to represent current Welsh chapel culture. We were both heavily influenced by the poem ‘Wnaiff y Gwragedd aros ar ol’ (*Will the women stay behind*) by poet Menna Elfyn, and Lowri’s crockery displays often hidden passages and imagery from the poem, which are revealed when drinking tea. I performed a short piece whilst serving tea, using body and text to ask questions as to the nature and currency of the ritual, and its effect on the psyche of Welsh women. I also often adhered to the poem and to my grandparents’ cup, saucer, and plate, which were displayed at the vestry as part of the performance; their presence felt throughout.

Following this performance, we have had several invitations to display/perform with other societies, mainly groups of older women, and we look forward to sharing and developing our research with their input and feedback.

Bio

Dr Rhiannon M Williams is a lecturer in Theatr a Drama at the University of South Wales.  She completed her PhD entitled *Y Capel Cymraeg, Cymdogaeth a Pherfformiad* (the Welsh chapel, community and performance) in 2016.  Her most recent publication was a chapter *in Argyfwng Hunaniaeth a Chred: ysgrifau ar athroniaeth JR Jones* (Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, gol./ed. E Gwynn Matthews), reflecting on the process of creating a performance duet with the performer Eddie Ladd, which was based on the work of the Welsh philosopher JR Jones.  Rhiannon is also a freelance performer, and has worked extensively with Welsh Theatre companies, specifically with children, young people, and communities. Seeing how performance can have a positive effect on lives inspired her to research and teach. Rhiannon is a mother of two young daughters, and a Welsh language activist.

Context:

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This was the starting point of a Practice as Research enquiry by the ceramic artist, Lowri Davies, and myself. The first part of our research was the staging of a chapel tea in the vestry of Tabernacl chapel at the National Eisteddfod this year, focusing primarily on the function of Welsh chapel crockery, and the role of women in the ritual of serving teas, both within the Welsh chapel and in a broader context. We will develop our work further, but will always return our focus to my grandparents’ cup, saucer, and plate, as they represent both the fragility and the robustness of our enquiry.