

National Identity through the Connotation of Cloth

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Crynodeb

Bydd y papur hwn yn ymchwilio i hunaniaeth genedlaethol Cymru trwy'r hyn a ystyrir yn frethyn cenedlaethol, er enghraifft y patrymau traddodiadol a gwehyddwyd, cwiltiau a bwythwyd â llaw ac arwyddocâd y brethyn a'r ffabrig a ddefnyddiwyd. Ymhelaethir ar y modd y gwerthfawrogwyd y rhain ar yr adeg honno ac ar hyn o bryd, archwilir brethyn Cymru yng nghyd-destun diwylliant Cymru.

Geiriau allweddol: Hunaniaeth Gymreig, brethyn, cenedlaethol diwylliant

Abstract

This paper will be an investigation into Welsh national identity through what was considered as national cloth, for example the traditional woven patterns or hand stitched quilts, and the significance of the cloth and fabric used. Elaborating on how these were valued then and now, I explore Welsh cloth in the context of Welsh culture.

Key words: Welsh identity, cloth, national culture

Introduction

“You don’t stumble upon your heritage. It’s there, just waiting to be explored and shared.” Robbie Robertson (CNN, 1999).

We all inhabit a heritage; it is what defines us as human beings, and just as Robertson (CNN, 1999) states, it is a part of our interaction with everyday life, our past as well as our present. The past shapes our present and influences our future, through my personal experience exploring my great aunt’s house, I realised how certain objects (woven woollen blankets and a hand-stitched quilt) have become a part of my history. They shape my identity, both personally and collectively, forming a national identity through the composition of traditional Welsh cloth.

The house of my great aunt has remained unoccupied for many years. Exploring the house has become a hobby of mine. Old woollen blankets, ‘carthenni’ as my mother would call them, swathed on the stair banister, dusty and neglected, a quilt that was once adorned in densely quilted stitches, now only bares the traces of the needles puncturing holes that once penetrated the cloth, only minuscule stitches survive, tufts of threads loosely hang from the worn paisley surface.

My mind strays to the painting that once hung on my living room wall, I found myself memorized in the gaze of the opulent paisley shawl, wondering, contemplating and romanticizing upon the narrative behind this sensorial cloth. The same patterned paisley cloth depicted from the hand-stitched quilt, one is but a remnant of the past, whilst the other a representation of the present, worn and used until thread bare.

The aim of this paper is to investigate how contemporary Welsh artists have incorporated elements of the national textile heritage of Wales to challenge the conventions, representations and relevance of what is considered traditional Welsh cloth. I will focus primarily on Welsh textile artists/designers, as well as examples of the treasured textiles of our nation.

The ideas I will be addressing include the psychology behind our attachment to material, also how the material qualities contribute to this attachment. I will also look at how cloth and material become an implication of absence, and the relationship between cloth and language. The theorists I will discuss in this essay are Freud and his theory of the fetish in correspondence with cloth, Deleuze and his theory of the fold, and Boym and Winnacott’s theories of Nostalgia.

The first chapter will discuss my personal experience of cloth through the painting Salem (Vosper, 1908), analysing the perception of national identity.

The second chapter will address the traditions of the Welsh cloth and their resonance in Welsh culture, providing the psychoanalytic philosophy behind our attachment to cloth. I will be analysing the heritage of Welsh cloth, such as Welsh quilts and ‘carthenni’ in addition to their depiction in literature. Each example will display certain qualities a particular cloth evokes; a certain air of nostalgia and longing, its use and worth, concealing and revealing things and its purpose.

The third chapter will continue by discussing how contemporary Welsh artists such as Hefin Jones, Julia Griffiths Jones and the fashion brand *Coracle*, have been influenced by past processes of the once treasured Welsh cloth and developed them further into contemporary artworks. This research seeks to investigate how these artists have utilized cloth within their practice, and challenge the pre-existing thoughts and meanings of traditional Welsh cloth. The rebranding of craft has enabled the revival of these skills in particular Welsh women artists who are inspired by their own domestic

and private lives, combining traditions that have been overlooked by our Welsh visual culture (Collet, 2008: 97).

1. A Personal Interaction with Cloth

The painting hung on my living room wall; the ostentatious dark striped wallpaper lay behind it, even that wasn't a distraction from the contents of the print. It allured me even as a child, this old fashioned print would somehow envelop my interest, for many years I wondered why the old haggard lady's gaze was avoiding mine? The viewers? Her hat obscures her eyes; was this borne out of shame? It wasn't her face that allured me: it was the folds in her paisley shawl which drape loosely over her right shoulder, trailing over her left, falling into soft folds, forming a shape in the gentle creases, a face appears in the folds.

The painting *Salem* by Curnow Vosper has remained a mystery to me for the majority of my life, yet it is considered to be Wales' most famous painting (according to The Lady Lever Art Gallery) (2016), where Figure 1 is part of their collection. Displaying a quaint narrative of religious life in Wales, a woman dressed in traditional Welsh rural dress arrives at chapel. I would like to stipulate that the paisley shawl was not traditionally Welsh but rather a patterned cloth which derived from India. Also the notion of 'traditional Welsh costume' is questionable in terms of its authenticity, as in fact it was an act of promoting 'Welsh national identity' when it was under threat. (Museum Wales, 2014) The image seems to echo the past identity of Wales,

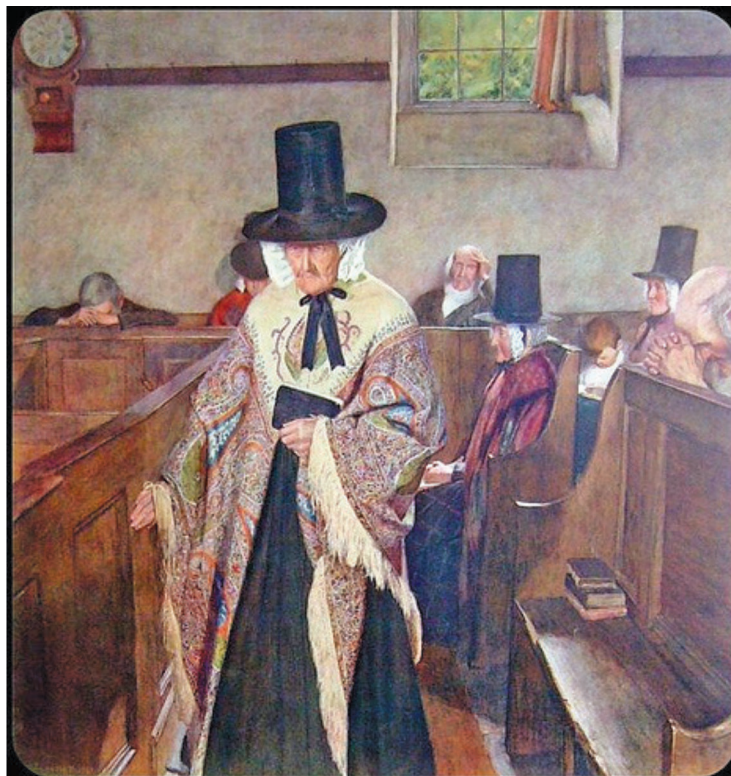


Figure 1: Vosper, S. *Salem*, 1908, photograph, watercolor, painting.

expressing the morality of the Welsh faith, and the simple devotion to religion. This nostalgic image epitomizes the simpler life and the portrayal of ‘the Werin Gymreig’ (*Wales Online*, 2010).

Sian Owen has arrived late to the church, arriving just before 10; she is seen to be walking to her seat. Her opulent shawl is the centre of attention of the subject matter, a contrast to the subdued tones of the painting. Many believe that they can see the devil’s face in the folds of the shawl. Could this be a comment on the sin of vanity? (Lady Lever Art Gallery, 2016). The philosopher Deleuze studies the interpretation of folds, the fold is a metaphor for a relationship of difference with itself (Deleuze, 1993: 139).

Deleuze explains that the object (Sian’s shawl) must be freed from its subjection as a garment piece and analysed as what it really is; a piece of cloth, before it can be a subject to its limitations as a garment. The folds hide as well as reveal, the folds in this painting become a living presence; I find myself imagining how it would feel running my hand through the patterned cloth, a soft gentle feel with a touch of coarse of the warp. I encounter a sensory experience through its visual materiality. The frustration of not being able to touch and interact with the cloth, we are limited to only the aesthetic gaze of the paisley shawl. Anne Hamlyn also recognizes the allure that fabrics contain, capturing the viewers in a reverie that provides no realistic reason. In the text *On Stuff and Nonsense: The Complexity of Cloth* (2005: 220) Pajaczkowska states that we encounter cloth as “neither object or subject, but as the threshold between”. The implication of cloth dissolves into the relevance of the material; it is free for our own interpretation (Pajaczkowska, 2005: 220).

This painting proves useful in that it not only highlights the connotations of cloth but also represents a portrayal of the dominant strong mother figure, the idea of ‘y Fam Gymreig’ that was crucial to 19th century Welsh family. The idealization of the postcard image of the ‘Welsh Lady’ is a renowned perception, where the idea of the domesticated woman in the ‘Welsh costume’ carrying on with her everyday chores, is a recurring theme in Curnow Vosper’s paintings (Stevens, 2002: 63).

Arguably paintings were elaborated and often staged, the painting is telling a tale rather than describing reality. The painting can be foreseen as a stereotypical view of Wales from an outsider’s perspective, it is a portrayal of how Welsh people wanted to appear after the war and depression (*Wales Online*, 2010). Therefore the authenticity of the aura of the painting is questionable, as addressed previously in this chapter the depiction of the painting (Figure 1) also comments on the authenticity of the ‘National Welsh Costume’, it was merely a device to promote national identity.

2. Cloth, Context and Psychoanalysis

Sue Pritchard (2010) defines the meaning of quilts in an article discussing untold stories in the exhibition *Quilts 1700–2010* in the V&A:

Quilts stimulate memories of warmth, security and comfort: their layers concealing both personal and collective narratives. Many quilts travel down through generations undocumented, but some may be accompanied by individual histories, passed down by word of mouth (Selvedge, 2010: 53).

Pritchard (2010) highlights quilts as “undocumented”, perhaps referring to their insignificance in the past, whereas today quilts are now renowned artifacts displayed



Figure 2: National Quilt Museum, Sarah Jane Morgan, *Untitled*, 1920, stitched cotton quilt, photograph, exhibition.

in a museum context, they become individual archives of the past, every delicate stitch providing a warmth of memories of a past, they exude a presence, they become a language.

In this chapter, I will illustrate my own personal interaction with quilts in a museum context. This chapter will explore quilts and cloth that contain their own individual identities, whilst also elaborating on the psychoanalytical theory of our attachment to cloth. The importance of the 'carthenni' and quilt in my great aunt's house have led me to further investigate the reasons as to why we hold a sentimental attachment to cloth both on a personal and collective level, highlighting Pritchard's comment on quilts passed down from generations without any form of recognition.

We inherit individual identities as well as a cultural identity in traditional handmade quilts, through the materials and the labour involved in the making. After visiting the Welsh Quilt museum in Lampeter, I was drawn to one quilt in particular, a quilt produced by Miss Sara Jane Morgan of Cefyn LLwyd, Aberystwyth.

It hung upright on the bright white wall, it exceeded a painting, it was there right in front of me, a presence of cloth. I witnessed the rectangles of coloured cotton joined together with intricately stitched spirals of longevity, the imperfect pattern where she had run out of space, squashing in a smaller circular motif. Stitching a suggestion, each stitch a reference to a bodily action, a movement of tension and flow, confined but free. I imagined her dainty tender hands and the monotonous rhythm of her needle piercing through the sandwiched cloth, the prick of the needle puncturing her finger, how her hands must have ached, her eyes must have sore.

It was a quilt that was made for her brother and his wife as a wedding gift in 1920. Diverging from the other quilts, Figure 2 had a narrative; it was a personal gift instead of a commercial production. Purbrick (2014) draws upon the idea of the gifts in the book *Love Objects: Emotion, Design & Material Culture*. Gifts are a concealed past of the commodity, gifts are compelling objects (Moran, 2014: 19). The act of gifting an object manifests a relic in an intimate history, the implication of quilts depend on their capability to convey a bond between a singular person or a group of people (Pritchard, 2010: 53).

Gifts become an expression of love, without the use of words, it can convey the prestige of a person (Moran, 2014: 19). Through material forms, they document emotional and loving relationships; this quilt documents a relationship between a brother and sister, a brother leaving the family home and his sister to begin a life with this wife. The quilt symbolizes the relationship Sara has with her brother, the notion of the gift “still possess[es] something of the giver” (Moran, 2014). She has indented this quilt with the memories that they have shared together and the bond that remains between them. Not only is the quilt itself enriched with sentimental meaning but it is also a validation of the attachment between the person and the object (Moran, 2013: 10).

I would also like to draw upon the quilt being displayed in a gallery context; it hung upright on a white wall, enabling the cloth to come alive, the puckered surface erupting an array of textures, engulfing every stitch. Unlike a painting, I was able to experience the cloth. Quilts have become artworks in their own right (Phillips, 2015), their context has changed, they have become valued as artworks rather than household items constrained to a function, the value of each one measured through our engagement with this personal object that displays individual identities.

In the book *Wabi Sabi* (2003), Juniper states that the value of art is measured in status of what it can communicate to us as humans; a feeling, a connection or pleasure. We perceive and contemplate art through its function (Juniper, 2003: 93).

Although considered as an art piece in its own right, we must not forget that it wasn't the intention of Sara Jane Morgan when she was stitching the quilt in her home. The purpose of the quilt was to be given as a gift for a household, it was to be used. This has enriched the quilt's sentimental meaning, giving it a broader context because of its past use.

In the article *a Commentary on Women Creating spaces in Welsh Visual Culture* Collet (2008) states that quilts were not seen as artworks because of their domestic and practical qualities. It was unconventional for quilts to be displayed publically or to subsist the devaluation of use. The quilts that still remain, in today's context they present an understanding of women's creative production; a representative of homes and the lives of women as the homemaker, in a society where women's creative work was constrained to life experiences and by the restrictions imposed upon them by society (Collet, 2008: 93).

Therefore the question is: do these quilts really display an authentic view of a creative outlet for women of the time or are they a product of the constraints of society imposed on women confined to the home? The emblematic emphasis on cloth in women's lives, is drawn upon by Vincentelli (1994) in a discussion of the short story *The Quilt* by Kate Roberts (1946). In a state of repudiation, facing the inability to pay her bills, Ffebi immerses herself in a quilt, a quilt she accrues regardless of her debt:

A quilt that made you catch your breath; that brought every woman there to nagger it and look longingly at it as she walked away. A quilt of thick white welsh flannel, with wavy stripes, green and blue, yellow and red [...] She wanted to buy it, and the more she thought of her poverty, the greater grew her desire (Vincentelli, 1994: 230 citing Roberts, 1946: 52).

The quilt became an object of desire for Ffebi, it represents the need to uphold and maintain the protection of her home and family that she is losing through her inability to pay her debts. The quilt provides her with warmth and solace in a time where she felt exposed. Through wrapping herself in the desired quilt, Ffebi overlooks her troubles through the gentle embrace of the woolen cloth. This notion of the cloth possessing human qualities is reflected in the text *The Complexity of Cloth* (Pajaczkowska, 2005: 223). Pajaczkowska articulates that we distinguish the signification of wrapping, swathing and enveloping ourselves in cloth as a form of touch, possession and preservation. We embrace the notion of wrapping as an artificial sense of touch, an expansion of the hand in the lack of the body (Pajaczkowska, 2005: 223).

The applicability of the concept of the cloth becoming an object of desire is echoed in Alice Walker's short story *Everyday Use*. The family's hand stitched quilts are the catalyst of controversy, two sisters, Maggie and Dee, both have contrasting opinions about the values of material culture (Hemmings, 2012: 438).

Dee is infatuated with the aura surrounding the quilts; the act of her stroking the quilt only intensifies her lust; the quilt becomes an object of desire. In *The Handbook of Material Culture* (2006: 199), Keane discusses objects that hold a certain enchantment, the object of obsession and embodiment of loss that establish the fetish. Freud developed the term fetishism, it is the act where humans become attached to things, and therefore the objects become self-displacing of subject matter (Tilley *et al.*, 2006: 199). This theory is supported in *The Gendered Object* (1996). Pat Kirkham examines Juliet Ash's writings on *The Tie*. Our evaluation becomes a subject of fetishism; we become tied to an object in consonance to our devotion and inability to part. It is accomplished through the longing to recognize the absent and present reevaluating the context of the object subjected by its use (Kirkham, 1996: 169).

Dee is blinded by the aura of the quilts: they become an anchor for the continuing bond with her grandmother, an emotional stand in, that prolongs the memory of grandmother while acknowledging her absence. The quilts conjure the notion of the 'objet a', it is only when they are seen for what they really are that they can be appreciated fully.

After conducting an Interview with textile historian Elen Phillips (2015) and exploring the textile archives in St Fagan, a particular quilt remained in my mind, a cot quilt from the Pembrokeshire region. Its period remains unknown (Phillips, 2015). Crib quilts were an important tradition in Welsh culture. Typically made by a



Figure 3: National Museum of Wales St Fagan archives, *Pembrokeshire Cot Quilt*, date unknown, stitched silk/cotton, photograph.

village quilter when a new baby was due, this quilt would be passed down and used by each new addition to the family (Jones, 1997: 37).

This isn't the only Welsh tradition tying the mother and child, there is also 'Y Shawl Fagi', which was a shawl that was tied in a way keeping the mother warm, leaving both hands free to carry on with her chores. It was called carrying the baby in the Welsh fashion (Hill, 2011: 51).

Figure 3 delineates an underprivileged family, the notion of the make-do and mend. The patchwork squares of fabric derived from old dresses and clothing that could not be repaired to make household items such as quilt. These segments, for example, could have come from the mother's old dresses, these squares of textiles hold a life of their own, a story of their own, before they come together to make this quilt (Phillips, 2015).

The bond between a mother and child, each segment of cloth embossed with the DNA of the mother is reflected in the article *Threads of feeling* (2011: 39). Discussing an exhibition at the Foundling Museum, fragments of cloth were left as objects of identification for the infants that had been given up by their mothers (Unauthored, 2011: 39).

The sentiment of a mother and child bound by cloth is a universal theme, our interaction with cloth starts from when we are born, it is the first thing we are swaddled in by our mothers. Donald Winnicott's theory of the transitional object analyses our attachment to cloth. As infants we cling to cloth. I recall even myself having a blanket that I would carry everywhere, until it became thread bare with holes and 'mysteriously' seized from my possession. Winnicott explains this attachment to that first cloth as a replacement of the mother's breast; it is the initial step of segregation from the mother, which leads to the growth of the infant, it is an object they cannot

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part with, a transitional object but also a metaphor for the infant's attachment to the mother (Rugg, 2005: 125).

Winnicott elaborates on the qualities of the transitional object, like the objects I have previously described (shawl fagi and cot quilt). The objects provide warmth, mirroring the relationship between a mother and her child. Judy Attfield diverges from this statement, focusing instead on the importance of the characteristics of the cloth, which stimulates a comparable reaction when the cloth touches, caresses and brushes against the body (Rugg, 2005: 126).

The beauty of this cot quilt is also echoed in the eroding squares of silk, displaying the layer of carded wool. Through this quilt's ageing we can see the beauty of how it had been made, the attempt to preserve the quilt in a museum context. Figure 3 displays the wear of the quilt, forming a discolored obscure stained pattern. These suggestions of stains are elaborated in the *The Textile Reader* (Hemmings, 2010) in the text *Stain: on cloth, sigma and shame*. Jenni Sorking's thesis draws upon stains becoming record, a marking of the wearer; the stain maps an event, for example the narrative behind the stain itself. Wear and age elaborate on the defect of recollection, exposed to the elements and decomposition, it becomes evidence of a residue and remembrance (Hemmings, 2012: 60).

The cloth becomes a metaphor of a relationship, a society; the thread tacking the affiliations of a community, the tenderness and delicacy of the cloth comprehends our susceptibility as humans, our every relationship prone to the domain of collapse, deterioration and demise (Weiner and Schneider, 1989: 2).

These examples are an integral part of the Welsh heritage. Quilts and woollen cloth are a forgotten part of the Welsh heritage that held the identity of Wales. The present generation witnessed their grandmothers and mothers use the 'old bedding' as a cover to forbid the frost of the potato beds or even discarding the treasured cloth on a bonfire (Jones, 1997: 16). This is clearly evidence that the blankets were not valued and weren't seen as treasured family heirlooms. Rather they were functional, and sometimes disregarded or considered worthless. As referred to in the beginning of the chapter by Pritchard (Selvedge, 2010: 53) as "undocumented" and regarded as insignificant, our infatuation with the ideal perfection of aesthetic qualities made us disregard these cloths due wear and tear or stains. Unlike *Wabi Sabi* (Juniper, 2003) they were not considered beautiful in our culture. Only recently our outlook on these lovingly made quilts and woollen blankets 'carthenni' has changed. We are now starting to fully appreciate our heritage, to the extent that we feel like by buying a Welsh blanket we are buying into our rich Welsh heritage (Phillips, 2015).

Welsh Woollen Mills today have diversified into a luxury high-end brand from what was considered a necessity (for warmth) to a luxury product, for example Melin Tregwynt. Welsh carthenni have undergone a radical transformation from their industrial origins and are now seen as the latest trend. One example is Melin Tregwynt's *Carthen range* seen in Figure 4. What is interesting to point out is the fact that the patterns remain from the traditional Welsh blanket, it is the colour palette that has adapted from earthy hues and primary colours into a more subdued palette reflecting the colours of our Welsh landscape (Phillips, 2015). The marketing image of the *Carthen range* displays a chalk like faded sketch of what appears to be a view of an interior; a window looking out, with eroded smudge like hues of colour echoing those of the threads woven into the blankets.

As a nation, we are guilty of putting other parts of our heritage on a pedestal and forgetting about the Welsh cloth. We have now realized the importance of our



Figure 4: Melin Tregwynt, *Carthen range*, photograph, text.

textile heritage and appreciate the process behind the making (Phillips, 2015). Our postmodernist culture has turned the past into a recognizable 'brand' of aesthetic beauty. An engagement with objects of the past, such as the Welsh *carthen* produced by Melin Tregwynt, is controversially turning history into style, a brand that can be sold to various audiences. Heritage is enveloped by a charming portrayal of the past, a Welsh past, selling not only a quaint rural aesthetic of what Wales represents.

This return of the past is represented by postcards and labels of nostalgic images of millworkers from the 20th century: a Welsh woman spinning and farmers flocking their sheep as seen in Figure 5, using these images as a sentimental vision of our past, rural Welsh farming industry. It also gives the consumers an insight of what they are buying into: a slice of heritage, that long tradition. Cleverly combining nostalgia and the contemporary, Melin Tregwynt weave the past into their brand in order to appeal to 21st century consumers (Phillips, 2015).

Arguably, there is a certain thread of analysis that flows through articles about the revival of nostalgia, namely that history's context and significance is being demolished by becoming an object of aesthetic, the latest 'fashion' trend for decorating one's home. One might assume that we no longer possess an authentic relationship with our heritage and past, that we are consumed in an aesthetic emptiness, deceitfully fascinated with the past as a element of our consumerist lifestyle (Schachar, 2012).

Our postmodernist fascination with the past merges into a metamodern outlook, witnessing an engrossment with nostalgia that is more about the morality rather than style. Ultimately, consumers are beginning to proceed to a more balanced appreciation of aesthetics consolidated with recognition of its history and resonance in the present.

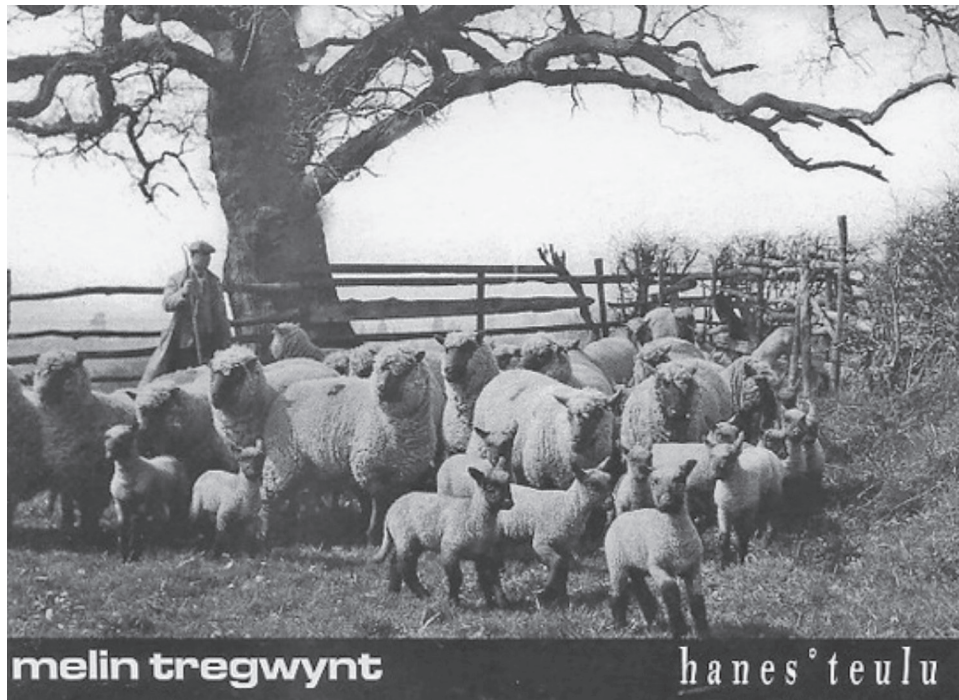


Figure 5: Melin Tregwynt postcards, *Untitled*, black and white photograph.

3. Contemporary artists

Chapter three will continue to consider how contemporary Welsh artists/ designers are exploring their Welsh heritage, and how it becomes a source of inspiration, producing work that reflects on the past but also has a presence in the future.

A recent article in the *Western Mail* (2015: 7) entitled *Weaving Welsh magic into new line of 'Carthen Blanket' clothes*, featured two friends Jayne Hicks and David Tomlin who launched their own fashion brand after realizing that Wales had no fashion brands focusing on Welsh heritage. *Coracle* is a brand that focuses on the woolen industry and in particular the Welsh carthen blanket woven by Elvet Woolen Mill. It transformed Welsh carthen blankets from traditional throws left on beds into sophisticated, elegantly styled coats as seen in Figure 6.

Expanding their target market to include not only Welsh people but people who are fascinated by heritage and history, the brand offers the experience of a sense of 'hiraeth', a state of deep emotion, nostalgia and that profound longing for the absent. It carries the understanding that the object of desire will never return, in this case it is the notion of home. This attachment to the absent can be replaced by an attachment to an object resembling the absent, in this case the jackets that become a representation of home for Hicks and Tomlin, that longing of being away from home but metaphorically a return to home through the connotation of cloth (*Western Mail*, 2015: 7).

There are many remakes of the Welsh carthen, for example *Blowden's Welsh Heritage Blankets* (Olding, 2013: 34). Blodwen's reinvention on the Welsh blanket is a glimpse into an idealized past an "authentic re-imagining of cloth; a respectful replication of original designs, a reinvention of the welsh blanket" (Olding, 2013)."



Figure 6: Hicks, J and Tomlin, D. *Coracle*, 2015, photograph, text.

The reworkings of the carthen blanket by the brand *Coracle* and Welsh woollen mills such as Melin Tregwynt gives both a sense of past and contemporary value in our modern culture.

Among the many reproductions of the Welsh woollen blankets is *Journey Quilt* (Figure 7) by Julia Griffiths Jones. The domestic space and its duties is reflected in work varying in techniques such as wire, embroidery, stitching, quilting and patchwork (Griffiths-Jones, 2015).

Her main source of inspiration stems from The National Museum of Wales, each location introduces a different aspect of the nations heritage. The museums reflect on our resourceful materials in Wales, for example coal, slate, and wool. Such natural resources define Wales and its material culture. Figure 7 – *Journey quilt* by Julia Griffiths Jones focuses on Melin Teifi, the operating mill in the National Wool Museum. Each gallery a reminder of the past creating “an awareness of the pervasive influence of wool: of woollen manufacture as part of the warp and weft of the life of a nation“ (Hill, 2011).”

The process of production becomes a narrative in her work, for instance through observing the machines that are used in the production of the woollen cloths shown in Figure 7. Her interest in the dobbie and jacquard looms becomes evident in her wool book *Jones The book* (Jones, 2010: 31).

Her experiences of the mill in her drawings are translated into the digitally printed woollen cloth: fragmented squares pieced together to form a patchwork quilt similar to the cot quilt (Figure 3) addressed earlier in this paper. Referring to the notion of make do and mend, the title *Journey Quilt* reflects on Julia’s experience in the mill, a journey back to the roots of her Welsh heritage, a journey of discovery. Quilts are mementos, a keepsake and reminder of experiences. We long for the lost, an “enchantment of



Figure 7: Griffiths-Jones, J. *Journey Quilt*, 2008-09, photograph, text.

nostalgia, in the sense of the return to the scene of loss, not as an expression of a longing for something to be as it once was” (Rugg, 2005) Griffiths Jones’ discovery of the processes involved in the making of the woolen cloth leads us to an understanding of each individual square symbolising the salvation of the remnants of our nation’s identity.

We move from cloth in the contexts of its production to cloth in the context of being sent to space. Hefin Jones and his project *The Welsh Space Campaign* with the concept of “launching ordinary welsh people into outerspace” discovers a universal content in the Welsh culture and customs (Jun, 2013).

It is important therefore to address an old custom in Wales that has remained until the present day. In villages across Wales it is a custom to address people based on their occupation or specialism. I recall my grandmother addressing people over the dinner table as “John y Bwtchwr, Nanw siop dop and John Y Fountain.” Reflecting on this custom it ties in with the concept of *The Welsh Space Campaign*, the notion of a Welsh community coming together to produce this work; a plumber built the pressure system, a traditional clogmaker produced the clogs and woollen mills donated the woven material for the spacesuit (Jones, 2015), thus delineating the national identity of our nation through the true altruism and the sense of community it continues to uphold.

The gathering of a community to produce this work not only enriches the work, but also captures a sense of cultural identity. These particular objects are a reflection of our landscape and environment through the use of materials, for example the use



Figure 8: Jones, H. *The Welsh Space Campaign*, 2013, photograph, text.

of wool as garment by miners, firemen and soldiers (Hutchings, 2013). These objects become a personal metaphor of our ancestry. This work accentuated the consciousness of the Welsh culture gradually deteriorating through the threat of losing the Welsh language, we become feeble and transcendent. Through the notion of sending the Welsh into space it demonstrates that Wales as a nation has the proficiency to explore space too enabling Wales to be recognized in a wider context (Jun, 2013).

This raises the question of our perception of nostalgia. Boym (2001) portrays nostalgia as an ambiguous longing for our ancestry, an instinctive action that challenges time. In order to comprehend a complete picture of the present, we must contemplate and deliberate the attributes of the past (Walder, 2011: 9). The longing we have for aspects of our rural home is mirrored in the spacesuit, commodities that once provided us with warmth; wool, wood and copper. Such essential materials are now a metaphor for our nation being transported to a colonial setting, one that we are not familiar, which brings the traditional into a new environment. Wilmsen's thesis of a longing exemplifies our urge as humans to determine our feeling of displacement, the need to discover a sense of our home or homeland (Walder, 2011: 48). As a result, one might argue that this notion of 'discovery' of the home is a product of not only

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language, culture and heritage but is in fact a product of our subjective narrative that we devise from our own personal memories.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that the current fascination of artists, exhibitors and myself with Welsh cloth from our past has derived from our longing to discover our heritage and the notion of home. The tendencies of our postmodernist consumer culture perceives the remnants of history as aesthetically beautiful, but is our fascination with the past consumed by aesthetic emptiness rather than an authentic relationship with the past? The revival of traditional woollen cloths by Melin Tregwynt and featured in *Coracle* (as seen in Figures 4 and 6) suggests that whilst the patterns remain the same, the colour schemes have been contemporized, giving the carthen a modern look.

Welsh quilts are now displayed in a museum context, such as the quilt seen in Figure 2 from the National Quilt Museum and the cot quilt (Figure 3) in the archives of The National Museum of Wales, St Fagan. Their value has changed from a product of domestic use to artworks; they are now national treasures rather than individual stories and narratives that document emotional and loving relationships. Hefin Jones and Julia Griffiths Jones are artists who have each taken a contemporary approach in reviving the notion of Welsh cloth. Julia Griffiths Jones uses the process of cutting up and piecing together as a visual representation or record of experience, much similar to the process of 'piecing together' quilts. Whilst Hefin Jones' use of the Welsh raw materials in *The Welsh Space Campaign* (Figure 8) brings a community and traditions together, forming a cultural identity through a spacesuit.

Analyzing contemporary brands such as Melin Tregwynt, I would like to address the use of the marketing image *Carthen Range* (Figure 4). This faded image comments on the 'faded history' of a place, a past, emerging yet receding into the wall, a canvas that allows us to imagine yet not fully grasp in its materiality. This experience mirrored in my interaction with the painting *Salem* (Figure 1). The painting provides a participation of a past, yet it also limits the application of our senses. Through the presence of the quilt and carthenni, their materiality consumes us. We are able to engage with the subject matter, the stains, the stitching, experiencing an unexplainable feeling of content; the cloth has somehow acquired human qualities, providing care and comfort as well as protection from the outside world. We are almost transported back to childhood, swathed in a blanket by our mothers. As reflected in the short story *The Quilt* (Roberts, 1946) by Kate Roberts, where Ffebi immerses herself in the quilt. The idea of 'wrapping' ourselves in this idea of a tangible past with these blankets, as elaborated by Pajaczkowska (2005: 223) in *The Complexity of Cloth*, a need of encasing ourselves in a false sense of touch, we experience possession of a past that embraces us as a human would. Infused with implication, cloth forms a language, it tells the tale of a nation.

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