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For an archived snapshot of the story as it appeared between 2020 and 2023 on <https://portspastpresent.eu/>, see the Relation field below.

Dublin Core

Title

Billy-in-the-Bowl

Subject

Holyhead

Disability

Love

Creative Practice

Creator

Gillian Brownson

Publisher

Ports, Past and Present Project

Date

2023

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Relation

<https://perma.cc/3QHS-4LJK>

Format

Curatescape story

Language

English

Welsh

Coverage

53.308685757919605, -4.632446884131551

Curatescape Story Item Type Metadata

Lede

Holyhead writer and performer Gillian Brownson presents a poem about Billy-in-the-Bowl and the woman who fought for him.

Lede (Welsh)

Yr awdur a pherfformiwr o Gaergybi Gillian Brownson yn adrodd gerdd am ‘Billy-in-the-Bowl’ a’r ferch a frwydrodd drosto.

Story

Billy lived in Holyhead in the nineteenth century. He was a young man affected by paraplegia in a time when society still operated under conventional notions of ‘perfection,’ and of the many important stories presented in the invaluable *Holyhead: Stories of a Port* blog, this story sings to me because of the Holyhead woman who defiantly and fiercely loved him.

We wouldn’t know about Billy, or his love, if it wasn’t for the writings of Irish Composer, Tenor and Actor, Michael Kelly – a famed contemporary of Mozart. He encountered Billy while staying in the then named ‘Stanley Arms’ on Victoria Terrace, after a 7-day journey, by road, from London. What was to be a very short stay before his crossing to Dublin turned into a nine-week convalescence when doctors informed the star of the London Stage that he was not well enough to make the crossing. During that nine week stay in Holyhead, it was Billy who visited Mr Kelly every morning to enquire after his health, and kept his spirits high with stories of his cariad, who he was to marry against her father and his selected suitor’s wishes.

I’m thrilled that this young girl, the daughter of a wealthy farmer with all of the incumbent expectations, defied her father and society at large, to follow her heart. The couple did marry, thanks to her tenacity, and had two boys. This short poem is to mark her bravery, and is written for girls of all ages, in the hope that we continue to challenge notions of beauty and understand, as Michael Kelly did, that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder”.

Billy-in-the-Bowl

There was a man of Holyhead,
Who got round in a bowl,
He had no legs, but his arms were strong,
and his life, it took its toll.

It didn’t stop a farmer’s daughter,
Who loved him with all her heart,
But her father had no wish for this,
And kept them both apart.

He offered her a fortune,
A handsome wealthy spouse
But Billy lived inside her heart,
She could not get him out!

She told her father, strong and true;
“I will not marry another,
I’ll marry Billy, and his bowl,
And I’ll be his children’s mother.”

Story (Welsh)

Ymhlith trigolion Caergybi yn y bedwaredd ganrif ar bymtheg roedd dyn o’r enw Billy. Ar adeg pan oedd cymdeithas ynghlwm wrth syniadau cul am ‘berffeithrwydd’ y corff, roedd e’n dioddef gan barablegia. O’r holl chwedlau pwysig sy’n ymddangos ar y blog ‘*Holyhead: Stories of a Port*’ mae hon yn codi fy nghalon fwyaf oherwydd y ferch o Gaergybi a frwydrodd yn heriol i’w garu.

Ni fyddwn ni’n gwybod dim am Billy a’i gariad oni bai am gyfansoddwr, actor a chantor enwog o Iwerddon, Michael Kelly (1762-1826) – un o gyfeillion Mozart. Daeth ar draws Billy tra yn aros yn y ‘Stanley Arms’ ar Victoria Terrace, ar ôl taith saith diwrnod o Lundain. Dim ond ymweliad byr roedd hyn i fod i seren llwyfannau’r brifddinas cyn iddo groesi i Ddulyn, ond dywedodd y meddygon nad oedd yn ddigon iach i deithio, ac arosodd am naw wythnos. Yn ystod y cyfnod hir yna yng Nghaergybi, Billy oedd yr un i alw’n gyson bob bore i holi am iechyd Mr Kelly. Cododd calon yr actor gyda straeon am ei gariad, oedd yn mynnu ei briodi yn groes i ddymuniadau ei thad, a’r dyn roedd e wedi dewis iddi.

Dwi wrth fy modd yn meddwl am y fenyw ifanc hon: merch i ffermwr cefnog, yn herio disgwyliadau ei thad a chymdeithas yn gyffredinol, er mwyn dilyn ei chalon. Priododd y ddau, diolch i’w gwydnwch hi, a chawson nhw ddau fab. Mae’r gerdd hon yn dathlu ei dewrder, ac mae’n gyflwynedig i ferched o bob oedran, gan obeithio bydden ni’n parhau i herio syniadau confensiynol am harddwch, ac yn deall – fel deallodd Michael Kelly - mai ‘nid prydfferth prydfferthwch ond yr hyn a hoffwch’.

Factoid

Related Resources

Peter Scott Roberts, 'When an Irish Tenor met Billy-in-the-Bowl', *Holyhead: Stories of a Port*, 2020, <https://holyheadstoriesofaport.com/2020/04/05/when-an-irish-tenor-met-billy-in-the-bowl/>, archived at <https://perma.cc/B4S8-EPQY>

Official Website

<http://holyheadmaritimemuseum.co.uk/>