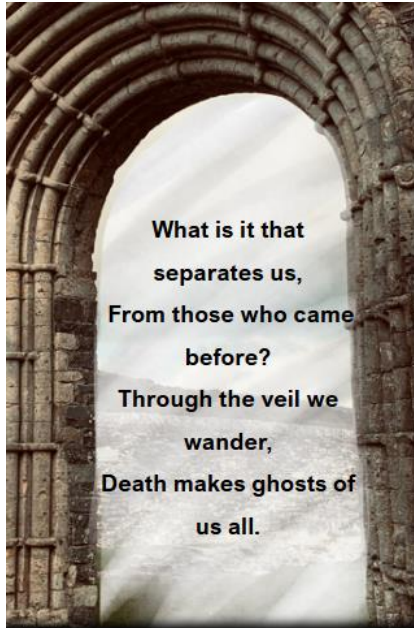


A Personal Reflection on Strata Florida. Student Number: 2400613
(HPHP4018).



Driving into Strata Florida the first thing I noticed, standing proudly in a field, was the West Door to the Abbey. Devoid of roof or wall, it was reminiscent of a portal - a transition point to a realm beyond our own. Portals are used as metaphors in many pieces of literature, representing anything from a threshold of transformation to the denial/acceptance of self. My immediate instinct, surrounded by religious iconography, was to see the arch as a gateway to the 'otherworld'. One small step and I felt as though I could breach the boundary between life and death itself.

Boundaries and liminal spaces have always fascinated me and show up often in my writing. It is a way to process the boundaries we face in everyday life, from class to belief, to the unknown. Liminal spaces such as the archway, can represent the threshold between the conscious and subconscious – what a character knows and how that might contrast with what they feel.

This thought inspired me to write the short poem above, musing on what links us to the people of the past and how separate we truly are to them

After stepping across the threshold, the interior of the abbey lay spread out before me. With its jagged walls and the looming hills, I felt as though I'd been transported to a land of myth. Indeed, the abbey is a place where the myths and legends of old were



immortalized in writing, with the compiling of the Mabinogion – an important manuscript in Welsh culture and literature.

This fantastical atmosphere made me think of setting its own character – complementing or standing juxtaposed against a protagonist or theme. This is highly important when it comes to writing as the setting can add to the tone of the piece, foreshadowing future plot points, or even representing a character's

emotional state.

The concrete spread over the remains of the abbey to preserve it summoned ideas of time standing still – but at what cost? We walk as ghosts amongst the memories of the past, seeking out connections to cling to, even if it only ends in destruction and disruption of the original.



Following this thought, I became concerned with place and its use as a representation of the human psyche. Does the preservation of a place result in the stagnation of ideas and prevent progress? What implications would this have on a character and their society? These are all questions that are worth thinking about when constructing a narrative.

Trailing through the grounds of the abbey I stumbled across a wire fence separating me from an old graveyard and a small, but intact, chapel. The headstones were weathered, hinting at the age of the interred, while the chapel itself seemed better preserved. Running low on

time, I was unable to find the entrance to the church grounds. Even if I had, as barren as it was and cut off from the abbey by the fence, I felt as though I would have been trespassing.

It wasn't until I had returned home that the idea of borders once again sprung to mind. Instead of welcoming someone inside, as I felt the archway indicated, this felt like a warning to keep out. Separating religion from the mundane and emotion from experience. It made me think of events of the past – such as women burnt as witches being buried outside of sanctified ground. This is an idea easily explored through literature. Whether writing about a culture's beliefs and acceptance of a person, and how a character might adhere to or challenge the status quo.



Crossing over the manicured grass of the abbey, three depressions became visible against one of the walls. Prayer rooms, with intricately carved tiles from the original building paving the floor. The tiles were beautiful examples of craftsmanship, painting a picture of the beliefs and thought processes of the time. One of the designs shows a figure holding a mirror. This could represent self-reflection in relation to one's faith, something humans have been practicing across the ages. Pictures were a way of telling stories long before the written word was invented, as still serves as a way of doing so today.

At the crossing point sits a baptism pool. Mottled stone white and grey steps guide the way in and then back out towards the altar. In the eyes of the church this would represent the initiate being cleansed and coming before God.



Water as a metaphor represents cleansing and rebirth. Within writing, this could represent an idea or a character that will experience change throughout the narrative, the movement of space, or even an ending and a new beginning such as the call to action.

I left the main body of the abbey to visit the quaint little museum on the site. The brightly coloured farmhouse doors immediately grabbed my attention. I found this excellent use of a wordless narrative, tempting people to explore what lies within using aesthetics and colour.



The doors to the museum contrasted with the narrative written on the noticeboards around the abbey proper. These were darker, fitting in with the dour exterior and relating information in a clinical manner. Audience is imperative to consider when writing, no matter the piece you are constructing.

Dark clouds rolled in as we stepped forward as a group to view the graves of the princes of Wales. Many of the heavy slabs were replicas, the originals taken elsewhere to preserve them. Here, before me, lay the legacy of the Welsh people.



Legacy is something creative writers seek to immortalize, whether that is the legacy of a culture (as seen with the princes), or the legacy of a poet and their life's work (as seen with the grave of Dafydd ap Gwilym, beneath the yew tree). It was a privilege to visit and be inspired by the legacy of Strata Florida.

Total wordcount: 1,000

References

Perry A. (2024) *Strata Florida Abbey and Museum* [Photos: Taken by author]