

BOSSE-GRIFFITHS, KATE (1910-1998), Egyptologist and author

Name: Kate Bosse-griffiths
Date of birth: 1910
Date of death: 1998
Gender: Female
Occupation: Egyptologist and author
Area of activity: History and Culture; Literature and Writing
Author: Marion Löffler

Kate Bosse-Griffiths was born in Wittenberg, Germany, on 16 July 1910, the second of four children of Paul Bosse (1881-1947), a doctor and head of Wittenberg town hospital, and his wife Käthe Bosse (née Levin, 1886-1944). Käthe Julia Gertrud Bosse was of Jewish descent through her mother, but was brought up a Lutheran. As Kate Bosse-Griffiths she made a unique contribution to twentieth-century Welsh literature by introducing modernist themes not discussed in Welsh previously. She is also remembered as an eminent Welsh Egyptologist.

Kate's interest in the classics was awakened by her education at Melanchthon School in Wittenberg, from where she went to study Archaeology and Egyptology at universities in Berlin, Bonn and Munich. In 1935 she was awarded a doctorate for a thesis on the human figure in late Egyptian sculpture, which was published in 1936. In the same year she was appointed to a post at Berlin State Museums. Berlin was ideal for an enthusiastic young Egyptologist, but for a woman of Jewish descent it was a very dangerous place to be in the late nineteen-thirties. In 1936, her father's contract with Wittenberg hospital was terminated, because his wife was Jewish and he refused to divorce her, and he opened his own clinic for pre-and postnatal care (which as the Klinik Bosse Wittenberg, is a memorial to him to this day). In 1944, his clinic was forcibly closed down, and Kate's mother and her two brothers removed to concentration camps. Her mother died in Ravensbrück, a concentration camp for women north of Berlin, in 1944.

Kate Bosse-Griffiths escaped Nazi persecution in 1936. Her journey led her to Scotland, where she became assistant to the famous biologist, mathematician and classical scholar, Sir D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, then to the Petrie Museum, London, and from there to the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, where she became a Senior Fellow of Somerville College. It was here that she met her husband, **John Gwynedd Griffiths** (1911-2004) who shared her interests in the Classics and in Egyptology. They were married in 1939, and moved to Pentre in the Rhondda Valley, where **Gwyn** had been appointed a teacher at Porth County School. Writers, poets and pacifists began to gather around them to form Cylch Cadwgan (the Cadogan Circle). Members of the group, like **William Thomas (Pennar) Davies** and Rhydwen Williams, must have been impressed by Kate, who brought an unfamiliarly open approach to their discussions and who was already mastering the Welsh language. Her continental, modernist background and her classical education, informed by the discussions and pacifist principles of the Cadogan Circle, soon expressed themselves in the poems, novels and short stories she composed in Welsh. She published a series of innovative poems and stories in the journal *Heddiw* in 1940 and 1941. Her first novel, *Anesmwyth Hoen* (Uneasy Passion), appeared in 1941, the collection of short stories *Fy Chwaer Efa* (My Sister Eva) in 1944, her second novel *Mae'r Galon wrth y Llyw* (The Heart is at the Wheel) in 1957, and the late short story collection *Cariadau* (Kinds of Love) in 1995. Her early work drew attention for its combination of a feminist approach with intense spirituality, and particularly for her frankness in discussing parts of women's lives still taboo in Welsh literature, such their sexuality, and related subjects like adultery and abortion. *Anesmwyth Hoen* won the Llyfrau'r Dryw competition in 1941, yet in his review **E. Tegla Davies** asked if the author could 'moderate and economise upon those areas which could cause misunderstanding and pain'. In her more factual popular books, *Mudiadau Heddwch yn yr Almaen* (Peace Movements in Germany, 1943), *Bwlch yn y Llen Haeam* (A Gap in the Iron Curtain, 1951), and *Trem ar Rwsia a Berlin* (A Look at Russia and Berlin, 1962), she travelled in space and time to analyse her relationship with Germany and Eastern Europe, introducing these unfamiliar worlds to the Welsh reader. During the 1950s, she also contributed to early Welsh-language broadcasting with programmes on classical German works like *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* and *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grisha*. Her interest in the ancient religion and the supernatural led her to write a factual account of folk beliefs and medicines, which was published as *Byd y Dyn Hysbys* (The World of the Wizard) in 1977.

After a short period in Bala, where Kate and **Gwyn**, together with Rev. Euros Bowen and **William Thomas (Pennar) Davies**, co-founded the journal *Y Fflam* (The Flame), the couple moved to Swansea, where **Gwyn** had been appointed Lecturer in Classics and Egyptology in 1946. It was here that they raised their two sons, authors and publishers **Robat Gruffudd** (born 1943) and **Heini Gruffudd** (born 1946), while Kate was working as Honorary Curator of Archaeology at Swansea Museum. At the end of the nineteen-sixties the couple spent a year in Egypt, where **Gwyn** was visiting professor at Cairo University. Kate used the time to write a book that combined her knowledge of Egyptian history with a description of its modern society, *Tywyssennau o'r Aiffit* (Ears of Corn from Egypt), published in 1970.

In 1971, an opportunity to return to Egyptology arose when the greater part of the Wellcome Collection of artefacts from Egypt was offered to the Department of Classics of Swansea University College. The college accepted and Kate Bosse-Griffiths was appointed Curator of its Wellcome Museum. It was here that she spent the rest of her life, doing what she loved best: cataloging, organising and researching the collection of Egyptian artefacts. From 1972, articles based on the treasures in the collection began to appear in the *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, as well as in French and German journals and scholarly volumes. Illustrated catalogues by her, such as *A Musician Meets Her Gods* and *Five Ways of Writing between 2000 BC and AD 200* explained different parts of the collections to the public. She had the pleasure, at the end of her career, of seeing the near completion of the Egypt Centre in the new Taliesin building of Swansea University. It opened in September 1998. A volume of collected essays, some of which had been published before, was published in 2004 as *Teithiau'r Meddwl* (Travels of the Mind).

Kate Bosse-Griffiths died in Swansea on 4 April 1998 and is buried at Morryston cemetery. Most of her manuscripts and her diaries remain in the family, but some manuscripts relating to her work for Welsh radio are held at the National Library of Wales.

Author

Marion Löffler

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Published date: 2016-04-27

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APA Citation



Löffler, M., (2016). BOSSE-GRIFFITHS, KATE (1910-1998), Egyptologist and author. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. Retrieved 14 Nov 2024, from <https://biography.wales/article/s10-GRIF-KAT-1910>

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