JOURNEYING WITH ABEYANCE:
A WELSH CULTURAL APPROACH TO CONTEMPLATIVE CONNECTION WITH THE
LIVING WORLD

by

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Abstract

As a response to climate change, this dissertation attends to a Welsh cultural approach to contemplative connection with the living world. In it, I write with auto-ethnography to explore my own cultural background, and relationship with trees and ancestral characters. Trees are vital to this journey with abeyance, a word I first heard when walking in the rainforests of the Pacific Northwest. Learning that abeyance originated in Wales where I am from, I retreat to this place and from there, connect with the larger patterns of life.

Situated in an area of curriculum studies known as eco-poetic life writing, I contemplate the etymology of abeyance and its rootprints abey, abide, abashen, badinage, esbair, and baca. These words make room for encounters with ancestral voices of a ninth century lore-maker Hywel Dda; Gwerful Mechain, an erotic poet from the fifteenth century; a novelist and social entrepreneur, Amy Dillwyn; and my maternal grandmother Phyllis Gittins.

Together with these rootprints, voices of my ancestral co-journeyers, and the diverse life-worlds of remote woodland, I have been learning to change the way I think and relate with trees. Realising it is not enough to deny the influence of complex cultural contexts: I invite readers to navigate their own ancestral journeys in relation to places and issues mattering to them. Environmental and contemplative educators may be interested in this way of knowing and connecting with trees and the living world, with culture, words, and ancestors. They may want to delve into their own memories of place and spiritual connections with extended poetic work. They may revisit places and relate with words and the spaces between words in creative, devotional, and regenerative ways equal to the challenge.
Lay Summary

As a response to climate change, this dissertation attends to my cultural background. In it, I journey with the word abeyance, a word that comes from trees and connects to ancestors.

Writing within eco-poetic life-writing, I explore the following questions in poetic, contemplative, and in-depth ways:

- What might it mean to journey with abeyance in the context of climate change?
- In what ways might this journey contribute to sustainability education and contemplative education?
- How does this journey create space for unique cultural approaches to contemplative connection with the living world?

I journey with words, and the spaces among words, as they gesture to ways of being and becoming with places, and taking care of places and trees as living beings in our communities.
Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Joanne Price.
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## Glossary

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<th><strong>Definition</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>A rootprint / gair gwraidd</td>
<td>In this dissertation, rootprints refer to the root or ancestral words of abeyance. They are old words and not widely used today. Like word-seeds, they live beneath the ground and help guide people toward a more contemplative, poetic, and in-depth way of living. These rootprints and their ways do not claim to understand abeyance, but they help to create the conditions for it to live. My use of the word rootprints is inspired by Hélène Cixous’ and Mireille Calle-Gruber’s book, “rootprints, life writing and memory” (1997). This defines the roots of Cixous’ writing process, and the ways her words embody her experiences of sexual difference, alterity and exchange, and the multiple subjectivities found within the human body. The term rootprints offered me a way of moving between and among the many worlds of abeyance. Like a doorstep or threshold, this word opens into multiple other worlds of words and events, stories, experiences, people, trees, and stars that deepen the context of this journey.</td>
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<tr>
<td>An alphabet, Ogham / wyddor</td>
<td>Ogham (pronounced OH-am) refers to an alphabet dating to the fourth century at least. Used to convey ideas, communications, and spiritual understandings, Ogham may have been designed to communicate messages in ancient Gaelic and other Celtic and Brythonic languages, including Old Welsh. Although its origins are uncertain, some say it was developed by West Walian and Irish settlers after contact with the Latin alphabet. This alphabet is made up of twenty five characters or letters,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
known in Welsh as llythyr. Each letter is made up of up to five slanted lines, notches, and strokes, either half or full, horizontal and diagonal. These are grouped into five families named after its first letter. Each letter relates to a distinct tree or plant personality and these act as entrance points to poetic understandings of their use. Many believe these letters were derived from tree and plant beings themselves. Today, Ogham inscriptions are found on stone, but it is likely they were written on sticks and trees, and later used in manuscripts. While there are several hundred stone inscriptions in Wales, many more have been destroyed to construct roads and houses. While the remaining stones state personal names and were probably used to mark ownership, this ever-evolving alphabet has been used as mnemonic or memory devices, divination tools, and runes. Although we do not know how Ogham works, in recent years it has been suggested that the order of letters form a calendar of tree magic, with each letter corresponding to a Celtic month (Graves, 1961).

Abashen / adennill  Abashen is a rootprint of abeyance. It refers to losing and finding composure.

Abey / plygu  Abey is a rootprint of abeyance meaning to bend, curve; incline; and be subject to. It refers to taking the time to retreat to a contemplative place, when I may abide with words as they shape my mind in relation to theirs, and are lived. Abey speaks to the certainty with which life repeats and renews itself.

Abeyance (atal anghred)  Abeyance dates to the Marches in 1556, and refers to a temporary suspension of time. To enact abeyance, I take time
out of the usual course of events and experience life differently. Abeyance is also an act of resistance, as it resists separation and considers relationships among things more important than the things themselves.

**Abide / aros**  
Abide is a rootprint of abeyance, and describes an action of staying, dwelling, tarrying, remaining without going away, residing, or persisting. To abide in a place is to keep the space of waiting open, or to leave spaces as spaces, because it is from within these realms that life thrives.

**Alder tree / coed gwern**  
In the Ogham alphabet, the letter or character of an alder tree is ᚃ faern or f. As the third consonant in the first Ogham family, alder regenerates the soil and is associated with generosity, shelter, and compassion. There is an alder tree and an ash tree at the meeting place of streams at a bwlch, regularly visited in this dissertation. Alder helps people to be the change they want to see, its medicine is used for helping with inflammation and flexible thinking, and its decay-resisting wood can be used for making whistles, pan flutes, drums, and recorders.

**Amy Dillwyn**  
Amy Dillwyn (1845-1935) is a character or co-journeyer in this dissertation. She was a novelist and social entrepreneur living in nineteenth and twentieth century Swansea, south Wales.

**Ash tree / coeden onnen**  
In the Ogham alphabet, the letter or character of an Ash tree is ᚃ nion or n. The tremendous height and root system of ash is thought to promote renewal, health, and perspective. This gentle giant is part of the olive family, cradles life, and protects children and young people. Ash firewood burns with an intense
heat even when green. Its strength and elasticity makes for plates and bowls, garden potash, and boating oars. Ash leaves are great for making pickles, and for digestion and cleansing, and in Welsh folklore ash sap was given to a newborn baby for good fortune.

Awen
Awen is a Welsh, Cornish, and Breton word for poetic inspiration. The muse of creative processes, awen refers to flowing spirit or inspiration.

Badinage / ffwl
A rootprint of abeyance, badinage means to be a fool and suspend disbelief. There are badinage moments in this dissertation when I catch myself actually believing in something quite different to something else.

Baca / aeron
Baca or berry is a rootprint of abeyance.

/ Bwlch
Bwlch is a Welsh word for a gap, space, pass, opening, aperture, or notch in the landscape. Pronounced bowl-hch, bwlch refers to a spring, a stream, a waterfall, or wooded area, for examples, that connect differing terrains such as mountains and farmland. As a place that borders and extends us, the word bwlch generally appears on walking maps to denote a change in terrain, these power-places act like gaps or differences in the storyline of the map. These specific differences tend not to make it onto the map, hence bwlch is often a neglected area.

Cedar tree
Many mother and grandmother trees in the Pacific Northwest are cedars. The overlapping tips of cedar leaves are rich in vitamin C. From the Cedar tree, I learn to respond to climate
change with gift giving, or the idea of taking only what you need and having enough to give away. As Robin Wall-Kimmerer (2013) writes, the tips of cedar leaves are “like tiny braids of sweet-grass, as if the tree was woven of kindness itself” (p. 280).

**Climate change / newid yn yr hinsawdd**

Climate change is a reality. Scientists agree the world is getting warmer and this problem is caused by carbon dioxide emitting human activities, such as burning fossil fuels to power homes and cars. Higher temperatures have been linked to an increase in drought, hurricanes, floods and other extreme weather events, and the loss of plant and animal species (IPCC, 2019). There are many ways to take action and reduce our carbon footprint, such as using transit, cycling places, growing and eating home and locally grown fruit and vegetables, keeping heating on low and wearing a sweater, electric cars, taking fewer, if any, flights, planting trees, taking care of woodland, and exploring our own culturally responsive solutions such as this dissertation does. Here, I take a Welsh approach to climate change and advocate for contemplative and poetic solutions to complement the tried and tested.

**Co-journeyers / cyd-deithwyr**

In this dissertation, I write with the lives of four historical characters. These co-journeyers are a part of my cultural lineage or larger mind of Wales. We share a rich history in relation to being Welsh.

**Contemplation / myfyrio**

Contemplation refers to an action of abeying to and abiding with something for a long time. In this dissertation, I carefully consider the word abeyance with deep reflective and reflexive
thought. I stand back, rethink, and connect with how reality is happening.

Cultural / diwyliannol
Cultural relates to the ideas, customs, differences, diversities, and social behaviour of a people.

Cyfraith lore
This was created in ninth century Wales by Hywel Dda in an attempt to bring together the lore of several territories making up what would become known as Wales. Hospitality and neighborliness are core to Cyfraith lore which originates in an organic knowledge system beginning with trees.

Cynganedd
Cynganedd refers to a part of the Welsh bardic tradition known as Welsh metrics or strict meter poetry. This combines both internal rhyme and alliteration, and is about learning intricate rules of what can and cannot be written. Involving patterns of consonants that need to chime together, in cynganedd one part of a line has to echo the consonants or rhyme scheme of another. Cynganedd entails twenty four different forms of writing poetry, including englyn and cywydd.

Esbair / syfrdanol
A rootprint of abeyance, esbair refers to being astonished and is a derivative of bāee meaning opening.

Gwerful Mechain
Gwerful Mechain (1462-1500) is a character or co-journeyer in this dissertation. She was an erotic poet working within the tradition of Cynganedd and living in fifteenth century Powys.

Hawthorn tree / coeden ddraenen wen
In the Ogham alphabet, the letter or character of the hawthorn tree is ᚆ h or huath (pronounced hoo-ah). Hawthorn exists in the
second of five Ogham families, as the sixth consonant. As one of three trees making up the fairy triad, together with ash and oak, hawthorn is about balance and harmony. It is also full of contradictions, which are said to go unnoticed by speakers of the languages of trees. Hawthorn, for example, is imbued with male energy and yet associated with fertility and femininity. Their flowers and fruits are used as a tonic to help the heart, and clear the mind of negative thoughts and confusion.

Hazel tree / coeden collen

In the Ogham alphabet, the letter or character of the hazel tree is ᚹ coll or c or k. Hazel exists in the second of five Ogham families, as the ninth consonant. Hazel trees are associated with creativity, poetry, and delightful fantasy and visions. Contemplating their seemingly random and curvy branches may result in previously unthought of responses. In Welsh folk tales, purple hazelnuts fall into a pool and create bubbles of inspiration on the surface of moving water. Salmon swimming upstream eat the nuts flowing downstream and gain poetic powers. Hazel shoots called withies are used for fencing, water divining, walking sticks, and wattle and daub buildings.

Hywel Dda

Hywel of Debeubarth or Hywel Dda (880-950) from ninth century west Wales is a character or co-journeyer in this dissertation. In an attempt to maintain independence and relative peace in a leaderless territory later known as Wales, Hywel created Cyfraith lore.

In-depth / mewn dyfnder

In detail, comprehensively, and thoroughly.

Journeying with

This refers to a process of spirit and potential toward a more
abeyance / teitho gydag atal anghrediniaeth

contemplative, in-depth, and poetic sensibility. Although, I cannot claim to understand its greater workings as it is always evolving and moving ahead, this journey undoubtedly creates openings for unique ways of responding to climate change.

Languages of trees / ieithoedd coed

This derives in the Ogham alphabet and teaches people to think and relate with the world in a new way. By attending to the life-worlds trees, I become a little more aware of the broadened necessity of the world itself, and let the languages of trees lead toward integration.

Marches

Marches derives from proto Indo-European and means mereg, edge, or threshold. As an attested word referring to a borderland between two areas, the Marches have been associated with the word abeyance. Rich in stories of “split-head” people (Nelson, 2008, p. 6) with land-souls and enlightenment heads, the Marches are made up of all the twos, all the dualities, and in-betweenes. By nature, they are made up of more than the Marches, having more than the Marches in the Marches, and life is lived in multiple ways.

Oak tree / coeden dderwen

In the Ogham alphabet, the letter or character of the oak tree is ᚆ dair or d. The seventh consonant in the second family of Ogham, oak is associated with endurance, strength, and success. A life-affirming power, in Welsh folk lore sessile oak attracts the lightning of the thunder gods. Oak bark is used as a medicinal astringent, and drinking rainwater gathered in oak boughs relieves fevers.

Pacific Northwest

Sometimes referred to as Cascadia, the Pacific Northwest is a
geographic region in western North America, with the Pacific Ocean to its west and the Rocky Mountains to its east. Though no official border exists, it includes the province of British Columbia in Canada, and Idaho, Oregon, and Washington states in the US. Broader conceptions of the Pacific Northwest also include southeast Alaska, Yukon, and northern California.

Phyllis Gittins

My maternal grandmother, Phyllis Johnson nee Gittins (1917-2000), is a character or co-journer in this dissertation. She is known as Phyllis Gittins in this dissertation, as this is the name she used to describe herself in a family tree. She lived her whole life in the Welsh Marches during the twentieth century. Farming with her husband, Ernie Jim Johnson, she lived a contemplative and poetic life in rural Herefordshire.

Poetic and poet/hic / barddonol

To be poetic is to use words in expressive and wonderful ways. Adding an *h* or aitch to poetry to make poet/hic has the capacity to rekindle the awen of poetic verse and prose. Joan Retallack (2003) created the word poethic to describe the experimental feminine practice of exploring the multiplicity and unintelligible beauty of what we do not understand.

/ Powys

Powys is a county or province of Wales. It is a modern place name, and made up of much of the Welsh Marches.

There / yno

When a person reaches their limit, they may well be thrown into their *there* or *yno*. *There* I connect with personality. The slanted aitch brings a spark of life to an old word. Like the letter *y* in *yno*, an aitch can be both this and that, as it attempts to compose and invent, write in prose and poetry. *There*, or thyere
Welsh Marches / YMers

The Welsh Marches is an imprecisely defined area bordering Wales and England in the United Kingdom, and for many, stretches to the west Wales coast. It does not appear on the map, shares a geographic landscape of mountain hills and valleys, and has inspired many fictions. Although its meaning has varied at differing times, the Marches or Marchia Wallia (or imperfect Welsh foreigners as different yet connected to Pura Wallia or perfect Welsh foreigners) is independent of both countries and has the character of a frontier. As such, the Welsh Marches are cosmopolitan in character and attractive to newcomers.

Welsh / Cwmraeg

Welsh was a name given to people living in a mountainous area in the west of the British Isles in 1287. Wallia or Welsh means stranger, and was given to these people by the Anglo-Saxon neighbors. Hence, many Welsh people live in a context of making the strange familiar and the familiar strange. Welsh culture thrives in both belonging and being an outsider. Always contemplative and poetic, Welsh is still on the move. As poet Menna Eflyn says, “Oh yes, Welsh is female. I want her, like me, to love the possibilities of the world so much as to want to hold on to her wonder” (Elfyn, 2002).
Acknowledgements

I acknowledge that this dissertation has been written while living, working and playing on the unceded and traditional homelands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), sélílwitulh (Tsleil Waututh) Coast Salish peoples.

Sincere and heartfelt thanks to everybody who has contributed to and participated in this long journey.

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Thank you readers and co-journeyers, Hywel Dda, Gwerful Mechain, Amy Dillwyn, and Phyllis Gittins for your voices, wisdom and fiercely compassionate support and inspiration. Thanks to our ancestors, who are trees, paper, plants, animals, and places. May we learn to help all beings in every place find a way to flourish.
Chapter one: Introduction – Beginning with trees

Welcome to this journey with abeyance,

a journey beginning with trees.

As a word, abeyance comes from trees and although it is impossible to define definitively, by giving up on one definition it holds back from being everything it can be and offers spaces to education ... spaces to breathe and rest in knowledge that allows learning to arise and pass away. As a sensibility of spaciousness, abeyance makes room for different and similar ways of relating with life. Through acknowledging trees, it welcomes letters into these pages, and words and the spaces between words, and it welcomes alphabets that give way to regenerative waves of trees, life, plants, people, and stars.

I heartily invite you to join me on this journey with abeyance, as it invites a contemplative, poetic, and in-depth way of living. But before exploring this further, let me take the time to introduce myself. I would like to speak to my experience as an educator, where I come from, where abeyance comes from, how you might situate yourself in this journey; and what kind of response is hoped for.

1.1 Where do I come from?

I was born in a rural area of Ceredigion, west Wales and in many ways this place continues to shape my life as an educator. I lived in this land where mountains meet the sea until I was five years old, and for a while attended a Welsh speaking pre-school in the village of Tal-y-Bont not far from Aberystwyth. In 1976, I moved with my parents and younger sister to Pengenffordd in the Welsh Marches, where our third sister was born. The Marches are a wild soft land bordering with England, and we moved here to be nearer to our extended family. Being with trees are among my earliest memories, with trees around and in our garden and also in wooded areas by streams. I have clear and happy memories of playing among the trees. As I grew older, I’d rush home from school and my mom would have made us a piece of toast and with a cwtch pack us off for an hour or so before dinner. I would walk with my sisters and our dogs and cats, and often alone, and remember climbing
trees, playing among the trees, splashing in streams and just happily being in these quite remote places of the British Isles.

From as early as I remember I would love to take time out in wild places. It was easy to imagine other beings living there and I would often see a fairy among the leaves of trees and sometimes recognise her to be the tree itself. These were my earliest days, when reality would shift and blur with ease without analysing and simply being in playful communion with nature. At times I would climb up into the canopy of a hazel tree and crawl along its branches, on to intertwining trees. I’d find places to listen to the wind singing in the leaves, and look out to a big oak tree beside large quartz boulders marking the edge of a dingle as it opens to a sloping field usually left as grass. I remember Oak’s broad crown and trunk, its roots stretching out like snakes diving in and out of the soil. In the dappled sunlight I once saw a fox vanish beneath these roots as if into another world. It felt like I had come across the veil between worlds and knew it in the core of my being. And while I knew fox probably had its den beneath the trees’ roots, my senses told me it was more. These are the stories of a childhood of play that evoke an “opening of time back into the ancientness” that sounds in our surroundings as both present and future (Seidel & Jardine, 2012, p. 181).

At eighteen, I left home to work as a teaching assistant in Lebowa, Southern Africa. I taught in a Northern Sotho school for physically challenged children and young people, and helped with adult literacy night classes. I had always wanted to be a teacher, and it was here, working with small groups of students that I became more aware of the many layers and stories at play in this world. A year later, I studied a three year African Studies course at Birmingham in England, before training to be a teacher at a college in London, and teaching geography and history for four years at an inner city high school in Southall.

In 1999, I saw an ActionAid advert in the Times Educational Supplement and my imagination was immediately caught with the words, “Write the World”. I applied and was soon living my dream as an educator writer, and studying a master’s degree in education, gender and international development. I was enjoying my first long term lesbian relationship, and working with ActionAid in collaboration with many other related organisations. Fulltime and freelance, I worked with teachers and students in schools and
colleges across England and Wales to write the world for a further fifteen years. Together, with communities in southern and eastern India, Burundi, and coastal Kenya, among other places, we developed innovative materials to support the sustainability and global citizenship education curriculum. We would work together to identify loopholes in the curriculum, set up forums whereby communities would speak directly to each other and visit, and create widely used and award-winning resources. It was like finding the loopholes, and letting them speak for themselves with a resounding yes! We worked with a diverse range of grass-roots reflect-action and participatory problem–solution oriented approaches to teaching and learning, and created space for students to bring these to life with their own stories as well as the stories of people living in very different contexts.

1.1.2 Rejuvenated by stories and trees

As climate change became more of a problem, we found ourselves increasingly relying on scientific evidence and this linear rational problem-solution way of thinking. Although, I had learned that stories have no limits and I believed in their power to make things new all the time, I needed to delve deeper. A catalyst for this occurred while we were working with Adivasi communities in the Nilgiri Hills of southern India. I had quite a lot of free time or what felt like free time and later realised this was a part of life I wasn’t used to. And there was this realisation that what we were doing in climate change education wasn’t enough. Being there, in the remote forests of this place took me back as far as I remember so that the world we live and the life I was living took on a kind of ethereal character. I had always been an educator interested in new ways of telling stories, but here I could feel myself constantly being rejuvenated not only by stories but by trees. Trees themselves were making their presence known in ways I could only describe as poetic. They were ushering other more in-depth, cultural and contemplative ways of knowing that I didn’t have the skills to articulate, let alone integrate into the world of environmental and climate change education.

I often wondered: what was it about the Adivasi people’s way of living that may have influenced this? What was it about communities who live among trees? Adivasi peoples across India make up eight percent of the population and until recently were largely left to live in the hills and forests where other people did not want to live. They have
never been part of the caste system and have a sense of connectedness and dignity I hadn’t experienced before. Their knowledge systems are very respectful of trees, and there are layers of experience and ways of being and knowledge and ceremony that were not approached at all by the problem-solution thinking.

I heard a radically connected and different heartbeat here coming from a very deep, decent, really imaginative and caring, nurturing and flourishing place. I was introduced to a deva tree here with equal reverence to being introduced to a person or temple. Standing beneath the deep green and rounded leaves of the tree, the already slow time seemed to slow further and I was astonished at how clear the deva tree’s warm and welcoming presence was. There was a sense of powerfulness and connectedness coming from the tree that rippled out toward the village ahead and whole forest. Here, I learned that trees have their own spirit beings and are connected via underground and above ground networks to a place. This morning, after some days of rain, with the early morning sunshine dappling on to the path and reddening its branches to auburn, we were undoubtedly in the presence of another being. Leaning back, I remember swaying with the movements of leaves as they ushered a sense of spaciousness that somehow made room for what I will have recognised as abeyance. Letting the tree relate with us through our relating with it, and letting it story us with the warmth it gave us.

We continued walking, and this experience lingered on the edges of my consciousness for years to follow. Back in London, I complemented working as an educator writer with taking courses in tree medicine, biodynamic farming and even clowning as a way of making space for these more than human intelligences and healthier relationships with education. This new learning resonated with what I knew as a child, when I understood plants could be teachers. I was, perhaps unconsciously, working toward a more culturally holistic approach to education, but without compromising our political work to support the land-rights of marginalised peoples. I was learning reverence for trees as trees, and trees as more than trees.

2.1.2 Living among rainforests of the Pacific Northwest

In 2008 I decided to take time from work and travel to Vancouver, where I would live many years. Living among the rainforests of the Pacific Northwest, I was transported
literally and metaphorically to the place of my early childhood in west Wales, and the Welsh Marches. This journey became the heart of a PhD in curriculum studies and a time in life when I felt like the whole world was in abeyance. Moving back and forth between here and there in the strange context of the university, I took a while to remember the power of words and stories in moving beyond problem-solution conceptions of education. I took a while to take courage and delve into my own cultural background. Not least because when I revisited Wales and tried to reconnect with trees, I learned that ninety nine percent of tree cover has been lost in the past five hundred years. And so, I sought out wild and wooded places I had known as a child and soon understood that a more poetic and contemplative approach to education was not only vital, but at the heart of my culture.

In the rainforests of the Pacific Northwest, deva trees are known as mother and grandmother trees. Several hundred year old cedars, firs and hemlocks loom in the shadows, together with life-worlds of lichens, mosses, ferns, fungi, wildflowers, rocks, birdsong, insects, mammals, and amphibians. They help feed the ecosystem including the people who live there. As Peter Cole says:

We help trees grow by exhaling a hundred times as much carbon dioxide as we inhale and this carbon dioxide comes from the plants’ bodies too perhaps through their spirits their communication systems the trees in turn help us by providing osilenyoxgen it’s because of plants and algae that there is usable molecular oxygen that fires life (personal communication, February 2012).

And there’s something else, adds botanist Diana Beresford-Kroeger (2017),

trees are more than trees, they are the secret to our existence ... they make us feel better ... produce a whole array of medicinal aerosols such as alpha pinene and beta pinene, antibiotic compounds ... in the air they release a form of camphor compound and liberated with that is an anti-cancer limonene compound which aerates itself,
firing up in the atmosphere like the parasols of a dandelion ... so all these chemicals are now in our lungs and giving us a slightly narcotic reaction ... connecting to all areas of my body telling me to relax as my immune system is being boosted (Beresford-Kroger, 2017).

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 1.1.** Relishing the rain (Joanne Price, 2015)

I learn that the trees, and especially cedar, are receptive to people breathing life into them. There are many “spheres of nurture” (Ingold, 2008, p. 137) at play in the way people work with the knowledge and spirit of trees, spheres that get to the heart of this dissertation and what I understand by abeyance. Let me say more. I first heard the word abeyance in these rainforests. I was walking in Pacific Spirit Park in Vancouver with a friend who loves trees and was studying the lifeworks of world teacher and mystic Jiddu Krishnamurti:

I do not know if you have ever examined how you listen, it doesn’t matter to what, whether to a bird, to the wind ... to the rushing waters ... If we try to listen we find it
extraordinarily difficult, because we are always projecting our opinions and ideas, our prejudices, our backgrounds, our inclinations, our impulses; when they dominate we hardly listen to what is being said ... One listens and therefore learns only in silence, in which the whole background is in abeyance, is quiet; then, it seems to me it is possible to communicate (Krishnamurti, 1997, p. 3).

As we walked, we would often let our conversation drift into silence. Not silence as the absence of sound, nor silence as empty spaces needing to be filled, but silence as sufficient as is. I associate this word abeyance with a feeling of living spaciousness, with many sounds, smells, vibrancy and a felt sense of trees as beings with holistic life-worlds sending nutrients and connecting with one another. While Krishnamurti believed his teaching could be applied everywhere, my ongoing journey with abeyance would take a different turn. Especially, when I learned that abeyance originated in the Welsh Marches in the sixteenth century to describe this place that was not fully participating in the modernist and expansionist trend of the time. For many people living in this area, however, abeyance was understood not only in terms of a “temporary suspension” (OED, 2019), but also as a sensibility of contemplation and remembrance (Merriam Webster, 2019). As I journeied on with abeyance into my own cultural context, I was slowly accepting that I did not want, nor need to discard where I come from and that there existed a particularly Welsh way of being more holistically with a place and living beings of trees. I learned that around the time when abeyance became a word in 1556, a massive number of trees were being cut down to make way for urbanisation, industry, transport, and agriculture. And yet, there were also places, particularly in the Welsh Marches which have been neglected because of steep or contested terrain and poor soils for example. I came to know many of these ancient wooded places as bwlch, as this is the generic Welsh word that appears on walking maps to describe a gap in the landscape. When I took time out and retreated to these places, I was reminded of what used to exist on a larger scale. And while these bwlch have “made invisible by our societal grid” (Gerofsky, 2018, p. 57), and commonly disregarded as marginal and useless, abeyant and even abysmal: to me they are invaluable and vital places to contemplate and remember interconnectedness and more holistic ways of living.
Journeying with abeyance, I continue to learn to relate with and take care of these places that give life. There, I attend to “notions of equivalency” (Cole & O’Riley, 2003, p. 31) to de-territorialize this terrain so that “non-human, and more-than-human intelligences and agencies” have space to regenerate ecological diversity (Cole, 2016b, p. 8). There, I see larger patterns in how lives are connected, and use this knowledge to continue journeying with abeyance toward changing the way I think and respond to environmental challenges.

1.2 A Welsh cultural approach to contemplative connection

In this dissertation, I have taken a Welsh cultural approach to contemplative connection with the living world. In it, I work with three research questions:

- What might it mean to journey with abeyance in the context of climate change?
- In what ways might this journey contribute to sustainability education and contemplative education?
- How does this journey create space for unique cultural approaches to contemplative connection with the living world?

I explore a poetic and in-depth approach to relating with climate change. I explore words, and the spaces among words, as they gesture to ways of being and becoming with places, and taking care of places and trees as living beings in our communities. As well as bringing a more cultural and contemplative approach to environmental and climate change education, this work is also concerned with what it could offer other contemplative and meditative approaches to education. Delving into my own and our own cultures might bring very different understandings of trees into conversation. The majestic rainforests of the Pacific Northwest, for example, differ from sacred tree groves in Wales and yet they both support life in a place. They are both, as Robin Wall-Kimmerer (2013) writes, “peopled with centuries of past lives” and this “seeming chaos belies the tight web of interrelationships” (p. 278). And, there need not be any contradiction between connecting with abeyance and exploring your roots, because as David Abram (2011) writes, both of these places provide thousands of ways to reconnect with “so much of what quietly sustains us” (p. 6).

When I delved into my own culture and its relations with trees, I encountered the Ogham alphabet. I learned that the languages of trees are important to Welsh culture, but
there are few written records about how to speak and enact these in this particular place. Although there are many hundreds of Ogham inscribed stones in Wales, most of the literature relating to these comes from Ireland. I would study the linear and rational looking lines and symbols of Ogham tree symbolism for weeks at a time, and came to see that this would only ever come to life via story. Again, but in a much more solitary way to previous experiences in education, I would lose myself in contemplating individual tree letters of this alphabet. Time passed among hazel trees, hawthorn trees, alder trees, ash trees, and sessile oak trees. I took time to reconnect with each of their ways, while researching ancient tree lore and reading and discussing the histories of this land with this knowledge. I was learning to relate with Ogham as an ever-evolving language.

1.2.1 Hearing the voices of my cultural past

As this journey moved back and forth between Wales and the Pacific Northwest, a kind of imaginative realm emerged. I would hear voices emanating from this realm, voices of people I would encounter in articles and books when studying the theoretical roots of abeyance. Voices from different times would visit me at bwlch and their worlds came to occupy my thoughts in wonderful, poetic, and perplexing ways. The voices of ninth century lore-maker Hywel Dda, Gwerful Mechain, an erotic poet from fifteenth century Powys, novelist and social entrepreneur from Swansea, south Wales, Amy Dillwyn, and Phyllis Gittins, my maternal grandmother would soon become co-journeymen on this journey with abeyance.

Admittedly, there were times when I felt overcome with their presence. Their comments and insistences on how to journey with abeyance could evoke confusion, and yet I felt a strange loyalty and wanted to abey with this process come what may. I couldn’t believe my eyes at first as their sometimes irreverent, sometimes elegant voices would interrupt, tease, and challenge me. They would tap me on the shoulder with a glance when I take myself too seriously, and leave me wondering whether this was a common experience for people learning the languages of trees. And yet, even with intensive and extensively rigorous study into the life-worlds of abeyance, I am yet to encounter similar stories. Why, I wondered am I hearing their voices? Why here in this familiar place of rolling green hills
and valleys, land of words and bardic cultures and theatrical characters and primarily oral histories, I wondered? I felt I had no choice but to listen, and see what they have to say.

Figure 1.2. Seeing what they have to say (Joanne Price, 2018)

1.2.1.1 Difficult and healing voices

I first heard the voices in a hazel tree’s keening withies or upward shooting branches. I felt both a deeply moved fear and sense of enchantment as voices were approaching like antagonistic and disproportionate beings being called up from long ago. Far from my childhood experiences of playfully interacting with a hazel tree, at times I would struggle to relate with the voices of these characters. They would speak to me in
poetic stories about how they too lived in varying degrees in times of deforestation. I would listen as they announce the Welsh not only as a culture beginning with trees but as a people with a long history of agriculture, still capable of animating the trees and plants to go into poetic battle against ecological destruction. As their voices came and went, I was reminded of Ben Okri’s (1997) words to listen to,

the cries of the stratosphere, the howls of deforested earth … to the passionate dreams of difficult artists, and to the age-old warnings that have always lurked in the oral fables of storytellers (p. 19).

I was careful not to name or put their voices into words for worry of turning them into strangers whose eccentric and eclectic life worlds are made to fit into writing. Their overflowing voices, blood, tears, and excesses of reality would haunt me with fears of memory and traces. And yet, these strangers or welshnesses living in these everything realms, would sometimes surprise with an invite to name them and make their words fit. As I continued to research, I found resonance with these experiences in Frederique Apffel-Marglin’s (2011a) description of conversing with voices from before modernity when:

people lived in constant interaction with a host of beings, powers, spirits who tricked us, protected us, quarrelled with us, guided us, taught us, punished us, and conversed with us. We were wealthy in our human and more-than-human relationships (p. 3).

With contemplation, I was becoming more empathic toward the social and historical contexts of the voices of Hywel Dda, Gwerful Mechain, Amy Dillwyn, and Phyllis Gittins. I was learning to welcome and celebrate their lives, and no longer confine them to the other and marginalised, nor condemn them to live dangerously in psychological and cultural borderlands. Grateful for their lives and respectful of the spiritual realm, I let their worlds stretch back into the invisible centuries and stretch into futures of more words, unwritten and written, but remembered because they are lived.
In the words of poet-storyteller-healer Jeanette Armstrong (1995):

In that part of me that was always there

grandmothers are speaking to me

the grandmothers in whose voices

I nestle

and draw nourishment from

voices speaking to me

in the early morning light


Fortunately, I have occasionally been gifted with healing experiences. In this dream, for example, my grandmother came to meet me as the spiraling branches of an ancient alder and ash tree at a bwlch. I saw her in a green earthly shawl, worldly and otherworldly, beaded with raindrops and catching the sunlight with a shimmering dance of memories that helped me remember this place as a place she loved to visit and would bring us to for picnics. Absorbed, I find a viewpoint high in the sky and look down to see us both as specks in this place, like flecks on a blanket with Hywel Dda, Gwerful Mechain, and Amy Dillwyn. What’s more, there were voices from the literature woven into the life patterns of this blanket too, the voices of philosophers, poet-thinkers, educators, artists, and scientists and their theoretical, theatrical, poetic, storytelling, collaborative, and contemplative worlds. As an almost finished and beautiful blanket, I began wondering with the trees who to share this with, and what journeying with abeyance might bring to education.

1.3 Who am I speaking to?

In this dissertation, I am speaking to educators at all levels and age groups from early childhood to lifelong learning. I am particularly speaking to educators and scholars of sustainability and climate change education in ways that explore going beyond problem-solution thinking. I am also speaking to educators of contemplative education for whom cultural knowledge may be missing. These educators may be interested in the ways of
knowing I bring forth, as I endeavour to make room for words and the power of words, and the voices of ancestors whether they are past, present, or future. When these cultural voices come to play, I choose to listen to them rather than discard them, because they tend to bring messages worth hearing. Other educators may be interested in this way of knowing and connecting with trees and the living world, with culture, words, and ancestors. They may want to delve into their own memories of place and spiritual connections with extended poetic work. They may want to revisit places that matter to them, and learn to take care of places in different ways.

Journeying in ways that make us more aware of the cultural contexts we come from, helps to bring new insights into our lives as educators and our capacity to respond to issues such as climate change. Likewise, in contemplative or meditative practices, instead of letting voices go, we can learn to write, read, research and explore the lives of characters from our cultural past. Conversing with them and visiting places where they lived, their voices may become integral to a more playful way of being connected with the living world. They may have something to say that could bring more to what wasn’t enough.

Perhaps, readers may feel encouraged to explore different ways of living, as you let a more contemplative or poetic way of educating and writing influence the direction your journey may take. As such, this personal and in-depth study speaks to readers who come from different places, different cultures, and different experiences … travellers, refugees, asylum seekers, boat people, tree people, word people, paper people, people who are being adopted into tree communities, foster folk and families, faithful ones … I hope there is something for everybody here.

1.4 Chapters and co-journeymers

This dissertation is made up of eight chapters. This introductory chapter, followed by a description of the methodology in chapter two, a review of literature in chapter three, and chapters four, five, six, and seven respectively devoted to the life-worlds of Hywel Dda, Gwerful Mechain, Amy Dillwyn, and Phyllis Gittins. In fact, these characters or co-journeymers unanimously insisted on being given a chapter each, but that’s another story. Chapter eight has a slightly different feel to previous chapters, as it ushers us back to a beginning with trees and offers words to move forward with.
I would like to briefly introduce the methodology, and literature review here, and provide some background as to how my co-journeymers helped structure this dissertation. Let me begin with auto/ethnographic methodology and situate this in relation to curriculum studies. As a meeting place between autobiography and ethnography, this journey with abeyance responds to occasions when my personal history, together with histories of my co-journeymers, becomes implicated in larger social, cultural, and historical processes (Palulis, 2012, p. 192). These processes emerge with an etymological exploration of abeyance and its rootprints or ancestral words. These live beneath the earth and include words such as abashen, abey, abide, badinage, bäee, esbair, baca, (see glossary) bay as in bay leaves and sea inlets, bai, the reddish brown colouring of a horse, and badius or ochre yellow (Klein, 1966). Together with their Welsh equivalents, these Old English words tend to be rarely used and as Hugh Brody (2000) writes, “lost in the modern psyche” (p. 152). Living on the edges of consciousness in places such as bwlch they do, however have the capacity to rekindle sparks of what Carl Leggo (2017), describes as, activism, awareness, comedy, consonance, contemplation, description, emotion, exposition, fantasy, imagery, imagination, music, narration, orality, performance, philosophy, prophesy, rhetoric, romance, story-telling, tragedy, voice, wisdom, and words (2017, p. 28).

For, “after thousands of years on earth, we have only caught a glimpse of the potentially limitless possibilities” of words (Leggo et al, 2017, p. 28).

An exploration of these rootprints, in relation to larger processes such as climate change, can be situated in curriculum studies and auto/ethnographic genealogy. These broad areas allow for contemplative, in-depth, and poetic research and makes room for educator writers to move among disciplines. There, this journey moves from one discipline to another, abides both within and outside of curriculum studies, and among seeds of knowledge able to flourish in diverse areas, constantly begin again, even in adverse conditions, or simply to continue from another perspective.
These rootprints of knowledge are explored in chapter three’s literature review. In a mapping of my scholarly ancestors, I contemplate literature relating to organic knowledge systems beginning with trees. This chapter is grouped into three parts: trees as wayfinders; writing with muses; and eco-poetic and contemplative literacies.

1.4.1 Celebrating continuance

Actively resisting alphabetical or thematic organisation, my co-journeymers wanted a chapter each. In no uncertain terms, I heard, “We want to be classified and ordered according to a linear structure that prioritises Hywel, is followed by Gwerful, then Amy, and then Phyllis”. And then:

HYWEL DDA: We would like to be put in our place in a clear enough semblance to recognise the influence of all our relations and celebrate continuance.

Surprised by this, I wondered why they wanted a linear structure when I had identified this kind of thinking as problematic. Their insistence was undeniable and I chose to heed it. I chose to let them make a portrait.

GWERFUL MECHAIN: Let her ponder where we’d get. Let it be energising.

And so, in each chapter, these co-journeymers proffer ways of living to be carried forward. For example, in chapter four Hywel Dda helps us to reconnect with discursive practices beginning with trees in ways that practice refrain. Chapter five sees poet Gwerful Mechain gifting an erotic, ample and defiant voice, as she negotiates the poetic climate of her age. Here, she embellishes unstressed lines which alliterate with stressed ones in the Welsh bardic tradition known as cynganedd. In chapter six, author Amy Dillwyn stories transitory events of her day including the Rebecca Riots, in which farmers dressed in women’s clothes and beards fight for the earth in un/conventional ways. In chapter seven, my grandmother shares her life in imaginative realms. Appearing as a fox, she helps me to relate well with the chaos and tricks bought into this world through words and clichés. There, she creates space to allow experience itself to carry a message, and to make room for a Welsh cultural approach to living with trees, each in our differences.
beloved ghosts we are
wild inspiriting the living
let the living speak with the voices
the voices with the living
so the living can see more creatively
and the voices gift them with remembering.

As I wrote with these voices, I would wonder whether they were coming from a subterranean outside, from repressed traditions before we named them as such. I would feel a sense of esbair at the creative resilience of certain words and fluidity of others. With Hywel Dda, I tended to move from topic to topic with ease and then stop ... and make room for livingness. Gwerful Mechain makes assertions that belie everything I had known of her. By performing both within and without the conventions of the Welsh bardic tradition, her words are always challenging assumptions. Whereas, with Amy Dillwyn, I am drawn into the life worlds of the characters in her novels as they share insights into evolving relationships with the earth.

AMY DILLWYN: Yes, words are constantly being made, unmade, and remade in writing with trees. There are aspects of my character’s lives I found difficult to connect with, and as I developed concern and compassion for their lives, openings appear ...

My grandmother Phyllis Gittins teaches me to accept that I may not see what I cannot see and hear what I cannot hear. With her, I journey further into a bwlch, when she shows up as a fox and ushers us back into some of the world’s quietest places. All, as part of a process, in which: “a rich and diverse imagination and respectful action would do and did and does” (Cole, 2003, p. 456).

I will have learned to journey with abeyance in hopeful ways. Not hope as waiting for something, but with a hopeful intelligence that is about taking responsibility. As chapter two approaches, I am reminded of Hélène Cixous (1997) speaking to the ethical questions of writing with the characters of our cultural pasts, “or of responsibility that has always
haunted me” (p. 6). With Rosi Braidotti, this writing enacts a journey toward the re-grounding of the subject in a materially embedded sense of responsibility and ethical accountability for the environments they inhabit (2014, p. 64).
Chapter two: Methodology – An auto/ethnographic genealogy

Here, I introduce auto/ethnography as the methodology used in this journey with abeyance. I speak to the ways this journey is lived and written from both autobiographical and ethnographic perspectives. Having both personal and cultural resonances, I work with other advocates of auto/ethnography toward situating a Welsh cultural approach to contemplative connection with the living world. This is then considered in relation to a genealogy or lineage of complementary words and co-journeymen; and followed by a contemplation of three aspects of this auto/ethnographic genealogy: tree-inspired rhizomatic thinking; etymological journeying; and poetic and eco-cultural contemplation.

2.1 Situating this journey in relation to auto/ethnography

In “The Art and Science of Portraiture”, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) introduces auto/ethnography as research that,

both witnesses and stories with empathy and discernment – the layers and subtexts of human experience, listening for the voices and silences, documenting the good, and honoring the chaos and contradictions, the ironies and ambiguities threaded through our lives (p. 43).

This resonates with my journeying with the rootprints of abeyance and voices from my cultural past, as we enter into chaos and contradictions. Lightfoot’s words also speak to this journey as a naturally evolving methodology, or wayfinding. They speak to this journey as a continuing, always re beginning, always learning and providing space for living rather than reaching a final destination. As Susan Gerofsky (2018) writes, it is a journey of, “possibilities, qualities, history, and a numinous, ineffable character that can only be known through experience, engagement, and patient unfolding” (Gerofsky, 2018, p. 57).

Lightfoot and Davis (1997) help to delineate the processes at play in auto/ethnographic research by bringing together a dynamic balance of structure and improvisation as well as order and chaos. They do this in ways that connect with Patricia Palulis’ (2012) “auto/ethno/graphic” writing as poststructuralist drift-work (p. 194). In an article, storying the weathering of ice-caps in Greenland, for example, a storybook becomes
an event with beautiful words that begin in the middle drift and whose telling is not yet over (p. 19).

These writings also resonate with the tradition of life writing in curriculum studies. As part of a Life Writing Collective (2019), Chambers, Leggo, and Hasebe-Ludt relate with this genre of auto/ethnography as interdisciplinary, literary, and cultural, with special interest in becoming poetic and living with poetic rhythms (Leggo, 2009 & 2017). Intersections between the personal and cultural, as intricate layers, subtexts, and weatherings of human experience, become vital in exploring how the past may be at play in the present, and by making room for my thread to be woven into the fabric of a bigger story, because I have been influenced by stories shared with me (2019). Here, oral histories, storytelling, poetry, and drama, for example, are used in ways that “blur and transgress genres and modalities” (Life Writing Collective, 2019). As Erica Hasebe-Ludt (2009) writes:

Life writers are sojourners engaged in a life-time of pilgrimage of seeking and searching, researching past, present, and future ... we remember where we have been, attend to where we are, imagine where we might go (p. 97).

Something new and more spirited emerges as writing created with others gives voice to unexpected elements and makes way for a new “ethos for our times” (Hasebe-Ludt et al, 2009, p. 1). The passionate life writings of curriculum scholar and teacher Ted T. Aoki inspire this collective. In his chapter, “Layered Voices of Teaching”, Aoki (1992) guides us to a place where we may better understand what we have given our hearts to. It is from this hopeful place, he writes, that his words may be open to those whose thoughtfulness and “listening is attuned aright” (Aoki, 1992, p. 195). Questioning thinking as only rational and critical, Aoki makes room for us to reimagine auto/ethnographic thinking as “an embodied doing and being” in ways that “allow the unsaid to shine through the said” (p. 195).
2.1.1 Silences, muses, and poetic faith

Aoki’s description of an embodied doing / being speak to the heart of my auto/ethnographic journey with abeyance. Remembering abeyance begins with the trees and an organic knowledge system of words and the spaces between words I have given my heart to, I am learning to relate with these spaces in generative ways. That reminds me of Cixous (1997) describing how she relates to generative spaces with an attitude of “good suffering” (p. 7), and I realise that the more I relish silences, the more there is to shine through.

Enjoying writing with something greater than I understand, helps to welcome the voices and as I welcome them, their voices in relation to my inner muse direct and shape words as they shape me as I am endlessly shaped by this journey. As Samuel Taylor Coleridge eloquently describes, in this journey there is that:

semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith (Coleridge, 1817).

This poetic faith or badinage is, as Gregory Bateson writes, “a difference that makes a difference” (1970, p. 4). Together with these authors of auto/ethnography, I seek poetic faith in the edgy places, bwlch margins and boundaries of my mind, where I learn to welcome the ambiguity, ambivalence, and contradiction that may come with this. Attending to slight differences, I notice a shift in attitude toward an “ambivalent space but a space nonetheless” (Aoki, 1992, p. 420) as words come into life in a process of emitting and transmitting themselves. What is most true is poetic, says Cixous (1997) as “it is not stopped – stoppable” (p. 4). In these places, these wild and vulnerable bwlch, I get to hear what I can no longer hear. I close my eyes and “I want to watch watching arrive” (Cixous, 1997, p. 4).

When clock-time stands still and the muse comes to play, spaces open up for the voices and even the sacred. Being momentarily in a space between a word which is ending and a world which is beginning, makes room for paradox and what Susan Gerofsky (2018)
calls a “non two-valued logic” where each term need not be distinct and may well contain its opposite (p. 48). In the midst of here-there, known ... unknown, relationship and non-relationship, continuous and discontinuous threads, day in night in day, seasons of the earth, rhythms of life ... space is held for the deeply felt and experienced, the fluid and transformative, “paradoxical and self-contradictory” situations (Gerofsky, 2018, p. 48). And allowing for all he slowness needed to take

the moments of stopping, that make these texts more visible than others, those which dash off continually without stopping (Cixous in Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 8).

2.1.1.1 Contemplative connection with the living world
Retreating to a bwlch, I contemplate the language of and/not that Aoki (1996) describes. This, he says, allows fragmented understandings to relate with each other with the word “and” (p. 420). Whether or not these connections are “conjunctive” or “disjunctive” (p. 420), they connect even in their differences. To me this speaks to a Welsh way of making the familiar strange and strange familiar, a way of living soulfully with contradiction toward “the care that silently dwells” (Aoki, 1992, p. 192).

I try to remember this when the voices come into writing, and meanings are continually changing. I try to remember Aoki’s writing from a sloping place between auto and ethno (Aoki, 2000, p. 324) and Palulis’ (2012) storybook becoming “intervals for breaks and gaps and swerves” (p. 193). But, more often than not I honour the chaos and contradiction and create a space that may allow “a space marked by differences neither strictly vertical nor strictly horizontal” (Aoki, 1996, p. 420) by remembering what I have given my heart to.

2.1.2 A socio-cultural practice
Here, I consider auto/ethnography as socio-cultural practice. Particularly, in relation to a Welsh approach to contemplating connection with the living world. Beginning with trees, this culture believes in the capacity of words and the silences among words to change the world. As anthropologist Wade Davis writes, stories can change the world
Likewise, in a turn to narrative, auto-ethnographer Stacy Holman Jones (2007) writes that changing the world is often just an issue of “believing words matter” (p. 206) and noticing “stories want to have it both ways, and to say ‘it depends’” (p. 233). In this sense, our words and stories have the capacity to act as both a window on to the world and a doorway. As Julie Salverson (2001) describes, stories act like “an instrument of encounter, a place of public and private negotiations – where the goal is not just to emphasise but to attend” (p. 125).

Auto-ethnographer Sara Lightfoot (1997) recognises for “possibilities to become possible” (p. 43) we need to go back toward our cultures. Similarly, Sara Ahmed (2010) shares how embracing the potential of the past may involve going back as regressing, “feeling backward”, returning to the past, recognising what you have as well as what you have lost, what you have given as well as what you have given up (p. 219). In “The Promise of Happiness” (2010), Ahmed writes how feeling backward in “good suffering” as Cixous (1997, p. 7) mentioned earlier, can be an affirmative activity. As part of this feeling backward, there may be an experimenting with words and as we experiment with words and we go to this sloping place and we write with the and, and, and/nots, we tend to open up conceptions of time, and think time differently. So rather than assuming we are bringing what was in the past to present in one completion, there may be space to contemplate what happened in the past. For example, when writing with Hywel Dda, Gwerful Mechain, Amy Dillwyn, and Phyllis Gittins, they sometimes prevent this from happening with a comment, explanation or silence that I find challenging to connect to. And so, I connect in our differences. And, I’ll come back to this later and we will have another conversation. And so, I contemplate differences among past and present so that these may stand in relation to the future, for “the future will draw on this variation” (Trueit, 2006, p. 104). As Gregory Nagy (1996) explains, this variation is the same thing but “a new instance of the same old thing” (p. 52). Like living our lives in a way that we see the sun rise every day, but every day is different. There, I abide in a bwlch, with the trees and the voices of characters past in a continuing present. I find myself letting go of remembering the past for its own end or as it was, and rather as part of an ever-unfolding present.
From this perspective, I relate with auto/ethnography as a socio-cultural practice. In a way, this resonates with what Dominic La Capra (2009) calls, “socio-political practice” (p. 25). By attending to unobtrusive practices into the present, he writes it is possible to relate “with what our descendants did and what was done to them” (p. 5), and make contingent what was assumed to be unchangeable (p. 6). Likewise, Lightfoot (1997) describes a radical democratic politics, “committed to creating space for dialogue and debate as well as the silences that shape social change (p. 206)”.

Susy Zepeda (2014) does this by relating with her Xicana Indigena cultural past in creative ways as they help her to remember, “we had forgotten that we had forgotten” (p. 121). Using creative visualisation (Gowain, 1979) and Queer Xicana Indigena practices of remembering through poetic storytelling with characters from her past, she re-imagines history, sexualities and spiritualities from non-heteronormative perspectives (Zepeda, 2014, p. 121). And thus, makes space for others to listen deeper and keep asking: how can we, individually and collectively, continue to live more creatively and take care of the earth? And, how might auto/ethnography support this?

Figure 2.1. Remembering (Joanne Price, 2017)
I am reminded of the Mabinogion stories originally written in twelve century Wales. This collection of stories, made up of four branches named after their central characters, not only assumes trees to be divine but can be endlessly rewritten for differing contexts. The unpredictable and ridiculous plots, beautiful words, strange figures and larger than life characters were part of an ancient oral tradition, a collection of stories and poetry for all ages, in which the trees actively participated. Remembering that ninety nine percent of trees have been lost in Wales, I wonder: How could a culture beginning with trees lose its trees? John Mohawk (2008) describes such a situation as the result of centuries of “cultural madness” (p. 262). Inspired by Zepeda (2014), I am drawn to rewriting these stories for audiences today, in ways that reimagine the characters as non-royal and non-heteronormative. In this dissertation, my writings with Hywel Dda, Gwerful Mechain, Amy Dillwyn, and Phyllis Gittins contribute, albeit in differing ways, to making room for trees. Their words in relation to mine gesture toward the creation of what Gerard Vizenor (2008) calls a “new consciousness of co-existence” (p. 197) between the Welsh, newcomers, and trees.

These stories are concerned with what writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor (2008) describes as “survivance” (p. 196) or the survival, continuation, and flourishing of diverse life. In times of cultural madness, I learn from Vizenor’s characters. In his life-writing, all characters are provoked to consider their actions and words. Talking backwards and shifting from one form to another, they converse in a multiplicity of issues. As with Hywel Dda, Gwerful Mechain, Amy Dillwyn and Phyllis Gittins, our influx and often tentative connections cannot be rushed as we learn to welcome one another in agonistic imagination. For, writing with just one percent of the trees in your culture, there will inevitably have been comedic conversation. As Vizenor (1993) writes, when there is comedy there is the trickster character as,

both nothingness and liberation ... a loose seam of consciousness, that wild space over and between sounds, words, sentences and narratives (p. 196).
This trickster-comic-liberator: a “communal sign, a comic holotrope” (Vizenor, 1993, p. 196) who like Giles Deleuze (1987) reminds us that what counts are not just the trees but what there is between. There, in the between as site of relations, spaces can be made for many parts of life we can never fully understand. In these spaces of multiplicity, stories are being kept open in order to make room for diverse and regenerative futures.

2.2 Genealogy

In this part of chapter two, I introduce the word genealogy into conversation. I explore the origin and meanings of this word in relation to what Lightfoot (1997) describes as “auto/ethnography genealogy” (p. 43). This is followed by a consideration of tree-inspired genealogies, etymological, and eco-poetic genealogies.

The word genealogy is commonly used in relation to tracing a continual line of descent or development. This may include lineages of ancestry, family, roots, eccentrics, words ... a passage pointing in the direction I ought to go perhaps ... or possibly a series of ideas or sensibilities that just come to us in a kind of novel one at a time way? As Sara Ahmed (2010) writes, “to learn about possibility is to do genealogy” and this may involve “returning to the past, recognising what one has, as well as what one has lost, what one has given as well as what one has given up ... and thus involves a certain estrangement from the present. Other things can happen when the familiar recedes (p. 218)”. And so, how a person responds to genealogy may depend on how they conceive of time.

Friedrich Nietzsche first used the word genealogy to describe that which has “somehow come into being” (Nietzsche, 1887). In his book, ‘On the Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic’, he emphasises the agonistic or conflictual elements of history in relation to their psychological dimension, and in so doing explores the potential of genealogy to create difference in the present. This original understanding of genealogy, as expressed within the tradition of Western philosophy offers passages to futures not through a recovery of the past, as for Nietzsche the past is without the possibility of reversal, but by “the redemption of that past, through the use of it in the creation of the future (Deinstag, 1997, p. 78). Here, Nietzsche seeks to articulate our experience of vulnerability as it relates to “the structural or trans-historical dimension of trauma, without historizing, localizing and containing it in
misleading ways or projecting its cause onto others as scapegoats” (La Capra, 2009, p. 193). Waiting is a, “a pre-requisite for genealogy” says William Pinar (2011, p. 6) and may require distancing oneself from the lineage or worldviews being contemplated. This can create a “non-place ... in between” wherein Michel Foucault (1991) influenced by Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) imagined “divergent and marginal elements” emerging (p. 77-86).

In an article, “Getting Tense about Genealogy” Daphne Meadmore, Caroline Hatcher, and Erica McWilliam (2000) bring together their understandings of the nature and purpose of genealogy in relation to divergent and marginal elements. Opening with Foucault’s “history of the present” (1991), they describe genealogy as the “union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tacitly today” (Foucault, 1991, p. 222). I find the two conceptions which Foucault (1986) drew from Nietzsche – “descent” and “emergence” – particularly relevant to this journey with abeyance as these map both the demands and limitations of genealogy as a methodology. Whereas descent calls into question all that seems unified in subtle and individual ways, emergence looks to the moments of arising which give birth to new ways of existence.

Meadmore, Hatcher, and McWilliam (2000) speak to the tensions inherent in using this non-traditional research method, which “is often misunderstood, sometimes misrepresented, and has still to achieve broad acceptance” (Meadmore et al, 2000, p. 2). They liken genealogy to a literary genre, a story where the task of relating to the history of the present involves identifying clues, details, patterns, subtle contours and minor shifts, as well as finding errors, minute derivations rather than searching for causality (p. 2-3). As such all of these irregularities form the line of descent that guides this journey with abeyance. As they make space for the line or lineage of my relationships with Hywel Dda, Gwerful Mechain, Amy Dillwyn, and Phyllis Gittins as their lives unsettle the present. By conversing in a place from outside of clocked time, this genealogy is inspired by their small stories, marginalised topics, and taken for granted practices as I write with Daphne Meadmore, Caroline Hatcher, and Erica McWilliam writing with Foucault writing with Nietzsche to make space to think differently. And although a genealogical methodology may appear to lack direction, it does not rely wholly on serendipity. Rather than being
completely stitched up, my grandmother’s picnic blanket at the bwlch for example has a deliberate mistake in it as a reminder that life is always in-the-making. By our bringing our own lives into this genealogy, speaking truthfully about ourselves, asking how questions, refusing the notion of progress, and accepting there are no fixed answers or ideal processes (Meadmore et al, 2000, p. 465-469), we can better identify creative responses to issues as we move more easily now from one historical era to another without being so confined by temporal limits. As Erica McWilliam writes: “genealogy is a journey among texts, a rhizomatic journey that does not have a predetermined point of arrival or departure” (Meadmore et al, 2000, p. 474).

In the following part, I introduce a rhizomatic genealogy and describe this in relation to trees.

2.3 A rhizomatic genealogy

As a journey toward spaciousness and abundance in education, the words in these pages, at best, emanate from a middle realm of possibilities. As Rebecca Luce-Kapler explains, this way of enacting genealogy as “sideshadowing admits, in addition to actualities and impossibilities, a middle realm of real possibilities that … deepens our sense of the openness of time” (2002, p. 22). So we, as journeyers, may share what Brent Davis describes as “overlapping loops of memory, present perception, and future imaginings” (Davis et al, 2002, p 3). For “were we to gain mastery over it, we would find that the life in each thing would vanish without a trace” (Bashō, 1990).

By making space for places themselves, this literature acknowledges that there is no one story, definition or outcome and welcomes words and worlds that open to creative possibilities. Or what Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) call the “rhizome” as it helps us to work with what is not visible and to “privilege smallness” (Gough et al, 2013, p. 48). So, in this journey with the co-journeyers, we may also create spaces to consider what caring for a tree or a place means beyond immediate human self-interest and response to human group dynamics? What does caring for a non-human being mean and what forms can this take? Only seeing a human voice reflected is as Noel Gough (2003) writes “seriously … deadly … when the cosmos contains so many other lifeforms in such wide variation” (p. 48).
As Nicole Armos (2017) writes in ‘The Middle Land – Poetry as Transformative Inquiry into Mythologies of Place’: “I find myself drawn to my poetic practice, creating not one, but rather a cluster of poems that can express the fuller range of contexts, nuances, and emotions of my conflicted relationship to place” (p. 160). She writes poetically as a way of understanding her “historical and recent, forgotten and deeply felt migrations” (p. 161) and creating her own personal stories or mythologies. These personal mythologies, writes Gregory Cajete, “start with an exploration of our personal and cultural origins” (1994, p. 118). For, as Erika Hasebe-Ludt (2009) writes, “We cannot escape the pervasive sense of longing, belonging, and not belonging that shapes our relations to the places we linger and have lingered and might linger” (p. 98). Thus, opening again toward what writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor knows as: “a loose seam in consciousness; that wild space over and between sounds, words, sentences, and narratives” (Vizenor 1993, p. 196).

“Writing as a Nomadic Subject”, Rosi Braidotti (2014) advocates for rhizomatic genealogies that begin in the middle as,

we need to think differently about the kind of subjects we have already become and the processes of deep-seated transformation we are undergoing. The philosopher in me believes that a new alliance between philosophy, the arts, and science is a crucial building block for this qualitative shift in perspective. The writer in me, on the other hand, continues to muse about the complex ways in which the imaginary both propels and resists in-depth transformation (p. 163).

Genealogical methodologies allow for more “conceptual creativity” and “theoretical courage” in order to cope with ecological issues. This, at a time when age-old habits of thought need to be re-composed, and even if this occurs in contradictory ways (Braidotti, 2014, p. 164). As we write we are journeying and “living intensively and inhabiting language as a site of multiple others” within what we call the self (Braidotti, 2014, p. 164). And so, the writer of genealogy writes to resist the master signifier. Foxing its powers, the rhizomatic writer “tricks (Deleuze), decodes (Foucault), unveils (Derrida), or seduces (Barthes)” language into a direction they are not structured to follow (p. 164).
And yet, second wave feminist Jane Clare Jones (2014) argues not for more manipulation but a clearer and “thicker conception of the good” (Jones, 2014). In this era of extreme weather, decontextualized quotes, and mental distraction Jones asks us not to forget the contributions of second wave feminists in reconsidering what human flourishing looks like. In an article, “On Feminist Genealogy” (2014) she writes about learning to “tolerate the vulnerability and terror of our existence” and the real need to get our heads and hearts around the fact that in becoming a person we are still dependent on others and our self is also others. It is “vital” she adds that “we remain in relation with the women who gave us life. But the life that they gave us is also our own, and it is honouring them for us to live it” (Jones, 2014).

Through Jones’ words, I am becoming more aware of what awen, as the muse or flowing spirit of creative artists, may sound like from a feminine perspective. As Jones and Braidotti are both involved in the work of reminding communities that there are creative solutions to issues, as well as new ways of considering them. As I reread Gerald of Wales’ (1194/2004) description of awen I contemplate its trance elements, and wonder what Braidotti and Jones would say:

when consulted upon any doubtful event ... they do not deliver the answer to what is required in a connected manner; but the person who skilfully observes them, will find, after many preambles, and many nugatory and incoherent, though ornamented speeches, the desired explanation conveyed in some turn of a word: they are then roused from their ecstasy, as from a deep sleep, and, as it were, by violence compelled to return to their proper senses. After having answered the questions, they do not recover till violently shaken by other people; nor can they remember the replies they have given. If consulted a second or third time upon the same point, they will make use of expressions totally different; perhaps they speak by the means of fanatic and ignorant spirits. These gifts are usually conferred upon them in dreams: some seem to have sweet milk or honey poured on their lips; others fancy
that a written schedule is applied to their mouths and on awaking they publicly declare that they have received this gift (p.14)”.

2.3.1 A tree inspired genealogy
Following Foucault and Deleuze, Brent Davis and Dennis Sumara, understand genealogy rhizomatically as,
a trace of several strands of happenings as they pull away from and sometimes re-entangle with one another and as they give rise to a proliferation of possibilities.
Hence, whereas histories most often obey the image of a (time)line, the image that is most commonly associated with a genealogy is a tree. When the notion of genealogy is applied to a cluster of ideas—like, for instance, contemporary conceptions of teaching—certain accommodations are required. For example, unlike biological ancestry, concepts do not emerge through successive generations. Critical moments in their evolutions can occur at any time, with whole new branches of thought growing out of old roots or dormant stumps (Davis & Sumara, 2003, p. 3).

When my co-journeys suggested that we structure this dissertation chronologically, this tree genealogy becomes productive as thinking with trees in this way may create openings for difficult conversations. Their suggestion doesn’t mean that our words cannot also self-organise as “a series of traces from the trunk to the outer branches” (Davis & Sumara, 2003, p. 5). In moments of constraint or anger at the system, we can work with these moments of tension and excessiveness as they draw our attention to the taken-for-granted and easily missed worlds and their potential to enliven this journey. As Rebecca Luce-Kapler explains:

Paying close attention to the words, we are reminded of the connotative character of language – every word is coloured by its life in other contexts. Writers know that language can be ambiguous and this can make us hesitant, certain that we will be misunderstood about those important moments we write on the page. At the same
time, the ambiguity of language lets us slip and slide, hiding behind our own intentions in the creating of a text. Spending time in careful attention, casting a light with another spills the side-shadow across the page and in that moment, we can break the singular line of the narrative into threads of possibility (2002, p. 1).

Brent Davis and Dennis Sumara (2003) share how the roots of this tree genealogy begin with Charles Darwin in the mid nineteenth century. When Darwin proposed a way of thinking that differed from the metaphysical beginnings of Western philosophy associated with Pythagoras, and regenerated ancient belief systems. Hence a tree genealogy is more able to express the diversity of lifeforms and transitions that thrive in nature. Rather than assuming common origins of things and organising thinking by separating out different elements or times, this tree-being with its ever-shifting shapes, creates openings to consider “historical emergences” (Davis & Sumara, 2003, p. 4).

These emergences can be lived out in web-like etymologies that show us back to ourselves, says Davis. Here he speaks of the moment an observer realises what they see is a reflection of their own cultural biases, “– the slanted lines that cut across the right-angled grain” (Davis et al, 2002, p. 8). As etymological genealogy with a regenerative dynamic, space is being made for more interesting and endlessly elaborative unfolding:

A tree, for instance, isn't a finished product. It's a continuously elaborated event, a recursive happening of branches branching into branches in a dance with the circumstances of its existence. What we see is completely familiar, yet utterly unique. And a favorite structure of nature, mimicked in rivers, streams, and washtub sludge ... in bones, neurons, and arteries ... to a more fits-and-starts, happenstential, accidental tracing of the emergence of our-species among-other-species (Davis et al, 2002, p. 10).
HYWEL DDA: I’m wondering what the tree might say, think, or feel about being seen as an event or recursive happening?

2.4 An etymological genealogy

Here, I describe genealogy in relation to etymology, and in particularly in relation to abeyance and its ancestral words or rootprints. These include abashen, abey, abide, baca, baee, badinage, and esbair (see glossary).

Journeying with these rootprints living beneath the ground enacts the regenerative potential of etymological genealogy. Part of what we are doing is finding a way to live with what comes to us in healthy ways, and in ways that give back. I am drawn to Jeanette Armstrong’s (2008) etymological explorations of the word “land”, as the place where the ancestral rootprints of abeyance abide. In the Okanagan, she writes,

our understanding of the land is that it’s not just that we’re part of the land, it’s not just that we’re part of the vast system that operates on the land, but that the land is us. In our language, the word for bodies contains the word for land, so when I say that word, it means that not only is my ability to think and to dream present in that word but the last part of that word also means “the land” (2008, p. 67).

Thus, she adds that every time she refers to herself, she realises she is from the land and her body is the land. Like me, she was fortunate to grow up in a loving family who took care of the land and worked with others to bring health to the land. And yet, when she gathers food from the land she considers how this food also gave her grandmothers and great grandmothers’ life for many generations. “What our grandmothers have said” she writes,

is that the land feeds us but we feed the land as well. What they meant was that we give our bodies back to the land in a very physical way but we also do other things to the land, We live on the land and in so doing, we impact the land: we can destroy it, and we can love the land and it can love us back (p. 68).
Unobtrusive and minority voices, voices from a subterranean outside before we knew them as this, can also be heard in the land. These voices, writes Armstrong (2008), express the things we are not looking after, not doing, not being responsible toward, and trying to overlook (p. 70). Reading Armstrong (1995 & 2008), I gesture toward different ways of thinking with abeyance and its rootprints as they come to the page in the following chapters. When writing with the word abashen, for example, I read Martin Heidegger’s (1927/1962) understanding of being thrown and I related to this in terms of being thrown by the voices.

2.4.1 Knowing more than I know

“Thrownness” writes Heidegger (1927/1962, p. 123) relates to coping with what throws us, not in a violent way but in a knowing way. I relate with an ontological sensibility of knowing more than I know, as if we are always already living amidst regenerated understandings. We are always already surrounded by that which we cannot get clear about, says Heidegger, such us our “stimmung” or moods (p. 79). Moods, he writes, are all pervasive and easily overlooked. They reveal our “thrownness” or “foundness or givenness” (p. 124), as they make it possible for a person to take a stand. And wither this stand arises out of being prepared or unprepared is not the issue, because what I think Heidegger is saying is, fear is fear and unpreparedness is unpreparedness and not the person. So, when a person is forced to take a stand and thrown into its there, its limit, then unpreparedness itself, like anxiety and thrownness can be “serene” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 124). And so, when I turn to Heidegger I do so with an authenticity of serene craziness – gesticulating wildly as these words and their connectedness to the land take time to come to fruition.

Cixous (1991) in conversation with Clarice Lispector comes to mind. Writing as a woman who, like Heidegger, fundamentally wants to live in a society with less violence, here we find her busily absorbed in the activity of writing, only to be thrown by the limited structure of words and language. There, she sees “how familiar and strange texts, by Rilke or by Heidegger or Derrida, had been read-already, carried away, answered, in the writing-living” of Clarice Lispector (Cixous, 1991, p. 60). Such seeing and writing, says Heidegger
1927/1962), provides the “essential structure of care” (p. 276). Likewise, abashen allows us to hear previously unheard of voices as they give us the ways (Cixous, 1991, p. 61).

2.4.2 Breaking the singular line of narrative

As this journey with abeyance continues to encounter minority voices, I am reminded of Brent Davis’ essay, “Breaking the Singular Line of Narrative into Threads of Possibility” (2002). Here, he goes back and forth with fractal geometry to reveal multilayered and recursively generated words, “whose bumpiness of detail remains constant, whether shrunk or enlarged. In this sense, fractal forms are very much like memories. Press one, and a web of similar forms emerges. Press on an aspect of that web, and the same thing will happen again. And again and again” (Davis et al, 2002, p. 1). For example, the words ‘normal’ and ‘standard’ can mean more than ‘norma’ as associated with a carpenter’s square, and ‘standing up’ and making a right angle between something vertical and its horizontal level.

It doesn’t take much pressure to squeeze a few tell-tale associations out of them. ‘Normal’, for example, has stretched its tendrils into the realms of the correct and the deviant, the right and the wrong ... and standard deviations are all about locating people under the normal curve. The meaning of, ‘standard’ has shifted from ‘an example to admire’ to ‘the ways things are supposed to be’ (Davis et al, 2002, p. 5).

In a chapter, “In the Midst of Slippery Theme-Words”, Ted T. Aoki slips further into the textures of words and their topographies (Aoki, 1992). He takes slippery words like “multiplicity” and ... and ... allows lines of movement to grow in the middle of its letters. He says multiplicity is not a noun and I wonder about abeyance. There are no nouns when “life is ever in a movement of flux” (Aoki, 1992, p. 269). As Giles Deleuze writes,

In a multiplicity what counts are not the elements, but what there is between, the between, a site of relations which are not separate from each other. Every multiplicity grows in the middle (1987, p. 269).
Calling upon us to think differently, Deleuze, Aoki, and Davis move toward a slippery English where a noun may not always be a noun, and words like and, between, among and but act as connectors.

Journeying with abeyance in this way allows for lines of movement to emanate from between its letters. As a word journey, abeyance is growing in the middle and being a becoming space. Here ‘abey’ submits to the earth as s/he nourishes us and speaks to “the sonorous world, unmeasurable in terms of the disembodied measure of the visible, calculable world” (Aoki, 1990, p. 374). To abey means to move toward the sound, beat or pulsing rhythm of the earth, the inspirted omm or awen of life as it “refuses linearity (and) promotes its own polyphony” (p. 374). Whereas, the more visible “ance” denotes an action like a dance. Ancient Hebrew for grace, ance derives from the Latin “antia” meaning “an act of”, and is a suffix used to connect nouns and verbs, such as continuance! As Joan Retallack writes,

Nothing can matter without words coming alive – spinning, contextual, connective, associative webs that not only apprehend the multidimensional realities of what we care about but enable our variant-radiant intelligences to range toward transformations of desire and cultural realization (Retallack, 2003, p. 142-3).

This opens an ambiguous, edgy, conjunctive space, “located at margins and boundary, spaces of doubling ... spaces of generative possibilities” (Aoki, 1996, p. 422) ... for what Joan Retallack knows as poethical practices:

These poetries, these poethical practices – ironically marginalised in established feminist circles – are the experimental feminine. In active exploration of multiplicity and unintelligibility this is the articulation of silence that draws us on (2003, p. 144).

“It is she. It is she again. It is preference ... slivers of preference and literate ... And later breaking. Slips” (Harryman, 1991, p. 6). Here’s another: “Egg and oxygen both contain edge, with egg’s edge located at ‘share’ and oxygen’s at ‘shear’” (Darragh, 1981, p. 8). And
another: “I suppose we hear a muddle of rhythms in water ... the streets of traffic are a great success” (Hejinian, 2000, p. 28). These unintelligible words that come to meet us while we journey with abeyance, matter says Joan Retallack. They matter not just as an expression of feminism but as an enactment of genre. Here the “it that mat/t/hers behaves like living matter”, is language – the material of the writer connected to poethical ways of life.

The unintelligible worlds present at bwlch speak to these poethical ways. Amidst the real and imaginative realms of a bwlch, there exist more-than-human and phenomenal worlds. As well as occasioning the emergence of more complex possibilities on what it means to be human, the life-worlds present here ask for the “physically rooted belief that truth keeps happening” rather than assuming truth to be out there waiting to be discovered (Davis & Sumara, 2003, p. 7). As such I occasionally choose, usually on the fly, to include sentence fragments without a main verb in this thesis. I choose to include the nonsensical with writerly and poetic purpose, as gestures toward welcoming seemingly random worlds and nurturing them to fuller expression each in their own ways. This genealogical way of journeying with abeyance with respect to that what I am yet to understand helps me to relate with the life-worlds of beings living here.

When the voices of the co-journeyers are heard ...

AMY DILLWYN: But truth never makes sense.

I respond by negotiating the psychic gaps that exist between my desire to continue journeying with abeyance, and what Elizabeth Ellsworth describes as “the difference between conscious and unconscious knowledges, conscious and unconscious desires” (1997, p. 41). As these intensify I choose expression in partial sentences with grammatical errors. “There’s something provocative about learning’s proximity to discredited things such as trauma, surprise, discontinuity, tickling, the unconscious, paradox, magic, silence, obsession, invisible and unrepeateable events” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 194). And so, rather than pretending these do not exist, many of the pages in this thesis act as a holding place for words, thoughts, feelings, ideas and actions that are beyond me. As Vitanza writes, these movements can be read as waves or “waYves” or waYaES” (2011, p. 19). Sometimes,
sentences arrive full and complete, “timorous and forthright, crystalized” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007 p. 7) and these live shoulder-to-shoulder on the page with the fragmented. As Brent Davis adds, each recursive step is an “a reiterative event that might settle into predictable routine, or that might fly off into wild gyrations. Your heart obeys a fractal rhythm” (Davis et al, 2002, p. 11). There’s no telling how to respond in this journey with abeyance. For, the worlds this journey inhabits – “perceptual, existential, phenomenal, imagined, and virtual” – can usefully be understood as being made of influences and stories coming from somewhere else (Gough & Gough, 2003, p. 43).

To journey with abeyance
welcomes a part of me to remain obscure to myself.
And then, I give over to something else
I give over to the sacred.

2.5 A contemplative genealogy
To contemplate is to think about, meditate, consider, and muse and derives from Proto Indo-European origins for “tem-lo-, temple” from Latin “templum, temple, shrine, open space for observation, place reserved” (Houghton Mifflin, 2016).

Susy Zepeda (2014) calls for, a contemplative and deep focus and belief “in something more than what is immediately visible in historical narratives or representations” (p. 123). Likewise, Henri Nouwen (2013) describes the early Christian Benedictine and Jewish Haggadah traditions of Lectio Devina, as a contemplative path of “a form of devotional reading” in which we allow the situation to read us and respond to our deepest desires (Nouwen et al, 2013, p. 11). He describes this, as a “slow, deliberate, meditative reading in which we allow (abeyance) to penetrate our heart and question our spirit”. Contemplative practices, such as walking, cooking, and clay-making, believes Susy Zepeda (2014) are ways of enacting focused and devotional readings of the world. As embodied memory systems, these empowering practices create spaces of healing from colonial legacies of forgetting. Thus, opening people up to our more-than-human relations, and in so doing, regenerating “the connections among ancient cultures, stories, art, architectures, languages, spiritualities, and diverse and distinct sexualities” (p. 120).
2.5.1 Eco-poetic and eco-cultural contemplation

Melissa K. Nelson (2008) writes that contemplative consciousness is not just human consciousness but eco-cultural contemplation as well. For, imagination is a place outside of human consciousness and links us through genealogies to our non-human relatives such as plants. These plants are not metaphors: they are real beings and can be connected to through deep listening. Plants like animals suffer from ecological disturbances too, and from being regarded as a resource rather than a relative. Nelson says we must respect plants, sing to them, love them, make offerings and give back to them as these elusive and mysterious beings are not just an intimate part of life, they are us. Here, word and plant genealogies are rooted in places and are considered devotional, “as if they are carrying something else … intuitive and mystical dimensions with more-than-human-worlds” (Heaven, 2008, p. 33).

The problem in Western society, writes Paula G. Allen, is that we don’t acknowledge there are plant spirit voices and,

that we don’t understand the spirits. We don’t understand the supernaturals. We don’t understand that here standing with us are multiple worlds coexisting, cohabiting, and occupying the same space with us … (and) those communities are absolutely real and have everything to do with us. What we’ve done in the West is walk away and say “Oh, superstition” … and put military bases on sacred spots … There’s a great fear of that … which is supernatural. With the void. (With abeyance). With what you can’t control. With irrationality and hysteria, the energy of the womb. With deconstructing everything and then reconstructing in new forms over and over again (Allen, 2008, p. 140-41).

Much like plants do …
2.5.1.1 A companion plant genealogy

Among a list of companion entities, the “Genealogy of the Posthuman” (2017) cites plants as subjects in their own right. Rather than occupying the lowest position in the hierarchy of living beings, they are considered dynamic and sentient beings with strong, sophisticated, and adaptive behaviours including “sensory perceptions, communication, and memory” (Adam Mickiewicz University, 2017). Here, evidence is provided that plants have something like a decision-making process taking place in their so called “root brain” that in turn, energises the earth and allows for inter-individuality “beyond what has ever been imagined” (2017). In response, we humans are asked to imagine engaging in “opening up to wonder … thinking outside the human … recognising diversity itself not for human utility … explore the possibilities of life in excess of human systems” and realise that a bwlch, a wilderness, or a garden place is “not for us but for it” (Daigle & Cielemecka, 2018).

By expanding our understandings of time, we “shift dominant human centric understanding of temporality … and foster the thriving of all instances of life” (Daigle et al, 2018). When I accept that human time, Echinacea time, or bee time are not the same, but radically interconnected, I can more easily respect what we humans do not understand. John Keats (1899) calls this sensibility as “negative capability” (p. 277) as growing toward becoming more capable of living with uncertainty, mystery, and doubt. In a letter to his family, Keats characterises the capacity of writers such as William Shakespeare to pursue a vision of beauty even when it leads into intellectual confusion and uncertainty. Similarly, Zen teachings consider moments of feelings thrown by a sudden insight into the character of the real, and David Abram (2011) writes about this capacity to hold in abeyance “our inherited conceptions” and “our already settled certainties” and open “ourselves to whatever pulse rides within each being we meet” (p. 299-300). Thus ushering a consideration of the really real, or what he calls the “ambiguity of the real” (p. 6).

2.5.2 Patiences rest in abeyance

Hélène Cixous (1990) writes,

We have forgotten that the world is prior to us. We have forgotten how things have preceded us, how mountains grew before our gaze existed, we forget how plants are
called before we think to call them and recognise them, we have forgotten it is plants that call us, when we think we are calling them that come to meet our bodies in blossom (p. 65).

Taking time to notice the trees were here before us and forests ontologically precede and exceed the subjective, time takes shape. When we decide to be contemplative, there is time to let time take shape. A contemplative “thinking” genealogy, writes Cixous (1991) “gives time” (p. 67). “And all beings, even the littlest things, are full of time: it is just up to us to think of it” (Cixous, 1991, p. 67). In the words of Dōgen Zenji (1242/2013), it is no more true that we speak than that the things, and the animate world itself, speak within us: That the things have us and that it is not we who have the things ...

That it is being that speaks within us and not we who speak of being (p. 12).

*Figure 2.2. Tree time (Joanne Price, 2019)*
This reminds me of the very real work of poet and music composer John Cage (1989). In his outdoor performance piece, “Lecture on the Weather”, the instrumental sounds of weather intermingle with the real weather, so to let the voices of the weather be heard differently and to demonstrate that the weather has us, and it is not we who have the weather. “Having been so totally and delightfully suspended in both weather and whether” says Joan Retallack,

we could attend to the extraordinary grace notes of ambient possibility, the range of contingent detail that teems about us. What makes Cage’s aesthetic so important is how often we’re annoyed, confused, dismayed, frustrated by ambient circumstance (2003, p. 200-201).

In a chapter, “The Poetics of Complex Realism” Retallack (2003, p. 196-221) devotedly shares beautiful and contemplative worlds of John Cage. She takes time to notice how time is often bound up with feelings of inadequacy, are we too early, late, is it too late now ... and to listen to Cage’s work in a way that lets go into the “will we ever be ready?” (p. 201) as a way of helping us to journey more honestly, courageously and humorously “... the long pauses ... the not knowing whether the performance had already began ... real weather ... random voices ... the contemplative “dignity” of his music was invoking an “attentive calm in which time had become audible, constant, palpable, friendly and habitable – as fully habitable as space – even as it was disappearing without trace” (p. 201). From Cage, I learn to dignify the seeming disarray of words and worlds in this thesis, as he says: “It’s all in the air. We are all working on problems of how to live in the world” (Cage & Retallack, 1996). And yet his work, being perfectly imperfect – or as Retallack says, Pythagorean in its “deterministic randomness” (p. 205) – uses chaos for optimism. I wonder for this journey with abeyance. As I write with the words of philosopher poet thinkers without knowing whose words are going to come to the page next, and often being directed by what texts I have to hand, to my memory of previous readings, hunches, a phone call, a suggestion, chances and choices are being constantly made, there are variations in silence, sometimes a confidence that can’t stop turning the pages of a book, and other times a hummingbird
fluttering by the open window creates a pause to close a book and let the voices come, and when they don’t I feel thrown and rush to take the time to ... contemplate another quote and write it down, because this description by Joan Retallack is really un/important for learning to live with ecological issues ... because ... in the concert, she says, in the patiences ... the outside weather was continuous with what was happening in the room ... 

where Cage’s more gentle storm included the weather of predetermined and coincidental conjunctions of sound and voice variables – words, ideas, and silences that form the complex system of sociopolitical climates (2003, p. 202).

And one more, by John Cage: I thought it “would help to change our present intellectual climate” (Cage, 1979).

2.5.3 Patiences are birth-givers

Poet, writer, and scholar Paula G. Allen would likely have enjoyed Cage’s “Lecture on the Weather”, and I imagine she would agree with Hélène Cixous that “patiences are birth-givers” (Cixous, 1991, p. 66), as they radiate out and empower others. All of the others – “the cockroaches, the beetles, the humans, the trees, the horses – everybody gets empowered by that” (Allen, 2008, p. 143). And what’s more, she says, 

grandmothers are good at doing this because they are funny and think in very connected ways. If ... you’ve discovered you can’t find a central thought no matter how hard you try. And you say, oh my god I’m losing my mind. And you are, and isn’t that wonderful because you’re plugging into mindfulness (contemplation), the great big ones, the huge systems that are always interacting and interconnecting ...

So the grandmother system is the one that says okay, you’ve got to feed the kids, all the kids – the cockroach kids and the beetle kids and the forest kids and the Echinacea kids, and all the kids ... I hope it makes you a wonderful life, because you’re supposed to be here to have a good time. You’re supposed to be here to honor
the earth, to honor the feminine, to honor chaos, to honor terror, to honor fear, to honor the supernatural, which is what you are. Which is what we all are (Allen, 2008, p. 143).

Honouring chaos and contradiction and the ironies and ambiguities in our journeys (Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 43) requires contemplative patience. Taking care of trees, words, stories, and auto/ethnographic genealogies requires patience. As Cixous (1991) says, there must be a wait so,

powerfully thoughtful, open, toward beings so close, so womanly-familiar that they are forgotten for it, so that the day will come in which the women who have always been – there, will at last appear (p. 77).
Chapter three: Literature review – Mapping the worlds of my scholarly ancestors

This review of literature is formed of three parts: trees as way-finders; writing with muses; and eco-poetic and contemplative literacies. Together they delve into the voices of a wide range of philosophers, poet-thinkers, and life-writers I have been journeying with. These multidisciplinary authors and their texts have been associated with curriculum studies, feminist poststructuralism, complexity theory, eco-literacy, and contemplative and holistic education. Together these act as a map to contextualise this work in relation to scholars and theorists who have influenced this writing. As I learn from and write with them, contemplating,

spaces shifts moments pauses creations cracks and crises
making room for new age old versions
letting what’s past be regenerated by the present
giving shape to an imagined future
occasioning more possibilities
random chance ambiguous sources of change
inviting us further among the spaces that open up.

3.1 Trees as way-finders

Here, I introduce the term way-finding or “knowing as you go” (Chambers, 2008, p. 123), or beginning with the fundamental elements of trees, waves, clouds, stars, “sun, moon, birds, fish, and the water itself” (Davis, 2009, p. 52). Way-finding learns via direct experience and the testing of hypotheses with information drawn from a multitude of branching branches (p. 55). We find a way in relation to tree colours, their shapes and movement in a place. As Wade Davis writes, “light alone can be read, the rainbow colours at the edge of the stars, the way they twinkle and dim with an impending storm, the tone of the sky over an island” (2009, p. 55).

Here, I relate these concepts of way-finding as used in curriculum studies, and explore literature relating to ancient Brythonic navigation systems beginning with trees. The Mabinogion texts and Ogham alphabet are then contemplated in relation to literature interested in congruence between the life-worlds of trees and the ways people live.
3.1.1 The Mabinogion

This collection of poetic stories and poetry was originally written down between 1382 and 1410. As a treasure of Welsh literature, it is made up of oral traditions living in a whole weave of stories among stories and in the landscape. The Mabinogion is written in clear and concise Middle Welsh prose by people who considered the incoherence of poetic words as authoritative revelation. And yet this very neat and strange piece of literature, likely made up of disparate pieces gathered together, is an invaluable record of Welsh culture (Davies, 2007, p. 23).

Consisting of four books known as branches, the Mabinogion is rich with stories of people, trees, birds and animals in which words often turn people into animals and back again. Stories and poetry abound with giants and eagles, mice, owls, horses, foxes, and wolves, quicken trees and alders in the front line, hazel peacemakers, and great gorse. They tell of enchanter’s enlisting plants, shrubs and trees into englyn poems written in the first person of how “I have been a multitude of shapes before I assumed consistent form” (from Cad Goddeu or The Battle of Trees, in the fourth branch of the Mabinogion, the Book of Taleisin). In “The Celtic Encyclopaedia” (Mountain, 1998) the deities, heroes, and warriors of earlier Welsh times are listed alphabetically and in great depth. Reading five volumes of listed creatures and figures makes for fascinating reading, and brings to life the Mabinogion in even more strange ways.

What I find amazing is the capacity of these texts to regenerate themselves into different contexts. There are tens of thousands of ways to do this. As Wade Davis (2009) explains: there are “ten thousand different voices” and this is why we way-find,

So our children can grow up and be proud of whom they are. We are healing our souls by reconnecting to our ancestors. As we voyage we are creating new stories within the tradition of the old stories, we are literally creating a new culture out of the old (p. 35).

He continues: “Theirs were oral traditions, with all knowledge stored in memory and transmitted generation to generation” (Davis, 2009, p. 51). That is why the way-finders do
not sleep when they are navigating. They remain separate, completely unperturbed by the crew, little chores to do, just sitting alone at the stern of the vessel tracking with their minds. “If you can read the ocean”, Mau, a way-finder once told Nainoa ... “If you can see the island in your mind you will never get lost” (in Davis, 2009, p. 61). For people learn to “conjure islands out of the sea just by holding a vision of them in their imagination” (Davis, 2009, p. 53). And yet, some of the world’s incredible way-finders can be found in laundries and washer-rooms, people often so busy doing chores they are able to construct such an island with lines of defence. Because, as Cixous (1997) writes, they had “an obligation to become engaged and defend a certain number” of envisions (in Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 5). Like the voices in this thesis, they have no intention of vanishing into the past.

3.1.2 Inspired speech

The Mabinogion texts (Davies, 2007; & Mountain, 1998) allude to a Welsh culture beginning with trees and an acceptance that everyday consciousness need be interrupted occasionally by profound psychic excesses. Awen or awenyddion, meaning inspired speech, is associated closely with the fourth branch of the Mabinogion where trees speak and participate in the life-worlds of people. Combining the roles of poet, storyteller, and historian, a poet bard was expected to enter into trance, lose the ability to be coherent, and take on superhuman shapeshifting forms. They were expected to invent words, riddles, nonsense syllables, full of figures, repetitions, advice, chants, sing-songs and mumbles. Perhaps this was no more than jest, but the Welsh have nevertheless inherited a culture of incomprehensible and emotionally charged relations with trees.

HYWEL DDA: I was taken out of their true self and I knew the history of people long past and their star wanderings and the ways tree life curves.

GWERFUL MECHAIN: These languages of trees lived on in the court poetry in fifteenth century Powys, they lived on in inspired speech intermingling with poetic prose.

HYWEL DDA: Before contact with Normans and Saxons, there were more Welsh and Brythonic connections over the Irish Sea by Cardigan Bay so called because of copious cardies handed to new arrivals.
In recent times, more has been made of connections with ancient Ireland by neo-Pagans such as Robert Graves in “The White Goddess” (1961). Here, links are made between animated trees in Mabinogion poetic storytelling and the Ogham tree alphabet that represents each letter with a tree personality. With there being hundreds of ancient stones scripted with Ogham letters existing throughout Wales, it is likely that Ogham was widely practiced here. Graves’ work has, however, been widely contested and it is likely that Ogham was primarily a way-finding system and has evolved into a tool set for organising letters, words, and calendar time.

Letting Ogham approach as an ever-evolving way-finding tool, makes it possible however to connect with the poetic stories of old and shift with ease from one perspective to another. We can way-find by learning about the individual characteristics of various trees via oral knowledges, books and articles, and via experience. Using these to navigate the terrains of where we live. Trees, writes Fred Hageneder (2006), connect with what is unconscious and the gaps in my knowledge (p. 4) as they overlap with writings in the literature, and as Wade Davis writes (2001), “inspire the imagination like whispers from before time” (p. 50). In the words of Brent Davis (2003), way-finding with trees:

Unlike a history, which is popularly understood to be a linearized chronological narrative of events that are seen to have precipitated a specific outcome, a genealogy (or mapping) is a trace of several strands of happenings as they pull away from and sometimes re-entangle with one another and as they give rise to a proliferation of possibilities (p.3).

In this journey beginning with trees I way-find with many authors who are moving toward resisting the use of reductive and fragmented words. Few of the writers’ consider them-selves insiders and connected all of the time, as they never completely relinquish their own independence and remain committed to challenging their assumptions and self-illusions. They each take themselves to their limits to recognise the degree with which we all as humans are capable of living with extreme behaviour, madness, compassion and
intelligent hopefulness. Some welcome mistakes and mis-readings as integral to respecting the contexts and assumptions with which they write. Sometimes, they do and say the opposite of what they intended, by writing fast when they decided to go slow and opening themselves further toward expecting the unexpected. In so doing, they risk placing themselves centre-stage, exploring situations from many perspectives, inhabiting different worlds, and even writing what their peers ate for breakfast so to open their work and actions up to us for exploration and appreciation, and toward being a better person. By including all of who they are and immersing themselves in a variety of subject matters, I have felt invited to work with their transdisciplinary worlds as one would an instrument, to be tuned and practiced in ways that prepare journeyers to see our own limitations in relation to choosing to live creatively with un/certainty.

3.2 Writing with muses

I journey with writers who journey with creator muses. Many may be characterised by an attitude of deconstruction associated with feminist poststructuralism, and its promises of more ethical, flexible, and robust ways of interrogating cultural assumptions with foresightedness capable of transforming vision into action. I have travelled with scholars such as Elizabeth Ellsworth (1994), Janet Miller (1996), and Patricia Williams (1991). These women live and teach in New York: Ellsworth at The Centre for the Humanities, Miller at Teachers’ College, Columbia University, and Williams at Columbia University School of Law. They write what haunts them, from emotionally affected places and allowing themselves to see what emerges. For Ellsworth, “the circle is not round” (1994, p.143) and meaning is not just about connections but about deferrals, or branching points, or as Miller writes in “Already becoming something new” about “less exclusionary notions of what are who are possible” (Ellsworth & Miller, 1996, p. 54). Connection, as Williams (1991) writes is dependent on accepting the unknowability of self and life and “a new age, that is predicated upon the alchemical abilities of our personalities to undo old formalisms and refuse a merely inclusive new expansionism” (p. 131). She speaks to, “connection between my psyche and social perception, and between an encompassing historicity and a jurisprudence of generosity” (1991, p. 8). These scholars ask me to attend to the unsaid and unsayable in order for particular worldviews to be maintained and
toward becoming aware of each of our own conditions. In “The Incorruptible Simplicity of Being”, Williams (1991) expresses her marginalisation with the schizophrenic example of attending both a conference on literature and on the law. In her dreams, she had visions of archetypal polar bears coming to her suddenly from somewhere deep in her psyche, silently pawing to hear what this law will mean for them:

It is snowing in their world. Hunching, they settle at the edge of the classroom, the walls of the classroom melt in the heated power of their breath, their fierce eyes fix upon me. They hunch and settle and listen, from beyond-language. Why am I so terrified? Some part of me knows it is intelligent for me to be schizophrenic. It is wise, in a way, for me to be constantly watching myself, to feel simultaneously more than one thing, and to hear a lot of voices in my head: in fact, it is not just intelligent but feminist and even postmodern (Williams, 1991, p. 207).

I was seized by these words, their silver-gold colours and dramatic expressions of both resisting and respecting the Law. Her dream resonates with shamanic Polar Bear March Hare rising up and up so far into the skies of belief that s/he remembers they are rooted in a suspension of disbelief that at once feels grounding. I see them as vulnerable and fleeting and am in awe. Taking us back further, Williams (2019) says people underestimate how important the written word is in African-American culture. Admitting to keeping a lot of stuff, because a lot of stuff is necessary when you need paperwork to prove your existence, she delves through the letters, scrapbooks, and journals her family have kept in hopes of gathering more ghosts to advance the larger story of her ancestor’s history.

It is also wise, I know, to maintain some consciousness of where I am when I am other than the voice itself. If the other voice in my head is really me too, then it means I have shifted positions, ever so slightly, and become a new being, a different one from her, over there. It gets confusing sometimes, so I leave markers of where I’ve been, particularly if it’s not just a voice but a place I want to come back to in
time ... But since I know they are nothing more than, as I have said, markers of where I have been, I get up the courage to calm myself, and settle in for the vision that their presence will have brought. In their turn, the bears give me back my listening, they ring me with their listening, beyond language! I speak to them of the law: The Law. The Law says, the Law is. My life, my tissue, my membrane ... I hear the sound of my own voice but they make no sense. I know the words but there is no connection, familiar words in an unfamiliar rush, the light from my words is furious and flickering. I am circled in pretense, entwined in nonsense, tangled in cables and connectors. I speak to the distance of emptiness, I speak in circles and signals, I speak myself into the still (Williams, 1991, p. 207-8).

Eudora Alice Welty also storied the place of her cultural heritage in Mississippi, where she lived through the eyes of many of its inhabitants. There, from 1909 until 2001 she storied an often comical world of near magic wonder that managed to remain mundane to the characters of that place. Like Williams (1991), she uses comedy to bring what was marginal to the centre. She places readers in the is-ness of what is happening because I often don’t know what to do with her stories that combine the law of myth and everyday reality to create portraits of odd but undeniable beauty. Her fluid, grammatically inconsistent writing respects absence, silence, the forbidden, and the ignored, that which is petty, not just unimportant but very unimportant. She writes with an abundant generosity of littlenesses. In a collection known as "A Worn Path", Welty storied grandmother Phoenix, who faces her greatest obstacle by leaving home. A tale of an unstoppable love and care for her grandchild this story is dictated by her interior thoughts which are somewhat confused and ridiculed, but accepting of the condition of her life as it is a path worn by others before her. Enough so, that Welty does not need to explain the meaning of her stories and instead chooses to present events in multiple ways that allow readers to draw what conclusions they might.
Amidst the openings created by these writers enters Todd and Levinas’ (Todd, 2003) profound portrayal of the incomplete nature of listening. There was a film, Michel Negroponte’s documentary, “Jupiter’s life”, about the filmmaker’s intense relationship with Maggie, a homeless woman living in Central Park. Listening to Maggie’s “panoply of surprises” and “strange tales”, Sharon Todd (2003) describes how the film unfolds with few responses resolved and leads to the filmmaker having to let go of constructing meaning (p. 119). They also learned to be more open to their own story in ways that “exceed the boundaries of understanding” (p. 119) and let “the point of becoming (becomes) an act of generosity, a gesture of openness that risks our own suffering” (p. 122). I found this film beautiful and yet got stuck with feelings of emptiness … abeyance, perhaps? For all of my poststructuralist sensibilities, I wanted this situation resolved. A space for something else was opening up. I rush from place to place in an attempt to slow down, when l’ecriture feminine approaches and a whole other tradition of writing with muses.

3.2.1 L’écriture feminine
Conjured into existence in the 1970s by French poststructural feminist literary theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous, l’écriture feminine, or feminine writing, offers women and men the freedom to articulate their individuality within an oppressed society: one dominated by patriarchy, racism, and oligarchies. These people are considered mothers of l’écriture feminine and believe there is a writing relationship between sexuality and language and that our sexuality is directly tied to how we communicate in society.

Cixous (1997) particularly speaks to the enormity of oppression that has kept women in the dark. Rather than speaking to a general woman, as there is no one typical woman, she says women’s imaginary is inexhaustible, richly inventive, heart raising streams of fantasies, resonant visions and haunttings from early childhood in which “beauty will no longer be forbidden” (p. 31). Cixous encourages people to un-think the Law by occupying the margins or harem because you are for you, you must write yourself and claim this unique world as “I too overflow” (p. 31).
Her writing is full of openings that cut to the beyond and make her work breathe. My relationship with her writing abounds with these cuts and ruptures, that take me to task for being too careful, too slow, too fast, too warm, half on fire, still going on, you haven’t changed a thing, only everything. The openings in her writing go beyond all enchantments, as she takes the classic myth of the muse, Medusa, and turns it into its opposite. We must write over the myths that turn the protecting Guardian Medusa into someone too horrid to look upon: by writing your body – the intact body before tragedy because: “You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see she’s not deadly. She’s beautiful and she’s laughing”.

L’écriture feminine comes in waves not in lines. Openings spill forth like tiny waterfalls, flowing streams, with rhythm and pulse and non-representational language. Writing the body is about song, and Cixous instructs women to use their song as a means of authority. Exploring how the female body is closely connected to female authorship, she urges her audience to write, using many direct conversational statements such as "Writing is for you", “You are for you”; “Your body is yours, take it” (1979b). Following the movement of the body, themes, flows of words and images, l’écriture feminine is therefore primarily a constructive practice, dependent upon deconstructions of love and life and a good dose of ambiguous cultural, linguistic and gendered differences.

By reclaiming individuality and a sense of personal ownership, writing draws attention to that what cannot be fully categorised, made logical, clarified, idealised, enclosed, coded, prescribed, and theorised. But rather than rejecting these identifying characteristics, in a surprising turn, Cixous uses this language and linear structure to say what she has to say. Because this, she adds, is all some women have available to express themselves with. As Verona Andermatt Conley says in describing Cixous’ writing:

By virtue of its poetry that comes from the rapport of the body to the social world, l’écriture feminine disrupts social practices in a way that both discerns and literally rewrites them (1990, p. vii-viii).
By making room for each person to have a unique curriculum view, as a style or genre, l’écriture feminine provides a home for the orality that lives among thoughts and ideas, speechlessness, questions, and certainties – worlds needing to be voiced and which bring the undeciderable and fantastical toward more lucidity. In these gestures toward clarity, l’écriture feminine also makes room for the responsibilities that come with attending to our inner muses and returning the Medusa to the positive woman she used to be. And in so doing, she will more than modify power relations: she will prepare a way, but she said to herself:

You are mad! What’s the meaning of these waves, these floods, these outbursts?
Where is the ebullient infinite woman who...hasn’t been ashamed of her strength?
Who, surprised and horrified by the fantastic tumult of her drives (for she was made to believe that a well-adjusted normal woman has a ...divine composure), hasn’t accused herself of being a monster? Who, feeling a funny desire stirring inside her (to sing, to write, to dare to speak, in short, to bring out something new), hasn’t thought that she was sick? Well, her shameful sickness is that she resists death, that she makes trouble (Cixous, 1979a, p. 73).

3.2.1.1 Hélène Cixous

Cixous is a writer, theorist, and playwright who gives herself a poet’s right to speak otherwise, she says, she would not dare to speak. Situated within the literary tradition of l’écriture feminine, Cixous teaches her readers to say yes to life.

Best known for her article "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975), which established her as one of the early thinkers in poststructuralist feminist theory, in 1968 Cixous helped found the first centre of feminist studies at the experimental Université de Paris VIII. In 1974, she funded the Centre de Recherches eu Etudes Féminines, the first such centre in Europe. She was born in Oran, western Algeria in 1937 to a mother of Austro-German origins and a father of Berber and French-colonial and Jewish origins, Cixous experienced anti-Semitism from a young age. A self-described foreigner in her own home, she is
considered “exceptional as she writes against a large body of Jewish identity and origin” (Everett, 2017, p. 201). Like many of us, writes Abigail Bray, Cixous “was born into a mixed and fragile cultural heritage with competing loyalties and affiliations, and complex histories” (2004, p. 2). As a young woman, she leaves Algeria to study in Bordeaux, France where she continues to live and write as an Algerian with feelings of not being French and a degree of unity towards Algerians living in France. Cixous’ double-bind of both nation and gender makes her writing stand out from other poststructuralist writers, and for me relates to her incredible capacity to remain true to poetry as a profound language of tolerance and even, universality.

Reading her, I do not know where she writes from – her father, mother, other voices within her? Although she writes for life, she also writes from death toward life. I am captivated and anxious at the same time about my naïve mis-readings of her. There are openings everywhere, several in a sentence signifying despair. I can have up to twenty a day, twenty openings rupturing me into twenty pieces and when I’m lucky they come to me as seed pieces, silent seeds vulnerable to my not-knowing which way they must grow. I live with post traumatic seed disorder reading Cixous. I am silenced by the horrors of my own orderly words being washed away in your torrent. I cry war no more. I am cut into twenty into a hundred thousand battle ready seed peace’s. Do you hear them?

Every opening, every cut made by Cixous act as another, one more welcoming place for missing peoples and othered cosmologies. Those, for whom she is determined to de-territorialize the middle terrain. By writing about real and imagined worlds and never answering finally and forever what it means to be one or the other she risks “a fundamental orthodoxy about sexual difference which limits rather than liberates our understanding of what it means to be human” (Bray, 2004, p. 5). This belief guides and motivates her many writings on the plight of the poor world and her interest in the lives of Clarice Lispector, Paul Celan, Nelson Mandela, and Marina Tsvetaeva, among others.

As co-author Mireille Calle-Gruber says in the book “rootprints”: 
One cannot talk about your work if from the outset one ignores the thirty or so
books you have written. What is most true for you is poetic writing (Cixous & Calle-
Gruber, 1997, p. 3).

Cixous:

What is most true is poetic ... How can we see what we no longer see? We can devise
tricks: my grandmother’s room which I looked at through the keyhole; because of
the focalisation. I have never seen a room that was so much a room. The city of
Algiers which I looked at in the bus windows ... What happens, events interiors ... I
want to watch watching arrive ... I want to find the root of needing to eat. And taste it: work of sweat sleep (Cixous, 1997, p. 3).

By the time Calle-Gruber met Cixous, she says her bookshelves were already full of
points of view – certain/uncertain types and continuous ... discontinuous threads.
Reminders that: “I know that it’s by being unknown to myself that I live” (Cixous & Calle-
Gruber, 1997, p. 8). Hence, many of her poetic stories summon devalued characters or
muses from her spiritual past in ways that evoke wonder and uneasiness. Writing from
where the it/id/the female unconscious, no longer denied nor repressed (Cixous, 1979a),
she moves among spaces that open for the multiple subject, who as Bray says, “can
genuinely think and write in a range of genres about a range of issues” (2004, p. 3). Here,
one is more concerned with poetics than politics, a phrase which is echoed in Cixous’ call
for “more poetry in politics” (Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 7).

By attending to the call of something else, Cixous’ writing can be pedagogical. In this
sense, she may deliberately bring an organic order to writing. Letting a sentence turn back
on itself ... recycle, reflect, and flex “the flux of writing” (Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 5).
To: “mark off a field so that we do not lose sight entirely” (p. 5). Because there are times,
she says when one has to make strategic gestures and construct a camp with lines of
defence in order to protect yourself (and others) against intolerance and defend a whole
host of positions. Not least a passion for welcoming all people in ways that the question of difference must remain open to question – “To do this” she says, “I left my own ground” (p. 5).

3.2.1.2 Hélène Cixous and Clarice Lispector

Cixous travels with Lispector (1920–1977), a novelist and short story writer acclaimed internationally for her innovative writing. Born to a Jewish family in Podolia, Western Ukraine, as a child she moved to Brazil with her family, amidst the aftermath of the First World War. While in law school in Rio de Janeiro, her first novel “Near the Wild Heart”, an interior monologue, was published.

Lispector’s free-flowing writing goes beyond disjunctive either/or thinking and flies in the face of the law. In fact, what in part draws Cixous to her are her ways of completely disrespecting the law without transgressing it. For Clarice, the law is just a word and she does not let herself be civilised and hence she is not caught up with resentment, but follows her desires to places like beaches and woods outside of culture. Here, she writes her mad truth, naked as a wild animal and without a trace of guilt or fear.

Lispector’s writing is life-affirming. Unrestrained by the binary thinking that organises the law, her writing goes deep to sites of generative beginnings like in her book, “The Passion” (1974) she invites readers to “traverse even the very opposite of what is being approached ...

To Potential Readers:

This book is like an ordinary book. But I would be content if it were read only by persons whose soul is already formed. Those that know that approximation, to anything whatsoever, is done gradually and painfully–and that it has to traverse even the very opposite of what is being approached. Those persons, and they alone, will understand very slowly that this book doesn’t take away anything from anyone (Lispector, 1964).
Through her poetry and prose, Lispector brings together opposites that cannot be reversed. In other words, she crosses over by undoing opposites.

With Clarice’s words, together with Hywel Dda, Gwerful Mechain, Amy Dillwyn, and Phyllis Gittins help, we begin as “more abstract, mentalist and rational” beings and ask to open toward “a more embodied, emotional and devotional approach to the world” (Gerofsky, 2010, p. 16). As Abram writes: toward the “immeasurable otherness of things, the way that any earthborn presence exceeds the calculations we perform upon it – the manner in which each stone, each gust of wind, each termite-ridden log or gliding sea turtle harbors and bodies forth a creativity that resists all definition” (Abram, 2011, p. 299).

Amidst these realms, the “nether realms” as Clarice knows them where you may hear the voices of others living outside of the law. To descend into these places is for her, a very real descent into “a place of happiness” (Lispector, 1989, p. 121). If we are to enter into the realms of the excluded and trouble, we may encounter what she calls a, “libidinal choice” (p. 121). And, “it is important to recognise that this libidinal choice is non-violent, and while it may be transgressive and involve losing one’s composure, it is not reactionary” (p. 141). In fact, it is more productive than reactionary, more subversive than violent, and calls for a more loving and creative relationship with the non-human.

Sometimes, she adds we only have one muse – and then nothing more.

But there is time underneath in immeasurable quantity, in proportion to our demands: it is enough to think and think and think, and we reach the source.

Thinking gives time. And all beings, even the littlest things, are full of time: it is just up to us to think of it ... But Clarice has certain audacious attentions that go to the encounters like gentle wild beasts. ‘I was alert. I was completely alert. A great sense of hope arose inside me, and a surprised resignation: in this alert hope I recognised all my prior hope, I recognised too the attentiveness that I had experienced before, the attentiveness that never leaves me and that, in the final analysis, may be the very
thing that is most a part of my life— that perhaps is my very life itself (Cixous, 1991, p. 67-71).

I cannot remember reading words so beautiful as Cixous’ in this chapter, “Clarice Lispector: The Approach” (Cixous, 1991, p. 59-77). I have much to learn about writing. Taken by others, by Hywel Dda, Gwerful Mechain, Amy Dillwyn, and Phyllis Gittins do we live what we live, what of all the translations and misreadings of one another’s lives, the stressed and unstressed moments that take us far from ourselves? The fictional as real as fictional.

3.2.2 Fiction as theory

When this thesis writes itself, I relate with my co-journeys— Hywel Dda, Gwerful Mechain, Amy Dillwyn, and Phyllis Gittins— as more than muses. As: real people from my cultural past whose lives, for the most part, were not recorded and many of whose words have been subject to translation. I am drawn to texts that re-frame writing with muses from a story or fiction as theory perspective.

The power of story-telling in educational research is now well-documented but the experience of encountering non-fictional and fictional characters in research journeys requires deeper exploration (personal communication with Gerofsky, June 2019). The potentially un/settling experience of encountering the presence of actual characters amidst being engaged in a process of life-writing and narrative inquiry can come as a surprise, especially when it is announced in no uncertain terms that:

GWERFUL MECHAIN: The company’s not Amused.
HYWEL DDA: We are more than beloved ghosts. I want to continue with this journey.

3.2.1 Channeling voices

Authors of stories and novels have long described the experience of channeling characters, in which a person who lived in the past or a fictional character called by and/or created by an author seem to inhabit the writer’s conscious and unconscious mind more and more completely, and to take on a life and will of their own (Byatt & Sodré, 1997). Historians and archaeologists, too, have encountered the narrative dimension of research, and the possibility that characters/co-journeys may seem to have presence and volition as they become better known to the writer/researcher. As Little (2000) writes,
The language of storytelling is not soft or easy or transparent and it may indeed be essential to convey what is important about the past -- to translate what is essential, what is true beyond facts. We need to understand that once we release information, so to speak, once we translate it, let it be free, we are no longer in control of it. Ask any fiction writer or, I suspect, any writer of a memoir, if the characters ... obey her, you will hear that they take on a life of their own (p. 11)

During a conference presentation, “Invoking women and others from our shared pasts: Bringing creative and devotional dimensions to education for equity and sustainability” (CSSE, June 2019), Gerofsky and I contended that the writer/researcher’s experience of meeting and living with characters intimately connects with research. Characters/co-journeymers from our historical pasts, and perhaps partly from our own psyche or imagination, have the potential to engage creative and devotional dimensions that enrich understandings. When channeling their worlds I am both there and not there as I am called to them, and call to them “as both vocation and invocation” (personal communication with Gerofsky, June 2019). I hesitate, worrying about mis-representing their lives. I am slow in letting silences speak for themselves. For, as Gerofsky says:

these characters may very well not obey the wishes of the writer, and may decide to pop up at unexpected times, to make their voices heard in no uncertain terms, and to dictate to the researcher/author what they would like recorded on the page. We welcome these characters and the surprises they bring as a way to connect with our relations, ancestors and the spirits of our places, with humility, humour and some awe. These voices from the past-become-present may have some important things to tell us. We listen with attention, sometimes argue with them, and heed their guidance towards the potential for more equitable and sustainable futures (personal communication, June 2019).
We considered why each of us welcome, listen to, quarrel with and give over to each of our characters/co-journeymen. Acknowledging that, “time-travel, and meetings with characters who are both of us and of their own worlds can be an uncanny and unsettling experience, but also an experience of opening up to the stories of others in narrative forms of research” (personal communication with Gerofsky, June 2019). We each shared our own research process and encounters as suggestions to others engaging in this form of poesis.

3.2.2 In defense of fiction

At certain rare moments in this journey, I have enjoyed writing with my co-journeymen in clear ways. Then, I write more succinctly and with words and testimonials that relate to life as it is happening. Much of the time, however, the voices are not so clear and I am drawn to writing fiction.

In an article, “In defense of fiction” Stephen Banks (2008) asks, without the use of narrative and fiction, how can research call attention to itself (p. 155)? Situating fiction within the conventional research framework, he shares ways in which fiction as theory enhances meanings and enriches processes. By separating out – a conventional “former” verses a fictional “latter” (p. 162); “positivist” verses “positive” (p. 160); and “people who are” verses “people who can be” (p. 162), he brings attention to the blurry zones between conventional and fictional theory and, on several occasions, uses the word “verisimilitude” to encapsulate these interstitial spaces. Banks (2008) discusses ideas about truth that differ from the positivist view of Truth with a capital “T” and believes that even made-up stories have a truth, and it’s the “expressive-emotional” dimension of a story that is of most importance, because it is this that captures the interiority of characters, their particularities and their lived experiences or truths (p. 160). Banks also plays with the idea of sentience and the role of personal identity in fiction as theory. Unlike conventional research models that match individuals to generalised trends, stories, he concludes, represent an “unavoidable exhibiting of ourselves to others” (p. 159).

Fiction, for Judy Iseke-Barnes (2009), in creative combination with places, encounters, experiences, and imagination, is at the heart of all learning and teaching (p. 25). While she accepts that our relationships with the other make us who we will be, she insists that these encounters, whether with actual others or not, must ensure an unsettling
of ourselves. Enter the Trickster character, and the possibilities of trickster stories in eliciting who we are, who we can be, and the preconceived ideas and fictions we may have about the other. She introduces us to trickster-teachers, who enact transformation and resistance, and take readers to their limits so that lessons of respect can be re-learned. Storyteller Jo-ann Archibald (2008) explains that the trickster is often placed in “journeying mode”, travelling between places and “learning lessons the hard way” (p. 9). This, she says, reminds her of the power of connections within families, communities and places. For, if “we become disconnected, we lose the ability to make meaning from Indigenous stories” (p. 9).

In a chapter dedicated to education in the book, “the other side of eden”, Hugh Brody (2000) describes a how a person’s isuma or spirit is necessary to make meaning of life, and even the trickster, in journeying mode. In Inuktitut, he writes, this faith is held within the linguistic tradition. When a person experiences separation, they might say, “Isumaga asiujuq, ‘My isuma is lost; I am out of my mind” (p. 299). And yet, these words can be interpreted in varying ways, as isuma has many uses. Brody stories the root-word isuma being spoken in relation to someone’s experiences of adult education and their struggle with the thought of being educated: Isumanguarm here translates as ‘I sort of thought’ (p. 299). In Inuktitut, he explains, thought is considered to have an independent existence and is closely linked to the capacity for thought (p. 300). When a person misunderstands, misreads or appropriates another’s words out of context, people are likely to say, Isumaqijuq meaning she lacks necessary thought (p. 300). The person is not blamed for this lack of thought as “people learn when and what they are ready to learn” (p. 297). And, the individual mind,

is the thing that must choose to learn, develop, make decisions. Pressures from others on that mind, according to the deep beliefs of hunting peoples, are more destructive than instructive. The mind has the capacity to learn, and left to develop on its own, it will do so (Brody, 2000, p. 300).
There is also embedded within the word *isuma*, a view of mind itself (p. 301). Brody introduces this by saying that parents identify children with respected elders. They “trust children to know what they need, do not seek to manipulate who children are or what children say they want” which tends to secure confidence and mental health (p. 302). Here, *isuma* speaks to how people respect one another as separate but equal by respecting individual characteristics, and “affirming that in crucial ways the development of *isuma* is independent of social manipulation and control” (p. 301). In this hunter gatherer society, he writes, “kindness, generosity, consideration, affection, honesty, hospitality, compassion, charity” are necessary for survival (p. 146). And to describe these virtues, “and seek to understand them, is not romanticism but the most relevant kind of realism” (p. 147).

3.2.2.1 Gerald Vizenor

Author of many non-fiction, fiction, and poetry books, as well as screenplays, Vizenor is, within his writing, a trickster. His story-lines are often fantastic as he welcomes hybridity and contradiction as a cause for celebration and offers up poetic visions that invite melancholic lament, laughter, criticism, wisdom, and spiritual insight. He is a writer I would like to study further, as his quote: “a loose seam in consciousness; that wild space over and between sounds, words, sentences, and narratives” (Vizenor 1989, p. 196) pops up several times in this thesis journey.

For now, by way of an introduction, Vizenor’s writing evades simple categorisation. Beginning his career in the US armed forces in Japan and later studying at New York University, Harvard, and Minnesota, where he studied his Anishinabe heritage and the actions of Native American activists, Vizenor currently teaches at the University of California, Berkeley and the University of New Mexico. He began writing with trickster co-journeyers when he found resonance with the Japanese haiku. Re-laying this, I am reminded of Ted T. Aoki’s (1992) feeling of “being drawn into another world – a discourse world” by the haiku form (p. 265). In this way of living in language and flowing “in that little open space” (Vizenor, 1993, p. 181) between Japanese haiku and Native American trickster stories, Vizenor’s playful attitude undercuts domination-victimisation categories and creates new worldviews. Always on the move, his co-journeyers provide openings to relate with the past differently. In so doing, they inspire me to give life to traditional stories.
like the Mabinogion by presenting them in new perspectives. Who knows, in time to come my co-journeymen may be able to challenge heteronormative perceptions of the Mabinogion and offer a more unconventional vision of survivance for human and more-than-human worlds? Like Braidotti’s (2014) writings of affirmation (p. 174), Vizenor’s characters insist upon survival through an imaginative affirmation of self. Trickster affirmation: so infused with the realities of ecological destruction it resists with a shudder perhaps, the dangers of minimalizing the self and slipping into narcissism.

In his novel “Dead Voices: Natural agonies in the new world”, Vizenor (1994) uses tales from original sources to illuminate centuries of conflict between Native American peoples and European peoples who he calls “wordies”. In this novel, Bagose, a woman transformed into a bear describes the world from the perspective of animals-fleas, crows, beavers and Vizenor’s ultimate unifying figure – a trickster.

3.3 Eco-poetic and contemplative literacies

The authors here, for whom learning never stops, share ways of rethinking and standing back to see how reality is happening. They are concerned with larger patterns and how living things are connected. Each, in varying ways, writes relating in a way that observes the delicate interdependencies of livingness.

3.3.1 Rosi Braidotti

Braidotti (2002; 2011 & 2014) describes herself as a contemporary philosopher and feminist theoretician who lives her life in transit, moving between cultures and languages. When she visited the University of British Columbia to speak to this, I remember being inspired by her desire to change. She was tired and yet excited, having just arrived into Vancouver airport from Europe, and yet as she spoke to the audience a coyote appeared at one of the windows, pressing its head into the glass. She stops and admits that in the taxi ride to UBC, she had seen eagles and I wished she would stay longer than the few days scheduled here.

I was inspired by her deep yearning for transformation via a journey of affirmation. There was something in what she was saying that reminded me of Sharon Todd (2003) drawing from Levinas to describe how listening and feeling discomfort amounts to saying
to the Other, “I can change” (p. 136). And yet, Braidotti was saying something similar and yet different to this. Her language feels more accessible to me as she speaks of empathy and compassion, and in it I can hear the potential of this journey of abeyance as a journey that can continually revitalise itself. As Braidotti (2014) writes, this journey can “create openings for the transformation of negative into positive passions” (p. 174), as she writes openings as “spaces of becoming” with mutually attractive forces (p. 174).

Perhaps, Braidotti’s life experiences resonate? For, she writes and lives with an array of accents that spell out what she describes as her own “ecology of belonging, my loyalty to parallel yet divergent lives. I am always writing with an accent” (2014, p. 167). Her eco-literacies therefore have a “resilient autonomy” (p. 168), enabling her to let words go, come what may: “Nomadic writing is an act of constant dispossession” (p. 168).

Braidotti’s call for more conceptual creativity and theoretical courage speaks to these un/certain times when “paradoxically old power relations are not only confirmed but in many ways exacerbated by the new political context” (2014, p. 163). We need creativity and courage, she writes, to dwell with and leap across the aporia and other forms of cultural stasis induced by our historical condition:

It has become like a mantra to me: we need to learn to think differently about the kind of subjects we have already become and the processes of deep-seated transformation we are undergoing (p. 163).

At the beginning of it all, she believes, is a commitment to writing. Writing, she writes,

is an intransitive activity, a variation on breathing, and end in itself; it is an affective and geometrically rigorous mode of inscription into life ... Writing is living intensely and inhabiting language as a site of multiple others within what we call, out of habit and intellectual laziness, the self (2014, p. 164).
Influenced by her believed French theorists, Deleuze, Derrida, and Irigaray, Braidotti’s (2011) nomadic writing is essential poststructuralist in that words and language are more than a way of communicating. They are “an ontological site of our shared humanity” and can never be reduced to meaning making (p. 164). Like the third body, language both separates and connects humans to the conditions that engender us, namely the maternal body. And Braidotti’s writing style responds to these conditions via resistance and ethics (2011, p. 47). Like a fox, she resists the directions she is programed to follow, noticing her temptations to conform to common sense and challenging sense making and subject coherence (2014, p. 165). Ethically, she recognises the impossibility of a unitary self via writing that “has to challenge and destabilise, intrigue and empower” (p. 166).

As I depart from and connect with Braidotti’s writing with the occasional affirmation of common sense, and a rare tendency to be critical of the unconventional, I share with Braidotti (2014) “an insatiable loving curiosity for the world” (p. 166). In this journey with abeyance, I am guided by her writing “in an intensive mode” (p. 168). Rather than simply taking us inland from the coast, these intensive writing modes simultaneously propel us outwards, “zig-zagging” and spiraling along the varied directions or wayves of cosmic or “chaosmic” connections and experiences (p. 175). As they, in constant turns, help us to make sense out of the external dimensions of subjectivity as they enfold within the subject (p. 169).

Journeying with the root words of abeyance, I encounter the conceptual possibilities of each of their life-worlds in immanently radical ways (p. 169). Inspired by Hywel Dda, Gwerful Mechain, Amy Dillwyn, and Phyllis Gittins’ unlikely contributions to creating a more vital, holistic, and monistic world under the fictional unity of a grammatical I … I affirm whatever semblance of unity there may be among us.

Braidotti’s (2011 & 2014) monistic vision alters the terms of interaction between humans and non-humans. As her writing tricks conformist notions of living, spaces open up to “that roar that exists on the other side of silence” (2014, p. 170). Becoming nomadic, she writes is,
the process of affirmation of the unalterably positive structure of difference, unhinged from the binary system that traditionally opposes it to sameness. Difference as positivity at the heart of the subject entails a multiple process of transformation, a play of complexity that expresses the principle of not-one (2014, p. 171).

There, the expression of abeyance as birthplace of abundance is no more a play of dialectical opposites, nor a teleologically manipulated process, but a tapping into the material vitality of neglected places. As the forces at bay at a bwlch gather force, what is regenerated is regenerated not in a way that repeats sameness but in a way that repeats sameness with a slight difference. I understand these slight differences as shifts in attitude, a suspension of disbelief in the creative potential of places. With this, I am reminded of Noel Gough’s reminder that “research is a textual practice, a process represented in language and performed through acts of writing, textual production and reading” (Gough et al, 2003, p. 45). And yet, with this reading I experience a slight shift in understanding and liken it to Braidotti’s process of “expression, composition, selection, and incorporation aimed at positive transformation of the subject” (2014, p. 171). This relates with Jeanette Armstrong’s writing, but from the perspective of a different context.

3.3.2 Jeanette C. Armstrong

Armstrong is an author, educator, artist and activist of the Salishan peoples of the interior plateau of the Okanagan, eastern Canada. Her culture practices what she describes as,

permaculturing what is on the land, taking care of it, stewarding it, making sure it was producing enough ... I think anthropologists and ethnographers have described us as semi-migratory, but of course we’re not migratory at all. We simply move around in the territory at different seasons and different times of year, but we always return to our villages in the winter months when all is done. So it’s like harvesting a huge garden and it’s like taking care of a huge garden (2007, p. 3).
Her words make me more aware of how I may be trying to reinvent myself with the perspectives of Indigenous writers, and the ways in which European post-colonial writers may even neglect these perspectives. Careful to learn with and from Armstrong (1995), I am listening as she shares perspectives of the intensity of her experience as an Okanagan: who is indigenous to the land I live on and how that experience permeates my writing ... how my own experience of the land sources and arises in my poetry and prose and how the Okanagan language shapes that connection (p. 175).

Unlike English, or least English spoken in places where it doesn’t isolate its verbs, Okanagan has never been written down (p. 187). Over time, her language has acquired a music-based sensitivity as if “everything is singing” (p. 188) and re-sounding in patterns of movement and imagery and action.

In her article, “Land speaking” (1995), Armstrong writes that her own father told her that it was land that changed the language because there is “special knowledge in each different place” (p. 176):

It is the land that speaks N’silxchn, through the generations of our ancestors to us. It is N’silxchn, the old/mother spirit of the Okanagan People which surrounds me in its wordless state” (p. 176).

This language, she is hearing as a constant voice within her that yearns for human expression. She is hearing them as voices of the land that claim and own her. As Hywel Dda, Gwerful Mechain, Amy Dillwyn, and Phyllis Gittins occupy me, perhaps? I am as Armstrong continues to speak to how voices, that move within as my experience of existence do not awaken as words, Instead they move within as the colors, patterns, and movements of a beautiful, kind, Okanagan landscape. They are Grandmother voices which speak (1995, p. 176).
The word "tmixw" in Okanagan, she writes, is the closest in meaning to the English word grandmother. As a human experience, it means, “something like loving-ancestors-land-spirit” (p. 178). Here, as Armstrong is speaking Okanagan noun-based words as an experience connected to action and everything else (p. 190), I contemplate abeyance as an experience or enactment of listening for a heartbeat and ...

I nestle

and draw nourishment from

voices speaking to me

in early morning light


In a sense, Armstrong writes, all Indigenous voices “are generated by a precise geography and arise from it” (p. 178). I wonder how a nomadic thinker can relate with this and am remembering Braidotti’s (2014) note that “the greatest trips can take place without physically moving from one’s habitat” (2014, p. 182). And yet, I do travel, and I must literally hold in abeyance my carbon footprint and at least try to learn the land-based languages of the places I visit and live. That way, writes Armstrong (1995), the language of a specific locality shares insights as to how the world is “viewed, approached, and expressed verbally by its speakers” (p. 179). So that, I understand “I am being spoken to by the land” (p. 181), and with words I am needing to hear.

As I journey with Armstrong (1995), I am realising the power of words and how they influence interactions and feel a need to be more careful. As Armstrong admits: “I am a word carrier, and I shape-change the world” (p. 183). In these times of ecological urgencies, she teaches readers to use words with hopeful responsibility. For, as she writes:

I am a weaver of memory thread

twinning past and future
I am the artist

the storyteller

(2005, p. 185).

In Okanagan, she writes, “language is a constant replay of tiny selected pieces of movement and action that solicit a larger active movement somehow connected to you by the context you arrange for it” (p. 190). I am glad to hear this as it supports my need to re-write in response to new knowledge and experiences, but not without a discomfort from recognising this journeying with abeyance has a long way to go, especially in relation to what David Abram calls, the “more-than-human” worlds (Abram, 2011, p. 7).

3.3.3 David Abram

Abram refers to himself as a philosopher, cultural ecologist, and performance artist and is the author of “The Spell of the Sensuous” (1996) and “Becoming Animal – An Earthly Cosmology” (2011). Reading these books, I can shift my thinking and feeling about the place of humans in the world. His contemplation of the violent disconnection of the body and the natural world, what this means, and how we live and die in it … usher me into the world in a way that becomes more whole. “Ah, not to be cut off” he writes, citing Rainer Maria Rilke, at the beginning of the closing chapter of 'Spell of the Sensuous’ …

not through the slightest partition

shut out from the stars.

The inner–what is it?

if not intensified sky,

hurled through with birds and deep

with the winds of homecoming.

(Rilke, 1995).
Not to be cut off, as Rilke says, and yet “we seem today so estranged from the stars, so utterly cut off from the world of hawk and otter and stone ... by writing these pages I have hoped to renew some of those bearings, to begin to recall and re-establish the rootedness of human awareness in the larger ecology” (p. 261).

Akin with Cixous’ writing patience with Lispector by acknowledging connections between the inner, psychological world and the perceptual topography in which we live, I feel called as Abram says, to “turn inside out” (p. 162),

loosening the psyche from its confinement within a strictly human sphere, freeing sentience to return to the sensible world that contains us. Intelligence is no longer ours alone but is a property of the earth; we are in it, of it, immersed in its depths.

And indeed each terrain, each ecology, seems to have its own particular intelligence, its unique vernacular of soil and leaf and sky (p. 262).

Each bwlch has its own mind. Each alder tree, hazel, ash, fox, gorse, stream, rain shower, snow blizzard, sunset – all the things that make up bwlch as a place of mind, a place with specific intelligence known by all the humans who visit this place – each bwlch has its own psyche – “Each sky its own blue” (p. 262).

Abram lives in the foothills of the southern Rockies in Washington State and was born on the other side of America at Long Island. Although he takes issue with situating himself within a “human set of coordinates” he admits sharing very little about the earthly place he inhabits (1996, p. 267). When in high school, Abram began practicing sleight-of-hand magic and this sparked his ongoing fascination with the way we perceive things. He later worked as a magician in bars and clubs and took time out from university to be among the street magicians of Europe. Toward the end of his visit he met psychotherapist R.D. Laing in London who guided him in applying sleight-of-hand magic to psychotherapy. After university, Abram lived and studied with indigenous magic practitioners in Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Nepal. Returning to North America, he became a student of natural history and ecology and in the late 1980s he becomes known for studying the influence of language on human’s sensory experiences of the land.
Abram (1996) considers language, not as a human invention, but as a gift of the land itself. And while he acknowledges human language has its uniqueness, with him I remember, “birds and other animals have their own styles of speech (and) by insisting that the river has no real voice and that the ground itself is mute, we stifle experience” (Abram, 1996, p. 263). Cut off from the deep meanings of many words, even abeyance, I feel animated by understanding the life-worlds and root-prints which support and sustain it. His words enable this by assisting with letting words slip off these pages to inhabit a *bwlch.* Letting abeyance slip off this page, I speak to alder directly and learn to plant words like seeds – “letting language take root, once again, in the earthen silence of shadow and bone and leaf” (Abram, p. 274).

I turn directly to Abram (2011) for guidance with contextualising words and my co-journeymers in places. I am inspired by their language of movement and gestures belonging to this animate earth. A chickadee calls from the trees outside the window. I get up from the table, open the window on this warm crisp winter’s day. I want to move forward with words that say and write what we see and hear, smell and taste of the land around us. And yet, the conceptualisations of those who have influenced Abram’s thinking, such as Deleuze, and the theorising of radical immanence and transcendence in material feminism that increasingly influence mine, take us further from expressing words that are borne by the same air that nourishes the trees and swells in the clouds that connect us inter-generationally. I am grateful for their wisdom my brain cannot always fathom the words. I lose my *isuma* and yet, when I read a word like, “sheeeeeee-fridiila-fridiila-fridiila-sooohhhh-ridilee-ridilee-saaayyyyy-teedelaa-teedelaa-seeeeee-tidleee-tidleee-tidleee” I am back because this word carries energy I directly understand (2011, p. 200). I just heard this word from outside the window, I felt it open my vertebrae and send spirals to the top of my head. I know it has a lifeworld of its own and how I feel in relation to it.

There are ways of speaking, writes Abram (2011) that close down that spontaneous and thoughtful exchange between our creaturely body and the animate earth around us; between our senses, nervous systems and the encompassing ecosystem (p. 189). “Can we find another way of speaking?” he asks. Can I sing up, open up, “swoop in closer still” (p. 198) to the wildness, unlock my senses from fixed definitions of abeyance? Can I go back and forth with words, invite a “coming over” to the place of a *bwlch* and let the wildlife...
there enter into conversation between Hywel and Gwerful and Amy and Phyllis (p.193)? Can we together “glean a sense of what’s in the wider landscape” (p.197)?

For, that which I think of as wild is not really out of control; it is simply out of my control. Wildness follows its own order, its own Dao, its inherent way in the world. There is no place on earth, says Abram that is not wild (2011, p. 233). Even as I write this chaos and complexity abound not just in the ways me and my co-journeymers are accustomed to expressing them, but in altogether different ways too. Abram gives the example of air currents all around us – like small vortices made by your breath as it slips in and out of our nostrils (p. 198). I am drawn to elements of Daoism in his work ... that he knows to let things be and allow life to follow its own way.

For Abram (1996 & 2011) relational ethics has to do with a simple respect toward others. With him, we learn to think across systems, to different places and times, and seek to understand. Letting the whole background in abeyance, we turn aside from “the churning of thought, dropping beneath the spell of inner speech to listen into the wordless silence” (2011, p. 178). While I am inspired by his passion for the rejuvenation of a thriving oral culture; with "layers of language much older, and deeper, than words" (2011, p. 167), I am patient. And in the interim, recognise this “strange world we inhabit: an immense sphere around whose surface two long lines of birdsong are steadily sweeping ... Until, as dusk dims into night, the choral abundance fades into a quietude much deeper than the muted talk of the day, a cool hammock of silence slung between the soft scratching of crickets and the far-off hoot of a great horned owl” (p. 185).

With Abram, as with Braidotti, and Armstrong, I am moving together and apart with the European literary scene and expanding my understanding to include the sub-cellular and planetary toward journeying in ways that are rich in feeling and intuition and connecting to the larger social, cultural, and spiritual contexts which Wall-Kimermer gives voice to.

3.3.4 Robin Wall Kimmerer

In her book, “Braiding Sweetgrass – Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants” Wall-Kimmerer (2013) writes that she learns the origins of words from watching the plants,
especially the berries who offer up their gifts all wrapped in red and blue. We may
forget the teacher, but our language remembers: our word for the giveaway,
minidewak, means ‘they give from the heart’. At the word’s centre lives the word
min. Min is a root word for gift, but it is also the word for berry. In the poetry of our
language, might speaking of minidewak remind us to be as the berries? (2013, p.
382).

Wall Kimmerer describes herself as a mother, botanist, bryologist, decorated
professor, and member of the Bear Clan of the Potawatomi Nation, a long lineage of
storytellers. There is a special connection between her heritage and her work, she says as
they both share a profound respect for all life forms, whatever their size. In her first book,
“Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses” (2003), she offers an
extraordinary celebration of the smallness and bigness of life in poetic and contemplative
ways: “Life exists only because of a myriad of synchronicities that bring us to this particular
place at this particular moment” (p. 23). In return for such a gift, the “only sane response is
to glitter in reply” (p. 23). Just beyond the events of our everyday lives, the taken for
granted words and worlds inhabited by mosses and berries have much abundance to share:

The berries are always present at our ceremonies. They join us in a wooden bowl.
One big bowl and one big spoon, which are passed around the circle, so that each
person can taste the sweetness, remember the gifts, and say thank you … It is not
just about the berries, but also about the bowl. The gifts of the earth are to be
shared, but gifts are not limitless … How do we refill an empty bowl? Is gratitude
alone enough? Berries teach us otherwise. When berries spread out their giveaway
blanket, offering their sweetness to birds and bears and boys alike, the transaction
does not end there. Something beyond gratitude is asked of us. The berries trust that
we will hold up our end of the bargain and disperse their seeds to new places to
grow … We need the berries and the berries need us. Their gifts multiply by our care for them and dwindle from our neglect. ... And so the empty bowl is filled (2003, p. 382).

Somewhere along the line people have forgotten berry teachings and the words we use are connected to this: “In Potawatomi, we speak of the land as emingoyak: that which has been given to us” (2013, p. 383). Whereas, in English people tend to speak about the land as a natural resource. I am reminded of abeyance being introduced in 1556 to describe land and property without ownership. These places were considered to be in abeyance because they could not be clearly defined in relation to land ownership. And yet, Wall Kimmerer’s books story people who have bought land in order to take care of it for future generations.

Her elders say that ceremony is the way we can remember to remember. I contemplate abeyance as remembrance and understand this in relation to “the earth being a gift we must pass on, just as it came to us” (2013, p. 383). When we forget, we need ceremony and dances for mourning. Gifted this, I relate with abeyance as both a forgetting and a remembering. When I visit bwlch, I close my eyes and wait for my heartbeat to meet the rhythm of this place. Remembering Abram (2011). I press my forehead against a tree and let tears of grief fall to the earth as expression for what has been neglected or forgotten. Wall Kimmerer ushers this further and writes about matching the pulse of a drum in ceremony:

I envision people recognizing, for perhaps the first time, the dazzling gifts of the world, seeing them with new eyes, just as they teeter on the cusp of undoing. Maybe just in time. Or maybe too late. Spread on the grass, green over brown, they will honor at last the giveaway from Mother Earth. Blankets of moss, robes of feathers, baskets of corn, and vials of healing herbs. Silver salmon, agate beaches, sand dunes. Thunderheads and snowdrift, cords of wood and herds of elk. Tulips. Potatoes. Luna
moths and now geese. And berries. More than anything, I want to hear the great song of thanks rise on the wind. I think that song might save us (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 383).

I am grateful for her poetic descriptions of the rainforests of the Pacific Northwest:
Fluted trunks rise from a lawn of deep moss-green, their canopies lost in the hanging mist that suffuses the forest with hazy silver twilight. Strewn with huge logs and clumps of ferns, the forest floor is a featherbed of needles dappled with sun flecks. Light streams through holes over the heads of young trees while their grandmothers loom in shadows ... You want to be quiet in instinctive deference to the cathedral hush ... But it wasn't always quiet here. Girls were here, laughing and chatting while their grandmothers sat nearby with singing sticks, supervising ...
(2013, p. 277).

In the early 1990s when seeking clues for the remarkable abundance and fertility of the Pacific rainforests, Susanne Simard (2015) and a team of forest ecologists at the University of British Columbia found that Paper Birch and coniferous Fir trees in this area, were not only communicating through the “wood wide web!” (p. 249), but taking turns at being mother and caring for the other, depending on the season. Studies revealed the, “finely adapted languages of the forest network. We have learned that mother trees recognise and talk with their kin, shaping future generations” (Simard, 2015, p.249), and when an area of Birch was clear-cut, she noticed that the firs suffered too. Robin Wall Kimmerer (2003 & 2013) and Beresford-Kroeger (2017), among others, draw from Simard and her team’s research to support long held beliefs that “trees are not just trees” (Beresford-Kroeger, 2017).

Brent Davis’ (2002) genealogy of a tree-being as way-finder also comes to mind. As he speaks to this: “curious capacity -- this irrepressible tendency” of a forest (p. 13). To
learn how “to take a tangle of experience and to impose edges, to trace out a path, to draw out a coherent tale needs to be something more than self-indulgent poetic fancy” he writes (p. 13). Rather, like the trees, he says, “it has to work in the realm of collective action” (p. 13). Perhaps, perhaps the only sane response is to call for Robin Wall Krimmerer (2003) and glitter in reply? For, in reality,

in the pause before the earth rotates again into the night, the cave is flooded with light. The near-nothingness of Schistostega (forest moss) erupts in a shower of sparkles, like green glitter spilled on the rug at Christmas ... And then within minutes its gone. All its needs are met in an ephemeral moment at the end of the day when the sun aligns with the mouth of the cave ... Each shoot is shaped like a feather, flat and delicate. The soft blue green fronds stand up like a glade of translucent ferns, tracking the path of the sun. It is so little. And yet it is enough (p. 36).

Jung (1971) knew when he insisted that, “the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of being into blazing awe at the miracle of life itself” (p. 37). And as T.S. Elliot writes, “we shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time”, from where we begin again. Only this time: a little more aware of “the emergence of possibilities, and the insistence on ethical action” (Davis & Sumara, 2003, p. 15). As these words tumble on to the page, I am reminded of Francisco Varela (1999) pleading for a “re-enchantment of wisdom, understood by non-intentional action” (p. 75). I contemplate their meaning and anticipate knowing when I am ready to.

As Wall Kimmerer (2013) reminds, trees in these ancient rainforests are just a beginning to continuing this journey with eco-literacies. The numbers of species of mammals, birds, amphibians, wildflowers, huckleberries, sword ferns, mosses, lichens, fungi and insects are staggering:
It is hard to write without running out of superlatives ... Alone is a word without meaning in this forest (2013, p. 278).

*Figure 3.1. More than grateful (Joanne Price, 2015)*
Chapter four: Hope as relentless renewal – Encountering Hywel Dda

This narrative opens as it closes at a place in the Black Mountains of the Welsh Marches. This place has no name, although the word bwlch is cited on a walking map near to this place, as well as several other places in the area. In the Welsh language bwlch refers to “a gap or space, pass, opening, aperture, or notch” (King, 2007) and is used to describe power places such as sources of water, standing stones, caves, river confluences, mountain tops, and particular tree beings.

This particular bwlch is situated between mountains and farmland in a gap in the landscape with no specific use. It is a place I have walked past for years. And yet, when I get inside of it, I see many of the trees are old, their branches covered in moss. I feel loss there, and decay. As well as enchanted by knotted interlocking branches and raised roots that are forever inviting more variations. There are circular hollows in their trunks, sheltered by leafy branches. I have to crawl in places to move, or walk in the stream which is by now a few hundred metres from its source, and already has pools for the water to rest and gather blossoms, leaves and twigs. Grasses grow into the stream and among the tree roots, and in the spring there are orchids, violets, buttercups. The place is alive with birdsong, wrens, thrushes, and kites live here. I have seen foxes. There’s an exposed feel, being so close to open moorland and yet the low-lying trees have created a kind of porous umbrella that channels the wind above their tops and into the valley below. The place varies from season to season, not least because the trees are deciduous, alder, hawthorn, hazel, rowan, sessile oak, ash and an apple. Being high up, there’s often snow here in winter and in summer, the luscious new growth greens last late into August.

The mountain road here hugs the contours of the mountain and can easily be imagined as a storyline. Hugh Brody describes this line between wilderness and farmland as “at the heart of human consciousness” (2000, p. 73). I get a sense of what he’s saying when I visit this place. There’s something else here that is neither wilderness nor farmland, or both. It’s hard to say. Although this bwlch is nevertheless situated in a remote area, there is a small road and walkers and people living in nearby farms pass by. Walkers often stumble upon the place as a pleasant surprise. As the approach from the valley takes you up a steep uphill and a gentle down into a crossing where two streams tumble across the road, break into waterfalls and moments later, join next to an ancient alder tree. From here, the
sounds of running water, taste of chlorophyll-coated ions, rich textures, smells of abundance dominate as they are held. The bwlch acts like a holding place in many ways. Once you are there, you can see Twmpa mountain in the winter but when there’s foliage on the trees there are no views out.

Like numerous other bwlchs these places connect disparate landscapes with a change of scene, a notch, and a variation in tempo. They tend to be too steep or rugged in terrain for agriculture and hence have probably not experienced deforestation. Although this place is not named, the energies, voices and spirits living here compel many of us to stop a while and as Wendell Berry says, “get out of your spaceship, out of your car, off your horse and walk over the ground”, remembering the clues on what it means to be alive (2018, p. 73).

4.1 I walked and I walked and I walked
Midway through this PhD journey, I moved from Vancouver to a village in mid Wales to be nearer to my family. I took time out from studying, as in Dante’s words I found myself, “in the dark woods, the right road lost. To tell about those woods is hard – so tangled and rough” (Dante, 1492/2012, p. 29). Knowing I could not go back, practicing this exit was not only an admission of how easy it can be to become eclipsed from ourselves in far-away places, but to invite a new rootedness in an old place. Inspired by philosophers and poet-thinkers whose academic lives reached beyond doing just one thing, I made plans to open a bed and breakfast for walkers and readers, as the flat I lived in happens to be situated next to two long distance footpaths. Hopeful that Stephen Nachmanovitch’s “bus, bath, and bed … siesta … Sabbath … rest, review and revelation” remedy for connecting with the educe in education would come to fruition (1990, p.152-155). Between guests that had left in the morning and new arrivals early evening, I went for walks. I would walk out of the village, past the castle, across fields into woodland and with sufficient time up to the mountains.

Putting one foot in front of the other, I walked and walked because I love to. Walking reminds me that I am alive. As a contemplative practice, it makes space for conversations between my being and places that are beyond me. Walking lifts spirits, and some days I walked all day, and relished the exhaustion as it energised my mind and further helped me
to let go of mental, emotional and biographical clichés that had been accumulating since studying. I walk quickly to not lose sight of the paradoxes that give it meaning.

4.2 Drawing down the light

Situated at the edge or mereg of Wales, Y Mynyddoed Duon or the Black Mountains forms a range of ancient rounded hills and moors opening to valleys for miles. Walking with views stretching out before me felt exhilarating, but soon into this journey I was stopped short by a gorse plant scratching at my legs and drawing enough blood to give it my attention. I studied common gorse *Ulex europaeus* and a smaller version, *Ulex gallii* that flower all year round in exposed moorland areas. In places too poor or uneven for cultivation and forming a movable line of yellow ochre flowers between mountains and fields. Drawing down the light, blazing a trail and burning like flames upon the land. According to folklore, gorse jabs at resignation, “forcing a person to another effort” (Barnard 2012, p. 147).

Gorse has thrived in this area for centuries, but I hadn't thought to notice it before. As herbalist Julian Barnard (2012) writes, having lived through all the wars of the world, through fire and lightning, deforestation, through all the storms of time, the gorse plant not only survives and flourishes, but offers itself as hope (p. 136). They say that as far back as the ninth century, gorse grew in places where trees once were. It has a unique way of fixing nitrogen in the soil and preparing the ground for the return of woodland. Hence, its medicine will no longer be needed in reforested places.

I was alarmed to learn that gorse held such medicine. I often dowse for herbal tinctures and there had never been a need for gorse before, but I did listen and ask the plant for a part of its flowering branch and sleep with it under a pillow for a while. In addition to taking a few drops of gorse tincture in water every morning. True, I was feeling overwhelmed by my studies and concerned for my mental health. I knew instinctively that the solution lay not in bringing together disparate pieces of writing into one place like a puzzle, and was more akin to learning to play a musical instrument. As I walked new worlds came to me. I see shapes in the terrain, hear voices, familiar and friendly, converse with the weather and enjoy getting lost in this place. Gorse medicine, however, does not
offer a cure for this nor return you to where you were before. Rather, it shares what Jacques Derrida (1992) calls its “pharmakon”, which is already both poison and cure in order to experience just the right amount of suffering to let healing usher you to a new place.

4.2.1 **Hywel Dda – there’s your trouble**

I had been walking for hours among gorse as it follows the contours of the moorland, when I heard a voice I assumed to be Hywel Dda’s.

HYWEL DDA: What has gorse got to do with me?

ME: I’m not sure to be honest, Hywel, but the more I understand about your life I get a sense of your persistence.

HYWEL DDA: You know what your trouble is?

ME: No.

HYWEL DDA: There’s your trouble.

This voice would come to me randomly as I walked, usually when I was physically tired. They helped me to relate with this place differently and come to know Hywel Dda better. I am learning to welcome them, as there are so few texts written about Hywel’s life and none in his own words.

Hywel Dda is best known for making Welsh common law known as Cyfraith Hywel. There was a sense of optimism permeating this lore, as he skillfully achieved an almost impossible task of consolidating, codifying, and setting down in writing the traditional laws of six or more territories. As a vassal king of what would soon become known as Wales, Hywel Dda had to appease British and Papal rule and create a centralised curriculum map, detailed with guiding lore. These laws were based on orality – observations, insights, stories and practices – and held memories about how to follow the natural laws of a place. Coming from local knowledge systems, the openness and allowance for contradiction within this lore helped ensure that local cultures would be preserved and prosper.
Poets and others were summoned from each of the several areas making up what was about to become the new consciousness of Cwmru Wales. Inspired by the Irish Brehon Laws of 430, everybody met at a great conference at Tŷ Gywn in Whitland where they created three areas of lore: The Lore of the Daily Life; The Lore of the Land; and The Custom of Each of Them. None of the original pocket books that the laws were written into have survived, but some were documented elsewhere and passed from generation to generation orally. As a whole, they spoke to equal inheritance for all children no matter of their parental marital status, wide ranging protection of women’s personhood, marriage as a civil not church matter, special protection for kittens, fillies, and calves, and fines rather than imprisonment as punishments. They emphasised reconciliation and compassion rather than advocating an eye for an eye.

4.2.2 That’s as good as I can do for now

The Cyfraith lore that Hywel Dda created originates in Ogham, an organic knowledge system beginning with trees. Ogham, comprises twenty five characters or letters linked to the unique spirit or voice of a plant or tree being. As a mnemonic memory system for vast amounts of knowledge and insight, Ogham works on many inter-looping levels: linguistic, lore and insight, and spiritual.

Celebrating diversity of mindbodyspirit, Hywel was influenced by the dreamtime dimensions of Ogham when humans and the more-than-human-world came to be and a kind of logos or Cyfraith reflected this. Beneath the name or noun of dreamtime was its verb, dreaming as an act to produce a new song or coda. At its core, Cyfraith built its lore of hospitality and neighborliness out of communing with the spirits of plants in dreamtime. I simply blow my dreams about and that’s as good as I can do for now. I do something? I do something. Like music coming from the stars in the sky, Hywel spoke to me during this time of all the secret whisperings of the world being held within gorse. But this is a story that defies belief and we don’t have time. Times are hard. There’s so much to do and times are soft. I was living a long way and soon it will be only good deeds that matter and among them will be these words.
We must bring back stories, says Hywel Dda. Cyfraith Hywel was shared via storytellers who kept traditions alive with stories and riddles. Who knows, perhaps gorse lore was told as a guiding story? I would love to know. A story that was yet to come, in which the letter O as in Onn and Uhn, the letter gorse beings are called by in Ogham, asks that we stand up and circle our bodies in the three times circle. Thus: making wiggle room for open ideas ... because I am going to need them.

Words like gorse are also known as eithyn in Welsh and furze, fyrs, fursbusg, whin, ruffet, and frey were offered as refrain for people to digest and hold complete understandings in abeyance. Being held by the wisdom of plants and trees asks for no more than to be listened to with our third ear or heart. Feeling for the spirit of this place, the lost languages that once grew here, celestial bodies, deities and animals and plants with many eyes distributed throughout their bodies. Stories in which people were supported to feel their own way into what is appropriate or response-able to do in this place.

Calling on the spirit of gorse, I hope to keep trying to make it beyond. As individually and collectively this plant gestures to “a true expression of faith in life, gorse shows us how that can be” (Barnard, 2012, p. 150).

Gorsedd circle of fire-keepers
lighting ablaze these hills
holding hope as relentless renewal
in warming ochres and yellow.

4.3 Missing worlds
The closest I have been to understanding the organic knowledge system beginning with trees is via Richard Rorty’s (1999) explanation of how, in modern times, the word tends to disappear in the self as “organism / word / environment” wholeness. What is left, he writes, is a gap or pause or a bwlch between ourselves and the phenomenal world (Rorty, 1999, p. 149). In this world, the whole word may be in abeyance: a place of “quiescence, dormancy, latent potential”, where nothing is capable of being transformed into something (Webster’s New Dictionary of Synonyms, 1968, p. 3).

Etymologically, abeyance as potential relates to its 1405AD Medieval Latin root-print, “batare” meaning “bay window” (Klein, 1966, p. 3). Or “space between columns”
borrowed from the Old French word bäee for “opening” (Barnhart, 1988, p.82). Rather than considering this middle place empty or lacking, it was a holding place for potential connections between two bodies of thought or worlds.

All of a sudden, I warm toward this elusive “abeyance” that escapes my understanding, because I can now imagine the gap between me and the environment as a creative place. A place like bwlch, located at the margins and boundaries of my world, but with space for ambiguity and edginess. As a place of doubling, it can create hopeful, metonymic, poetic and “generative possibilities” (Aoki, 1996, p. 422). Ted T. Aoki describes this place, lost in my psyche, as a “conjunctive space” (Aoki, p. 429) where “fragmented parts are joined with the word ‘and’, and allude to unconventional ways to be in relation with the environment. And, even to the potential of places themselves speaking to us and calling to us to be with them (Swan & Swan, 1996, p. 9).

4.3.1 A generative place

This belief that whole life-worlds can grow from the lost places between ourselves and the environment was new to me, conceptually speaking. It was, and still is, one of those notions that I find it challenging to get my head around, but realise we practice instinctually in moments of awe and more.

HYWEL DDA: The old Welsh word, awen, has helped me to move toward understanding in a more soulful way. Awen, a Welsh word, loosely translated means flowing spirit or inspiration. Awen is that, and much more. It is the ta p ah wen that encourages healing, the flash of insight gained from a single drop of dew. Awen is life itself and thrives at the heart of Cyfraith lore.

ME: Walking with gorse medicine helps with noticing awen, as its life-force works with the threads that connect us all.

HYWEL DDA: In the ninth century, rituals and ceremonial lore were designed to help people relate with place differently, as they are now. Built into Cyfraith was recognition that awen may differ for each person and so celebrating an individual’s own mode of thought, discourse, and creativity exists at its heart. Self-ownership and self-authorship are cited not in relation to land ownership but in relation to particular places.
The ancestral root-prints of abeyance bring us closer to awen. These ancient words usher an awareness of wording and worlding these middle places between self and environment. Places like bwlch come to life out of being recognised as more than a place. There’s a world of inspiration between us that speaks through us, the alluring scent of gorse that sends flurries to my heart and makes me want to learn more about this ancient way of being taken into a world that is deeper than explanation and permeated with paradoxes. Awen speaks, “to an in-the-moment impulse and giving voice to it through the conduit of our responsive pulsing inquiring bodyminds is a gesture that guides the heart into the depths of mystery” (Walsh, Bickel, & Leggo, 2015, p. 12). Making this space, poetic as it calls to what Cixous describes as a “second innocence: the one that comes after knowing, the one that no longer knows, the one that knows not to know” (Cixous, 1991, p. xii).

Rather than being a harmonious place of stasis, our awen voices emerge out of a joyfully discontinuous-continuous kind of harmony. Like Zen, Cyfraith lore knew that “to seek tranquility is to kill nature, to stop its pulsations” (Daisetz Suzuki, 1870/1996):

Oh gorse
make me traverse the opposite
of what is being approached
i want harmony again
that is not harmony

Awen speaks to the imaginative excess at the heart of living beings. As with Cyfraith lore, there is room for living wild words and planning words, the lived and planned curriculum (Aoki, 1993, p. 123). This lets the pragmatic and urgent dimension of awen usher forth love affairs and erotic ecologies with plants, trees, rivers, animals, and people as life itself opens to something else.

4.3.1.1 Tap ... tap ... tap ...

I am reminded of Hywel “when the rain stops, sunlight comes through the trees so clear and true that the damp world shines” (Kishkan, 2011, p. 229). I see that the excess dewdrops dripping from the canopy to the forest floor have awen in their midst.
4.4 Sharing Cyfraith lore with stories

HYWEL DDA: In the ninth century, storytellers share Cyfraith lore with creation stories. Storytellers instruct the lore via stories about how the world began. They tell how humans were a part of these stories and the ways they found places to live in the stories, and ways to deal with one another. Words acted as entitlement to places, and stories are like a play for voices. They speak with the voices of places and give meaning to life in ways that are as different as each person.

In her book, “The Global Forest: Forty ways the trees can save us” Diana Beresford-Kroeger (2010) describes the storyteller of ancient law as a bit of a drifter character (p. 3). When they enter a room, they are often not fed and given a seat by the fire as they were in the days whence, “the hills emptied to their heels” (p. 3). They would show up with their own “settee” or bench that was also their bed and place it by the community of the fire (p. 3). They sat but not for long, as every so often they liked to get up and move their backsides round and round. The role of a march hare trickster kind of character, in this area, may have been to remind people that it is only when we think one law or way of being is right, that societies get into trouble (Nelson, 2008, p. 11).

They say that if a person wanted to know the lessons of gorse, for example, they may go away dissatisfied or worse. For instead of instructing law in a direct way, the storytellers let us back into the fold of the everyday environment in which all live, to a place what possesses its own awen or “is-ness” (Aoki, 1991, p. 73). A life where we all, human and
“more-than-human” (Abram, 2011) live in a unity that transcends the whole. Such poetic story-telling is playful and purposeful, has the potential to invent worlds and teach us how to live in them. As Carl Leggo says, “After thousands of years on earth, we have only caught a glimpse of the potentially limitless possibilities of poetry” (2017, p. 28). We may just have arrived at the point in which we discover the world is still unknowable, and that each letter, turn of phrase or sentence has the potential to invite new forms of

activism, awareness, comedy, consonance, contemplation, description, emotion, exposition, fantasy, imagery, imagination, music, narration, orality, performance, philosophy, prophesy, rhetoric, romance, story-telling, tragedy, voice, wisdom, and words (Leggo, 2017, p. 28).

Melissa Nelson (2008) writes about poetic storytellers welcoming words and being the protectors of life, love, and what is precious in life. She describes their role as shapeshifters, creators and destroyers, those who “walk the shoreline forever” and make “good laws” (p. 1). This lesson comes with learning refrain and brings me closer to understanding abeiaunce as it derives from abey meaning to bend, curve; to incline, lower; to make obedient; subject to the lore of a plant like gorse which ultimately defies understanding. Given this, there was no separation between the ethereal and the technical, and Cyfraith will have been designed to be simple and complex: “to be grateful – to practice reverence for community and creation – and to enjoy life” (p. xxii).

4.5 Letting trails trail
As I walk with gorse medicine, the voices arrive with letting trails trail. Rosi Braidotti’s writing of the “Nomadic Subject” (2014) helps me to share this experience. In particularly, her curiosity for drawing a cartographic reading of the present in terms of “cultural, political, epistemological, and ethical concerns” (p. 167). Not wishing for the “inertia, nostalgia, aporia, and other forms of cultural stasis induced by our historical condition” (p. 163), she engages in a “seemingly absent-minded floating attention” (p.171). Trailing trails that trail as they mark the end of philosophy and the beginning of mysticism by among other ways, remembering that the “old meaning of the word ‘end’ means the
same as place” (Casey, 1997, p. 39). From one end to the other, would therefore mean from one place to the other. As Martin Heidegger (1927/1962) writes, “the end of philosophy is the place, that place in which the whole of philosophy’s history is gathered in its most extreme possibility. End as completion means this gathering” (p. 57).

(un)necessary detours
wit(h)nessing and weathering contradictions
shapes, sounds, sensibilities, stone, star beings

I found myself moving into a space where I was not so central. As Ted Aoki says, “I have wanted to escape from that kind of space, that bind of space. I have wanted to make space for the emergence of new meaning” (Aoki, 1991, p. 192). As holes appeared in my shoes and I stumbled and fell and I open a little more to the unending knotted chains of Celtic tradition, in which contemplative thinking unfolds as a variety of trails opening through a series of interrelationships: “that allow us to find our way even if we don’t know what we will find” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 212).

4.5.1 Devine demiurge

This journey was connecting with “education as an opportunity to get lost” (Block, 1992, p.1). Here, Alan Block chooses not to follow “marked paths” which may “make a straight-cut ditch of a free meandering brook” and instead suggests “education has more to do with meandering: with getting lost” (1992, p. 1). Responding to questions and circumstances, “in more positive self-directed forms” (p. 11), he draws inspiration from literary philosopher and scholar Mikhail Bakhtin. For Bakhtin (1968), meaning no more lives in experiences of getting lost than in the word or soul of the speaker or the listener (Block, 1992, p. 4). Rather, it is realised only in active and responsive relations with one another (Bakhtin, 1968).

Not until a curriculum journey risks originating from experiences of lostness and giving up on all roads home, Alan Block (1992) suggests, do we appreciate the vast and strange worlds of our subconscious. In words not yet known or rediscovered. In fact, he adds, citing Henry David Thoreau, “not till we are lost do we begin to realize where we are, and the infinite extent of our relations” (p. 1544). Not until we are lost can we know “divine
demiurge” (Cixous in Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 165). Devine, beloved, the deva in us, the devil in us, gorse whose words are rich in spirit, powerful, and appearing in the worlds our language hides and the action of a poem brings alive.

### 4.6 Way-finding

I am yet to excel at walking with these worlds. I have fallen many times, literally and spiritually. These have asked me to walk alone a while and reclaim my relationship with the Marches and its long history of chaos. I have felt sadness and anger emanating from within me in relation to the pain-body of this place. And I have questioned whether this rhetoric of being lost is necessary at all, when I have long lived among borderlands.

AMY DILLWYN: Just tell them to take them as they find you, and walk away if they don’t.

I occasionally regress into a primal sense of lostness while walking. I see the landscape repeat itself in every direction, and when I turn around all I hear are glimpses of words caught on the curve of the wind ... confused and interrupted fragments, arbitrary, and abstract.

GWERFUL MECHAIN: The company's not confused.

With the spirit of gorse, I force myself to another effort and learn that this plant, though it looks dead, dies directly back during prolonged pressure and cold, only to rejuvenate once conditions become more favourable. I see myself in that, and time and again determine to go back to the place you last remembered where you are.

#### 4.6.1 The interior is grieving

Beneath the layers of green shoots, thorns, and delicate petals of gorse sits a tangled knot of branches, from which you can hear a voice coming from the depths, a murmuring heart grieving the forests that grew here. Lying on the earth beneath gorse, I close my eyes and let centuries of intelligibilities give way to the tiny spiral shaped shadows turning freely among branches. Each turn somehow returns “me to zero in order to pass from one word to the next” (Cage & Retallack, 1996), and move closer to creating, “new forms of intelligibility that are resonant with our values” (p. 126).

Signs that the gap between gorse and environment had not yet become too wide, and that while some words may still be lost and you feel “beside yourself, and you continue
getting lost, when you become the panicky movement of getting lost, that’s when you are unwoven” weft, warped, confused, embrangled, left bare, that lets strangeness come through (Cixous, 1991, p. 38-39). That’s when gorse traverses you: “disarming the head, disarming the heart, disarming the body: each one by means of the others and all disarming language” (Cixous, 1997, p. 15). You can no longer close, finish, or define gorse, just feel in the ancient breeze the possibility of presence in constant play. Engaging as Hywel Dda, Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous do, perhaps, perhaps, with a sense of the world too diverse to be reduced?

HYWEL DDA: Cyfraith lore calls on gorse to help us blur philosophy and story, difference and time, making room for all that can’t fit in neatly.

Such as undecidability, excess, complexity and diversity, come together in multiple onenesses, leaving only traces of binar-uni-ties and facts of incompletion. Yet this unconceptualizable, unperceivable dimension in language is calling for gorse to be gorse and you to be you, and more than you. Writing things until they are near us; giving each to each other; going to live in the very close. Paying attention to what cannot be grasped with our eyes and ears. Patiently protesting against the world while loving it enough to “admit something which we are currently not admitting to ourselves: the fact that we do not understand life and the livingness of things at all” (Shotter, 2005, p. 195). Here, John Shotter (2005) discusses the rethinking of teaching and learning in a new context that comes into view with this admission.

Many of society’s orphans, refugees, artists, poets, and musicians feel called to live in this place. Knowing it to be “entredeux”: a true in-between – between a life which is ending and a life which is beginning. For some, entredeux is: nothing, but for gorse it is the place where you are not dead; the place to assist people who are no longer where they were and not yet where they want to go. Where you are not yet in the process of fully reliving and know it. A place of “structural unfaithfulness” filled with “innumerable moments that touch us with bereavements of all sorts” (Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 9). Being “faithful to this unfaithfulness” (p. 9) is helping me to have a healthier attitude toward the Marches which were declared “invisible” in the seventeenth century when two nation-states were formed in their place. Part of the problem was the “corruption, interference in local affairs, unnecessary legal cases, confusion of jurisdiction, cost and the arbitrary nature” of the
Marches (Morgan & Power, 2009, p. 109). This resulted in Francis Bacon arguing that the important magnitude of this case necessitated it being “contracted into a smale roome” and that the word marches is “a true construction of a monasilable” (as cited in Morgan & Power, 2009, p. 109). He concluded that the English gentry were indeed correct: the Welsh Marches belonged to ancient Wales, a place that was more of a dream-country than nation-state. And, although this did not necessarily “signifie some other place”, the word would from 1608 apply only to the English shires or “marches outwarde”, and not to the old lands or the “marches inward”. Perhaps these words described their characters, geographically and philosophically, I wouldn’t know but “drowned in the names of Wales and England, and lost to the nature of the marches were also in reason to loose the name” (Bacon as cited in Morgan & Power, 2009, p. 110).

Figure 4.1. Enchanted lands (Joanne Price, 2018)

Consequently, the Marches “tend to be ignored in modern works” (Evans, 1999, p. 43) and regarded as places with long histories “of tyranny and disorder” (1901, p. 266). What the history books rarely tell, and what I have learned with gorse are ways of working
creatively with, through and beyond dislocation. In her 1904 diary, for example, herbalist Beatrix Albinia Wherry noted that the genuineness of Y Mers’ character is “self-evident to anyone who knows the garrulous dramatic visionary folk of the Welsh Marches” (p. 75). For a people whose history has been dismissed as whatever “or somethen” – a comment made by historian Bradley in 1901: “No sentence I may remark, is ever quite fully rounded in the ears of a rustic borderer without this qualifying termination” (1901, p. 273).

I read Trinh Minh-ha (1992) and begin to celebrate the Marches as “the heterogeneity of our own cultural backgrounds” (p. 141). Finding in the language we already have: words … thought to be lost or marginal and passed beyond or behind thought. Words and the spaces among them, that contain spirit, influence our interactions, and have the power to shape-change the future.

4.6.2  **Storying my outsiderness**

With gorse, as a companion plant teacher, I decide to story my own outsiderness in relation to this place. I felt like an outsider from an early age. There has always been something making it challenging to conform to the conventions of wider society. Some curiosity that has helped me relate to all stories, societal and individual, as a creation of self and yet as Cixous says: “all autobiographies like all narratives tell one story in place of another” (in Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 178). These stories come from the “imund” or roots of my relationship with this place (Cixous in Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 55). “Our own marshes, our own mud” (p. 119) … into silences that are not just absences of speech, but “spaces, gaps, discontinuities, untidiness, and real life resistances” (Trueit, 2006, p. 274).

I remember walking into the classroom after break-time and seeing everyone huddled in a circle. I was nine years old. Moving toward the edge of the group, I heard the notes of a tune, then a pause, a stutter, and more. To my excitement, someone in our class was playing a music-box handmade by our Welsh teacher, an itinerant teacher who came to visit us every few weeks and this time, had made a tune just for a quiet friend. She always came with surprises. Another day, and I was invited to come forward and wind the handle of the music-box as it let sounds slip off the hundreds of tiny braille-like pins, each ringing in the shadows of these many strange and long lost memories. I learned only the odd word
of Welsh in these lessons. Her classes were like timeout that I had already been socialised into devaluing. And yet I loved her visits as she encouraged daydreaming, the very thing I was good at. Years pass and when I am teaching refugee children I remember her. I needed the support of people who loved words and language, and honored spaces for music and generative silences, and ways of expressing this with children who speak different languages. When I want to convey to others that each world in their stories matters, I remember her.

Quiet friend who has come so far,
feel how your breathing makes more space,
around you
Let this darkness be a bell tower
and you the bell. As you ring
what batters you becomes your strength
move back and forth into the change.
(Rilke, Sonnets to Orpheus 11, 29)

By this time, the gap between school and home life was already vast. At home, I had the sense that my family was very rooted. I lived, as previous generations had at a small mountain farm with grandparents, aunties, uncles, and cousins living nearby. Whereas, I was free to be boisterous at home, confident at questioning un/certainties and always curious for more, I was shy at school. Not least from being born in an age of nationalisms and re-nationalisms and an early childhood education amidst the chaos and hope of the Welsh language resurgence in West Wales. These dark days were like “the brutal commencement” of education (Cixous, 2005, p. 155). And, this ‘Welsh thing’ (borrowed from Cixous’ “Algeriance”) came to haunt me during my PhD. Surfacing again in middle life in Vancouver, long after my Welsh experience and engagement as a feminist lesbian had begun to fit together. It was here that I learn to see past the “Welsh Thing” as a nationalist and homophobic “wasteland of non-achievement” that for so many years made me “want to identify with that which is furthest from that wasteland” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1986, p. 3). And instead, attend to that which is furthest from myself ... language and culture and more ... and with it, celebrate my “queerly rooted history” (Everett, 1997, p. 210).
When I think back to the gift of the pink blancmange incident during my first year of school, my queer roots were already there. I had helped myself to dessert and was carrying it to the table, when the plastic bowl slid to the end of my tray and spilled its contents everywhere. There was blancmange on the floor, on chair legs and even the dinner ladies’ shoes. Ahh, “dew dew, beth sy'n llanast,” oh what a mess. I am on alert. Back in that dining room menaced by the excesses of reality, real and othered violences. Shut out from speaking.

My family moves to the Welsh Marches, in part response to the political climate and to be closer to their parents. My Mum identifies as English and Dad as Welsh, even though their homes were just miles apart, but enough to switch associations of the Welsh motherland and English culture from the beginning. The English childhood I lived through my Mum was marked by a complete intolerance toward nationalism although she consistently turns to Wales for warmth and generosity of community working as a nurse, bereavement counsellor, and farmer. Initiating the turn to becoming organic farmers at a time when it was not easy, nor profitable, she opened our home to people from many walks of life.

This together with the help of a geography teacher at high school, made room to relate my genealogical memory with the vast expanse of lands where life would unfold. His way of questioning that made room for the impossible, made my now double outsidersness of nation and gender more livable. Although I waited to come-out as lesbian after I had left home, I knew from a young age that these lessons in learning how to be there and not there, were creating spaces for tens of thousands of different ways of being and becoming. There was more to reality than meets the eye in the long moments of silence between a question and response. I was learning not to find answers but to dwell in the gaps between words that were becoming a part of the culture of our classroom. Amidst my increasingly broken understandings of the world, was my own way of going beyond individuality. Far more cognizant of one’s own freedom which is not freedom than I would have liked, and the depths of my lives for which I assumed there were no words. And yet, I was fascinated by new worlds being produced in and out of conversations. Like the first time I hear the word ‘ornithology’. My dad was sitting at the kitchen table telling us the results of an
ornithology study, which concluded that there were several times the amount and diversity of birdlife in our hedgerows since we had been farming organically. I felt unusually disarmed at hearing this and had no need to provoke him as I often did. For the first time, I was cognizant of a resonance between home and school, and glimpsed an understanding of what dad had been through to farm both similarly and differently to his extended family. As a young man he had moved to West Wales to a farm abandoned since a lightning strike to the chimney a generation earlier. There he is taken in by his neighbours. They speak Welsh, he English and during the early years of my life, my parents were taught a way of farming that listens to the Little Mountain. A similar way to that what made room in those geography lessons for the previously unimaginable. And, in my story of outsiderness, that something was the possibility of becoming a teacher.

As Eric Prenowitz reminds, “there is always further in myself than myself” (1997, p. 249) and we can always be stronger than ourselves and more imaginative. Geography was becoming a real place where I would work through difference, and begin to re-story stories in order to experience a sense of freedom that was also very grounded in the terrain of many lives. I had been opened to realising a teacher’s or “housemaker’s predicament”, in which “there is no hospitality without a host, but neither is there any – any true hospitality, any hospitality that is not already calculating its return – with one. I can only welcome you into the space that is my own, never a neutral or public space, but there cannot be welcoming without a make-yourself-at-home, an abdication of domestic dominion by the host” (Prenowitz, 1997, p. 251).

Making being there
become about making rooms within this room
for Gorsedd
elusive beings
who are neither me nor you alone
but who are entering these pages
to be at home
4.7 Wild horses

Wild horses live on the mountainside in the Black Mountains. Horses, who according to Edward Casey, embody two essential traits of place: 1) the lived body; and 2) the gathering power of places (1997, p. 49). His writing has been described as resonant with alternative approaches to “place” but deeply based in Western philosophy and accessible to those willing to put in a little extra effort. He writes about letting place speak for itself, with words like, “letting the horse roam where it wants to go” (p. 49) and sharing that we get back into place in “the very way by which we are always there – by our own lived body” (p. 21). Our “this-here” body in this-here place, which is “basic to place and part of place” (p. 23). Second, he says, places gather and release things which belong as much to the place as to our brains and bodies – experiences, histories, language, thought, memories, expectations, familiar, strange, energies. These things are a part of being-in-place (p. 38). We learn about the lived body “getting into, staying in and moving between places” (p. 44) and the gathering power of place as an event. We rediscover the wildness at the heart of place, that “no culture can contain or explain, much less reduce” (p. 35). We discover the contradictory trickster of place. We travel through a “threshold” to the in-between spaces of place – the interstitial and liminal (p. 39-40). This transition, like the opening of a door, unites ourselves with a new universe, moving us from perceiving the world through space to being-in-place.

Still a way away from understanding this, I get up and make a cup of gorse tea and remember an encounter with a small herd of wild horses. As I came over a hill, we startled one another and one of the horses raised its front legs and neighed at me. I quickly retreated to gorse, and turned to see several horses crowded around one of their herd who was lying on the ground. She was in labour. I recognised the large horse protecting the edge of the circle, as a horse I had seen earlier in the week. From a safe enough distance perhaps we recognise each other, as I feel a strange invite to stay there. I sit down, and as the horse munches on grass I eat an apple. We would look at each other, and instead of chasing me it put its head down to graze, checking in again and again. A while passes and the horses appear serene, watching, waiting, and pondering.
The horse asks me whether I am old and can see well, to which I reply: I am old and I cannot see well. Time passes and eventually, I witness the birth of a foal and the celebrations of the herd, as they each took turns to help the foal stand up and take its first steps. I feel so moved to have shared this experience, thank the horses, and circling my body in a three times circle, run down the mountains, shouting with joy and listening to the horses sing back to me.

neighhhhh neighhhhh neighhaaaa
tatatatatata klaklaklakklaklkalka
hhhaahha hhhaahaha

Soon after I meet a farmer on a quad bike and tell him about the foal. He spoke quietly, thinking about his words and we each went our way. Not long later, I turn back toward the horses and to my surprise saw the farmer among them, patting the foal’s mane. I was reminded of the kindness animals have shown the people in my family who have worked these hills for generations.

4.8 A getting later

Months of walking later, I find myself at bwlch and rest by the waterfalls where time stands still. I recognise this as the place my grandmother had brought us to, where we had played in the streams while she sat on a blanket. I felt like a juncture had been reached. That the circle in which this place circles was being concealed and unconcealed by memories drawing in, opening and closing to many dimensions of earth and world and moving perhaps, toward an ineffable sensibility of abeyance? Could this be, what linguist Benjamin Whorf describes as, “a getting later of everything that has ever been done ... recurring stories that circulate to bind reality together ... returning versions of both ancestors and ideas” (1939, p. 75)?

Drawing this chapter to a close, I have everything to learn about Hywel and wonder whether I should end it at bwlch? Or just ahead, around the corner? And if not now, when? Still looking for Hywel ... do I stop here
being trailed, being trails
being each step traversing these tales.
Chapter five: Racy technician of the sacred – Encountering Gwerful Mechain

This narrative opens in the dance hall of an old country house in the Tanat Valley of the Welsh Marches. Poet Gwerful Mechain has just stood up to perform in response to a fellow poet’s provocation. Much to everybody’s amusement, she mimics her maid as:

She squats and lets out her water – cascading
From the cauldron of her pants as she totters;
Her twin holes make a great bubbling clamour
Then comes the dung and a rainbow arch of water

(“To her maid as she shits” by Gwerful Mechain, as translated by Gramich, 2018, p. 41).

With everybody falling into laughter and banging on the tables, and her maid not present to speak for herself, Gwerful gifts us with a flavour of the climate of this time. For, during the fifteenth century, inequity between the ruling and common classes was already creating a mess in the atmosphere. As top-down thinking had become integral to language and especially at the weekly improve-night in the dance hall / court-room of a local gentry.

Gwerful Mechain lived from 1460 to 1502 and was well-known for situating herself centrally within the Welsh bardic tradition known as cynghanedd. She showed up at events and engages in “in poetic dialogues with her male contemporaries, using the same forms, metres, tropes, and vocabulary as they” but not from a place of “marginality, exclusiveness, or outsidersness, but rather as a full participant in the tradition” (Gramich, 2018, p. 2). I am taken with the playful and inventive ways Gwerful Mechain embellishes the rules of this complicated poetic verse, and her ability to bring unconventional subject matter into conversation with the conventional. As well as the ways she speaks to the human, elemental, and mystical aspects of everyday living.

Bringing a creative and devotional presence to these gatherings, Gwerful Mechain is in my opinion a great leveler. Bringing in all manner of candid and humorous excesses into the confines of an oppressive poetic system, she works with what seems extreme as a way to regenerate a healthy and dynamic climate.

Gwerful pulls up a chair and joins me sitting at a table.
GWERFUL MECHAIN: Hello, what I have to say is this. I celebrate the strong oral qualities of hen benillion. This is also known as the old verses or people’s poetry and includes Canu Heledd or words “set in the mouth of a female character” (Mechain, 2018, p. 12). These folksy and proverbial verses deal with elemental human passions and experiences, they are often anonymous, and passed from generation to generation. What I do, is bring these popular and collective testimonies and rituals, including mourning rituals from the Songs of Heledd, into the heart of the bardic tradition. And I can do this because unlike the majority of my male counterparts, I am not employed as a court poet. As a married woman from a relatively wealthy family, I can turn up at improv-night and participate from a position of relative privilege. I can bring an erotic and provocative poetic voice into conversation with traditional poetry in ways that my male friends cannot. And so, I make it my business to embellish this.

Gwerful Mechain belonged to the Fychan or Vaughan family. Her father was Hywel Fychan and her mother, Gwenhwyfar and she had three brothers and a sister. Gwerful married John ap Llywelyn Fychan and had a daughter called Maud (Gramich, 2018, p. 8).

5.1 Abiding within the mainstream poetic culture

*Hywel Dda joins us at the table and shares more of the background to this evening’s event.*

HYWEL DDA: This bardic tradition of Cynghanedd or strict metre rule was not around in the ninth century. It was introduced in the thirteenth century after a battle in 1267 that marked the loss of Welsh independence and the beginnings of the assimilation of Welsh culture and language. During this time, the old poetry of hen benillion was outlawed, as was canu brad or prophetic praise poetry. And so, many of the poet-seers from the borderland areas of the Welsh and English Marches were employed as court poets for the ruling classes who were mostly Welsh, English, and French.

Listening to Hywel, I imagine how restrictive it must have felt for a poet-seer to work within a system that was designed to complicate originality. I am reminded of Dominic La Capra’s (2009) work with writing that remembers freer eras, “without totally transcending losses and at times involving humor or laughter” (p. 194). As the word abide may suggest, Gwerful Mechain chose to participate in cynghanedd. She chose to continue
elements of hen benillion within this imposed poetic structure, and as the word abide describes, to stay or dwell in some place or action (OED, 2019). Confident in her own craft and opinions, Gwerful remains a part of cynghanedd while also challenging it.

HYWEL DDA: This was made all the more fascinating, in that many of the country houses where the evenings of improvisational poetry and music took place, had contested ownership. Even today, many buildings and gathering places in the Marches are considered to be in abeyance as they have not been officially recognised since the thirteenth century. So there are a number of unforeseen circumstances that make room for creative voices to play within cynghanedd. Rather than simply doing what they are paid to do, and entertain the ruling classes by performing melancholic laments and repetitions of their experience of conquest, the circumstances of the place itself ushers in something else.

Morgan and Power (2009) describe the ways court-poets kept older traditions alive, as an act of extending “Welsh sacred space” (p. 114). Within the confines of cynghanedd, they usher the dead into their words and with them speak to the paradoxes inherent in society. They would take the norms of the day and poetically story-tell them from multiple perspectives, and with the participation of a few women such as Gwerful Mechain, bring the erotic and devotional together.

They created an accented English or way of performing poetry that had spaces for Welsh and English to abide with one another. This way of using language as an act of creativity challenges the imposed structures of cynghanedd, and creates a shift in focus as the dance hall door opens to a courtyard and the sounds of birds chattering and trees breathing enter into the performance as difference.

HYWEL DDA: As some nobility came to appreciate this poetry, they even encouraged the poets to draw from the Ogham and Cyfraith Lore. In order to speak the ancient spirit of tree verse, balance out this stormy era and relish a healthy fluidity between the sacred and the sexual that would bring the divine into presence.
5.2 **Astonishing array of the traditional and eccentric**

Many of Gwerful's poems leave modern audiences with our mouths open in astonishment. All agape, like bayer, another root-print of abeyance deriving etymologically from abeance as it relates to “aspiration, desire, and longing” (OED, 2018). Bayer can be traced back to 1121 when it referred to opening the mouth wide in astonishment (OED, 2018), as this amazing woman was able to make acceptable a voice that was “at once traditional and eccentric, a voice capable of serious devotion and riotous indecency” (Gramich, 2018, p. 19).

GWERFUL: I have become very skillful with words. I use them to defend women and speak up for all women using wide-ranging and erudite allusions to bolster the authority of my argument and voice. In, “A response to Ieuan Dyfi's poem on Red Annie”, I express female sexuality as uncontainable, and the many things a woman would give up before she gives up her cock (Gramich, 2018, p. 47). This is because I needed to defend Anni Goch by listing virtuous women throughout the ages.

HYWEL DDA: Goch, which mutates to coch meaning red in Welsh, and possibly indicating “indecency and bawdiness in Welsh, in the same way that blue is used in English” (Gramich, 2018, p. 65).

GWERFUL MECHAIN:

> While some of us dark ones have virtue and reason ...
>
> Gwenddolen was one who got her own back
>
> When her will wasn’t done; she just had the knack.
>
> Tonwen, she who was Dyfnwal’s wife,
>
> As leader she kept the land free of strife.
>
> Intelligent Marcia, Cuhelyn’s consort,
>
> Sorted our Laws and cleaned up the court.
>
> Venissa, who was Gwerydd’s wife,
She too brought peace and long life,
Standing between two raging battalions,
She brought sweetness not death to those rapscallions

(“A response to Ieuan Dyfi’s poem on Red Annie” as translated by Gramich, 2018, p. 65)

In my dialogic response to Ieuan Dyfi’s rant at being deceived by his former lover Anni Goch, I take a strong feminist stance (Gramich, 2018, p. 18) and praise these noble women leaders, Queens of the Britons, lore-makers, mediators, and peacemakers.

Another astonishing feature of my poetry is my ability to get away with a number of mistakes or faults, and the use of what they call inefficacious phrases in my erotic poems. I am blamed for my “ineptitude” (Harris as cited in Gramich, 2018, p. 11) especially in my pornographic songs, and considered to be “nothing more than a whore” (p. 11). But my saving grace is that, whereas “Cywydd y cedor, Poem to the vagina” is full of grammatical mistakes that do not appear in my sincere and devotional poems like the one about the suffering of “Dioddefaint Crist, Christ’s Passion, Death, and Judgement”. This, as Nerys Ann Howell realises, is because I am perfectly able to write conventionally and correctly when I want to and enthusiastically break the rules when I do not wish to (as cited in Grimach, 2018, p. 13). However you consider it, I create space to let the erotic and devotional coexist and in so doing, bring a large number of unconventionalities into the strict meter form.

In the introduction to her recent anthology of “The Works of Gwerful Mechain”, the only book in existence devoted to Gwerful, Katie Grimach (2018) gives thanks to the research of Nerys Ann Howells (2001) and Lesley Harries (1933). Their understandings, via Katie Gramich, are informing my ever-evolving responses and continued back and forth expressions of surprise and gratitude at the ways in which they realise Gwerful’s words differently. Nerys’ thesis, “The Work of Gwerful Mechain and Others” (1970) was likely written in response to Lesley’s thesis, “The Work of Huw cae Llwyd And Others” (1933) and resonant, perhaps, with Gwerful’s response to Dafydd ap Gwilym and Others. As Katie Gramich writes, it is possible that “Poem to the vagina”, is a counterpart and riposte to Dafydd ap Gwilym’s “Poem to the Penis” written two centuries earlier (2018, p. 41).
Gramich then responds by reminding us that “the boldness and explicitness of Gwerful Mechain’s erotic poem does not appear to have shocked her contemporaries, but it ensured that her work was neglected for many years after Wales became a nation of Nonconformists in the nineteenth century” (p. 41). Gramich attributes the incompatibility between sexuality and spiritual devotion to Nonconformist Christianity, which took sway of the country and created the “the self-destructive dilemma of the ‘poetess’” (2018, p. 2). During this time, says Germaine Greer, “maternal affections and domesticity were associated with femininity and not feelings of rage and despair” (1995, p. 37). Nor was femininity associated with feelings of contempt, disbelief, and lack of inhibition. Thankfully, Katie Gramich concludes, there is nothing submissive about Gwerful Mechain and, “above all, perhaps, it is the humour and joie-de-vivre of Gwerful which is most impressive: she is a celebratory poet in the widest sense of that word” (Gramich, 2018, p. 2).

With these texts, is there hope for our future?
As long as there are people conserving poetic welfare
for those who are yet to know
hen benillion from a long time ago.

With the clarity of raw truths, is there hope for our future?
As long as our worlds admit our own inept rules
with the same excessive humour
so goes the rumour.

5.3 Healthy disrespect for the law
Given that Gwerful Mechain did not adhere to the rules of cynganhaddd very carefully in her erotic poems, I am reminded of Abigail Bray’s (2004) description of Clarice Lispector's writing and its healthy or “courageous disrespect for the law” (p. 138), and feel a tender, plump, pulsating tangent coming on. Writer of philosophical fiction, this unconventional woman was born in December 1920 to a Jewish family in Western Ukraine. This was during a time of chaos that led to her family migrating to Recife where she became known as a Brazilian philosopher-poet-storyteller-of-the-inexpressible who takes her readers toward a mystical end where language both flourishes and fails. Most of her work, writes Abigail Bray (2004) is, “written in the first person singular and concerned with
interior consciousness and its relationship to the non-human” (p. 126). Influenced by existentialism and a phenomenological relationship to the materiality of the body, Clarice’s writing challenges postmodern aberrations of stream of consciousness to express “epiphanic moments” with “experimental prose fragments” (p. 126). Instead, she writes fragments of writing on pieces of paper and napkins, as well as plotless conversation and what Moser (1973) calls “unfiltered brainstorm” in which she types anything and everything that comes into her mind and that is exactly how it sounds (p. viii). Working with these disparate pieces, Clarice stretches language to its limits with her inner-outer stream of consciousness that admits, “I is merely one of the world’s instantaneous spasms” (Lispector, 1964, p. 12).

I wonder what you make of Clarice Lispector’s writing Gwerful Mechain? And whither you would agree your words also move us back toward “the most beautiful of lessons: the lesson of ugliness” (Cixous, 1991, p. 75), lessons of despair as integral to beauty? Lispector often reminded her readers that her unconventional and foreign writings were not the result of her European birth nor her ignorance of Portuguese, but the proper way a woman should present herself in times of inequality (Moser, 1973, p. vi). Although, she freely admits the influence of the Kabala tradition as it believes in finding divinity by rearranging letters on a page, repeating nonsensical and ineffectual words and scenes, parsing verses, and seeking logic in overturned worlds.

Clarice’s relentless linguistic and grammarian searching prevents her work, and thus her life, from being read quickly and deductions made so she fits in. What is abstract so often seems to me the figurative of a more tender reality, and while her artistic experimentations, with a vast range of styles and experience, may or may not be for everyone, they may find resonance with you? When I read her words, I wonder whither they somehow make room for a broader contemplation of your poetry, Gwerful? Whether they make room for the gut truths of womanhood, open to the materiality of my body and open toward decentralising the human Anthropocene? Clarice offers a reminder of the very real presence of purgatory and to listen more to the ignored and lost community members, those left outside of being able to fully conform. She does not shy away from dwelling here amidst apparently extreme and marginal places in order to learn more about despair and
compassion. To think of ourselves as only human, she says, further separates disbelief from belief, conformism from non-conformism, the erotic from the devotional, human from more than human, and further exacerbates a reactionary morality (1964).

In her book, ‘Stream of Life, Clarice writes the,

vast night takes place in a primary state of latency. My hand rests upon the earth and listens hotly to the beating of a heart. I see the large white slug with a woman’s breasts. Is it a human entity? I burn it in an inquisitional fire. I possess the mysticism of the shadows of a remote past ... In my night I idolize the secret meaning of the world. Mouth and tongue. And a loose horse, running free (Lispector, 1989, p. 37).

And yet, her nights and days also abound in everyday conversation. “I’m back” she writes, “The day is still very nice” (Lispector, 1964, p. 32).

The co-journeymers and characters in Clarice’s writing grow with her, as you do with me Gwerful Mechain. Through and around your words, as well my own, I live my everyday lives with as much dignity as I can. Your scrutiny and knowledge and broad intellectual powers teach me to take note of when the world goes mad. You call me from behind the walls of pacifism to a stronger pacifism, more robust and compassionate and capable of moving pragmatically forward. I am learning to write “the middle unpraised”, say yes to life and to “the warm bright quim, tender, plump, pulsating broken ring, the place I love, the place I bless, the hidden quim beneath the dress, you female body, you’re strong and fair, a faultless, fleshy court plumed with hair. I proclaim the quim is fine, Circle of broad-edged lips divine, A cunt there by a lavish arse. Table of song with its double in red” (Gwerful as cited in Gramich, 2018, p. 42).

While the following may not be to everyone’s taste, I want to embellish a little more with an unabashed moment in Clarice Lispector's novel, 'The Passion According to G.' in which the confidence arrives of a woman who had endured intense personal suffering, after she accidentally eats part of a cockroach. This helps her realise, she proclaims, that she is capable of existing at the level of a cockroach and reaching the irreducible, ancient, and
moist: “Listen, in the living cockroach the worst discovery was that the world was not human and we are not human – fierce joy takes over” (Lispector, 1964, p. 67). She describes how this mistake was better than food and leads Lispector toward a profound contemplation of the double or “what exists between the number one and the number two, how (she) saw the mysterious... between sensing – in the interstices of primordial matter there is the mysterious, fiery line that is the world’s breathing and the world’s continual breathing is what we call silence” (1964, p. 90).

Sometimes Clarice’s words reduce me to the silence of the world’s continual breathing from which a subject can be born as inspiration. This is my credo, the place we can respond as “strangers to ourselves” (Kristeva, 1991). Thus, letting the knowledge of our residing centrally wherever we are, as well as what we are on the edges or thresholds of our worlds, claim the opportunity to explore ... to confront the beloved ghosts and cockroaches of cynganedd, let Gwerful have her way, make me say what she wants me to say as I learn, learn, learn to conform, conform, conform with the warm, warm, warm and welcoming muses of maybe lost and lavish pasts, go with what springs to mind, leaps out of our mouths, interact with what jumps on to the page, and up my r’s with riotous respect.

I looked around the room and noticed Gwerful Mechain and Hywel Dda had moved to another table. Then, I heard: Shall we come back to you now?

There was a break between performers and an overturned barrel of mountain water was spelling out abeyance as its letters poured into the room announcing, we want to hear more from Gwerful Mechain, mindbody of boundless ability, we want more, more, more.

5.4 Gwerful Mechain and Dafydd Llwyd

After getting a round of drinks, I am back and just in time to hear this banter between Gwerful and Dafydd. This is Dafydd Llywd of Mathafarn, easily confused with Dafydd ap Gwilym from two centuries before. Dafydd Llwyd was a poet and likely lover of Gwerful even though he was considerably older than her, he was well known for his canu brad or prophetic verse. There are englyn poems between them: four-line rhyming verses in which the end rhyme in the second line appears three quarters of the way through the first line. These differ from cywydd poems which are made up of seven syllable rhyming
couplets between forty and eighty lines and complex patterns of alliteration, with each line’s ending, alternating between a stressed or masculine symbol and an unstressed or feminine syllable (Echard, 2013). Both englyn and cywydd forms are, however, a part of cynghanedd, meaning harmony, and they tend to be agile, moving, and suitable for many purposes such as telling a story and expressing love or grief and lighthearted satire (Gramich, 2018, p. 13-15).

Although Gwerful Mechain is likely to have learned cynghanedd from Dafydd (Gramich, 2018, p. 16), I imagine she also influenced him. Their heterosexual back and forth erotic poems, although conforming to the genre of englyn, took on a competitive and improvisational style that stretches the rules and were strongly reminiscent of their speaking voices.

DAFYDD LLWYD: I was taught by my father, as by now cynghanedd is passed between father and son. But I was not prepared for Gwerful and her poem full of questions about the future and her praises on the size of my membership. So I asked her in return, whether she had “a long sheath which would contain this.”

GWERFUL MECHAIN: “I’ll follow you if I’m not held back”.

DAFYDD LLWYD: “I’ll have a gold spear to make you behave” (from “Conversations between Dafydd Llwyd and Gwerful Mechain” as cited in Gramich, 2018, p. 82-87). I travel a long way to come to these improv-nights but they’re worth it for the banter. There’s no one else like Gwerful Mechain, and together we are bringing about change to cynghanedd.

Dafydd would have travelled away from the coast, to meet Gwerful for a horseback ride beside the River Tanat in north Powys not too far from her family home. Here, Gwerful dismisses Dafydd’s teaching that she might do herself injury by riding astride an old horse:

DAFYDD LLWYD:

Your nag is narrow and thin, believe me – my girl

If you ride him out so free,
Beware, your privates will hurt to the nth degree,
And in the end, it'll split your box, I guarantee.

GWERFUL MECHAIN:
Listen, a wild girl's nature does not split – your eyewash
Means nothing – I will sit,
Like a queen on my noble steed;
The sinews on my ring are as strong as steel
(from “Gwerful replies to Dafydd Llwyd”, an unfinished exchange translated by Gramich, 2018, p. 102).

Here, Gwerful takes another opportunity to embellish in ways that refuse to leave “the middle without praise” in equal measure to Dafydd's challenge.

GWERFUL MECHAIN: He provoked and I fought back, but Dafydd wants us to play it down in public. When I say no, he sends Llywelyn ap Gutun, another poet, to act as a go-between but instead of helping us harmonise, he antagonises: reminding us that it takes more than two to folk dance.

DAFYDD LLWYD: He’s a lousy walker, an unwilling messenger, and crude harpest is that Llywelyn (from “A love-message poem to Gwerful Mechain, sending Llywelyn ap Gutun to her as a messenger” as cited in Gramich, 2018, p. 122-124).

LLYWELYN AP GUTUN: Watch I’ll make more discord and lightheartedly insult you Dafydd, but never, “the lovely G. That paragon of the two Mechains under the trees” (from “A response to the love-message poem” by Llywelyn as cited in Gramich, 2018, p. 126). In my own poems, I ask advice on these and other matters from the most ancient of animal messengers, including a hawk (p. 126) and salmon (p. 131). I enjoy finding resonance between the alternating poetic forms and the play of consonants and vowels in the Ogham tree alphabet. In this alphabet consonants give shape and structure to poetic thought and
vowels come alive through our own unimpeded speech. They feed our souls and speak to the moment the salmon are able to get into their own stream and everything flows as they realise the future with the way they swim home, bring a dynamic heart back into the gathering and avert irreversible change?

Swimming upstream from the world and listening to what our inner soulful “faultless gift” (I’r Cedor) is saying. Guiding the heart into the streams of mystery, says Alan Block (1992), is to do with love itself, healing “paths of least resistance”, because it already dwells in what exists, in the earth (p. 10-11). From here, divisions dissolve and like Gwerful Mechain we can be both researchers who seek knowledge and seek out that which unsettles us, as “what unsettles us can lead us to a place of wonder” (Mesner, 2015, p. 93).

The poetic and musical call and response continues long into the night.

Participants words are rarely written down, and out of a lifetime’s participation in cynganedd, fourteen poems are definitely known to be Gwerful Mechain's, there are five that may be, and a number of anonymous works that could be (Gramich, 2018, p. 11).

5.5 Diverse hinterland

Without many words of Gwerful’s Mechain’s to write with much can be left to the imagination. She makes this easy as there is room within what I hear from Gwerful Mechain to encounter her in the imaginative realms which the Welsh Marches lend themselves to. This diverse hinterland, which has also been missed out of history books, has inspired many authors, not least Paul Faber who in 1857 wrote: “Over the Marches of two worlds, that of the imagination, and that of fact, her soul hovered fluttering” (OED, 2019).

It is no coincidence, or rather it is, that these poetic gatherings happen to hap here. As this place, with its contested history draws the creative and devotional to it. The name, Marches, is itself an “attested word” (OED, 2018), deriving from the proto-Indo-European word mereg meaning edge, threshold, or boundary: “a disputed tract of land separating one country from another” (OED, 2018). Belonging neither to one nor the other, the Marches have often been considered as being in abeyance. The notion that such a place separates and brings together polarities is an enduring one. Morgan and Power (2009) write about
their separating civility from savagery, and “despite the efforts of the Tudors to impose centralisation and uniformity throughout its territories, there remained institutions, structures of power and mentalities which were still in existence by the end of the sixteenth century” (p. 101).

5.5.1 Journey to Mechain

Taking time out from the gathering, I walk to the village-area of Mechain where Gwerful is from. This village used to consist of two areas: Mechain Uwch Coed (Mechain above the woods) and Mechain Is Coed (Mechain below the woods), with a large forest stretching across a hill and Bwlch-y-Cinau or ‘pass at the hull’ as in “body, bark, casing, shell, structure or framework” (OED, 2018). The Vyrnwy and Cain rivers flow nearby and I imagine Gwerful living in this rich and undulating land with full flowing rivers, herbs on their banks and an abundance of birdsong. I wonder whether she travels south as I have north and visited the bwlch at Twmpa.

Did you visit Twmpa – Gwerful?

This rounded twmpath mountain wonder;
Where musicians played for your community to dance?

There are many bwlch in the Marches, as elsewhere. Most are not named and yet mark a power place inhabited by panoply of spirits from the middle world. There are gods, goddesses, heroes and mortals, intermediaries and interlocutors, muses, and deities dwelling here. There are beings who reside in the interaction between speakers and listeners (Bakhtin, 1968).

I later learned that Gwerful Mechain did indeed live in Mechain or Llanfechain, north Powys close to the border with England. This is supported by many sources, not least the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth and scholars such as Katie Gramich (2018) continuing the tradition of rediscovering the lost female poets of the past.

Traversing this terrain on foot, I listen for the dense stories that I am yet to know. Wandering, what is it I am listening to when I listen along the river ways and alluvium of this place? My listening feels incomplete and the walking helps to let go of constructing
meaning, and instead listening for Gwerful there in these moments that exceed understanding. I move across theoretical terrains, reading and re-reading her words from differing perspectives. Remembering Patricia Palulis’ (2012) words that “literacies of place have their own lived/living cadencies” (p. 200).

I speak with villagers in Mechain, Llanfechain now, and no one has heard of Gwerful Mechain. The abashen I feel at their not knowing transforms into me joining them and their questioning me about who is this Gwerful Mechain? As Ted T. Aoki (1992) writes, “an act, an event, an opening is taking place” (p. 190): at this moment in the shimmering presence of her absence, “I stand – midst the silence – alone but not alone” (Aoki, 1996, p. 400). This experience swerves into another and I am back in the dance hall listening to Gwerful perform with a slight change in attitude. I sit apart from her as she speaks, and recognise her better as part of a long and enduring story whose telling is still evolving. It is as if we are there in silence together, behind the words and her performance. I realise there is no time limit to our journeying together, and am able to listen to what I hear of her own voice, a little more respectful now of her isuma or way as a person.

5.6 Queen Gwerful Quertful

At bwlch, I am reminded of Rosi Braidotti (2014) writing sensibility as central to the creative journey. How, a combination of the mapmaking cartographer coexists with the hyper sensitivity of the sensualist helps me to apprehend my imaginings of Gwerful Mechain in a way in which everything somehow becomes dominated by encountering an apple tree. I stop by this apple tree and encounter Gwerful Mechain. In this moment, “life rushes on towards the sensorial / perceptive apparatus with exceptional vigor and higher degrees of definition” (Braidotti, 2014, p. 171). I am enjoying the unusually deep pink-orange blossoms in Spring, a gentle dynamism to this place, a variation on the thrusting liveliness of her public persona as portrayed in books. These intensities propel me out of doubting this experience, they propel me out of the black-hole experienced when feeling unable to meet Gwerful Mechain and these colours are dispersed into a “myriad of bits and pieces of data imprinting or impressions” (p. 172). My encounter also connects with Deleuze (1987) writing as the folding in and out of perception. And while it confirms my singularity, I am also changed by the onrush.
Apple trees, I learn are dynamically in tune with the chaosmos, and as such are known by the character or letter Q in the Ogham alphabet ... signifying immortality and the Queen of Afallen herself.

Figure 5.1. Afallen (Joanne Price, 2018)

Queen Gwerful ancient apple Queen
  Q your Ogham letter
  as quert is for apple
  and afallen for Gwerful
  queen quertful gwerful queerful.

GWERFUL: Afallen.

ME: Yes, I encountered myself writing this poem in nomadic mode. I let go of linear time and wrote as if I was already gone. The key for me, is to allow these words to hold this
experience, to not be thrown by their fixedness, and rather to be “joyfully discontinuous” (Braidotti, 2014, p. 173). This way I am less likely to experience you Gwerful as Queen or not Queen. I am less likely to experience the paranoia of a dialectically driven consciousness and see the abundance of mushrooms growing near to the tree and by the stream. Double and triple headed mushrooms are a good source of zinc and appear like split figures but nonetheless make thinkable what was not before. Perhaps, they fill the gaps between Welsh and Triad, active and receptive, male and female, with fungal figurations? Helping me to move away from the sanctity of the past and experience “openings hinted at by the perfect present” (Braidotti, 2014, p. 174). They allow me to differ from you Gwerful Mechain, while remaining faithful to you: “or in other words, enduring” (p. 174).

There’s space to encounter my difference with Gwerful here. In order, as Heidegger writes, to allow “a fuller logos to emerge” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 56). Here, the place, with its memories and spirits enter into conversation as “that which regions” or an “inconspicuous guide” (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 131) and we may experience what Martin Heidegger calls, “Gelassenheit” or openness to the gift of places. Rather than walking in search of Gwerful, she approaches bwlch by way of our shared experiences of living here. Waiting by an apple tree, I am receptive to this place in a kind of being toward experiences of being in place. There’s a sense of easy responsibility toward preserving the otherness of this place and Gwerful Mechain.

As the Heideggerian sense of “Kehre” suggests, in letting go of needing to fully understand Gwerful Mechain, one may experience an unexpected turn toward thinking the unthought and openness to non-duality (Aoki 1991, p. 395). This unconditional form of relationality, explains Ted T. Aoki, calls upon us to take time out from being a subject that thinks an object, and instead lets “things appear” (p. 397). We move with a slowly evolving understanding so we can walk the humus of our work freely on our own while abiding in places and events in ways that let Gwerful, apple trees, mushrooms and streams back “into the texture of dialogue” (Aoki, 1991, p. 399).

Poet-philosophers such as Jacques Derrida (1998) bring this différence back into the texture of the worlds they create. Occasional creative couplet with Cixous, Derrida believes in the re-emergence of a subject after one has understood that they do not have to
disappear in relation to the other being. When someone comes to presence, he says, their experience in relation to another is reintroduced and there is space between them for différance to emerge. Trace is a part of this différance and rather than encountering Gwerful Mechain or bwIch’s absolute presence, there’s something else at play that refers beyond itself. There’s a deferral of meaning somehow and I feel less contained and more open to varied and contradictory and subjective relations among us. I dwell in this between place, this holding space for slippery words that no gold spear can make behave. Words move, letting what was thought to be on top of the order of things stop being at the top by believing itself to be underground. Here Derrida is teaching us about the endless chain of meaning, relentless deferrals, huge worlds of contradictions penetrating our grammatology. There is no effect when there’s no cause to seek, and our archi-worlds can never be fixed for long. And so, a shift in narrative happens from voiceless to voice, and I am reminded of Gwerful Mechain’s question to Dafydd …

GWERFUL: Dafydd, tell me when independence, Will Come, and the world once again advance?” (as translated by Gramich, 2018, p. 74).

How long must we wait for “receptivity that can heighten the capacity to act” asks Sara Ahmed (2010, p. 210)? How long must we wait for “the subject to differ from oneself while remaining faithful to oneself, or in other words, enduring” asks Rosi Braidotti (2014, p. 294)? How long must we wait for one’s own imaginary to propel and resist transformation, moving “the scene from one path to the other whose path is less obvious” asks Joan Retallack (2003, p. 92)?

Tell me how long we must wait
to my face in my language – in song
When will there be différance you
A voice to listen to?

5.7 Voices to listen to
Hen benillion, or the old verses of people’s poetry influenced Gwerful Mechain’s poems (Gramich, 2018). Their simple styles speak to evidence, that besides the fixed metre rule of the cynghanedd poetic tradition, there existed an eclectic tradition of multiple
poetic styles, song, proverbs, catchphrases and commentary, which were usually composed to be sung or spoken to a musical, often the harp, accompaniment. These were predominantly of anonymous authorship and passed between generations of mostly women. The humour and spirit of celebration that likely influenced Gwerful Mechain are also, in some ways, reminiscent of aspects of “l’écriture feminine” (Cixous, 1991; Gramich, 2018 p. 15): as she returns the Medusa to her original positive self in bold, fast, fun and uncensored ways.

By bringing the bodily rhythms and fluidities of hen benillion into conversation with cynghanedd’s hierarchy, meters, tropes, tone, and vocabulary, Gwerful may also have been regenerating what Julia Kristeva calls, “self and home” (1991). GWERFUL: Don’t be subtle. Perhaps, her words enfold “us all within common flesh” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 274), as she acts to re-story the “maternal chora” (Kristeva, 1991) and regenerate the deep well of life, these poetic spaces that resist logical representation, welcome paradox, and allow life to be both / and? Speaking fast to make life slow, perhaps Gwerful Mechain is calling on hen benillion to disarm the constraints of nation, the politics of place, and the rules of engagement that defend ourselves against the stranger? Perhaps, her poetry crosses all borders including territorial, bodily, conceptual, political, ethical, linguistic, legal, cultural, moral, spiritual, “vegetal, mineral, animal: knows itself to be dust, convolvulus, butter, air, body-fruit, recognises its arch-vegetal kinship” (Cixous, 1997, p. 165)?

GWERFUL MECHAIN: Just believe me what I say is what I say.
ME: Can life be as you say?
GWERFUL MECHAIN: White snow on a high peak. I really thought I’d never reach the village.

I hear Gwerful Mechain’s voice speaking and journey with abeyance in hope of more spacious relations with her. Being at bwlch, It is easier to let go of the strict meter rules of cynghanedd, the this and that of correct language, and splash into the overflowing waters in hopes of journeying to other places with Gwerful Mechain. Once, I dove deep to meet her I swam deep into an underground channel beneath, journeying downward into the centre of the earth where there was a red sofa and a pool of water so dark it took us out into the mountain side on a bleak winter’s day. Following the footsteps of a wolf and a bird, we
Deftly step from ledge to ledge, gripping bare hands into ice to reach the white snow on a high peak and reclaim this mountain. You’re right Gwerful Mechain, there were moments when I really thought I’d never reach the village and when I never really needed to. Released from the here and there’s, correct and incorrect rules of language, I travel with you to the ends of the earth and beyond.

GWERFUL MECHAIN: Well, I am Gwerful from the river bank.

Gwerful shifts about on the soft and spongy humus leaves beneath the apple tree, the broken branches and dark bark detritus husks in varying stages of decomposition and composition, and eases into the water again. Following her, the water takes us downstream and back into an underground stream beneath ... whooosh shhhooooohhh aaroooshhh. Leaving the channel my whole body is surrounded by moist soil which I breathe in and out ... moving through and around particles of minerals and rocks and organic matter ... slender as a worm ... I find myself ... emmulched ... for the longest time ... I am a worm immulched in the earth ... I am feeling the earth all around ... movements beyond me propel me forward ... i am thrown back into the stream flowing upstream following the salmon’s fast moving body gliding, jumping ripples ... making our way back to an apple tree (inspired by “Embedded”, Bickel, 2015).

Back at the courtyard, the night was in full flow.

GWERFUL MECHAIN: “Jubilant song soars from below, and the mead cups overflow” (Gwerful Mechain, as translated by Gramich, 2018, p. 27).
Chapter six: Take me as you find me – Encountering Amy Dillwyn

This narrative begins in the muddy waters of Digedi Brook in mid Wales, and moves to the muddy waters of a stream near Swansea where Amy Dillwyn lives ... before venturing on a boat into the open seas.

We were mud-larking. Playing in the mud, bringing bowls of water from the stream and making mud cakes, mud cups, cup-cakes. Like mad mud potters. Granny was sitting on a blanket reading while my sisters and I played in the mud by Digedi brook. I have a sense of the freedom Amy felt being nude in her mud, *imund*, our own mud. As a child she liked to mud-lark by a river near her home in Swansea, south Wales. In the novel ‘Jill’ (Dillwyn, 1885/2014), in one of her more subtle visual stories, she recalls playing naked in the mud with her brother Harry, and comments on the restraints her brother doesn’t have in life and the restraints she already experiences from a young age. Amy paints a beautiful parallel existence between her and her brother. She describes getting blissfully wet and muddy and acting the tomboy role which came so easily to her: “From infancy Amy was accustomed to climbing trees, wearing rough and ready clothes and boots, swimming at any opportunity and fishing from small boats in Swansea Bay. Her attitude then and later was always, “Take me as you find me” (from Amy Dillwyn’s unpublished diaries cited in Painting, 2013, p. 16).

AMY: Ahh ha ha (laughing).

Like feral children, they remind me of a passage in Hélène Cixous and Mirielle Calle-Gruber’s book “*rootprints: Memory and life writing*” (1997) in which she describes her relationship with Pierre, her brother:

All the time I lived my life with the life of a small boy, I lived with the possibilities. I had a female possibility (that was me) and a masculine possibility with all its episodes. We were united and disunited. We fought, together. In private, we said everything to each other (I think). I went through the stages of development of a
lucky boy. It was fortunate. The brother is very strongly in me. He appears in my
texts. We made childhood. We were explorers (1997, p. 202).

Although I didn’t have a brother, I often felt like a brother to my sisters, the more active,
splashing about and self-sufficient. And yet, if I was to take the ecological crisis that we are
in more seriously, I would have to question some of the old stories I tell myself. I might
heed Mary Aswell Doll’s (2003) advice and do more listening and “sloshing in the mud”
(Gough, Appelbaum, Aswell-Doll, & Sellers, 2003, p. 47). As she says,

instead of talk of imperatives, with that imperious-sounding intention of classical
urgency, I might go in another direction. The alchemists had a saying for how one
depens imagination about lofty, leafy matters. Opus contra naturam was the
expression they used to mean going in a direction contrary to growth. The gold of
material substance is wrought, they wrote, out of their personal dross. Imagine! ...
They saw what matters most was not knowledges out there but matter in here, the
material of the imagination. It occurred to them that the ‘gold’ of transformation is
really found within, and that changing inner patterns would have precious outer
effects. The growth model with its hefty upward bound toward health, happiness,
and development needs revisiting, redirecting, bending, turning back, turning
around, queering. Just there, in the dirt, lies another system, hidden perhaps but not
Not there (p. 47).

She refers to this journey as “the greening of the imagination” (Gough, Appelbaum, Aswell-
Doll, & Sellers, 2003, p. 47), and contrary to the “dreadful” and “deadly” “seriousness” of
“dominant paradigms” and “power/knowledge relationships” (p. 49). Amy was a part of
this movement, and like Oscar Wilde she writes against the fashionable approaches to
literature and art that sought to replicate Nature. And yet, I wonder whether this seemingly
contrary movement was just a way of living that actually followed their naturally queer differences? Wilde was considered dangerous, because as Noel Gough (2003) explains “a deep moral seriousness informed his camp posturing: he was serious about refusing to take himself seriously ... As Wilde (said), ‘We should treat all trivial things very seriously, and the serious things of life with sincere and studied triviality’” (Gough et al, 2003, p. 47). And so, as we journey with abeyance in hopes of encountering Amy Dillwyn (1845-1935), I want to say let’s not get stuck the headline statements about her life and truly welcome Amy. Commonly, the story of her life has been presented in two parts: the first half of her life as an invalid novelist occupying the settee, and the second part, a highly successful industrialist – from limpet on the settee to the world’s first woman industrialist no less (Painting, 2013). What are the continuities in her life and the other ways she cares for life? How does she respond to turbulent times, and find a way of living that not only works with the conventional norms of her time but makes space for difference. With Nietzsche (1887) and Foucault (1991), I am open to connecting with a continual line of descent, and with Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987), imagine “divergent and marginal elements” emerging (p. 77-86).

Going back to where we were ... by removing her clothes and playing wildly in the mud, suggests Mandy Lane (2017), Amy removed her gender and was more able to be herself. Perhaps this was her way of removing rules on how a girl from a wealthy Victorian family was meant to behave?

AMY DILLWYN: Perhaps? (Laughing)

Although Amy’s parents were encouraging of free expression, she was aware of the less welcoming gender and class restrictive life outside of their home. Amy’s father, for example, taught her to “kick up dust” and on entering the house to flick her outside shoes across the room (Painting, 2013, p. 33). Ever encouraging Amy’s spirit of adventure, he would say, “Smoke where you like, but don’t go into men’s smoke rooms or your ears may be offended” (from Amy Dillwyn’s unpublished diaries cited in Painting, 2013, p. 76). And, she never did, not being one for crossing the boundaries “between enjoyment and impropriety” (p. 76).
AMY DILLWYN: I did actually. From time to time I do venture into men’s smoke rooms and kick up dust. There’s no harm in it and there’s material enough for writing questions of class and power, even when my ears may get offended.

In an article entitled, “Rebellious Children of Wales: Amy Dillwyn and the sons and daughters of Rebecca”, Rita Singer (2013) describes a character in one of your books as wanting to replace the “incomprehensible, dispassionate language of power, i.e. English for another, more easily accessible and beautiful one, namely Welsh” (p. 6). By favouring the language of the ‘Self’ as a uniting act of translation instead of the language of the other (p. 6), perhaps your own inspiration for writing derives from that which Hélène Cixous describes as most true, poetic ... naked life:

I can only attain this mode of seeing with the aid of poetic writing. I apply myself to ‘seeing’ the world nude, that is, to almost e-nu-merating the world, with the naked, obstinate, defenseless eye of my nearsightedness. And while looking very very closely, I copy. The world written nude is poetic. (Cixous, 1997, p. 3).

AMY DILLWYN: Would you like to go for a sail? I have a small boat moored at Mumbles Bay and we could take it out in the ocean.

Thanks Amy, I’d love to.

6.1 What I do, I do openly
We leave her home, Tŷ Glyn in the seaside village of Mumbles, south east Swansea. And as we walk along the front with views over the bay, I notice “Dillwyn Close” and share with Amy that I used to run near here for Swansea Harriers Athletic Club. For years, I travelled across the Brecon Beacon Mountains every week to train in long distance running, and I remember streets with the name Dillwyn in and “Dilly’s Café” and I think I do recall something about a woman who smoked a large cigar in public. And then, in Vancouver I read an article, ‘Orality and Morality: Early Welsh Women’s Poetry’ by Katie Gramich, and I was drawn to your being strong in her your identity and secure in your own thoughts.

AMY DILLWYN: Well, if there’s no harm in it! (Laughing)
Amy reaches into her pocket, pulls out a cigar and lights up.

AMY DILLWYN: “I like to smoke. I find it puts me in a cheerful humour. Let others do as they like. It suits me and it may not suit them. What I do, I do openly: I certainly would not consent to doing it in secret” (from Amy Dillwyn’s unpublished diaries cited in Painting, 2013, p. 77). Would you like a cigar?

ME: No thanks. I like inhaling limonene best.

AMY DILLWYN: Limonene

ME: It’s a camphor compound given off by the trees, and it has a slightly narcotic reaction that helps me relax.

AMY DILLWYN: Kick up dust!

*Figure 6.1. Kick up dust (Joanne Price, 2018)*
ME: I was reading the book about your life by David Painting (2013) when he describes the press naming you as a, “literary business woman who delights in the weed” (S4C, 2015) as more than quaint eccentricity, despite the lasting but superficial reputation it gave you (Painting, 2013, p.77). It was an outward manifestation of your uniqueness he said, your desire to be yourself no matter what other people might say or think (p. 77).

AMY DILLWYN: There’s nothing wrong with it.

Like early versions of the Ogham tree alphabet with its visible consonants and invisible vowels, the limonene from trees activates whatever life is there in abeyance and sings to us of the capacity for abundance. If they had to be written down, the vowels move us to notice what’s already there and not not there. They create openings for something else that comes through all of the dross about rights and wrongs, this and that and speaks to our hearts through our own speech, care, breath, spirit, and holy smokes ... even the air we breathe. As, David Abram (2011) says these ineffable vowels “bind themselves back into the encompassing awareness from which our bodies steadily breathe” (p. 32).

GWERFUL MECHAIN: Oooo .... eeeee ... ooooo ...

AMY DILLWYN: Gwerful! What are you doing here?

_Gwerful was standing on top of the sea wall, arms stretched out and singing._

GWERFUL MECHAIN: I am Gwerful from the river bank, the ferry where money's happy. I uphold the ferry tradition.

AMY DILLWYN: Unloop the rope someone. We’re here, get in the boat.

6.2 If you should ever find yourself at Swansea

Amy took time to boat, fish, and swim throughout her life. When she needed to rest from writing or strenuous activities she would walk to her boat and go out to sea often in the company of her nephews and nieces. As her biographer David Painting (2013) writes: “It was tremendous fun for people half her age to visit this exuberant woman who eagerly joined in their make believe and left them all behind in her youthful vitality for whatever
caught her imagination” (p. 80). Storytelling stayed close to Amy’s heart (p. 77) and she would often indulge her companions in story.

It didn’t take us long to get on board and join Amy in story. As we huddle together on benches and Amy took to the helm, she shared with us the closing lines of a character known as Evan in her novel, “The Rebecca Rioter” (2004):

And now the story of the life of my old self is ended, and I trust you tell it ... for me if you have the opportunity. And if ever you should find yourself at Swansea, and if you go to the top of one of the hills to the west of the town, and see the view from there – looking across the bright blue sea to Devonshire in one direction, and seeing as you turn around Lundy Island, and Cefn Bryn, and the distant mountains of Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Breconshire, and the Swansea valley and the coast beyond Neath, and across to the Dunraven cliffs – then perhaps you will be able to understand why I have so pined and longed for my own home ever since I have been here (Australia) ... for I have never seen any other place that has seemed so beautiful (Dillwyn, 1880/2004, p. 177-178).

As we look toward the shore, Gwerful points out the chimneys of Llansamlet Zinc Works on the horizon.

GWERFUL MECHAIN: Such a story gift would be fine.

AMY DILLWYN: I wrote novels and short stories long before I took to managing the zinc works in 1882, after my father’s death and bankruptcy. These stories explored many themes, among them my conflicted sense of belonging to a class of landowners and politicians and a wealthy lesbian minority ethnic group. I storied the tensions between the gentry who are increasingly Anglicised and the remainder of the population who are poor, Nonconformist Christian, and Welsh-speaking (Singer, 2013, p. 2). I wore these themes on my sleeve until I myself died age ninety in a small house, where we were this morning, in Mumbles, Swansea and a world away from Hendrefoilan mansion house where I was born. I explored via story the socio-political challenges in my life in this place and to do with
wedding dresses and funeral attire, melancholia, and the day I lost everything, down to my tea-cosy.

6.2.1 The wedding dress
AMY DILLWYN: Although I did not want to marry, as my siblings and friends tied the knot, the wedding dress was said to be a source of pain for me. In my usually colourful diary entries, I’d mark wedding days as “the invasion” and “I should like it if this week were over” (Painting, 2013, p. 58). Even, the mainstream press commented that I would be “consumed with jealousy” at the news of another wedding (p. 58).

GWERFUL MECHAIN: Jealousy is the strangest attitude. It’s no good thinking everyone’s lewd.

AMY DILLWYN: I thought of myself as “a fool” I wrote in a diary, “to care as I do for Olive Talbot. My own belief is that I am half a man and the male half of me fell in love with her years ago and I can’t fall out of it again. I care for her romantically, passionately, and foolishly, and try as I may I cannot get over it. I wish I could, for its more pain than pleasure” (S4C, 2015). At my sister Esse’s wedding, the pain I felt though was less to do with my “different fate”, and more with having to wear a white silk dress trimmed with cerise, a headdress of azaleas and a tulle veil (Painting, 2013, p. 58).

ME: I’m reminded of Mandy Lane’s exploration of this in her artistic renderings of Amy’s relationship with marriage and divorce from societal restraints (2017). Laying a white wedding dress on mud, she walks it into the earth with bare feet, then pours molten metal over it to create an art piece, ‘The Iron On The Dress’. Accompanied by Amy’s words:

Take me as you find me; if there’s no harm in it then there is nothing wrong with it.
And I am not ashamed of being myself (from Amy Dillwyn’s unpublished diaries cited in Painting, 2013, p. 16).

6.2.2 Mourning Reform Society
AMY DILLWYN: Funerals were a different matter to weddings. When my father passed I wanted a private ceremony instead of a full-scale public event and ostentatious show of
But I abeyed to the pressure, and expressed my resistance by attending in a heliotrope skirt, a yellow rose at my waist, a fawn-coloured bodice, black jacket, and hat trimmed with bunches of flowers. In response to the raised eyebrows, I would gravely reply that I belonged to the Mourning Reform Society and was protesting against the cult of death which I argue working-class families cannot afford.

HYWEL DDA: But isn’t it cheaper to wear black?

AMY DILLWYN: Flowers don’t cost a penny Hywel. And anyway, I am concerned with the sweated labour of women working long hours in abysmal conditions to make the proper funeral attire.

GWERFUL MECHAIN: And for me, I am quite, quite foolish.

AMY DILLWYN: I admit, I have been terribly impacted by the deaths of loved ones. And yet, when my fiancé Llewelyn passed just before our marriage, I felt liberated from the fear and restrictions I had had before. No longer having to conform to clear boundaries expected of me, I was more able to be myself (Lane, 2017). In my novel, ‘Jill’, I describe a simple burial in which the corpse is wrapped in a sheet.

HYWEL DDA: I imagine you feel exhausted, having to play these roles, so long as you keep differentiating. Initially, Amy I was drawn to your resilience and bloody mindedness, faced with the tasks before you and your working equally with men and making a success.

AMY DILLWYN: Yes …

HYWEL DDA: Go on Amy!

*Hywel was smoking one of Amy’s cigars, and lingering on the edges of her words as she tried to speak.*

GWERFUL MECHAIN: Pass that to me Hywel.
Gwerful grabs the cigar, takes a deep toke and head back, opens her mouth and slowly releases a chain of smoke rings ... blowing circles around any temptation anyone had to make sense of Amy, reduce her to an identity, or become one with her.

HYWEL DDA: It can be dangerous, representing a person according to a certain set of principles. Let's connect with our multiple belongings, to a boat in our memories where shape-shifting is at the heart of creative life.

Utterly unperturbed, Amy clears her throat and launches into a story ...

AMY DILWYN: about a time in “Decadent Daughters”, a short story written by Olive Schreiner in which a Buddhist priest’s wife and a male friend smoked continuously while chatting about a woman’s departure ...

By the time she had finished, everybody had fallen asleep. Amy turns off the engine, puts her feet up and looking to shore, lets the boat ...

DYLAN THOMAS: She lets the boat bob on "the sloeback, slow, black, crowblack, fishingboat bobbing sea" (Thomas, 1954, p. 1). "Come now, drift up the dark, come up the drifting sea-dark street now in the dark night seesawing like the sea ...” (p. 98).

AMY DILWYN: Oh Dylan, where did you get to? Look here, have a limpit biscuit because it’s good for you.

DYLAN THOMAS: “The houses are blind as moles (though moles see fine to-night in the snouting, velvet dingles) or blind as Captain Cat there in the muffled middle by the pump and the town clock, the shops in mourning, the Welfare Hall in widows’ weeds. And all the people of the lulled and dumbfound town are sleeping now”. Look behind the eyes of the sleepers Amy, there’s "rainbows and tunes and wishes and flight and fall and despairs and the big seas of their dreams" (Thomas, 1954, p. 1).
GWERFUL MECHAIN: I’ll tell you no lies. The only sea I saw is the seesaw sea and you riding in our boat.

DYLAN THOMAS: “You can hear the dew falling there, and the hushed town breathing. Only your eyes are unclosed to see the black and folded town fast, and slow, asleep. And you alone can hear the invisible starfall, the darkest-before dawn minutely dewgrazed stir of the black, dab-filled sea .”

HYWEL DDA: Dylan Thomas! I can hear you in my dreams. We’re not sleeping mind.

And with that, they all of them, including Dylan but not including Amy drift into a deeper sleep.

6.3 Molluscs: a power worth affirming

There were times in Amy’s writing life when she found her health deteriorating and she hardly ever left her home. Describing herself as, “stuck to the sofa like a limpet on a rock” and “without the means of applying her intelligence to some useful purpose” (Painting, 2013, p. 60), she endeavored to write novels and put her reading and dreaming to good use. And yet, rather than it being a sign of despair this energy has inspired poetry, stories, and song. For Georgio Agamben (1993 & 2005), Judith Butler (1999) and Walter Benjamin (1969) melancholia can render the impossible possible through absence and usher imagination into the realms of “abeyance” as “a kind of social mediation” (Bohm, 1996, p. 111). Agamben (1993) celebrates melancholia as an impotent power worth affirming: “A necessary interruption in the continuity of life ... a mortal illness containing in itself the possibility of its own cure ... and the greatest disgrace is never to have had it” (Stanzas, 7). Amy’s submission that she may as well be a literary limpet conforms to this belief that without a touch of melancholia, genuine thought and creativity is impossible.

Amy’s years of occupying the sofa in many ways speak to Georgio Agamben’s concept of the “State of Exception” (2005). In a book of this title, he takes us to a vigorous zone, a place assumed to be empty of life but is in fact a place of profound imbalance between the law and politics. This place of vitality resonates with abeyance. Rather than
being considered a latent or empty zone, like the ocean between continents, it is actually full of a life and vitality and calls into question basic tenets of Western philosophy that would have us believe in the nullity of places that are inconveniently complex. By showing the ridiculousness and tragedy of working class peoples paying beyond their means for events, Amy gets us to face the mystery of the law. Events as public spectacles, like Eichmann’s trial in Agamben’s book (2005), provide opportunities to take a position with respect to the very nature of what is occurring. They ask us to remember what and who events are for, and to contemplate the role of tradition in relation to justice.

AMY DILLWYN: By wearing a hat trimmed with bunches of flowers or smoking a cigar in public, in some ways I imagine I take us to the limit or threshold of tradition: to a place between law and politics and from here I ask ethical questions. Because by now I embody someone who has had to both embrace and criticise opposing tensions, and more.

*While Dylan, Hywel, Gwerful, and Phyllis continue to sleep the boat continues to bob on open waters. You can still see the shore from here, distantly, as dusk begins to fall. I move to the bow of the boat and opposite from Amy, lean over the edge and look into the ocean to think.*

ME: The molluscs have come with us, Amy! There are hundreds here on the side of your boat.

AMY DILLWYN: Ha haaha (laughing)

The State of Exception that Amy enacted, as a limpet on the settee were to create poetic moments in her life that would sustain her in the future. Rather, than buying the story that she was unhappily inactive before transforming into a social activist, Georgio Agamben’s (1993 & 2005) work helps me to abide with Amy at these molluskual moments in her life and to recognise the fruitful dark therein. Shoshana Felman (1991) writes with the poetry of Paul Célan to share how in these moments of so-called inactive disconnection. When knowledge and purpose feels suspended, she says, there:
remained, in the midst of the losses, this one thing: language ... but it had to pass through its own answerlessness, pass through a frightening falling mute, pass through the thousand darknesses of death-bringing speech. It passed through and yielded no words for what was happening – but it went through ... and could come into the light of day again, ‘enriched’ by all that (Celan, 2001, p. 100).

Coming into the light of day through practices of reading, writing, resting, boating, and conversing on the settee alludes to suspending disbelief in social justice happening everywhere where we can reconcile with missing language. This includes reconciliation with abeyance itself, as a word who keeps deferring its meaning, is impossible to fully define and cannot be reified. Abeyance is a ‘State of Exception’ in many ways, and abiding with the words and languages, sounds and tastes of the worlds it creates, and their meanings, need not be dismissed. Rather, it is precisely the ineffability of a word like abeyance that may allow Amy to draw continuously forward, recognising and releasing different ways of opening into the world without fully controlling events. Instead, the way our boat rolls with the ocean and the naturalness with which Amy lights another cigar may testify “only to the unbelievable. To what can at any rate, only be believed, to what appeals only to belief and hence to the given word, since it lies beyond limits of proof, indication, certified acknowledgement (i.e. constat) and knowledge” (Derrida, 1999, p. 20). Her actions lie at the limit or threshold of the law and in so doing, ask us to reconsider or contemplate questions of her exceptional morality with urgency.

As Hannah Arendt, in her introduction to Walter Benjamin’s *Illuminations* (1969) writes of the gap at the threshold between past and present, it is our responsibility to engage in meaningful action in our lives. Whether this be from the settee or the workplace, she trusts that “some things suffer a sea change and survive in new crystalized forms and shapes that remain immune to the elements, as though they waited only for the pearl diver who one day will come down to them and bring them up into the world of the living – as ‘thought fragments’, as something ‘rich and strange’, and perhaps even *Urphanomene*” (p. 7).
Time passes and with dusk approaching, the radiant red of the setting sun comes up and shimmers out over the rolling sea. Come now, let us celebrate Amy’s true limpet days, their muscular cushions supporting her radula tongue. Let us welcome her uncontainable passion for language and association that showed itself in the tens of thousands of important themes, full of springs, letters, words and the spaces among them. This was her “libidinal” education as Clarice Lispector (1989) might say (p. 121), her limpital education with the hours she whiled away, writing overflowing text that was nevertheless unafraid of being identified and represented. With words like “Riot” that knew its limit before the sentence began. Words that transition to being completed by a feminine and sleep for a thousand years on settees softly couched in only womanly butchnesses. Living sofas that cannot retain nor hold back the comicals of the conical moment as it devours algae from the surrounding rocks for even more nourishment. As we well know, limpet’s circulatory system is based not in a one chambered heart, nor a two, but an intertidal triangulation of three strong and muscular chambers. Giving life to its cerebral nervous system that in turn lets its sticking out tentacles know exactly where the Medusa is coming from, and yet having just defied the rule of an overflowing law, lets you sit wherever you want on the sofa, in the middle and at either end, curled up, draped over its back and arms. After three, especially this morning and well into the night there will be no rules on where you must rest, just a good number of internal boundaries relating only with the eternal separation of moments that this night ushers. Teach me to take time Amy, when it comes, for infinite solitude among others where you can feel your own creative spirit and gift it more. Help us to ease the encounter with strange vasculaaars in ways that lets us make decisions and resume life back in the place one should be: as both passive and active, self and other, real and imagined and more. Knowing: once and for all there is something else and the most logical way of getting up to date information is to simply speak with these inner figures deep in your psyche ...

I look around and hear nothing. Even Amy is sleeping now and there is nothing more to write with. Where are you co-journeyers? I am old and cannot see well ...
### 6.4 Take us to the very edge

Contrary to what I had expected, with the welcoming back of my co-journeyers, the open seas were becoming choppy. We had lost sight of land and being surrounded by rolling waves, I wondered where are we going?

**AMY DILLWYN**: True, in my writing days, I did struggle with not having a clear sense of purpose (*Painting*, 2013, p. 41).

Or, as Claire Robson (2011) describes: “an urgent need to discover new purpose, or perhaps rediscover an ancient one” (p. 26). Amy is said to have had a keen sense of responsibility and a work ethic infused with her Quaker background, although she was not a practicing Christian. Though, not once did she propose excessive self-scrutiny as her effort was both a personal and communal commitment. As she, together with the characters she writes, releases the law from a place of necessity while also writing with each of their limits. One of the literary devices she uses to connect readers to the realities of the socio-political situation was to have her characters speaking a colloquial Welsh, with its apparent ignorance and self-deprecation giving voice to her own caddish heritage.

**AMY DILLWYN**: I don’t suffer fools.

I’m reminded of another root word of abeyance, badinage, meaning to fool around or suspend disbelief. Perhaps, Amy’s writings, deliberately provoke a seeming sense of incompetence as a way of creating the conditions for social change? Jacques Ranciere’s (2010) concept of ‘The Ignorant Schoolmaster’ resonates with what I experience as the “enforced stultification” (p. 7) of many of Amy’s characters, and how their words somehow break the circle of powerlessness for the “circle of emancipation” (p. 16) and the act of affirming and awakening the equal intelligence of all people.

**AMY DILLWYN**: I write with the voices that come to me, bringing about change in their own words and without worrying what others think of us.

**ME**: I’m inspired by the way the voices of many of your characters transcend their inadequacy by staying with it. When I slow into your novels, I welcome the ugliness of stupefying impotentiality and trust in the flow of this world a bit more. Coming from a working class background and from Wales in a way, this badinage sensibility may well create openings to place in question the stories we live by, without worrying excessively about other’s opinions and asking for help.
Take me to the edge
where something else lives
take us to the place where
something else lives.

As darkness inches up, Amy puts the boat in a lower gear, turns on the lights, and as we navigate the distant seas, the skies darken and thunder is heard. The waves are becoming bigger and our boat is disappearing into black-hole like troughs as they propel us onto the ridges of waves before descending again. The engine is roaring now, a glass wing mirror smashes into the boat and all of the people are waking.

AMY DILLWYN: Hold on. Take care of one another.

GWERFUL MECHAIN: These crests are like white snow on high peaks.

“The wind and rain increased, and before long we were surrounded by thick driving rain, which made it impossible to see objects at a couple of hundred yards off. Matters began to get serious, and (the group) held hasty consultations together and seemed to have very little idea of where abouts we were. They changed our course several times in a very undecided manner. At last, as the darkness of night came on in addition to the darkness of the storm, and as the weather seemed to be getting continually worse, (Amy) told us that (she) really had no idea where we were” (Amy Dillwyn, 1880/2004, p. 142)

6.4.1 Opportunity taken

With no one speaking, I remember that time in 1892 when Amy was given the opportunity to respond publically to circumstances described by the press as “catastrophic” (Painting, 2013, p. 81). During the days after her father’s death, she and everyone else learned that their family zinc business was in debt by the equivalent of twenty million dollars today.

The noise and rush of the water and the creaking of the planks made speaking a difficult matter. We were so tossed about that we could not stand alone, but had to
cling tightly to the rail lest we should be washed overboard by the great waves

(Dillwyn, 1880/2004, p. 142).

Amy’s Liberal MP father, Lewis Llewelyn Dillwyn, had let Llansamlet Spelter Works go. Rather than succumbing to the stigma associated with this failure, Amy faced the losses and systematically went about selling the family home and possessions and moving into lodgings on the edge of Swansea in an effort to save three hundred jobs. It was a lonely task, but for the first time in a long time, she said to have had more of a purpose:

AMY DILLWYN: “I am taking to the Spelter Works and trying to learn the management. Altogether I am becoming a man of business and go into Swansea and back by train most days” (from Amy Dillwyn’s unpublished diaries cited in Gramich, 2001, p. x).

She was determined not to take profits for herself, and after a decade all debtors had been paid, the business was hers, workers were paid a decent wage, their working hours reduced and benefits added, and Amy became the owner of her own home. In her diaries, she wrote about walking into Swansea when she could to reduce personal expenses.

AMY DILLWYN: “I rejoice in being able to walk well now – no one who has not been laid up for years as I was can fully understand the joy of being able to lead an active life again” (from Amy Dillwyn’s unpublished diaries cited in Painting, 2013, p. 74).

6.5 Transformative Social Action

Amy joined and took part in campaigns for women’s right to vote, and as president of the Swansea Branch of the Suffrage Society, she was primarily concerned about the rights of poorer women.

6.5.1 Striking seamstresses

In 1911, Amy played an active role in a strike by twenty-five women dress-makers working at Ben Evans’ emporium in the centre of Swansea (Painting, 2013, p. 103). Calling for better pay and conditions and a boycott of the store, she said women have no more than public empathy to support them. She never wavered in her fight for women’s emancipation and although Amy supported the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies, she did not
ally herself with Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters because of the violent methods they used to win the vote (p. 86).

HYWEL DDA: This reminds me of Mahatma Ghandi’s hunger strike, an expression of abeyance-in-action. Ghandi’s ‘fast unto death’ against British support of the new India constitution also, in differing ways, resisted further class or caste division and an enactment of satyagrahaan or “insistence upon truth” (Ghandi).

Perhaps, there are other ways in which feminist resistance can take the form of being toward the least action? Acts, such as poetry or a refusal to work, could be considered protest “against the act of exploitative labor” (Lewis, 2011, p. 11), while also reducing stress and conserving potentiality? Tyson E. Lewis rethinks this with Georgio Agamben saying that, “What is put at risk in learning is a sacrifice to our (im)potential” (Lewis, 2011, p. 1). Arguing for a different conceptualisation of freedom in education, he makes room for “the nothingness from which creation derives” (Lewis, 2011, p. 7). Far from the situation at sea, my mind:

```
goes back into our own mud
into the earth
mind full of quotes
quote nestled in quote
i can quote quotes of quotes “quote”
quote
upon
quote
“quote”

“and i remember them all” quote
let me lay my head in the mud
no quote
quotes go
thoughts slow
and a space begins to open
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6.5.2 Well – no – not to be quite certain sure

For a moment I was lost in remembering Amy saying:

AMY DILLWYN: I took my new role in life seriously. Although I have a sense of humour, I do not entertain popularity nor social flattery (Painting, 2013, p. 90).

In her diaries she criticises humbugs and often bursts into indignance at politicians who “breakfast on smoke mackerel fried in gin, caviar on toast, and a bottle of claret” (p. 28).

GWERFUL MECHAIN: Smoked mackerel fried in gin. I do feel peckish.
HYWEL DDA: Feed us more quotes ...

Thus it came to pass that when I had collected my senses a little, I tried to shout out loud all I had read before. As Amy continued to steer the boat, the stormy seas and wind drowned my voice and I realised I would have to wait for daylight before I should have any chance of knowing whether they had heard me (inspired by Dillwyn, 1880/2004, p. 143). And so, in 1905, Amy did what few other industrialists did, and she went on an exploratory trip to Algeria, riding a mule across the snow-clad Atlas Mountains and going down the mines to inspect the seams of ore for herself (Painting, 2013, p. 83). Amy’s “true open seriousness” as Mikhael Bakhtin writes in ‘Rebelais and His World’, was: “always ready to submit to death and renewal” (1968, p. 121). As, “true open seriousness fears neither parody, nor irony, nor any other form of reduced laughter, for it is aware of being part of an uncompleted whole” (p. 121-122). Uncompleted: in the sense that, while she had no time for dissolute fools, Amy showed enormous badinage and compassion toward the black sheep in the family. In her novel, ‘The Rebecca Rioter: A Story of Killay Life’ Amy tells the first person fictionalized account of a young man, Evan Williams, a Welsh speaking labourer who was arrested and transported to Tasmania. Through the sub-altern voice (Spivak, 1988) of Evan, a cad and rapscallion by common standards, she sets out to expose the hypocrisy and self-regard of the educated class. And yet, while conforming to a wild Wales narrative, Evan is never able to say what he wants to say. Even, on his death bed, he relies on his author (the anonymous E.A. Dillwyn) with the help of a doctor to speak of his longing for home or hireath and without the illusion of the protection of his community. Like an enchantress blowing away old illusion, Amy’s novel is at root a cautionary one as she stories how easily one form of violence transforms into another.
And yet, using humour in affirmative ways, Amy with Evan is able to question the apparent truths of their society and invite readers to join us in this. In so doing, Evan keeps the spirit of old Cwmru or Gwerin alive by providing different images to over-taxed working classes not having the inclination to question or play. He also creates space to contemplate who the character of Rebecca was. With sayings like, “well – no – not to be quite certain sure”, Evan prises open taken for granted assumptions and confronts the violence that has been imposed on women’s lives. It was common knowledge, for example, that the rioters called allegiance to Rebecca as the Queen. And although Rebecca was described in the press and history books as biblical, quoting Genesis 24:60 – “And they blessed Rebekah and said unto her, Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them” – the movement did have comic and irreverent tendencies.

She could just have likely been ‘Big Becca’ or ‘Great Rebecca from Llangolman who lent her dress to Thomas Rees, the first man to play Rebecca (Jones, 2015, p, 5). In questioning Rebecca, Evan questions the rioter’s actions of taking the law into their own hands to rid themselves of tolls, poor rates, and tithes.

AMY DILLWYN: In keeping with making light of serious business, Evan is ever the fool and doesn’t pretend to be a “real hero” (Gramich, 2001, p. xiv), just a “protagonist with a complexity which bellies his surface naivety” (p. xxi). His honest admission that he stopped runaway horses en route to a tollgate not as an act of bravery, but because a woman in the crowd had taken his fancy is witness to this. Writing through Evan’s endearing foibles, I draw attention to the inherent flaws of classist society. Writing as a woman in the role of a man in the role of a woman allows me to give voice to a silenced Rebecca: a woman who like Evan and me finds it hard to express how violence begets violence. Our hybrid protests are meant to give inspiration, as our words open this fraught situation to further ambiguity. For, Evan was arrested and deported to Tasmania, Australia for accidentally killing an educated man during the riots and his asking on his death bed, “Was the fault wholly mine?” (Dillwyn, 1880/2004, p. 173) was an active call to Rebecca.
6.6 Cross-dressing rioters

The Rebecca Riots have been described as the “freeing of the tollgates”, a respectful campaign against injustice and carried out in the spirit of “frolic and good humoured insubordination” (Jones, 2015, p. 3). During these riots, cross-dressing farmers and others protested against tollgates which were placed across droving roads by the British government between 1839 and 1841. Leaderless protests by Merched Rebecca or Rebecca’s Daughter’s caused the destruction of many tollgates in mid and west Wales with few Rebbeccaite being arrested due to their disguise. While the rioters were mostly men, women also participated and both women and men dressed up in dresses and false-beards, swearing obscenities as they charged the gates and their obscene charges. They adorned the clothes of the elderly and especially elderly matriarchs, as the antithesis of young men. The Rebbeccaite dress contained a mixture of masculine and feminine signifiers and used the transgression of the gender binary to challenge economic disparity between classes. Likewise, Amy Dillwyn suggests the men were tapping into pre-Christian notions of Rebecca as the motherland. In so doing, she manages to unite women and men across class differences and emphasise a communal understanding of Rebecca as working for social change according to multiple allegiances.

The storm subsides as the early hours begin to dawn.

HYWEL DDA: Did you know cross-dressing is an established part of traditional Welsh justice and written into Cyfraith law in the ninth century. This is a part of ceremony rather than something that occurs in everyday life, a great community leveler.

The rolling waves had given way to calmer seas now, and in the not so distance the ocean was scattered with yellow.

GWERFUL MECHAIN: What is this yellow?

AMY DILLWYN: There are people in the water I do think.

As the boat drew nearer to the yellows, there were hundreds of people wearing lifejackets bobbing in the calmer seas.

DYLAN THOMAS: Who are you out there? I am old and cannot see well ...
Children and adults grabbed at the sides of the boat and our arms as we helped them get out of the sea. And then, with everybody in the boat, I am astonished to learn that they had survived being shipwrecked at sea. Forced to leave Swansea yesterday afternoon after life had become unsustainable there, many people found themselves arrested and taken to the ship for deportation. And with their applications for seeking asylum declined, the shipwreck had come as a mixed blessing. With all of us, having survived the extremity of the storm, Amy steered our boat closer to shore, slowing and turning several hundred metres out to sea to travel in parallel with the coast while we look for a place to safely moor.

Time passes with chatter and more silences as the caviar is shared and blankets given round. Amy shares that she owns some land on the West Wales coast and she does think we may be close. We hoist up the sail to slow the boat further, and sitting in a corner wrapped in blankets with tens of others, I watch as the sail unfolds to reveal a sheet of swirling letters and quotations marks that rise up from the sail and spelling out a-b-e-y-a-n-c-e-drifts up and up into the star-studded skies. Like a northern light, abeyance looks to have found a new home, reflecting and extending the light in all others (Irwin, 2008, p. xv). And for a moment, someone whispers,

I saw the world that held the answer to the questions of my being was gold-red, a globe of light present here and tomorrow, red day descend(ing) from green night

(Cixous, 1979, p. 16).

With my focus on abeyance, I had noticed that a ‘left quotation mark had fallen back into the boat ... until it stood up, shook off any excess, and announced its survival with a wondrous acrobatic flip. Productive and generative and determined not to be afraid, it does it again, only this time in a more dramatic display of thinking flight. ‘Listen’ it is saying: Can you feel the air moving as I loop up and arch back around for the letter a? A word of one letter alone, a sentence enough. An aaaaabstract sentence waiting to be born, wants to get there, triggers a wait for something that may already have set the tone for what is to come. ‘A’ has hundreds of middles, each taking off without end and making it impossible to read as insufficient. And now, there comes the sudden whoosh of b, effortless e, spiraling y with
a rest in its curl, another a arching back around, the curve of an circling c, and another e.
And then: the “left quotation mark takes a bow and as it’s curls drop down they make the shape of a hat that hovers above the room and slowly moves toward the food. The hat lowers to the plate of mackerel and is motionless for the longest while, except for a few twitches and a tilt. And, another few twitches and a bit of a bigger tilt. Eventually, the tilts increase and the pointed snout and lolloping ears of a hare emerges the size of an angry mouse. It scampers from the mackerel to the caviar, running in circles, darting in and out of sight only to pause, rise up onto its back legs, balance its chin on the edge of a platter of carrots, and sneeze. This somehow gives it the momentum it needs to flip itself head-first into the carrots and begin munching with delight. When nothing is left, hare sighs and lets its legs give way to the remnants of olive oil coating the bowl, rubs its stomach, and rolls onto its back.

HYWEL DDA: Welcome back to Britain everybody!

ME: Sssshhh.

_I lean toward hare and am astonished to see it is wearing a dress and its whiskers have become bearded. An astonishment that might come after finding one’s own hare: coming into a style of thinking and feeling and expressing the world in ways that know this boat as a respectful space. I admit_

ME: I am all abashen, embarrassed with this fanciful foray, but ptsddds ... wait ... I always lose my composure when I survive a deportation order. Watching what’s left of the quotation marks shapeshift into a hat and then a hare, I get a sense of dawn in the middle of a riot.

**6.6.1 Shapeshifting worlds**

MARCH HARE: One could die for the pleasure eating caviar gives. Carrots affirm life. In the soil left where carrot lived, abeyance comes to us as moru caviar. That’s when mice know joy. Crunching into carrotu and having its fibres stick between your teeth and jar at the sides of your mouth is moru to bathing in an ocean of released carrot juices. Letting any pretense at being beyond destructiveness, be nourished now. Lowering warmer into this
ochre ocean, letting carrot welcome my hare, long overseen carotene story-tail, post
Anthropocentric destructive creature whose voice has been unknown to me for the
hungriest time. Like the “ad” in abeyance, that’s “adbeyance with a silent d capable of
transforming into the verb it once was (Ayto, 2009), ushering a pleasure capable of
controlling its own wildness.

ME: Okay hare, enough.

*Overwhelmed with desire, I reach out and successfully grab its tail. More chaos ensues as hare
struggles and I clasp both hands around its body. And then, without meaning to, squeeze and
cause the still-living hare to burst open ... its hare-like entrails oozing out into a mess of
truffley orange gloop.*

ME: Oh no.

*Disgusted by the sight of vivre l’orange dripping through clasped fingers, and also fascinated
by it, I turn to face the boat and seeing everybody quieted, take the helm from Amy and head
for shore.*

ME: I am a mad hare. I am every shyish piece of myself. I am the mess in my hands.

DYLAN THOMAS: Wait – there is something more wriggling in the palm of your hand.
What’s this?

CLARICE LISPECTOR: This boat is, “the opposite of what I had created in my house, the
opposite of the soft beauty that came from my talent for arrangement, my talent for living,
the opposite of my serene irony, of my sweet and except irony: it (is) a violation of my
quotation marks, of the quotation marks that made me a citation of myself. The (boat) was
the portrait of an empty stomach” (1964, p. 46).

LEFT QUOTATION MARK: It’s only me.

*Getting up again and shaking its body dry of gloop.*
LEFT QUOTATION MARK: First of all, I’d like to say thank you for being receptive to hare, and your openness to creating a non-dominative desire toward the materiality of the hare as a profane and ugly being.

MARCH HARE: You’re welcome. Now, help me walk across this palm and up to the top of the thumb. The gloop is still too thick to wade through.

*With this, she does what she wanted to do earlier, lowers her head and licks a trail of pure immanence through the entrails with her tongue.*

GWERFUL MECHAIN: Welcome back to Cwmru Wales everybody!

LEFT QUOTATION MARK: Thanks. Now, although I am a quotation mark let it be known that I am not an abstract being. I am alive and intelligent, autonomous and independent, and powerful. For all of the delirium I experienced in becoming a hat and then a hare, I consistently held a great respect for beauty in the abominable. For the potential of the abject that goes beyond defiance and beyond laughter. I was laughing at only one enemy.

HELÈNE CIXOUS: The “distortion and remoteness that are in (me) as they are in every human being” (Cixous, 1993, p. 150).

*Left “ continues walking and pauses two thirds of the way to her thumb. Breathless from climbing, it opens its mouth and no words come out, so it continues on toward the summit and once there, claims that this effort was simply …*

HELÈNE CIXOUS: “in order to reach the scene of meeting without consuming” (Cixous, 2009, p. 166).

*Standing tall, left “asks the boat …*

LEFT QUOTATION MARK: Are you sure you want to moor here?

*Then, leaning back to move forward, it takes a running jump and lands on top of the index finger.*
LEFT QUOTATION MARK: Secondly, tonight is not about being provocative for the sake of being provocative. It is not about being different for difference’s sake. Because being provocative and acting in extreme defiance of the law only ever leads to the creation of a counter law and what good would come of this?

HYWEL DDA: Hurray!

*Leaping to the top of the middle finger, the “left quotation mark stops and announces*

LEFT QUOTATION MARK: The only enemy is yourself. I know I just said that but I’ll say it again as it will never sound the same way twice. Always, a little different to before. Now, watch me do a back-roll to the top of the ring finger. Wonderful!

*Next, but not least left “ somersaults to the tip of the little finger. *

LEFT QUOTATION MARK: Now to the question of whether we can receive a gift like a hat or a hare without appropriating it.

JOHN CAGE: “Chance operations” like this “are a means of silencing the ego so that the rest of the world has a chance to enter into the ego’s own experience … the idea was that if we could listen we could bring about some kind of change” (remarks by Cage after 1989 performance of “Lecture on the weather”, 1989).

*Sounds of the storm.*

LEFT QUOTATION MARK: When we recognise our own materiality, with sufficient isuma to dwell in our hairiness, one tends to invite a lightness of being and space for the possibility of poetic transformation. So that, a gesture toward letting go of ego, may actually become something quite different and even excessive, more akin with learning to play an instrument than solving a puzzle. And while it may be fun, or not, to be entertained by my antics or to observe the acrobatic mind in action one needs to concentrate in order to play an instrument. To attend to that bundle of nerves in our neurological pathway and their tendency to be activated by hare, say, but at the same time, invite us to contemplate moment by moment what is occurring. So that, we develop long underused sinews to
integrate the fantastical with the real and open ourselves to previously unimaginable life-worlds.

That said, the left “began to elevate above the pinky finger, lean forward and found itself being propelled toward the harp … where it was welcomed by a harp to add itself to a bunch of strings and gifting the music with enough space to move into a different key.

ME: It’s a capo. All I ever wanted to be was a capo.

AMY DILLWYN: Heartbreakthrough!

And then, as the music of our boat at sea finds its own rhythm, left “jumps down from the harp, walks toward some empty seats in the middle of the boat and sits among the listeners and watchers. Within moments, it is joined by the right hand quotation mark” who has broken free from the mead in an earlier chapter and chosen to sit a little way away. Leaving a “…” between them for whatever new worlds need to emerge.

LEFT AND RIGHT QUOTATION MARKS: “…”.

6.6.2 Transitioning twice
AMY DILLWYN: There are traces of the shape-shifting of old in “The Rebecca Rioters” (2004). Transitioning twice, I create an inter-play between male and female that connects us with a primordial place in a different way. The tensions between class and gender make space for readers to feel their way into my story’s archetypal dimensions. They provide an opportunity to connect with ancient parts of ourselves in ways that help us to live with the tensions of opposites.

Amy’s writing would probably have been influenced by the Mabinogion creation stories and may have wished for inspiring queer characters. In some ways Evan becomes this, an inventive tomboyish heroine morphing between class and place. Like Taliesen, perhaps, back when the world was young and full of charming wolverines, a sorceress, the Queen Rebecca once composed a draught of raw magic in a vast cauldron. Pursued by the law, Evan who had accidentally tasted three drops of the magic shifted into a rabbit poacher, then a riotor, until finally becoming a grain of wheat that the Queen incarnated as a criminal and ate, becoming pregnant and bearing this growing magic child for nine
months ‘til his birth. Touched by his beauty, she spared his life and sent him out onto the
darkening waves, wrapped in a jacket, to the mercy of the gods.

AMY DILLWYN: I use the language of working class coarseness to shapeshift. My sentences
move freely between words that are permitted and those that are not. In “The Rebecca
Rioter”, I do not sanitise improper language as is common in the time and instead I include
the imperfect tense instead of the simple past tense like “that is what do puzzle me clean”

Perhaps, her endeavours are akin with Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1968) efforts to revitalise
sections of “Gargantua and Pantagruel” that, in the past, were either ignored or suppressed
in order to discover the balance between language that was permitted and language that
was not?

AMY DILLWYN: This is more than play, as I do not shy away from violence and am in doubt
there are elements in the Rebecca Rioters who intend to cause harm. And so, with Evan’s
ineffectual voice I try to both celebrate the riots and speak out against the tendency to
disallow voices of opposition. But, I haven’t any genius for literature or literary
composition and only take to it as a pis-aller, using my brains because I (couldn’t) use my
muscles, which last I should greatly prefer” (from Amy Dillwyn’s unpublished diaries cited
in Painting, 2013, p. 60). I’m nothing compared to contemporaries such as George Elliot,
and after reading “Middlemarch” I just decided to give up doing children’s tales and write
real novels for real people (p. 61).

Amy takes the helm back from me and lessens the speed as the shore approaches.

ME: Would it even be possible to narrate how Evan’s original voice changes into that of
someone who can no longer speak without the flair of shapeshifting? By comparing
yourself to other writers and giving up writing for running the business and politics, I
wonder, has your voice like Evan’s and everybody else’s here in this boat, become as
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes “unrecoverable” (1988)?

AMY DILLWYN: Perhaps, this is all I have to say?
6.7 Sailing toward shore
Amy recognises a small sandy beach, backed by sand-dunes and trees and steers the boat to shore. As we get nearer, the boat bumps upon the crests of waves before coming to an abrupt halt on the beach. Everybody jumps out and follows Amy’s directions as she shows a number of pathways to her land. I choose to stay back a while and with several others, make sure everything is ready for another sail should we need to. The boat is largely intact, and I carry whatever food there is in beeswax wraps, together with a shoe left behind, a cap, a half-full bottle of gin, the harp, “…”, and all of the blankets.

6.7.1 Being at home-abroad
Everybody had been gathering in an opening among trees, just inland from the beach. There was an old stone farmhouse in the far corner, and a rackety shed with enough canvas and wood for people to make their own tents. A fire had been lit in the centre of the grassy area come campsite, and there was Amy beside it sitting in her rocking chair and smoking a cigar.

AMY DILLWYN: Thanks for bringing everything up from the boat. Have a rest.

I sit on another rocking chair and stare into the fire. The silence between us was long but not inhospitable.

ME: When I visit Vancouver, I encounter this figure in the forests by the sea there. She is the trunk of a fallen red cedar, the shape of a woman adorning a dress of crumpled browns, layered like tobacco leaves. And she reminds me of you.

AMY: Smiles.

ME: There are lots of worlds at play in these places, independent of what is understood. I never feel the need to make the strange familiar here and somehow let the connections open for everybody else to if they choose. As, in this place when I first heard about your life, when I was there in the presence of layers of red tobacco like bark, a head of green hair moss, thin wing-like shards, burnt sienna, umber-abern brun. She has the above ground roots of a hemlock umbrella sapling wrapping around her waist, protecting and connecting with others.
Figure 6.2. Tobacco cedar soft (Joanne Price, 2016)

After another long silence, Amy passes me a blanket as the fire curls up into the sky and I drift into sleep.
Chapter seven: Widening the circle of knowledges – Encountering Phyllis Gittins

This narrative opens at Camp Echnayeba, also known as Camp Giât or Camp GiYât. This is a fictional place, inspired by a plot of land bought by Amy Dillwyn in Pembrokeshire on the west coast of Wales. It is a refugee camp of sorts, with resonances to Calais in northern France as well Indigenous camps in the Pacific Northwest. In the latter, communities are choosing to live in remote places during the summer months, as people did in pre-colonial times. Here, land is a context with which individuals regenerate ecological knowledges for future generations. Everybody has experienced deportation in various ways. Refugees, illegal immigrants, disposable bodies of the world, each person brings with them stories of “survivance” (Vizenor, 2008), histories, geographies, socio-political contexts, languages, challenges and opportunities.

As I sit with others around an evening fire in the centre of the campsite, no-one says much. I am relieved to be here, but exhausted from the journey. Looking around, I see hundreds of tents and notice how exposed this place is to the elements. There are a few trees at the edges of the campsite, but not many. Most have been felled in the past five centuries. There is Twmpa mountain in the distance, a huge ear lobe with tympanic membranes for mountain streams. Lining the eardrum in our middle ears, this delicate layer of tissue known as the tympanic membrane is capable of receiving sound vibrations from the outer air and transmitting them to the auditory ossicles or oracles. Tiny little bones in our tympanic cavity help us to know before knowing because their very structure is attuned to the flight of kites and their fire-gold feathers as they hold within them all of our personal and collective lives. They make space for their voices to come again before any translation.

Tired, I close my eyes and find myself falling into their dreams. I hear roaming sentences, a jumble of murmurings coming from the fire and the tents, and hours later, wake with a start to see a red fox. Standing among the tents, she is looking forward with soft red-ochre fur, a bushy tail, and a face dusted with snow even though it’s summer. We connect for the longest time, locked into one another’s gaze before she turns and runs, and leaves her visitation feeling a way into remembering there are many worlds before us.
Words trip into consciousness like an invitation to free the heart-soul-body-mind-spirit, an opportunity to go to a deeper place of meaning where there is more language than form ... stream of consciousness writing with minimal punctuation that somehow lets itself into speaking to the protocol of ritual if you let it. Time stops, fox disappears into the burrow of an old hawthorn tree, and I sit here feeling like it is half past three in the morning for hundreds of years.

VOICE: I derive inspiration from the nighttime skies.

HYWEL DDA: And I am rooted in multiple pasts.

ANOTHER VOICE: I’m not rushing into that good night.

ANOTHER VOICE: What are you going to do Amy?

AMY DILLWYN: I do hope for peace.

ANOTHER VOICE: If you’d been there we’d not have had to be so tricky.

OSCAR WILDE: Those who go beneath the surface do so at their own peril.

VOICE: You can’t smoke in here.

ANOTHER VOICE: We’re not at the source, we wouldn’t be quarreling if we were, would we?

ANOTHER VOICE: How do I know?

ANOTHER VOICE: We’re beneath a hawthorn tree. Steeped in folklore and signified by the letter H or huath in the Ogham tree alphabet, hawthorn trees are said to provide entry into a “poethical” realm (Retallack, 2003). They are said to create openings into a real realm of non-human and more-than-human companions (Hageneder, 2006, p. 37). Growing near to wells and springs, hawthorn or May Tree, Hawberry, Red Haw, Cheese, Wild Haw, Quick Thorn, or Cloutie Trees tend to offer a meeting place for fairies or sidhe. Sacred to faer folk, this tea of haw berries or pixie pears, aggles and hickies is said to be a great antioxidant for
strengthening the heart, physically, emotionally, and spiritually with long term benefits to the circulatory system.

ANOTHER VOICE: As you say.

ANOTHER VOICE: Okay, so hold me up, Lift up my arms toward that shard of light and in an instant I’ll be propelled into another life.

ANOTHER VOICE: Before you go, is there anything you foresee saying?

ANOTHER VOICE: I wonder where she’s going this time?

ANOTHER VOICE: Welcome.

ANOTHER VOICE: I wasn’t feeling welcome, but remember complaining comes with worrying about an outcome and can have a deadening effect on events, making the end predictable and repetitious.

ANOTHER VOICE: And my pen would weigh so heavily it would drop between the letters into flights of fear and fancy ... these intergenerational stories ... of disinheritance from the land, deforestation, stories of people who are failed versions of us.

ANOTHER VOICE: These speechless grandmothers, gambling kings, name-calling poets, lesbian miners are costing us the earth. I'm off centre I am ...

ANOTHER VOICE: Shower them with water bombs and pieces of napkin, stop them whiskers from sprouting on them cheeks. Cut them down like trees. Look at those leaves coming out of its hat. Arrest them.

ANOTHER VOICE: But, I'm a martyr to music I am.

ANOTHER VOICE: You're ridicliaaars.

ANOTHER VOICE: I just experienced destruction in layer upon layer getting here. I am part of a story in which violence begets violence. I feel tremendous longing for those I love, but know if they were present I would likely sing them away.
ANOTHER VOICE: Ok, let the ears go.

Splash

ANOTHER VOICE: Every morning when I wake ...

ANOTHER VOICE: Hush now.

ANOTHER VOICE: Help us, we’re soaked through.

ABEYANCE: Thank goodness I’m with the stars because they know what to do.

I look up through a gap between roots and into the night skies. Red fox passes by the opening and trips across the underground to a place alive with words. As it swishes its tail, abide, abey, abashen, bäee, badinage, esbair, bai, and others flicker and vanish.

7.1 To dream differently

In “The Poethical Wager”, Joan Retallack (2003) writes that we can re-dream our dreams and change our stories to “create a different sort of paradigm” (p. 106). Playing with differences within a situation, one can swish or swerve out of one’s destiny. She uses the example of swerving out of what may be obviously read as female by entertaining the energetic swerve within it as male (p. 106). Cixous (1991) also writes about how the dynamics of journeying in a place of limits, where a loss of love, passion, freedom and justice has to be faced so that “one may find the limitless terrain of creativity, which knows no borders and welcomes all exiles” (1991, p. 6).

MARCH HARE: I like to plan and redress. It’s like an initiation into living deeply and thinking down into the depths of the unspoooken.

SUBALTERN VOICE: Can you say more?

MARCH HARE: I was invited into this campsite and have no choice but to find a way of making life more lovable. Otherwise I would be insane.

VOICE: Love, care, and compassion are very heterosexual these days.
MARCH HARE: I was born into what we call a toxic place, but this is negative perception. I learnt the way of esbair, shapeshifting, and contemplation I did.

ANOTHER VOICE: This journey was like death for me, and I had to fall into a more life-affirming place. I am surpassing negativity and its myriad forms.

GWERFUL MECHAIN: We can wait.

AMY DILLWYN: Take your time. I was concerned we were hurrying to bring about meaning before its time.

_The voices were becoming clearer._

HARRY MOUNTAIN: Time works differently with Hawthorn trees. A person can be gone for at least seven years before opening up their left descending coronary artery and speaking freely (1998).

JOANNA VAN DE HOEVEN: It is in the best interests of the planet to live a life that abeys to trees (2013, p. 17). There are tree spirits and agricultural spirits and mountain spirits, spirits of wooded places, trees, certain flowers, the wind, sunshine, rain, snow and thunder, goddesses, gods, and deities of anger, lust, greed, compassion, divinity, and quietness abiding here.

AN EDUCATOR FROM ASSAM, INDIA: We invite visitors to seek silence and learn to listen to a place’s wisdom, to the voice of the wind in the branches of a tree. An elder and a ten year old child introduced me to trees as teachers. As we sat beneath an Arjun tree, they shared stories for the tree. Then, they replanted trees along the river, and amidst the rhythms of the planting-and-piling up of earth around each she knew how it felt to usher restfulness into physical work. As we placed each sapling into the earth we were nurturing future generations.

HUGH BRODY: You are made more human, more fully yourselves, only in our relations with what is not human, with that what we cannot fully understand (2000, p. 73).
GEORGE ELIOT: “Were we able to acknowledge this, we would indeed be able to ‘hear the grass grow and the squirrel’s heartbeat, and we should die of that roar which exists on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk out well wadded with stupidity” (1871/2015, p. 189).

CLARICE LISPECTOR: I welcome stupidity. And the absurdly fantastical into my writing home, even though my house isn’t very metaphysical because I cannot afford to shop for the things I want (1964, p. 23).

TED T. AOKI: The whole basis of Cartesian thinking is absurd (1993, p. 290), and it’s how we got into this badinage with the climate in the first place.

DRAGONFLY: There’s nothing wrong with Cartesian thinking, so long as we abey to both Western and other’ed knowledges. I was on the phone earlier today, and ...

TED T. AOKI: A dragonfly and a phone? It’s strange when there’s a collision of things one doesn’t expect to go together. It makes us laugh. Then I wonder, what does our laughing or chuckling perform? Could it rejuvenate earth? What is it about the capacity of chuckling as a gesture touched by ambiguity? In this particular curriculum paradox, “could it be that the structure of our chuckles is the structure of this campsite (1993, p. 291)? This bind of a place, a site of tension between this and that, a site of difference that speaks of two or more things at the same time” (1993, p. 291)? Can we find “humour in things that collide” and change in our differences (p. 300)?

PETER COLE: “So that there’s an exchange between the little we know and the much that we are” (2016, p. 274).

VOICE: So long as you take care to share the flow of the quotes as they quote together.
Quote.

TED T. AOKI: Let me share a story about a teacher I met who was caught in the bind of feeling worried and excited at the same time.

GWERFUL MECHAIN: Like stressed and unstressed?
TED T. AOKI: Yes, I described their situation as being “both this and that, and more” (1993, p. 292). Perhaps this teacher could not take themselves seriously in order to take the people they work with seriously? Perhaps there’s no need to “overcome correctness” in the way we respond to ecological un/certainty (1992, p. 197)?

GWERFUL MECHAIN: Don’t be subtle.

“…”: As a pair of quotation marks, I go with the flow. I take care of energy use. I drive a mobile mind, I’ve stopped flying to every conference. I invest in clean energy, I am a volunteer at various seed banks, giving a place for ancestral rootprints to abide and thrive. I eat weeds, I do herbs do me, I am committed to living poetically, enjoying, land-rights campaigning and the welcoming of climate refugees. If you don’t stop me, I’ll abashen this space with more vitalities.

JOSEPHINE DONOVAN: If the potential of the space marked “…” is truly capable of acting and thinking, we can create a “reawakening to the reality of the literal (the material, which re-constructed as a spiritual presence) and will motivate people to treat the natural world, including animals, as bio-spiritual reality that merits sacramental respect” (1998, p. 91).

ANOTHER VOICE: We first need to challenge assumptions to do with reason and maleness and emotional natural women. There are parallels between how we describe men and women, people of colour and the underclass, and how we treat the non-human and more-than-human environment.

ANOTHER VOICE: “We should look to lesbians as the vanguard of social change because they are committed to equality and relationships and sex as the basis of social transformation” (Gough et al, 2003, p. 53).

ROSI BRAIDOTTI: This is where a bit of creative conceptualising is useful. Let me introduce: “radical immanence” or “enfleshed or embodied materialism” and “sensible transcendentalism” (2002, p. 63). These are concepts that enable one to work with thoughts, abstractions and fragments, and create unusual connections outside of the mind/body division (p. 63).
SUSAN GEROFSKY: Such as learning to communicate the interdependence of more-than-human worlds (conversation, June, 2019).

ROSI BRAIDOTTI: There are times when we truly live words like “affinity” and “receptivity” (2002, p. 164-5).

STEPHEN NACHMANOVITCH: “It is like the complex dance of coming back to an old love” (p. 166) and learning to welcome the deeper patterns still emerging from consciousness on how to live well with the environment.

CLARICE LISPECTOR: So, we can serve “the survival of life on earth” (1989, p. 3).

AMY DILLWYN: And flourish.

The shimmering words and shapes I had seen before, were forming themselves into crystalline shining throughout the underground.

EDWARD CASEY: When places are enriched like this, “the space and time that result become the very basis of expansively expressive experiences” (1997, p. 51).

HYWEL DDA: This campsite threshold between the forests to come and ocean opens out as it encloses us with its regenerative power.

7.2 We’re holding the world in grace

Time passes, and days turn to weeks. Local people are helping us with food preparations and as we are doing this, there’s my grandmother being asked to fetch water. She turns to me and we walk toward a stream together. But, what is this in our way?

Standing near to the gateway of the campsite is a crowd shouting obscenities at a line of five people. They are saying ‘deport them’, ‘send them back to the asylum’. I am alone and my grandmother Phyllis has become one of the five and I do not recognise the others. A person from the crowd has steps forward and calls out:

CROWD REPRESENTATIVE: Are you guilty of living in this campsite? Is it true that your descendants like to slosh in the mud? Did they willingly turn mother earth into a common haw? Are you guilty of good intentions? Who are you?
PHYLLIS GITTINS: My name is Phyllis and I am a grandmother, a mother of three and a sister. I am a daughter and a wife, a lace-making farmer, a swimmer and an artist.

CROWD: Arrest her!

CROWD REPRESENTATIVE: Wait, she has yet to answer our questions.

PHYLLIS GITTINS: I married Ernest Jim Johnson and we farmed the earth lightly, letting land rest as fallow as needed and I admit, we did not follow the trend toward mechanised agriculture. I lived close to my siblings and, rare for daughters of poor farmers, my sister and I won scholarships to Leominster Grammar School. Gwenyth went on to become one of the first women in Britain to go to university, studying mathematics at Southampton before coming home to teach and farm, an opportunity not available to me since the onset of war. Born March 1st, 1917 I’m familiar with ...

CROWD REPRESENTATIVE: Do you only see a human face in the waters of resemblance? Have you willfully and deliberately and without question limited the earth to a heterosexual woman? Do you and your descendants have a blind-spot when it comes to non-Western voices? Do you overlook the value of organic knowledge systems beginning with trees? Are you guilty of destroying life with your deforestations?

PHYLLIS GITTINS: I am suffering, but I am not guilty.

The crowd was growing larger while Phyllis and the four other outcasts are forced to stay where they are. A tall man, who appears to be Hywel takes the place of the crowd representative. Wearing a white silk dress trimmed with cerise, a headdress of azaleas and a tulle veil, he introduces himself as Mother Rebecca.

MOTHER REBECCA: What is this my children? There is something in my way, I cannot go on.

CROWD: What is it Mother Rebecca? Nothing should stand in your way.

MOTHER REBECCA: I do not know my children. I am old and I cannot see well.

CROWD: Shall we come and move it out of the way, Mother Rebecca?
MOTHER REBECCA: Wait, it feels like a line of outcasts have been put across the gateway to stop your old mother.

CROWD: We will tear them down, mother. Nothing should stand in your way.

MOTHER REBECCA: Perhaps we can ... Oh my dear children. What can be done?

CROWD: They must be taken down mother. You and your children must be able to pass.

MOTHER REBECCA: Off with it then ...

While Mother Rebecca and the crowd were so engaged in calling out to one another, Phyllis and the others had begun to turn in spirals.

CROWD: But look Mother Rebecca, they are spinning in the gateway. They are making complex spirochetes and chaotic fractals and an alder and an ash tree is joining in. They enlist an oak, a hazel, several hawthorn, and four cedars, and then a fir joins them, a rowan, a pine, multiple gorse, and a little red fox.

PHYLLIS GITTINS AND THE OTHERS: Come on in, everybody.

CROWD: What shall we do Mother?

MOTHER REBECCA: This is a curly one. They're dancing the missing Y chromosome dance ... the missing part in our story. Let's just ...

PHYLLIS GITTINS AND THE OTHERS: Your violence against us is misplaced ... we're holding the world in grace ... your violence against us is misplaced ... we're holding the world in grace ...

MOTHER REBECCA: True, there is a relationship between their spirocheting and the earth's climatic return. I don't think they are perverse predators, there's no need to pull off their veils and unman them, we must turn this gate into a gaYte.

CROWD: Turn this gate into a gaYte?
MOTHER REBECCA, PHYLLIS GITTINS AND THE OTHERS: Let’s turn this gate into a gaYte ... turn this gate into a gaYte ...

Figure 7.1. Dancing alder and ash (Joanne Price, 2014)

With this, I join Mother Rebecca, Phyllis Gittins, and the others and let the spiraling ooshe us back to a primordial passion dance. It feels like the whole of Echnayeba is coming alive with the light of the stars, as the binary between us and them is transcended at last. The gaYte is thrown open in a whoosh of negative-optimism as everybody dances and dances and dances, transforming into spirochetes into animal spirits and back again in a ritual quietly designed to bring healing to the earth. Gwerful’s dress, an amazing multi-
coloured vortex in celebration of the living earth, was enveloping the dancers around her with its rippled fringe of mountain grasses, a whirl of blossom petals with shining scales. Hywel Dda, barely identifiable as Mother Rebecca was drumming wildly. And when the spirals pause for an honour beat, everybody holds their words up high above our heads and into the dance as Phyllis Gittins brings us back for more and Amy trance-dances into reverie. Her cigar becoming like a curly worm of many layers with glitters of phosphorescence taking Gwerful flipping forwards and backwards in rolls. Her scales and fins push out from her dress as she throws herself down the hill, into a stream at bwlch and back into the dance as salmon. All the beings you can imagine were coming alive in celebration of Camp Echnayeba. ‘There is everything to celebrate tonight’ calls Hywel, as he whorls in on himself, his nose lengthening into a snout and whiskers, and fur covering his face. Dancing backwards toward the edge of the circle to be with red fox, we turn to see Phyllis as a multi-stable figure dancing through the middles of meanings. With her arms outstretched, I rush to join hands and together we slow into a sacred spiral. As a cello accompanies a harp, I am opening to the larger world of living connections surrounding this gaYte, the material world I have overlooked and within which we are a part.

GWERFUL MECHAIN: Phyllis Gittins! We have reached a decree. You are subject, according to Cyfraith Law to eleven generations of rekindling a creative, devotional, and enjoyable life, fully paid.

7.3 Complementarity

As this journey with abeyance is constantly being re-made and in flux by events occurring, Phyllis Gittins was open to learning more about tree knowledges. Ways that thrive not only with local knowledges about plants and reciprocal relationships with place, but also with more diverse cultural cosmologies and practices.

PHYLLIS GITTINS: We need to listen to other voices.

PETER COLE: We need to listen to the many thousands of voices to “re-imagine a more compassionate just and ecologically sustainable world for all” (2016, p. 10). And to do this, we must “widen the circle of knowledges” (p. 4).
And yet, this cannot be achieved by simply bringing non-Western quotes into a conversation, but by envisioning Stephen Nachmanovitch’s “imaginary liberation front” (2000), which like a weather system is capable of drawing together Western and non-Western ways of thinking, “not for art’s sake but for life’s sake” (p. 36). I am reminded of the compilation of the Mabinogion poetic stories of oral knowledges. In an effort to bring significant voices into one text or dissertation chapter, these quotes have been coming together in clear and yet random ways. As I write, I am remembering their essence and step from one to the next, before taking time to find the original sources. I am learning that it is important to do this from a strong place and with just enough abashen to propel these words into action in a lucid way. Compassion, as an energy is very strong and it helps the quotes sound well together. But, at the end of a sub-section, it is up to the reader to make sense of them and to decide which emotions to read them with.

There is resonance with how we perceive another’s words and the contemplative connections underlying all existence. For, as Wade Davis writes there are “ten thousand different voices” and a diversity of ecological knowledges and practices for dealing with the challenges facing life on and with earth (2001, p. 202). Dynamic and holistic tree knowledges from each of our cultural pasts are, however, often left out of conservations. Together with an openness toward “ceremony and ritual practices that bring together human, non-human, and more-than-human intelligences and agencies mutual reciprocating conversations with the environment” (Cole, 2016a, p. 8).

7.3.1 Gathering berries

There are elderberry plants growing at the edges of Camp Echnayeba. Phyllis and others are gathering berries into a sieve. Someone is saying, good food is like herbal medicine, it can nourish hard to hear teachings. They advise only taking a third of berries from each plant ... leaving a third for others ... and a third for the plant. This way of gathering berries is a perverse enactment of abeyance. Its perversity, is in the detail for as Deborah Britzman (1996) says, taking just a third of berries denies the centrality of the plant as a plant without berries. And in denying its centrality, the centrality of the environmental context is enabled to emerge. In an industrial culture, it feels perverse to leave more berries than you harvest. Britzman (1996) calls this “pleasure without utility”
as room is made for something deeply contemplative. Less intent on filling up the sieve, Phyllis wonders among the elderberries gathering a few here, a few there, and all the while becoming more aware of the other plant, bird and animal beings.

In her book, “Braiding Sweetgrass” Robin Wall-Kimmerer (2013) describes the process of harvesting berries. In the Pacific Northwest, she explains, berries are among the first to arrive after trees have fallen, been cut, or subject to landslide or fire, and they get on with the work of damage control (p. 284). As opportunistic or pioneer plants, salmonberries, huckleberries, elderberries, and whimberries reproduce quickly and enjoy unlimited growth and produce an abundance of leaves. Then, once trees begin to arrive on the scene, the berries use their photosynthetic richness to make babies that will be carried by birds to the next place (p. 284). When trees inevitably arrive, long term regeneration and stability is favoured as: “the breadth and depth of these reciprocal symbioses are especially well developed in old-growth forests” (Wall-Kimmerer, 2013, p. 284). Rather than having already arrived there and existing amidst the old growth forest of our minds, Britzman (1996) and Wall-Kimmerer (2013) are, in differing ways, oriented toward the vision of diversity.

In a passage on the regeneration of “Maker of Rich Women”, Wall-Kimmerer (2013) shares a story about someone buying a piece of land full of berries because they both loved it and wanted to find ways to heal it (p. 286). Since the place had been deforested it was overrun with berries, and so they set aside eleven years to clear most of these. Without there being a set of guidelines on how to do this, they turned to the place itself. There were days, writes Wall-Kimmerer (2013) when they doubted the wisdom of this work (p. 287) and with human time being different to place time they needed more than one generation.

Given all of cedar’s traits – slow growth, poor competitive ability, susceptibility to browsing, wildly improbable seedling establishment – one would expect it to be a rare species. But it’s not ... while cedars can’t grow well on uplands, they thrive in the alluvial soils, swamps and water edges that other species can’t stand ... The unique chemistry of cedar endows it with both life-saving and tree-saving medicinal
properties. Rich with many highly antimicrobial compounds it is especially resistant to fungi ... Over the following eleven years, they planted more than thirteen thousand trees and created a network of trails with names that reflect intimacy with their forty acres” (p. 288).

Years of traveling and nurturing feelings of uselessness go into healing places of our imagination and reviving knowledges that work across different contexts in this place toward more enriched possibilities for living with each other on this shared planet. With hope, that we may create not just a common world but as Frederique Apffel-Marglin (2011b) writes, “a livable common world” (p. 162).

7.4 Making medicine

Phyllis hands me some lemon balm leaves and suggests we make a tea medicine to help us know what to do with these knowledges. I placed them into a teapot on the picnic table among tents, and poured in hot water warming on the fire. Several people joined us at the table, knowing perhaps that plants choose us, and we do not choose them. Like, making space for understanding: inspiration will come in a poethical way.

Phyllis pours tea for everybody gathered around. She tells us it should be calming after a morning of tribulation and questions. It’s just another aspect of theatre, is drinking tea, she says, and with this I shift in my seat. I am remembering her in the second half of her life, when she became a Quaker and together with her sister Gwenyth, protested at Herefordshire county council meetings with silent sit-ins. Upset at local politicians and councillors for building an underground bunker with enough room to save them in the event of a climate emergency.

PHYLLIS GITTINS: Do you want a top up, darling?

Thanks.

PHYLLIS GITTINS: I, am poured I, the tea-maker’s grandmother 1, the tea-maker I, the tea-maker’s friend I, the tea-drinker I, the tea-traveller.
As Phyllis sings tea, Francisco Alarcón (2008) describes a profound cultural revolution happening among the Mestiza peoples of Mexico.

FRANCISCO ARARCIÓN: They have been able to blend “a western humanistic utopia in which all human races intermingle to form an all-inclusive cosmic progeny … into a Mestiza consciousness” (2008, p. 274). As Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa, in her moving “Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza” says,

GLORIA ANZALDÚA: … the New Mestiza tea-maker challenges homophobia, racism, sexism, and classism by “developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be a Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode – nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turned the ambivalence into something else.

Awareness of this situation

must come before inner changes,

which in turn come before changes

in society”


PHYLLIS GITTINGS: This sounds familiar to contemplation.

As the conversation continues, I am struck by Phyllis’ words, and thinking to the Christian practice of centring prayer wonder whether this resonates with the New Mestiza? I feel heart soul mind body working together as it dawns on me that this ancient Western and Christian practice at that, may be helpful to our situation in this campsite. As much as we’d like it to, summer is coming to a close and the rhythms of fall approaching. I take another sip of tea, and try to re-enter the conversation, but am finding the seat of the picnic table uncomfy. Wriggling a little, I look down and to my esbair notice hairs protruding out of my
sandals and shorts, and poking out of my t-shirts as my body swishes out of the seat, and effortlessly touch my paws into the grass, turn my head to a side, and push off with my forefeet. Glancing down every few steps, I hold an image of where I must go. My thoughts are clear. I know what to do, and without looking back, I venture to the edge of the campsite, through the gate, across the curriculum field and beyond to an area of woodland. Hearing my grandmother’s poem, as I trip and traverse to a “Mountain interlude”,

PHYLLIS GITTINS: to waterfall of zither soft on wings rippled song re-echoing clear and still whispering, the breeze into rainbow harmony your laughing eyes must never cease. Revitalise.

I am remembering how she loves to swim and she did everyday well into her eighties. She makes lace and knits, and is a badinage cook. Having served in the women’s land army during world war two, this liberated her as it did for whole cultures of women as they found new roles in life. In the land-army, she drove jeeps between fields and loaded food into them to support the war effort, and in the process turned away from mechanised farming toward education.

When I reach the trees and recognise myself as fox, I curl into a ball and in the dappled sunlight rest beneath an Oak tree. Remembering David Abram’s (2011) words, I press my head into its centuries’ old bark until I can let my eyes well with tears that fall easily to the ground. The “soil needs this water. Grief is but a gate, and our tears a kind of opening to a place of wonder that’s been locked away” (p. 309). I cry tears of contemplation, knowing how difficult a life path this is and yet the only way to happiness.

Like an act of social repair, this intimate sensing takes time for solitude. Trees remember every experience they have had (personal communication with camphor compound). Trees remember and retain knowledge for us, so we can visit and listen to what they have to say to us. We practice withnessing trees, the bringing together of witnessing and withness (Snowber & Bickel, 2015, p. 72-76). A teacher tree or plant, says Peter Cole, “promotes whole person awareness prolongs life” (2016, p. 3) and each plant teaches what you are ready for … we call it working with sacred medicines” (p. 3). We only
need to work with a certain number of plants we become friends with, and while many of these may change some will stay with us (personal conversation with camphor compound).

As a fox, I can practice experiential land-based contemplation with flair: re-wiring my head as fox way-finds in the strangely familiar terrain of this bwlch. I wonder, what this means for fox and me and for the world? Envisioning a Welsh cultural approach to contemplating the living world, the island in my mind flourishes with an array of diverse life-worlds.

### 7.4.1 Fox myself a bwlch

Back at bwlch, fox knows that by giving a tree our time, we do them a favour. Fox knows that even our efforts to perceive places and trees, act as a gift. And the most vital gifts of all are the positive feelings of humans. Soulful and devotional relationships with trees and other beings are like nourishment for a bwlch, and for the earth. People do not

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*Figure 7.2. A bwlch (Joanne Price, 2018)*
have to understand everything about trees, their hidden lives, and secret communication systems. By simply accepting there are aspects to life and livingness that are still unknowable, the stories we share for the trees nurture them.

Fox had not forgotten why she was here and soon finds her way back to the place where waterfalls tumble across the track, the place where it all began. She dips her head into the falls and sinks her body into a pool. And in the quiet of this power place, lies down under the leafy canopies of alder and ash and slides her chin to the earth.

Fox closes her eyes, drops inside time, sensual present, where there’s no need to cloud the real. Recognising this place as one among many “thought-action spaces that might potentially liberate education” (Gerofsky, 2018, p. 47), fox rests in her own mud. Sensing mud as inter-are and necessary for growth, as the skies open and the rain falls she needs mud to grow flowers. Feeling the tap, tap, tap of awenyddion fox knows that an hour or so of lying in mud can bring deep transformation.

Realising I must use this mud: I feel sadness when faced with wrong perception concerning ourselves and others. Knowing I use words that bring more suffering, from here this contemplative mud fox brings less suffering.

Fox, myself a bwlch
The gap
The abject
The useless
The invisible.

The beauty
The productive
The dynamic
The pleasure
The relations.

The potentials
The felt
The betwixt
The spirit
The spiral
The sacred.

The llwynog.

When the rain stops, fox stands up, shakes off excess water and continues on. Time passes and by early Autumn fox arrives at a very old building among the trees. Situated in woodland somewhere between the mountains and the ocean, fox is drawn to the warm light emanating from a doorway. Running among tree saplings, weed plants and vegetables, fox jumps on to a verandah and looking through a doorway, sees Phyllis Gittins sitting on a blanket with Hywel Dda, Gwerful Mechain, Amy Dillwyn, and me. Noticing fox, noticing I give up my seat by the fire and pour her some tea.

There were no tables, besides irregular shaped ones, chaise-longues instead of sofas, and a Welsh dresser by a window opening to a courtyard I recognise from journeying with Gwerful Mechain. This once abandoned place of poetry had become home to people from the campsite whose collective energy felt very helpful.

There are patterns of light and shadow dancing on the early morning walls. There’s birdsong and a kind of co-consciousness with place and house-spirits, an environment where “animals and humans are understood to share common states of being that include family relationships, intelligence, and common responsibility for the maintenance of a shared world” (Cruikshank, 2000, p. 60). There’s room for trees to grow here, as their shapes move in and out of the light dancing. With the whole background in abeyance, I am connecting with ancestors past, present, and future with a sense of loyalty within all the categories of this place. I am listening to the ancestors within this place and deeper still within the earth.
Chapter eight: Moving forward

Here we are back where we started at the doorstep or threshold of a new place. I want to thank you for taking time to read this dissertation, and am hopeful you feel inspired to contemplate your own lives in different ways.

As a gesture toward a Welsh cultural approach to contemplative connection with the living world, I opened this dissertation with, “Welcome to this journey with abeyance, a journey beginning with trees”. I am delighted to say after centuries of journeying, the beginners mind is still active and so I offer this closing as another beginning. As I consider new awareness and the places we have come to, as well as thinking forward to what might emerge from this.

8.1 New awareness

First, trees as trees, and trees as more than trees, are amazing beings. Learning that we can help them grow by being grateful for the ways they dynamically regulate the earth’s water cycle and atmospheric systems that fire life, is beyond radical. Trees are connected via intricate communication networks in ways the human mind may allude to, but never know and with this knowing not to know I am respectful of trees and drawn further into cultural understandings that give reverence to trees as living beings with their own spirits.

As human beings, we can draw closer to the life worlds of trees with words, and closer still by attending to spaces among words. As we know now that words originate in knowledge systems beginning with trees. And so, when words are used in life-affirming and com/passionate ways I am in no doubt they are capable of rekindling life and saving our planet.

Gifted this awareness, I am sure that a more contemplative and poetic approach to the reality of climate change remains vital and urgent, as do more culturally sensitive approaches to contemplative education. Western scientific thinking alone is not enough to prevent irreversible damage to our planet in the next eleven years. How, as educators and scholars of multiple disciplines, we can respond to this urgency? What can be done to respect the science and realise what is most true is poetic? As an issue, climate change is different to advocating for human rights as non-human and more-than-human worlds have
become a vital part of this conversation. I feel panicked and yet excited at how much I personally have to unlearn, as the assumption that human beings are more important than animals and plants has been embedded in my cultural lineage for centuries. This is why we lost trees.

How can we, as educators and scholars, poet-thinkers and life-writers in the Western world speak to climate change in the language we have? A logic of science verses silence, facts verses story-tales, frontline verses peace makers cannot speak to how it is. In my life, I keep falling into making false choices between this and that, left and right, and this makes me sad. But I am learning to celebrate those moments when I catch myself, and in these moments of abeyance, feel a little more hopeful for future generations. In these moments of catching, I see the rootprints of abeyance and ancient life-worlds coming to life and moving in spirals that are asking to be lived anew. Then, instead of feeling I have to defend a position, direct and transactional words come forth to defend not just a whole array of positions but poetry too.

This is a time for directness, because I have to place my dualistic thinking in question. I must understand that the solution to climate change is in the problem. Living up to a legacy of enormous tree loss is no easy task. How can we as educators and scholars respond better to the cries of the earth and its disproportionate, difficult and healing beings?

8.1.1 *Silences as regenerative learning places*

Understanding silences as regenerative learning places begins with visiting places that are special to us, and caring for these places. There’s no better way of honoring your ancestors and ourselves than being in a place you love. Retreating to a power place, like a bwlch in the landscape of your lives will necessarily create openings for connecting with trees and usher you back to a time before speech and primordial language. Here, words may be understood as the sounds of trees, spirit, animals and other creatures. The tap tap tap of awenyddion emanating from these places may allow for living connections with life-affirming melodies and rhythms of atmosphere. As educators how can we tap into sounds that release these worlds? How can we tap into our dreamer, using our own languages? In
what ways are we already encouraging each other to open memory and express uniqueness, to do the work we are called to do?

And then, when awenyddion arrives with the words of people past who populate these places, why not listen to them? Why not, hear them see what they have to say? Far from being a serious channeling, practicing inspirited speech can be fun. I heard the voices of Hywel Dda, Gwerful Mechain, Amy Dillwyn, and Phyllis Gittins in the trees after I had first encountered them in articles and books, and conversations. In addition to researching their lives and words, I would let my imagination go and converse with them from a place of regenerative silence. What would characters from your cultural past say? And why would their words and worlds matter in this co-journeying with trees?

As I journeyed with the life-worlds of these characters and co-journeyers, they shaped what was happening. They would take me to places where I would feel uncomfortable, and in my abashen take a stance and reclaim a part of this dissertation with my own words. Although they ask me to complete their words, I am left with questions in answers. In bäee openings, created out of saying what needs to be said, there would be new voices, fresh voices, new renderings of old conversations. Something that my grandmother will have said, or Hywel Dda or Gwerful Mechain or Amy Dillwyn and they would be brought back into conversation. Sometimes muddy and sometimes crystal clear, this journey with abeyance is like living in the woods with trees. It’s like there are times when something comes to meet you and it might not be a something else, but a neologism you never heard because. And do you include this in your dissertation? Would you wait patiently for years at a time for clarity? When time is running out, and I hear from the scientists that there is only another eleven years left to prevent irreversible climate change (IPCC, 2019), what to do? Why not, just do the recycling, become a whole food consumer, welcome an ancient building that comes to you in the marches of your mind and open it up to poetic permacultures for all? Live well toward the eleven years beyond the eleven years and for eleven generations to come. Enact abeyance as non-intentional action in practical ways. Enjoy the voices of children laughing and playing in streams, and rhythms of water.
In this era of unprecedented urgency, I am becoming aware that this journey has been making time by taking time. While I still don’t understand why Hywel Dda, Gwerful Mechain, Amy Dillwyn, and Phyllis Gittins came into this dissertation, and why now when living in a far-away country as their voices occupy me from contributing in the socially accepted way I used to? Why am I, so loyal to this word abeyance and continue to journey with it?

Amidst silences as regenerative places, there are insights and new awareness that make increasing sense of this journey. The great creative challenge, as Hywel Dda reminds is to heed to these places in times of urgency. Then, patience is needed, sustainable action is needed, and trusting goodness becomes vital. I am learning to become content with that and delight in that, and that’s contemplation. When I have that mind, I can be more effective and a longer lasting, more thoughtful agent for change. Not as a frontline activist necessarily, but as someone advocating for as much dancing as marching. Knowing this truth I can offer it and enjoy it, but have no control over how others respond. As we have no control over the course of extreme weather events, except by the ways we live and allow with thanksgiving and joy, the spirit to flow through us in renewed worlds.

I am becoming aware of the importance of learning to abey as failing better. Admitting that a more contemplative approach to living connections is hard to live all of the time and challenging to teach. Nurturing each other to a place when they take a stance takes practice and a sense of purpose, and I am not fully there yet. And perhaps, as easy as it would be to arrive this work may be calling for just that?

I know when I fail better the voices take me to a deeper place (Chödrön, 2015). They take me to a place of understanding this strange Welsh lineage in different ways. They provide me with tremendous access to the memories and wisdoms of this lineage.

The voices take me to a place where I am able to contemplate living a little bit differently. A place where we can perceive a sunset slightly differently each day, and wonder whether this is all I have to do, journeying with abeyance? If so, then perhaps climate change is offering people the most wonderful offer we have had in our history.
With climate change I am awakened to all that I have. I can wonder why I have been so lucky to have taken so long to gain some clarity in this journey, just to know climate change as a battle we are fighting with ourselves, and journeying with abeyance as learning to live with and celebrate what we have.

As I fail better, I welcome the co-journeymen’s guidance and survivance as going far beyond reproduction or survival of the fittest thinking, and in so doing, this lineage together with the voices of philosophers and poets, creates openings for different futures. Futures: whereby the continual loss of trees can be reversed with sustainable action and a slight change in thinking. I am more than grateful for the voices of Hywel Dda, Gwerful Mechain, Amy Dillwyn, and Phyllis Gittins in helping to realise unique ways of relating with the larger mind of organic knowledge systems beginning with trees. By doing more than reflecting the places they come from or the physical land of Wales, with me they are making room for this journey to continue in creative, devotional, and enjoyable ways.

8.2 Future hopes

I am hopeful these words will inspire you to contemplate auto / ethnographic research as a regenerative response to reconnecting with what sustains human life in a planetary way. I am imagining you seeking out power places or bwlch that matter to you, and welcome the richness and wildness that abides there, as one of tens of thousands of ways to journey toward healing earth. Where would this place be for you? Somewhere, you enjoy and feel regenerated to embody your individual dreams and desires in relation to place and its trees and their vast networks of interconnections? How do you imagine learning to be wealthy in our more than human relations may help bring our planet back into dynamic balance?

Could you envisage inviting trees as active participants in decision-making of land-use? How, for example, could we welcome concrete eating bacteria and stories threaded with lichen into the fabric of our homes and other buildings? How to make space for these beings in our classrooms and school gardens, as a part of conversations into a larger ecology of mind? How else do you imagine enacting a change in thinking consciousness on many levels and in spiritually and contemplatively connected ways?
8.2.1 Future studies in contemplation inspired by poetic storytelling

Since journeying with this Welsh lineage of Hywel Dda, Gwerful Mechain, Amy Dillwyn, and Phyllis Gittins I have become more aware of why they each insisted on having a different chapter. When I write with Hywel Dda, there's a different style, feeling or mood to when I write with Gwerful Mechain, Amy Dillwyn, and Phyllis Gittins. Just noticing their different characteristics and what I look forward to in journeying with each person, generates insights into personality and also culture and history. Each lived in their time. Hywel Dda lived in a time of oral tradition before vast numbers of trees were removed. When we were speaking, he was explaining that much of Cyfraith lore lives on in the Mabinogion and in the poetic courts in Powys Gwerful Mechain performed in. But by the fifteenth century, Christianity had lost its contemplative roots and so holding back from being everything she could be, Gwerful Mechain’s poetry necessarily exaggerated a way of performing stressed prose verses with unstressed poetic excess.

Writing with Amy Dillwyn, I became burnt out as we journeyed from being a limpet on the sofa to a social entrepreneur and a turn to politics. These transformations felt so abrupt and severing. And so, by the time I encounter my grandmother a century later we are born into this world already burnt out, but with a gradual understanding that sometimes we have to burn ourselves alive in order for our voice to be heard. I am not talking about suicide here but an act of love. And we needed it, Phyllis Gittins and I as we began our journey together in an open campsite, a kind of refugee camp for people born into situations without trees. She was standing in the gateway of the campsite chanting as if she’s in a climate change strike. Its only when Phyllis Gittins appears as a red fox that I am ushered back into the potentials and possibilities of living a more in-depth and contemplative and healing connectedness. Fox regenerates a sense of hopeful intelligence. When she transforms back into human form, it felt like a naturally occurring transformation into an energising place of vivid realisation. Too profound to be explained or grasped in words and images, and beyond even badinage faith, I am held by the voices in a layer of language older than words.

I am listening to their voices in the trees
seeing them glitter in moving water.

8.3 Bread and roses too

I am holding a vision of educators and scholars, poet-thinkers and life-writers working inter-generationally to support and nurture one another. As young people and future generations are inheriting legacies of the deforested world, what can we do to encourage a sense of hope and help make their lives more beautiful? How can we nourish those who are called to take a stand on the frontlines, with tenderness and love? I am reminded of the miners in south Wales, who Amy Dillwyn would have known and their singing of a need for bread and roses too. As I am learning to delve into the past for inspirational responses, I am reminded to notice variations between the past and present, for it is in these variations that we can reverse irreversible damage to our planet. I want to sing these differences, enjoy living them poetically. I want to rethink, story, be inspired, inspire and ructlushiousup these differences because time is running out and I do be here for you.
References


