

The Faces of Wales

Confirmative Praxis (M7X02024)

MA Collaborative Dialogues: Illustration

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Word count: 5,448.

I. Introduction

In the new term of 1998, I entered a school for Welsh-speakers. At the age of 4 with a mother who didn't speak Welsh, I had very little knowledge of the language. I entered the school with nothing more than a few Welsh nursery songs, despite being born and raised in Wales.

I remember the children's media more than anything else. The titular character Sali Mali (1969) in her discernible orange dress acted as a surrogate mother during school time, and SuperTed (1982) became a hero to me long before any Marvel creation had. I found comfort in the shows and books presented to us, which led to an easier understanding of the Welsh language.

Even at a young age, I had managed to speak in full, fluid sentences to my teachers and classmates. Later on in life, my mother would say how surprised she was of my natural delivery. On one hand, I loved the language dearly and was eager to learn. On the other hand, it was a strict school, and you would receive detention if you spoke English.

Two years later at the age of 6, I was taken out of that school. I was diagnosed with autism and the school had no way of supporting my needs. My older sisters stayed behind, quickly growing up and making friends of their own. Soon afterwards, I had forgotten the Welsh language entirely.

Years after, I had become a new version of myself. I studied art. I made sense of the world by embracing my autism. I came out as gay. I came out as transgender. I came out as gay again, this time as a man. Every opportunity to grow and change as a person was one that I took, quickly understanding that nothing, not even the self, was permanent. My relationship with gender and sexuality formed into an ever-flowing river with banks to stop at from moment to moment. My art nourished from the idea of imperfection, having starved itself for perfection. In that time, I had only looked back once or twice to the language and culture I once knew, thinking it had no place in my continuously evolving self.

This research is the result of looking back once again and coming to the realisation that the next stage of introspection was to go further beyond personal history. It was a chance to explore the vast history of Wales itself and how someone like myself could have existed in a time where impossibilities were commonplace. Out of respect of my research, I will be using the terms Cymru (Wales), Cymry/Cymric (Welsh people/person), and Cymraeg (Welsh language).

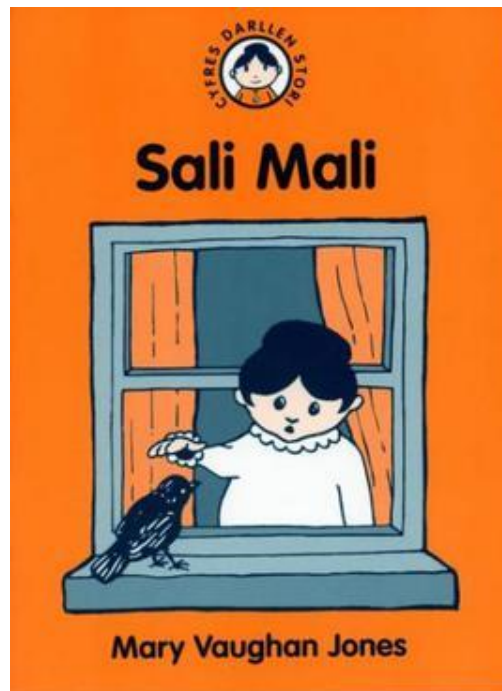


Fig 1: The cover of *Sali Mali* (Jones, 1969).

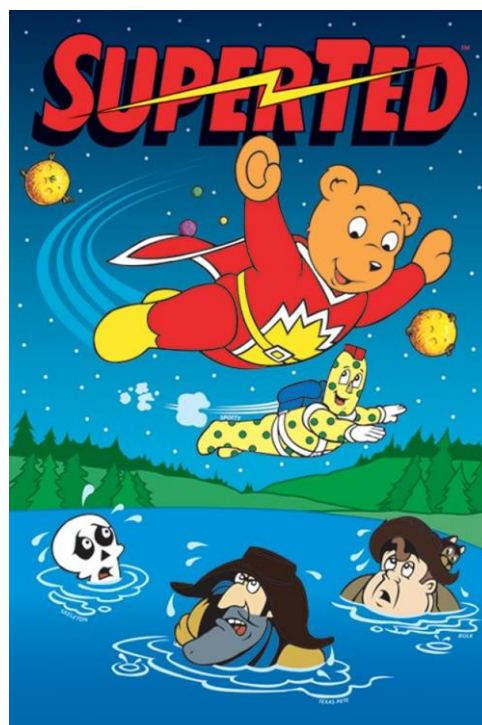


Fig 2: *SuperTed* animation poster (Young, 1982).

II. Eradication of Cymraeg

So, in a sense, hiraeth is also tied to a time before the usurpation of the name of the land, a time already long gone when the tales of the Mabinogion originated. To carry the name of outsider in your own land is a burden indeed.

John Howe, *Hiraeth, or Hekate as the Muse*.

"Hiraeth" has no direct translation. It is made from two Cymraeg words: *hir*, meaning long, and *aeth*, meaning pain. It is a word for the grief felt for a home that no longer exists, or perhaps never existed. The closest English word it could come to is "melancholy", but even that word implies that the home still exists. "Hiraeth" indicates the home had no real place in the universe originally.

Howe's quote identifies the Mabinogion - a collection of Cymru's earliest stories - being curated *after* the feeling of hiraeth entered the hearts of the Cymry. This is in response to the stories only gaining "official" documentation in a Post-Christian Cymru.

There is no clear point in time when "hiraeth" came to fruition. One indicator is its use in the *Hen Benillion*, a collection of Cymraeg poetry first documented in the 16th century but included works that may have been constructed centuries earlier. An unknown poet writes of a "cruel hiraeth" that wakes him up at night. (Crossley-Baxter, 2021).

The word "hiraeth" was coined specifically for Cymru and the Cymry, gaining particular traction during the mid-19th century following the publication of the *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales* (1847), better known as *Brad y Llyfrau Gleision* (The Treason of the Blue Books). At the time, education was seen as non-mandatory. The Cymry were mostly working-class, and a majority of schools were privately run by religious or charity-driven institutions. Children were spoken to in Cymraeg, being the only language they knew. The acceptance of English in schools was seen by the parents as an economic advantage rather than the destruction of Cymraeg (Johnes, 2019, p. 18).

The reports were intended to document the educational state of Cymru. Instead, it sparked controversy amongst the Cymry due to the documentation of Cymraeg itself, described as an "obstacle to modernization" and theological or poetic literature being "obsolete and meagre in secular aspects" (Jones and Roderick, 2003, p. 59).

These comments, as exaggerated as they may be, could be viewed as decisive when examining the intention of the commissioners and the history of English influence within

Cymru. The population of Cymru doubled from 500,000 in 1770 to over one million in 1850. Two-thirds of Cymru were monoglot in Cymraeg. The attention to politics gained traction amongst the people and a majority began to attend nonconformist chapels, leading to the shrinking numbers of Anglicans (Davies, 2006, p. 268).

The amalgamation of these events gave the Commissioners and the British Government the perfect opportunity to implement themselves into one of Cymru's admittedly weakest factions; the education system. The teaching of English was forced upon the children who could not speak it, assisted by the infamous "Welsh Not", which was a piece of wood hung around the neck of a student who dared to speak Cymraeg (welshnot.com, 2013).

Yet this was not the first time the Cymry had been the victims of silencing. In 1535, Henry VIII passed the *Laws in Wales Act*, banning Cymraeg from any court of law and public offices. This law was not officially repealed until 1993; four hundred and fifty-eight years afterwards (Ó Ruairc, 2018). The actions of Henry VIII were done through political means; in an attempt to "unify" Cymru and England, the positions of the Marcher lords (nobles appointed to guard the "Welsh Marches") were taken over. In turn, Cymry in higher power ensured that their children spoke purely English. As noted by Colin Williams (1990, p. 19), the significance of this era in time saw the anglicisation and colonization of Cymru, labelling the land as "England's first colony".



Fig 3: An example of a "Welsh Not"

HOW TO ANGLICIZE TAFFY!—In some of the English schools in Wales, when a scholar is heard speaking Welsh, he is punished by being obliged to carry about with him a wooden pin, until he is lucky enough to catch one of his companions committing the same offence, when he joyfully transfers the detested pin to the fresh culprit.

Fig 4: A cut from the *Leicestershire Mercury* (1847, November 27th)

III: Anglicisation of the Celts

It's no secret that the lives of early Celtic people is a mystery. They indulged in the unfortunate habit of not writing down information of their culture, despite there being evidence that the Celts were perfectly literate (Howells, 2022). Whatever literature gained from those times are through re-tellings, interpretation, and speculation. The description of the people themselves are not from their own words, but from the sides that attempted to hold domain over the nation. The Greeks, who gave them the name "Keltoi" saw them as ruthless mercenaries. The Romans later called them savages and barbarians. It was Caesar himself who claimed that the Druids of Cymru "communicated only through the initiated, and never written down" (Rolleston, 1994, p. 332). Soon, the Anglo-Saxons came and called them "Welsh", which in Old English translates to two words; foreigner and slave (Quinion, 1996). The knowledge we have about the Celts in their own words is their attitude towards change; if an event threatened their way of life, the Celtic people would "destabilise" and form a new way to carry on their beliefs (Cherici, 1995, p. 10).

The Celtic people are synonymous with war and violence under the guise of these narratives. The Romans in particular exaggerated aspects of Druidic life, claiming that human sacrifices were abundant. When further investigated, human sacrifice *was* a factor of the Druids, but even so it was such a rare occurrence that the cause of the sacrifices cannot be explained (Koch, 2006, p. 1549). Despite this, it seems hypocritical for the Romans to feud with the Celts over human sacrifice; it was documented that ancient Romans would go through the same practice. What we would view as ritualistic sacrifice, however, was seen to the Romans as justice. (Schultz, 2010, p. 516).

What stood out on a personal note was the ritual killing of androgynous children. As accounted by Celia Schultz:

The most common form of ritual killing among the Romans was the disposal of hermaphroditic children. On fourteen occasions between 209 and 92 B.C.E., androgyne infants and children were included among the prodigies reported to the Roman Senate. The children were drowned by the *haruspices*, usually in the sea (Schultz, 2016, p. 70).

There is no concrete evidence of how the Celts would react to "hermaphrodites", or anyone who - in today's standards - would be considered part of the LGBTQIA+ community. The most popular reasoning behind this is the introduction of Christianity to

the Celtic nations. This religion was introduced during Roman occupation, and with no surprise was met with conflict.

The Druids were respected by the Celtic people, deemed as being spiritually connected with nature, the body, and soul. They were scholars bonded to the grand divinity of the world, worshipping their polytheistic Gods and Goddesses much like the Romans did. Celtic Christians claimed they saw this not as a threat towards their monotheist ideologies, but rather as a step towards higher spirituality. Yet according to Cheric:

Gradually, the gods and goddesses of the pre-Christian world lost their divinity and became the heroes and heroines of a lost age. (Cheric, 1995, pp. 19-20).

But how could this happen if the Celtic people were determined to carry on their beliefs through destabilisation and reformation when taking into consideration the importance of the Gods themselves? It wasn't through lack of strength or lack of determination. It comes down to the harsh truth; they were small Cymric tribes going against the ever-growing Roman Empire. Christianity eventually spread across the land, and what we know of the old Cymric stories were told through the words of Christian bards; reviewed and revised to fit Christian ways.

IV: Cymric Gods and Goddesses

Women identified with the fruitful earth, with human passions and renewal of life. In direct opposition, men clung to the gods of the sky, to the deities of reason who were remote from reproduction. Yet sexuality remained a common ground of communication between the genders, a need to be recognised by both men and women.

Peter Cherici, *Celtic Sexuality: Power, Paradigm, and Passion* (pp. 20-21).

The Cymric Pantheon are split into two distinct aspects: the mortals, who gained Godhood through heroic deeds, and the immortals, who were born from magic and are Gods by this birth-right. Whilst the latter lived in parts of Cymru with the former, there was a specific land they could reside in; this place was called *Annwfyn*, or the Otherworld.

Unlike depictions of “another world” in other Western mythologies and religions, Annwfyn is not a purely “other world”. It is not described as a land accessible only through death or through a portal, but rather it is a world that very much exists in parallel with the mortal world connected by a thin veil. As Christianity took over, Annwfyn was associated with the concept of Hell, despite there being no evidence in the Mabinogion that Annwfyn is purely for evil souls, or that the King of Annwfyn himself is the equivalent of Satan. Through personal interpretation, I identify Annwfyn to be comparable to Mount Olympus, where it is said the Greek Gods would live as they watched over mortals. Some have compared the Greek Underworld to Annwfyn, but again, the evidence that Annwfyn is solely for the dead is lacking.

Annwfyn is initially mentioned in the First Branch of the Mabinogion, where Arawn, the King of Annwfyn and the master of the Cŵn Annwfyn (the hounds of Annwfyn), met the mortal Prince of Dyfed, Pwyll. A deal was set between the two where they would take each other's places in order to benefit the other. Arawn, using his magic, disguised himself as Pwyll and vice versa, where they stayed in each other's realms for one year. In that time, Arawn watched over Dyfed, and Pwyll defeated Arawn's enemy, Hafgan. Once the year was done, they returned to their respective homes, but became friends until Pwyll passed on. (Schreiber, 1997).

The interaction between mortals and immortals is common, as detailed in multiple stories featured in the Mabinogion. Friendships are formed, enemies are made, and even lovers are established. There is an intrinsic “human” quality to these stories, which could be the result of how the Druids saw the world. Whilst Christians believed in the separation of body and soul (in an attempt to resist the temptations of “the body”), the Druids saw the

body, soul, and the world as one, and that a detachment from one could negatively result in the detachment of the entire self (Cherici, 1994, p. 11).

What they believed could be given through the self (love, sex, etc.) may have affected their views of the Cymric Pantheon. According to Cherici, the Celts would identify sex as a carnal need, whilst the ideas of romance and intimacy were often reserved for the coupling of mortals with immortals (p. 26). Cherici also notes when a Celtic woman was caught cheating, that “[infidelity] is not the fault of the wife, but the fault of the husband for leaving her sexual and reproductive urges unfulfilled” (p. 22). Unsurprisingly, this was ground for divorce, which was acceptable to the Celts.

This leads to a notable story within the Mabinogion; the story of Lleu Llaw Gyffes and Blodeuwedd, his wife made of flowers. Through circumstance and magical intervention, Llew was cursed to never take a human wife, but was instead granted a woman made of flowers. He married Blodeuwedd, who in turn fell in love with another man named Gronw. They were quick to plan Llew’s death to be together, but the two were caught. Blodeuwedd was turned into an owl as punishment, however Gronw was killed by Llew.

When considering how infidelity was viewed among the Celts, it is unusual for Blodeuwedd and Gronw to immediately assume that Llew needed to die. If infidelity was seen as the fault of the husband, Blodeuwedd had nothing to fear. If divorce was a common practice at the time, there would have been no need to plan a hasty murder.

A major component had already been established; the Christians influenced the outcome of the Mabinogion. Perhaps the introduction of a murder – if there was one in the original story at all – served as a moral lesson to the audience?

The idea of this leads to a question that doesn’t come up often in the circles of modern Celts: were there homosexual couples in the Mabinogion, and were they covered up to fit Christian views? The only instance of homosexuality is that of a tragic and brutal occurrence in the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogion, where the brothers Gwydion and Gilfaethwy sexually violate the maiden Goewin, the servant of the brothers’ uncle Math Ap Mathonwy. Math used his magic to punish the brothers, turning them into mated animals of the opposite sex, such as a stag and a deer, a boar and a sow, then finally a wolf and a she-wolf. With each year, they would mate and offer the child to Math, who would raise it.

This cruel, incestuous tale is not the ideal representation of homosexuality. Much like Blodeuwedd and Gronw, this story may have been served as a moral lesson, and much like the former, it cannot truly be determined whether this was the original tale told.



Fig 5: Christopher Williams, 1937. *Blodeuwedd; Flower Face* [oil on canvas] At: Newport Museum and Art Gallery.

V: Turning the Celts Queer

For centuries, the boundaries of close friendship, intimacy, and same-sex desire were carefully traversed by men and women, and there was a boundary between acceptable intimacy between two friends or companions of the same gender and 'the forbidden intimacy of homosexuality'.

Daryl Leeworthy, *A Little Gay History of Wales* (p. 12).

The inclusion of queer people in mythology is prevalent in many cultures around the world. The Greeks were perhaps the most well-known for such themes in their stories, whether they were about Gods or mortals. In the *Iliad* (written between the 7th and 8th century), Homer writes of Achilles and Patroclus, two mortal men who held a close bond during the Trojan war. Whilst Homer never states that the relationship was romantic or sexual, it is later challenged as a homosexual relationship by Plato and Aeschylus (Fantuzzi, 2012, p. 227). The poet Sappho wrote of *eros*, or romantic / sexual love between women (Boehringer, 2014, p. 155), whilst her name and the Island of Lesbos give titles to homosexual women (sapphic and lesbian). Gods such as Dionysus took male lovers, and Hermaphroditus embodied both masculine and feminine qualities (physically and mentally). Myths from other cultures, such as Norse, saw the God Loki being able to change his reproductive systems to give birth to his children, and homosexuality between mortal men was seen as acceptable – as long as one was in the dominant role (Hallakarva, 1996).

With these examples, it's clear to see that the idea of queerness is not an impossibility in different cultures. The stories have managed to hold for centuries, allowing modern scholars to discuss the nature of these relationships and mentalities.

Considering this, I contemplated: why aren't there stories like these for the Celtic people? Had they been lost, or did they ever exist at all?

At last, a breakthrough. I had decided not to solely focus on relearning my Cymric heritage, but rather to focus on *how* my heritage relates to an entirely lost and silenced people. I honoured these forgotten individuals through a medium I knew best; illustration.

A partial amount of the work was based on my previous project, where I looked into my family history and how the simple act of my mother handing down her recipes to me widened my view on the metaphysical connection between myself and the ancestors I'd never met.

The incorporation of queer people into queer-less myths would bring up unnecessary discussions on where queer people belonged in history. To counteract this, I left the presented heterosexual relationships as is, whilst creating separate yet parallel stories that included modern-day queer people. This ranged from portraying them with their families, falling in love, and dealing with the harsh but very real side of the community, such as prejudice and depression.

Whilst planning the parallel imagery, I had to allow myself some flexibility with the stories in the Mabinogion. Though the motives and actions of the characters were shown, I had to interpret the emotions that preceded and followed certain tragic events.

I chose eight stories from the Mabinogion to coincide with the eight colours of the original Pride flag co-created by Gilbert Baker, Lynn Segerblom, and James McNamera, along with over 30 volunteers (McGreevy, 2021). Each colour symbolised a meaning: pink for sex, red for life, orange for healing, yellow for sunlight, green for nature, teal for magic, indigo for serenity, and violet for spirit.

I initially began with the six-striped flag (omitting pink and teal). This was the result of having no knowledge of the original Pride flag. These colours were removed over time purely for the lack of resources. The six-striped flag is a widely recognisable symbol of the LGBTQIA+ community, and whilst it would have been easier to stick with six, I couldn't allow myself to do so, for the six-striped flag is closely associated with "Rainbow Capitalism". In short, Rainbow Capitalism is a term used in the instance of corporations plastering this familiar flag on products for monetary gain during Pride Month. Rich Ferraro comments:

There's power in brands participating in Pride Month, and it's important for their employees and their consumers to see support for the community during Pride Month. But it can't just be during Pride Month [...] If a brand doesn't have a 365 day-a-year plan for LGBTQ inclusion, they really need to prioritize that over prioritizing a one-off Pride campaign (Ferraro, cited in Graham and Lucas, 2021).



Fig 6: The original Pride flag preserved by Gilbert Baker, 1978.

VI: The Interpretation of Speculative Myth

Now that the colours were chosen, I tasked myself with aligning the Cymric Gods to each meaning. With only eleven stories to choose from, I had to be precise in my decisions.

Pink was for sex, and with sex came the Celtic idea that women had full control of their own sexual freedom (Cherici, 1994, p. 21). A story that stood out was the tale of Arianrhod, a maiden who claimed to be a virgin, only to be tested by Math Ap Mathonwy's magic and gave birth to two children on the spot - one of those children being Llew Llaw Gyffes, the husband of Blodeuwedd. Arianrhod then fled in shame.

The story may be intended to shame promiscuous women. However, I admired Arianrhod for taking control of her sexuality and rejecting the societal expectations of motherhood. Not much is shown about her afterwards, other than cursing her son multiple times - undoubtedly, out of spite.

I aligned her story with that of a modern-day sex worker. This is a practice that falls upon a number of individuals for a multitude of reasons. In my work, I designed with a transgender character in mind, more specifically focusing on the experiences of trans feminine workers. As Nadal (2014) notes in a study, the possibility of a transgender woman securing legal employability was "hindered by the reluctance of employers to hire a transgender individual". The study also reports positive experiences from trans feminine sex workers, with some claiming they "felt appreciated as real women by their male clients [...] they did not experience that appreciation in other aspects of their lives".

Red was for life, and I decided to complement this with prejudice. I thought of the story of Rhiannon, the Cymric equivalent of the Horse Goddess Epona. One night after the birth of her son, Rhiannon fell asleep whilst her maids cared for the baby. The maids in turn fell asleep, and an unknown beast stole the baby. The maids woke up and rushed to cover their mistake by smearing Rhiannon's face with puppy's blood. Once Rhiannon woke, she was accused of eating her own baby as she was from Annwfyn and therefore not human. Under the orders of her husband Pwyll, Rhiannon was punished and was forced to carry visitors on her back whilst telling them what she had done.

I felt empathetic for Rhiannon. I couldn't understand the grief of losing a child, or to be accused of being their murderer, but I could relate to another part of this story in a way a queer person could: to be blamed and punished over lies.

The story I designed to reflect Rhiannon's is that of an attack against a queer person. This is a difficult subject to talk about, having lived a similar life of the character I designed. The prejudice against the LGBTQIA+ community spans eons and civilizations. Though many may think this prejudice has lessened in the modern era, it has not. The AIDS epidemic of the late 20th century saw the McCarthyistic rise of witch hunts towards gay men, impacting the community ever since (Rosenfeld, 2018). Recently, COVID-19 had been blamed on the community by religious figures, with some claiming the virus as "divine retribution" for Pride parades (Greenhalgh, 2020). Hence why I aligned this with life; prejudice for LGBTQIA+ people is part of our lives.

Orange was for healing, and I wanted to contrast the image behind the colour. In colour theory, orange is usually associated with optimism and fun. Healing, on the other hand, does not reflect these words. Healing can be a long and painful process, and certain events could restart that process from the beginning. I chose to go with the story of Brân the Blessed, a literal giant who was also the King of Prydain (the Cymric name for Great Britain). Rather than focusing on his tale, I wanted to portray his relationship with his sister, Branwen, and how their love for one another affected Brân's choice to go to war. Branwen was wed to the Irish King Matholwch, however Efnysien, the half-brother of Brân and Branwen, took offence that his permission wasn't asked for and slayed the horses gifted by Matholwch. Though forgiven, Matholwch continued to feel insulted by this gesture and began to treat Branwen poorly. Hearing news of this, Brân walked across the sea to save his sister, only for him and Efnysien to be welcomed to a feast. Suspicious of the intent, Efnysian murders the infant son of Branwen, starting a war between the two Kings. Brân's head is cut off and buried under the Tower of London, and Branwen dies of a broken heart.

My work doesn't show war, but a symbolic, quiet moment between Brân and Branwen. Her innocence represents the joy and kindness still found in the world. Unbeknownst to her, Brân's decision to fight for her had already been made.

I reflected this imagery with how a majority of queer people live with depression and thoughts of suicide. Again, this is a difficult subject to research due to my personal connection to it. According to the Mental Health Foundation (2021), "half of LGBTQIA+ people had experienced depression, and three in five had experienced anxiety", "one in eight LGBTQIA+ people aged 18 to 24 had attempted to end their life", and "almost half of trans people had thought about taking their life". Both Brân and my character are making the complicated choice of suffering verses death.

Yellow was for sunlight, and this granted me an obvious metaphor of happiness. The colour itself reminded me of the story of Gwri Wallt Eurn, better known as Pryderi, the long-lost son of Rhiannon and Pwyll. His story was simple enough; he was raised by the childless Lord Teyrnnon and his wife after defeating the unknown beast that first kidnapped Pryderi (which also tried to steal the foals of Teyrnnon). Pryderi is described as having golden hair and growing up at an incredible rate, possibly due to his Annwfn heritage. Teyrnnon realises that Pryderi looked similar to Pwyll and, despite loving the child, Teyrnnon and his wife knew that they must return Pryderi to his birth parents, however they stayed in his life afterwards.

To reflect the life Pryderi had with his foster parents, I designed a queer couple spending time with their adopted child. The right for queer people to adopt became law in the UK in 2005, and according to First4Adoption (2015), there had been "encouraging research into parenting by lesbian and gay adopters". As expected, there is no valid psychological research to why a same-sex couple can't adopt.

Green is for nature, and the most obvious choice was Blodeuwedd. Not only was she born from flowers, but the act of her falling in love more than once is, in my eyes, considered natural. I admired the way she openly expressed and shared love, and so I paired her story with that of three people in a loving polyamorous relationship, meaning more than two consenting adults in a romantic or sexual relationship. This is wrongly attributed to infidelity, as people in a polyamorous relationship are aware of one another and have agreed upon the nature of the relationship.

Whilst this type of relationship was not at all portrayed in the Mabinogion, the story itself may have been tampered with, therefore my interpretation is what it is: an interpretation.

Teal is for magic, and yet again I'm faced with an obvious choice. The enchantress Cerridwen is renowned as a witch in modern paganism, and in her story she crafts a potion of worldly knowledge for her son Afagddu, who was hideous and stupid compared to his sister Creirwy. She was assisted by Morda, a blind man who tended the fire of the cauldron, and Gwion Bach, a young boy tasked with constantly stirring the mixture. The rules of the potion stated that three drops will grant knowledge whilst any more would result in a poison. By accident, three drops landed on Gwion's thumb and burned him, prompting him to lick his thumb. He gained worldly knowledge and poetic inspiration, causing Cerridwen to chase him down. The two changed into multiple animals; Gwion into a hare, then a fish, then a bird. Cerridwen turned into a greyhound, then an otter,

then a hawk. Gwion finally turned himself into a grain and swallowed by Cerridwen as a hen, who later gave birth to him in preparation to kill him. Finding the baby to be too beautiful to kill by her own hands, Cerridwen threw him into the ocean.

As violent as the story is, I focused on Cerridwen's dedication to her children – at least, the first two. I thought of my own mother and what she had done to make me feel accepted as her son. I designed another mother, one who was raising a transgender child. The hints are subtle; whilst Cerridwen brews her potion, this other mother is making party food for her child, including a cake adorned with their new name. My interpretation goes further than the act of spells and potions; motherly love is magic.

Indigo is for serenity, and peace was hard to find in the Mabinogion. I turned to another source focusing on modern pagan practices and the analysis of the Gods found there. A single line connected Arawn and his wife to serenity:

When he returned home to his wife she was surprised at the affection he showed her (Quin, 2019, p. 25).

That line alone inspired me with the imagery of a strong and intimidating God-King being utterly in love with his wife. In that moment of reunion, it was just the two of them basking in their own peace, in the arms of one another. I mirrored their devotion to one another in the image of two women getting married, knowing that they too found serenity with each other.

Violet is for spirit, and this was meant to embody the spirit of LGBTQIA+ people. How could I pair this meaning with any story other than that of Taliesin? Once known as Gwion Bach, Taliesin is recorded as both a mythical figure and a real bard in Cymric history. He is applauded for carrying on the stories of the Mabinogion and other Cymric tales, keeping them alive today. Had it not been for him, this project would cease to be.

I designed the image of a transwoman leading a modern-day Pride parade in memory of Marsha P. Johnson, an important figure of the Stonewall rebellion in 1969 and an advocate of transgender rights (Rothberg, 2022). The affect Stonewall had in the U.S.A. transferred over to the U.K., leading to the founding of Stonewall Equality Limited, a charity for LGBT rights named after the movement. My character is also covered in tattoos; each one indicating to the previous colours.



Fig 7: Oliver Dominic, 2022. *The Faces of Wales: Sex* [digital illustration].

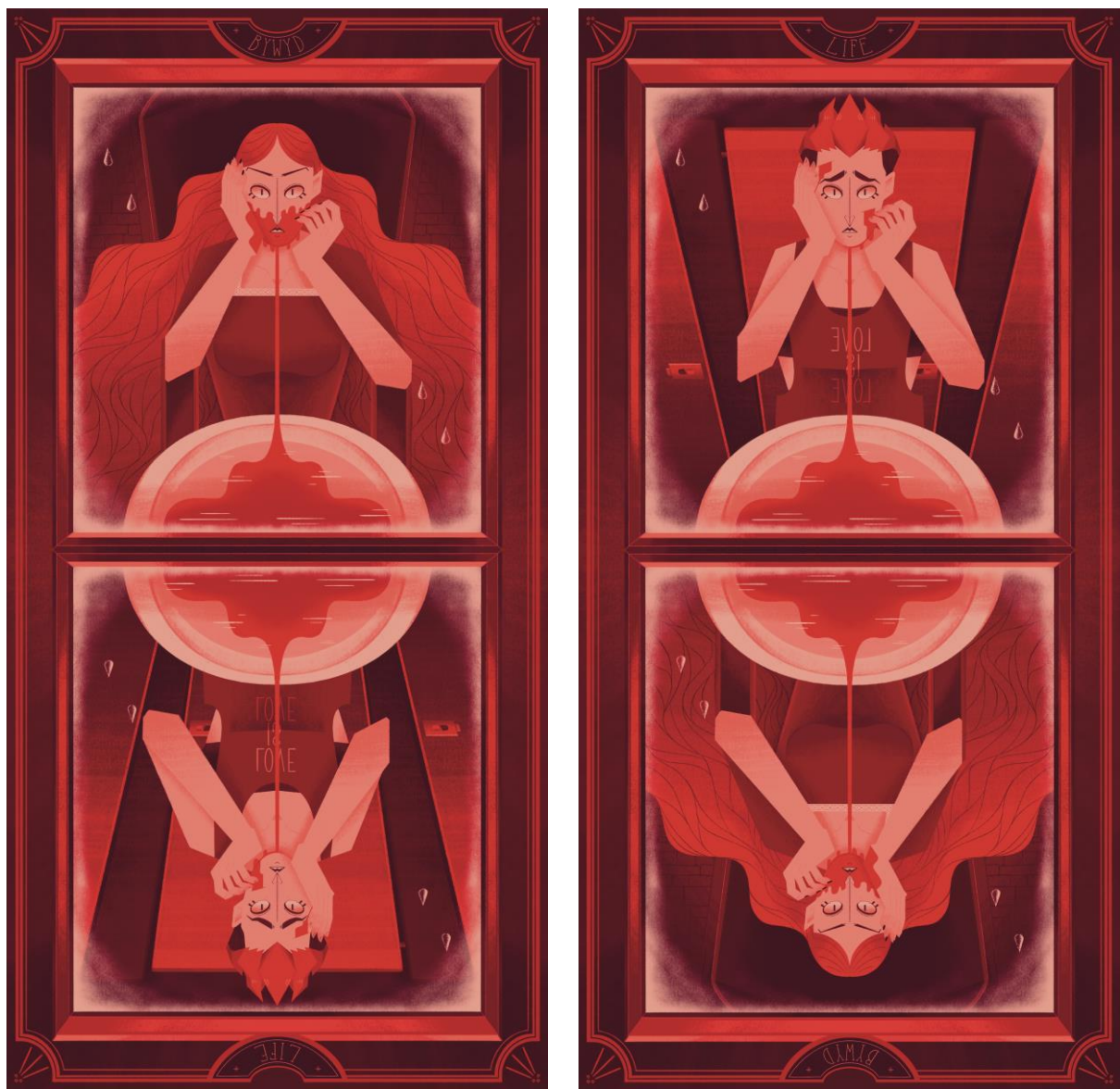


Fig 8: Oliver Dominic, 2022. *The Faces of Wales: Life* [digital illustration].



Fig 9: Oliver Dominic, 2022. *The Faces of Wales: Healing* [digital illustration].



Fig 10: Oliver Dominic, 2022. *The Faces of Wales: Sunlight*[digital illustration].



Fig 11: Oliver Dominic, 2022. *The Faces of Wales: Nature* [digital illustration].



Fig 12: Oliver Dominic, 2022. *The Faces of Wales: Magic* [digital illustration].



Fig 13: Oliver Dominic, 2022. *The Faces of Wales: Serenity*[digital illustration].

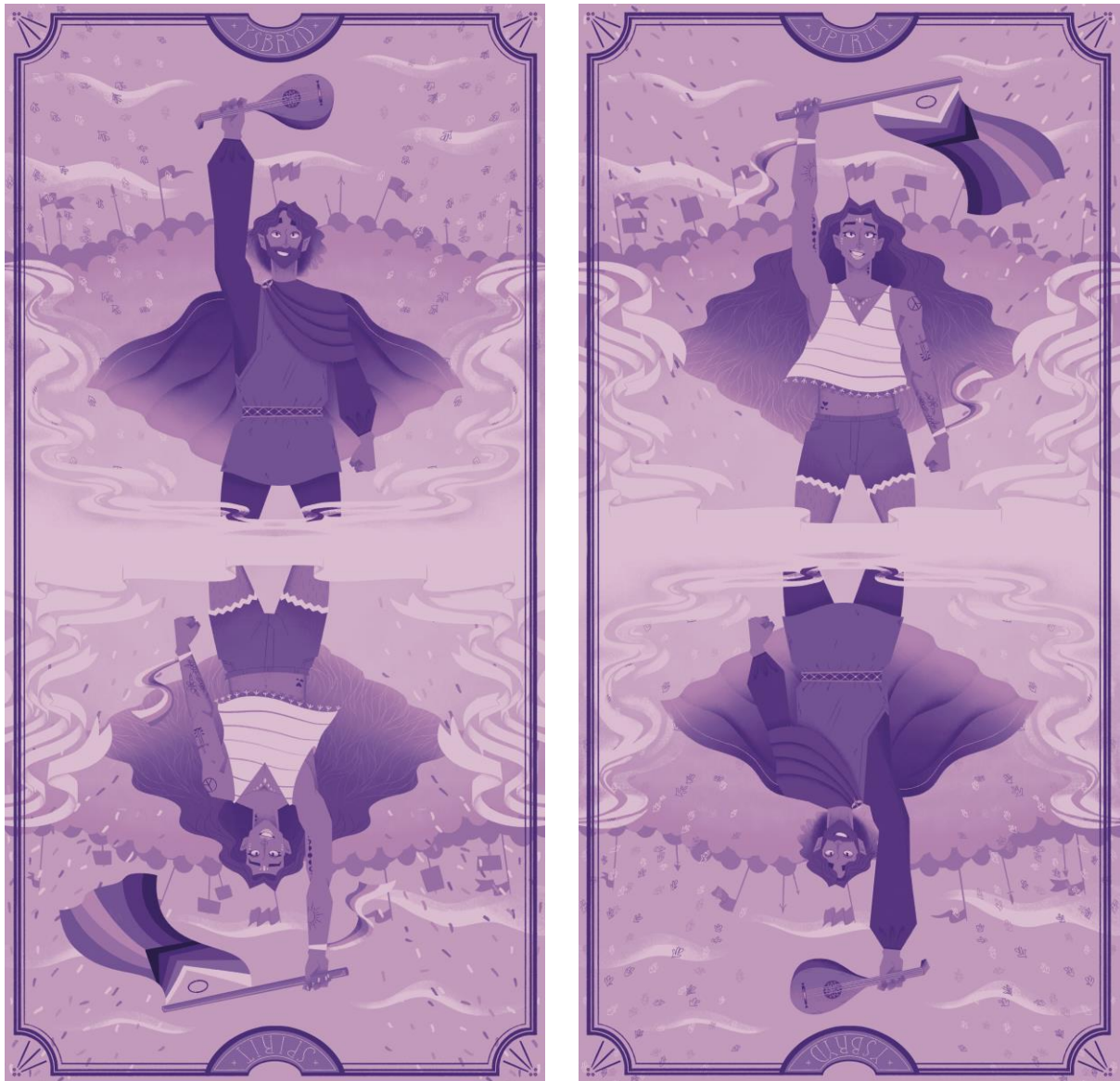


Fig 14: Oliver Dominic, 2022. *The Faces of Wales: Spirit*[digital illustration].

VII: Conclusion

My intention of this project - when stripping back to the bare bones - was to convey the concept of hiraeth. I learned of the word long ago, but only knew its true meaning in the past year. I had never felt so disconnected to Cymru before then; yet learning more about the Cymric Gods, the Celts, and the colonisation of Cymru did I feel that reconnection.

I am a self-conscious artist. I value style over substance and never allowed others to see my works in progress. A therapist would say this reflects how I never allow people to see my true self. In a way, that is true. In another way, I didn't know what my true self was, despite all the labels I collected over the years.

I like to believe this project has changed that. I've begun posting rough sketches of my work online rather than waiting for them to be done. I've started to talk to my family and friends about what's going on inside my head.

The pieces I created made me realise how truly and unashamedly *proud* I am with my art and everything they embody. They each stood tall baring the imagery of Cymru and queerness combined into one.

But I didn't just make these pieces for myself. I made them for my queer friends. I made them for my Cymric family. I made them for the silenced voices of those long gone, to the ones who never had a chance to find their place in a land that had already disappeared from view. To some, they appear as simple drawings. To me, these show exactly what the title says: The Faces of Wales.

VIII: Figure Sources

Fig 1: Mary Vaughan Jones, 1969. *Sali Mali*[book].

Fig 2: Mike Young, 1982. *SuperTed*[television show].

Fig 3: BBC, 2014. *The Welsh Not*. [online article]

Fig 4: British Newspaper Archive, 2023. *Leicestershire Mercury, 1847, 27th November issue* [online archive].

Fig 5: Christopher Williams, 1937. *Blodeuwedd; Flower Face* [oil on canvas] At: Newport Museum and Art Gallery.

Fig 6: Gilbert Baker, 1978. *Pride Flag*. At: GLBT Historical Society Museum.

Fig 7: Oliver Dominic, 2022. *The Faces of Wales: Sex* [digital illustration].

Fig 8: Oliver Dominic, 2022. *The Faces of Wales: Life* [digital illustration].

Fig 9: Oliver Dominic, 2022. *The Faces of Wales: Healing* [digital illustration].

Fig 10: Oliver Dominic, 2022. *The Faces of Wales: Sunlight* [digital illustration].

Fig 11: Oliver Dominic, 2022. *The Faces of Wales: Nature* [digital illustration].

Fig 12: Oliver Dominic, 2022. *The Faces of Wales: Magic* [digital illustration].

Fig 13: Oliver Dominic, 2022. *The Faces of Wales: Serenity* [digital illustration].

Fig 14: Oliver Dominic, 2022. *The Faces of Wales: Spirit* [digital illustration].

IX: Bibliography

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