

Transforming Blodeuwedd

An inquiry into the ending of the 4th Branch of the *Mabinogi*: insights for a new cultural narrative.



Figure 1: 'Blodeuwedd Punished' illustrated by Margaret Jones (1984) in Thomas, G. and Crossley-Holland, K. *Tales of the Mabinogion* London: Victor Gollancz Ltd.

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KEY

Works referred to in abbreviation:

A-D – Aull Davies, C. (2008) *Reflexive Ethnography* (1st Edition 1998) London and New York: Routledge.

HHB - Hennink, M., Hutter, I., Bailey, A. (2011) *Qualitative Research Methods*. London: Sage.

LLG - Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., and Guba E.G. (2011) ‘Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions, and Emerging Confluences Revisited’ in Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. eds. *The Sage Book of Qualitative Research* (4th Edition) California, London, New Delphi, Singapore: Sage.

MAB – *The Mabinogi*: Davies, S. (2007) *The Mabinogi*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

MB4 – *The Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi: Math of Mathonwy*: Davies. S. (2007) *The Mabinogi*. pp. 47-64. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Term Referred to in Abbreviation

PAR – participatory action research

Defining Terms:

Within the context of this paper, the following terms are used with the meanings below;

Anima: Jungian term for feminine energy within a masculine identifying being (often less conscious). Better defined as ‘soul’ (Hillman 1992)

Anima Mundi: the soul of the world.

Animus: Jungian term for masculine energy within a feminine identifying being (often less conscious)

Archetypes: “Forms or images of a collective nature which occur practically all over the earth as constituents of myths and at the same time as autochthonous, individual products of unconscious origin” C.G. Jung cited by Joseph Campbell (2008 342 fn17)

Brythonic: Pertaining to Old Britain, pre Roman.

Celtic: Much disputed term. General consensus that it refers to a family of tribes speaking Celtic languages extant in the Iron Age and beyond. Used here to refer to Brythonic, Welsh and Irish traditions.

Counter-Culture: Those who “challenge [...] existing social and political norms” (Campion 2017:2)

Cultural Narrative: the beliefs a culture lives by based on a story of the people that may be unconscious.

Ecology: The study of our home; the earth, our eco-system.

Echtra: Ancient Irish Otherworld adventure tales

Embodied: Somatic term for a state of being where the spirit and soul of a person are consciously connected and aware of the body they inhabit; its limitations, pleasures and pain, and that of others and thus able to act in integrity. N.B. Disembodied: to feel disconnected or unaware of the physical responses of the body, unable to make grounded decisions.

Enchantress (enchanter): a Celtic ‘shaman’, or psychopomp and guide to the Otherworld (or unseen dimensions of life). NB The word ‘shaman’ is from Siberian Tungusic and refers to one who has knowledge of death and ecstasy (Eliade 1972 4, 509). One who sings spells (Pinkola-Estes 1995) and song/dream lines (Sentier in Greenfield 2014), & guides souls to the Otherworld (usually female) McLaughlin (2019).

Gaelic: A language and cultural branch related to Celtic. Here referring to Irish or Scottish languages and traditions.

Immrama: Ancient Irish voyager tales (possibly to the Otherworld).

Indigenous: Used to refer to groups of people/culture/narrative that is intrinsically connected to a particular place and or landscape, including a body of myth to tell of it &/or that is situated within it.

Intentional community: a small (from 3 to up to 400) group of people living together as a community with the express purpose of exploring new paradigm ways of living, and usually following some particular practices such as singing, gardening, spiritually-based rituals and celebrations, non-violent communication, and natural building, as well as holding workshops on self-development and ecological themes.

Logos: Left brained communication

Mundus Imaginalis: Corbin, H. (1976) the Otherworld.

Mythos: Right brained communication.

Myth: Sacred teachings (following Sheridan & Longboat 2006 380) that address the mystery of life (Yarnell 1994 3)

Mythology: study of narratives from long ago that preserve tales of place, and the cosmology and culture that were once practised there, before written texts were possible, and remain timeless by dealing with archetypal energies.

Paganism: A religion that recognises the earth and the sun as fundamental to life and reveres them, and all beings, seen and unseen, as such (Harvey 2007 ix)

Spirituality: A belief in a life force or energy that is greater than the sum of all our parts and whose existence creates meaning and purpose to our lives.

Soul: aspect of a human (or other being) that connects them to a storehouse of memories that could go beyond the present lifetime, and beyond their own lives.

The Feminine: Right brained activity within all genders, things, beings and places.

The Masculine: left brained communication in all genders, things, beings and places.

The Old North: The area where Brythonic tradition held out the longest; it covered what is now Southern Scotland, Cumbria, the Isle of Man, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Northumberland and North Wales

Trauma: a state of being consisting of frozen emotion/s, due to an event/s that was overwhelming in real time, where emotions were unable to be processed and released. Leads to disembodied states, potential psychological disorders and lack of empathy, and inability to make integrated decisions.

The Celtic Year

In this paper I recognise and use the Welsh terms for the Celtic seasons:

Calan Gaeaf - The start of winter and the Celtic New Year, Gaelic *Sawain*, modern Halloween.

Gwyl Fair – The start of spring, Gaelic *Imbolc*, Christian Candlemass.

Calan Mai - The beginning of summer, Gaelic *Beltaine*, modern May day

Gwyl Awst – The beginning of Autumn, Gaelic *Lughnasdh*, Lammas, Harvest time.

Blodeuedd or Blodeuwedd?

Blodeuedd: Welsh: Flower maiden

Blodeuwedd: Welsh: Flower face (a term used to refer to an owl)

On occasion I will refer to Blodeuwedd to account for the two aspects.

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Abstract

This research considers an aspect of the role of the archetypal figure of the Enchantress, and its implications in the early 21st century.

It focuses on the ending of the Welsh myth of the 4th branch of the *Mabinogi* and the theme of the transformation of the feminine, leaving the masculine to rule alone, and how that is perceived by counter-culture groups in southern and central England.

Key concept and narrative style methodologies were employed to collect data in the form of transcripts from a series of focus group discussions where participants had heard a telling and a re-telling of the myth. The data, which was also collected through questionnaires and follow-up interviews, was considered from a cultural eco-feminist stance with elements of autobiographical ethnography by the researcher, who was also the performance storyteller.

Findings showed that for some participants of this study the extant version of the ending of the myth is not acceptable, whereas an alternate ending portraying an aspect of the enchantress in a seasonal role enabled the myth to be considered as helpful to the way they perceived and acted in the world.

The paper concludes that rigorous questioning and re-framing of traditional myths can lead to discussions that open an arena for the re-evaluation of material recorded in the early medieval age in such a way as to allow suppressed elements to re-emerge and be dialogued with as a tool for social change. Research with different groups, and on different re-workings, and on other myths in the *Mabinogi*, are recommended to test these findings further.

Chapter 1 – Introduction – A Treasure in the Dark

Perhaps our myths are not something that we are born with, or achieve, but something that we have thrust upon us, to confront us not only with our heads, but with our hearts. (O’Flaherty 1999 345)

This paper is an inquiry into the ending of a Welsh myth, *Math of Mathonwy*; the fourth branch of the Mabinogi (hereafter MB4), from a counter-culture and insider-near perspective. It focuses on the transformation of Blodeuwedd and asks if it has relevance today.

Although I have maternal Welsh ancestry, as an English woman, I am aware that though I feel Celtic myth to be my tradition, it may not necessarily be perceived that way by Welsh speakers. When working with myth misappropriation can be an issue. For Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty (1999), however, it is the manner in which we approach a myth that is tantamount. In fact, she claimed, it is often the myth that approaches us, and this is, in fact, what happened to me.

I first heard MB4 in the liminal lands between Wales and England, beside a *Gwyl Awst* fire. Eight years later I was requested to tell it beside another borderlands fire. When an owl flew over me in the dark autumn sky, I knew Blodeuwedd had something to say.

As a performance storyteller I chose to conduct this inquiry over seven storytelling events. The tale was told, and retold as a seasonal cycle, interwoven with my journey with Celtic myth in Wales, which ended with a pilgrimage to Bardsey Island in Gwynedd.

I used participatory and mixed methods methodology in the form of focus groups and interviews; both post-storytelling and sometime later. Of the 44 respondents most were women over forty, with an interest in ecological and spiritual matters. As some participants were already known to me, this research is viewed from an emic perspective.

The research questions were concerned with if, or how, Celtic myth might enter the current eco-debate with insights towards a new cultural narrative.

Pressing issues for many ecologists, eco-psychologists, artists, eco-feminists and activists today are the dramatic effects of climate change, resource depletion and associated human impact on the eco-system, to the extent that a movement called 'Extinction Rebellion' began during the writing of this dissertation, and Greta Thunberg mobilised many thousands of children all over the world to call attention to an impending global disaster.

My literature review indicated that for many a split between Ecology and Spirituality in the dominant story is the cause. Some participants in this research considered there was a disconnect between 21st century life, and both Ecology and Spirituality.

In chapter 2 I explore eco-feminist arguments for a New Story that heals the split, and why it was to myth I turned, and in particular to the Celtic tradition. I outline the role storytelling can play in such a debate, as well as the responsibilities of telling myth.

The extant version of MB4 is medieval and tells the story of a semi-divine hero whose wife is fashioned out of flowers by two enchanters. The aspect that most called my attention during my literature review was responses to the ending, when Blodeuedd the flower maiden is transformed into an owl for betrayal, and Lleu, her husband, after a ritual killing in which he becomes an emaciated eagle, is nursed back to health and left to rule as King alone. Scholars' responses polarised between satisfaction and outrage. I asked participants for their responses to that ending and to a cyclical version, framed within my own experience. In chapter 2 I explore how frame tales and biological narratives affect our responses to a story.

The main focus for my analysis was the symbolism of Blodeuwedd and its relevance in a new cultural story. I was interested in Blodeuwedd as an enchantress or Otherworldly woman. My review of the literature showed that the Otherworldly female, with her catalyst, psychopomp and gatekeeper aspects, was gradually degenerated over time and hidden from view. I wanted to know what exactly was hidden and why, and what the enchantress meant to my participants.

The weakness in this research was its wide scope, creating many variables, a variety of questions asked at different times and to different groups, and more data than could be adequately discussed in a paper of this size. This dissertation focuses on one aspect of the role of the enchantress. The narrative emerged from insights and observations revealed by participants and incidents that occurred during research events. As an insider-near a certain amount of auto-ethnography is present; this is as much a snapshot of a cultural eco-feminist searching for meaning as it is a critical approach to the dominant story.

In writing this paper I stumbled along, wanting to conform to the rigours of academic writing whilst my storyteller's heart was desperate to weave a yarn. How do I add voice to the urgent call for a New Story, I asked. My heart told me to tell it as a story, my head was concerned; have I listened enough, to the sources I have learnt from, and to the groups with whom I feel kinship? What follows is a narrative journey between those two places that attempts to add one small element to a much bigger story.

Chapter 2. Literature Review – The Stories We Tell

The aim of this dissertation is to contribute to eco-discussions on the need for a new cultural narrative, from the viewpoint that the Celtic myth MB4 has something to offer.

2.1 The Need for a New Story

I write midst social, economic and political turmoil against a backdrop of ecological crises of unprecedented scale within living memory. In 2007 Graham Harvey claimed:

the natural world offers enough challenges: earthquakes, volcanoes, tsunamis and so on. Those problems are compounded by the culture we have inherited and those who benefit from the current power-structures (p82).

What Harvey refers to as culture can perhaps be more precisely expressed as the dominant cultural narrative, in which a separation between Science and Spirituality exists, essentially over our evolutionary origins. Rupert Sheldrake is an advocate of spirituality being compatible with science (2017), whereas biologist Richard Dawkins maintains the status quo (Harding 2013 p71) where the resulting masculine qualities of

logic and autonomy in leaders, I argue, has led to them making un-ecological and unethical socio-economic decisions because the Old Story commodifies natural resources as if they were infinite, and people and other living beings as if they were dispensable. In consequence, a question this research asked is if there is a split between Ecology and Spirituality *and* between them and everyday life, distancing people from the effects of their actions.

According to Berry (1988), Abram (1997), Hopkins (2008, 2019), Eisenstein (2013, 2018) et al, who advocate a New Story, this ‘age of amnesia’ (Shaw 2016) has contributed to phenomena such as extreme weather, climate change, resource depletion and the associated issues of political and climate refugees, and loss of wildlife habitats, leading to protests such as Extinction Rebellion, climate strikes, and rallies that display the socio-economic divide, such as being for or against Brexit.

The Transition Network (Hopkins 2008) supposes four stages of addiction to oil that could be perceived as concurrent chapters in a story that moves away from the dominant narrative. *Business as Usual* indicates that the Old Story is still current, whereas *Mad Max* responses indicate an aggressive backlash to threats to the prevalent story. *Techno-Fix* advocates look for solutions from within the current mindset, whereas at the *Power Down* stage people have accepted the need for change and look for New Story alternatives (ibid 46-7, Chamberlin 2009 p23).

Some Old Story proponents in the *Business as Usual* stage have been provoked into *Mad Max* reactions by Greta Thunberg’s rhetoric which has championed international climate strikes (O’Connell 2019). I write from the perspective that the fourth scenario is desirable, perhaps being one of those who, according to Nick Campion’s cultural history of the New Age, “believe that ideas [...] shape the world” where “longing for the past, despair over the present and hope for the future” (2017 p1) fuel action.

Emma Jung (1957 p8-9) situated the split between spirit and nature *within* the masculine psyche and stated that it has existed since the earliest of days. If this is the case, then the recognition of an ‘animate earth’ or Gaia, following James Lovelock whose theory named the earth for an early feminine deity, is a good step forwards (Stephan Harding 2013). Although eco-feminist Monica Sjöö (1999 p301 fn17) claimed that Lovelock did not acknowledge the “earth as a spiritual being with consciousness”,

Harding perceives Gaia as the *anima mundi* and believes that she is both life and death giving (2019), matching Sjöö's description of the Great Mother being both light and dark (1999 p119).

Is it perhaps this dark aspect of the feminine that has caused a rift between the masculine in us and nature? From the earliest extant myth, the Sumerian Gilgamesh, heroes have searched for immortality (George 2003). Do Celtic myths also deal with this theme?

Harding (2013 p28) and Baring (2013), amongst others, speculated on what turned us from a belief in *anima mundi*. The notion that the split is essentially one between masculine-feminine has been discussed widely; psychological views ranging from madness from fear-of-death (Paul Shepherd 1998), nature as enemy (Gearóid Ó Cruaíoch 2015 p111-3), to the role of trauma and associated addictions, (Glendinning, and Kanner and Gomes, 1995, and Chris Johnson [in Hopkins 2010]), and feminist views.

2.2 The Feminine Perspective

Kramer and Alsted (1993 p345) differentiated between “feminist thinkers [who] link monotheism to male domination” and “others [who] see it as disconnecting humanity from its spiritual relationship with nature and ecological concerns.” The latter group, eco-feminists such as Merchant (1980) and Spretnak (1991-2), discussed the failure of the dominant story based upon matrilineal hypotheses including goddess worship, such as those put forward by Erich Neumann (1963), Robert Graves (1999) and Marija Gimbutas (1996). Joanna Macy (2008 p50) subscribed to this earth goddess theory and Baring [and Cashford 1993], 2013) researched her myth extensively.

Counter arguments are put forth by a feminist of the former group, Cynthia Eller (2000), who disputed the validity of traditional feminine roles, celticist Juliette Wood who counselled against conflating “material evidence with metaphoric concept” (Green 1996 p2, Wood 8-25) and historian Ronald Hutton (2001b) who propounded that notions of an earlier reverence for the feminine began in the 1800's. Campion reminds readers of “the danger of simple historic periodization” and the “oversimplified [...] results of the [...] language games played by historians” (2017 p5). It is against these

language games that the mythic is continuously pitted. Barbara Mann (2011 p104), on the other hand, values the oral over the written tradition, whilst Ó Cruaíoch (2015 p7) acknowledges the import of affective *and* logical knowledge, a stance I suggest is indicative of a healthy cultural narrative.

A later group of pagan writers, Jones (2001), Restall Orr (2005) and Telyndru (2016) revisited the notion that seasonality lay behind the goddess worshipping impulse in Britain and Kane argued for the seasonality of MAB (1998). It was here that my thoughts were most aligned when I began this research.

I write from the cultural eco-feminist perspective; a critical stance that questions the dominant story and looks for answers within an eco-spiritual worldview. Though Sjöö argued that New-Agers are different to “pagan eco-feminists who still remember that Earth is Gaia” (1999 p12-13, 21) this paper enters the discussion that straddles that divide.

Whilst some (e.g. Hopkins 2019) argue the need for a *new* story, Martin Shaw suggests “the myths we urgently need arrived perfectly on time 5000 years ago” (Magan 2019), a view echoed by Sharon Blackie (2016), who also suggests turning to the wisdom of our indigenous myths for solutions, a view to which I subscribe.

2.3 The Role of Storytelling

The role of storytelling in envisioning a New Story is advocated by Abram (2019), and as a tool for promoting eco-values, by storytellers Anthony Nanson (2007, 2011) and Eric Maddern (ibid 2001xi). Although, I believe that myth may hold the answers we are seeking, Nanson (2007 p59-60) and Hopkins alert us to the challenge that old stories can “present the past in a way that diminishes the idea that anything of use might be carried forward from it into the present” (2010 p143-4). In 2.5 I argue that it is by examining frame tales that a storyteller can address this concern.

The role of storytellers to use the language of mythos to teach is an ancient one. A myth, says Bringhurst:

is a story that insistently occurs; a piece of timelessness caught like an eddy in narrative time. Once the story is known, a single image, or even a single word can evoke it. But

only a limited sequence of images, words or gestures can tell it. A story is not a solid object or a solitary entity but *a transformative relationship* (2013 p48)

a viewpoint that Nanson, who understands the need for spiritual as well as ecological teaching, echoes (2007 p18, 48, 2011 p11).

In 2014, counter-culture wise-woman, Emma Osbach, who lives off-grid in mid-Wales, (Appendix 1b) challenged me to share stories of inner transformation. A sense of ancient responsibility fuelled my search. I chose to story-walk through Wales into Gwynedd, the scene of MB4. It changed my life. Abram, Lupton, and Letcher (in Nanson 2007 p33, 42, 44) all speak of the relationship between story and landscape, and Shaw defines a storyteller as “a cultural historian of place” (2016 p1) whilst Davies speculated on the teaching role of the oral storyteller in the ancient Welsh tradition (2007xiii-v) where a storyteller is *cyfarwydd*, ‘one who gives direction’ (Wynne in Blackie 2019c: 34:20).

However precisely defined, the role of the storyteller as something more than entertainer is well recognised (Nanson 2007, Sherman 2015, Blake 2018). I was aware as a teller of MB4 that though my aim was research, telling a myth carries the responsibility of telling the story in the right way for any particular audience. Swimme claimed myth has ‘a very deep biological basis’ and that by hearing it we can be changed and so bring change to the nature of the universe (Spretnak 1992 xvii).

Thus, my role brings the responsibility of both the *cyfarwydd* and the researcher. Sherman (2015 xviii) describes the phenomenon of a story beginning to tell itself in accord with audience response as “a story trance” which occurs when storyteller and listeners are in relationship, and thus no two tellings are ever the same. I return to this point in 3.1.ii when I address issues of research validity.

2.4 Choosing the Fourth Branch

Maddern (in Nanson 2011xi) claimed; “a storyteller’s choice is inevitably affected by the values he or she holds,” however in my experience we do not choose stories; they choose, and possess, us (Abram 2019).

MB4 found me in 2010, in the liminal lands between England and Wales, told by Lynn Webster-Wilde (2003) around a *Gwyl Awst* fire of poets, bards and storytellers, as I walked around England collecting tales of Transition (Bradley 2013 p277), on sabbatical from my post at Transition Network.

The extant version of MB4 is found within the medieval set of Welsh tales, thought to have issued from Gwynedd, known as the *Mabinogi* (Davies 2007p47-64). It tells the tale of Lleu and his hero's journey, aided by his trickster uncle, Gwydion, and how his mother, Arianrhod, and his wife, Blodeuedd, put in motion a set of events over which he seems to have little agency. Finally Gwydion transforms Blodeuedd into an owl as punishment for an infidelity, having brought Lleu, in the form of an eagle, from the brink of a near-death experience caused by the lovers, and set up the conditions for Lleu to kill his rival. (For a full summary see Appendix 1.)

Inwardly, I reacted against the tale of female betrayal.

2.5 Frame Tales and Biological Narratives

Any discussion of MB4 would be incomplete without being aware of the frame it sits inside. Frame tales are the outer contextualising cover for an older story, but as they are also often referring to the past, they are “a representation of a representation of the past (Ball 2013 p151). Perhaps this frame, which in MB4 preserves a medieval perspective, written down in times of social disintegration (Henken 1991 p14, Davies 2013 p166), when, Marie-Louise von Franz reminds us, the masculine spiritual heritage began (1999 p202), accounts for reservations (2.3) about utilising old stories to inform the present.

Ann Wilson's work on medieval romance focuses on a parallel plot, or biological narrative, that appears in some stories, where a primitive and unconscious emotional response to change, that seems to belong to the mythic in its use of amoral characters and ritual, uses magic to deal with fear (2016). Ball, citing Tolkein, maintained that when older material is written down motifs are often retained to preserve their antiquity (2013 p152). Although Jackson (1961 p128) claimed MB4 was not a myth but a collection of international motifs, perhaps it is these motifs, which were “building blocks” for the oral narrative (Henken 1991 p10) that carry the archetypal, or biological energy of the myth (op. cit. Swimme in Spretnak 1992, Wilson 2016).

2.6 Blodeuwedd in MB4

Houston (1993, p5) cited Campbell in describing myth as able to mediate between light and what is in shadow. Yet the medieval version of MB4 offers no such opportunity. Blodeuedd is transformed into Blodeuwedd, an owl, and that is the last we hear of her (Davies 2007, p63).

I chose to base my inquiry around the much-portrayed Blodeuwedd. Space does not allow me to discuss the various interpretations but they range from amoral, malign, or insane (Walton, 1972, Lewis, 2006, Conrad, 1988), to victimised, vengeful and angry (Tomos in Heinz 2017, Blake, 2017, Blackie, 2019). Davies (2007xiii) believed the *Mabinogi* were once part of the oral tradition and Sherman (2015xviii) claimed there have been many retellings, over hundreds of years, before any story is written down. I wondered if an earlier form of MB4 would have mediated between light and dark, and if something more could be learnt about the shadowy Blodeuwedd. Though Davies would not agree MAB contains myth, she *does* acknowledge that it may point to ancient deities, and that it opens up liminal space, allowing for new questions to be asked, which imbue it “with a ‘sacred’ quality that it may once have” had (2013, p173-4).

2.7 The Enchantress Archetype

Sabine Heinz thinks of Blodeuwedd “as the last reflux” of an ancient goddess (2019). This research asks whether she embodies the archetypal qualities of the enchantress (Welsh *hwyvar*), as defined by Jean Markale (1975, p117); the female psychopomp of the Celtic tradition. Mary McLaughlin (2019) discovered the association between the Otherworld and enchantment when she searched for references to the Otherworld in Ulster folksongs.

For Miranda Green the power of the main female characters in Celtic myth:

lies in their role as facilitators or enablers; they are catalysts, stimuli whose very existence causes momentous occurrences which are crucial to the development of the myths themselves [&] while [they] may appear shadowy, insubstantial and ineffectual, we may perhaps regard them as archetypes, whose specific characters may not be as important as their symbolic roles (1995 p46).

I hoped, like Harding, to “catch glimpses of” such an archetype (2013 p65-6) within MB4. Von Franz (1999 p23) and Campion (2017) consider there is a certain “archetypally informed synchronicity” (Tarnas 2007 p69) in the spirit of an age.

In Weber’s oft-cited Age of Disenchantment (Partridge 2005 p8) many in the west have turned to matrilineal first nations for wisdom teachings, failing to recognise them in our own tradition (e.g. McCartney 2018). Mircea Eliade demonstrated that an important area of mythology was the role the feminine plays in helping “the hero to conquer immortality or to engage victorious from his initiatory ordeals” (1972 p78), yet in the medieval-scribed MB4 *Blodeuwedd* is not described in such a manner, which makes it difficult for me to accept Hutton’s account of the goddess being “constructed” in the nineteenth century (2001b p126), rather that she was already degenerated.

van Dijk-Coombes (2018) discussed the degeneration of the female role in the oldest extant myth, that of Gilgamesh and his failed search for immortality, which may once have displayed the ancient mythic theme of the triple-aspect goddess (Baring and Cashford 1993). In Gilgamesh (George 2003, van Dijk-Coombes 2018) there is a Mother, a Lover who has sexual agency, and a Wise Woman, mirroring Arianrhod, *Blodeuedd* and *Blodeuwedd* in MB4. In both, the Mother is associated with a power that the male does not have; Ninsun interprets her son’s dreams (2018, p64) and Arianrhod foretells Llew’s fate. Both *Blodeuedd* and *Ishtar* are depicted as promiscuous (p69), and in both myths, the wise-woman is shadowy and her role downplayed. *Shiduri* gives advice at the entrance of the Underworld but is only perceived as a gatekeeper (pp.75-9) and *Blodeuwedd* is not given a role beyond her transformation into an owl; the universal symbol (Bringhurst 2013) of the wise woman (2.10ii). Heinz (2007/8 p95) also noted similarities between these myths.

Why have so many traditions (Eliade 1972, Yarnell 1994, van Dijk-Coombes 2018) altered their myths to downplay the role Toni Wolff named medial woman (1956, p11-13)? Campion suggested that certain New Age ideas are taboo because they challenge the dominant narrative (201p6-9) whilst Levine (1997) and Hopkins (2019 p38) argue that fear of death and trauma are embedded in our society. Trauma causes rejection of anything that is a reminder of the cause of fear (van der Kolk 2015) and McCartney argues that it can cause retributive behaviours (2018). Abram (1997, p151) claimed

women “have an excess of spiritual power”. Could it be that the dominant story is fear-based and hence why the liminal aspect of the enchantress is taboo?

Sjöö (1999), Crowley (in Campion 2017:137), Harding (2013, 2019) and Satish Kumar (2019) intimated that the spirit of the new age will embrace aspects of the multifaceted feminine principle. This inquiry considers what aspect of the archetype might now be re-emerging.

2.8 Otherworldly Females in Celtic Traditions.

My understanding of the Enchantress is based on the Celtic tradition of the Otherworldly female. In the ancient Irish *Echtra* and *Immrama*, the hero has an encounter with an Otherworldly woman and is changed. The encounters mark stages of the hero's journey. Some examples are: *Echtra Thaidg* (responsibility), *Máel Dúin*, (maturity) and *Immram Brain* (death).

When I turned to the Welsh tradition it was possible to identify Otherworld motifs, such as a semi-divine beautiful woman, a flowering branch, and bird imagery, but as Rees commented:

The Four Branches of the Mabinogi are singularly devoid of detailed descriptions of magical characters [...] or indeed of depictions of the Otherworld landscape, for which Irish stories are more informative (2012 p49).

Despite this lack of description, remnants linger. As Green commented, the woman as catalyst is such a motif.

Sexuality played an important role in the stories of Ireland and Wales, where superficially women were passive, powerless individuals. In fact, such women were enablers, Catalysts for change, and their relationship with men triggered significant events (1995, p204).

I considered Blodeuedd to be playing this role.

2.9 A Satisfactory Ending?

The ending of MB4 has been remarked upon by several writers. Davies and Griffiths were concerned about the failed marriage. Griffiths, who surprisingly summarises MB4 with several deviances from Davies' version, sympathetically calls Lleu a “poor

boy” and states that they “should live happily ever after” (2017, p63) whereas for Davies “the image of a man alone [...] with no wife and no heir does not make for a promising future.” (2007xxvii)

Joseph Nagy commented in this way:

“Gwydion [...] intervenes decisively once again and saves the day, as well as our narrative expectation.” (2013 p15)

A reviewer of Saunderson Lewis’ play *Blodeuwedd* expressed similar sentiments:

“At play’s end she hurled herself off the ridge, her scream echoing wildly, and then a barn owl flew out at us, the spellbound audience” it was “a fitting ending.” (Gower 2013)

Their decidedly masculine response was in sharp contrast to my own. However, Blackie, whose collection of short stories on shape-shifting women was published during the writing of this dissertation, and includes a fictional response to the ending of MB4, had this to say:

“I couldn’t allow Gwydion’s injustice to stand. In some parallel universe, Blodeuwedd is definitely paying him back.” (2019a 230)

It was these differing perspectives that drew my attention to the biological nature of MB4; its power to provoke emotion. I wondered if there was anything of value for today’s narrative if the frame tale and biological narrative were stripped away (see figure 3 p27).

2.10 Transforming Blodeuwedd

HRH, the Prince of Wales et al (2010 p92-3) stated that it is through the sharing of mythic themes “that the essential patterning in life is understood”.

2.10.i. The Owl as Messenger

Although I was interested in exploring the Enchantress-as-lover (2.8), it was the gatekeeper aspect that was revealed. As Elder (in Weber 2017x) remarked; “though love is often exhilarating, it is also inextricable from mortality.”

An owl reminded me of Blodeuwedd after an absence of 8 years, on a pendant around the neck of a woman in the Welsh borderlands who asked me to tell MB4 to the fireside group we were with. I had never told the tale, nor knew if I were able, but when I did, it emerged as a seasonal cycle to a captivated audience. That night an owl hooted over my caravan accommodation.

Alan Garner in his postscript to ‘The Owl Service’ shared a similar experience from Wales where he was considering creating his version of MB4:

“As I stood on the doorstep in the night, thinking these things, an owl brushed its wings in my face” (2017, p217)

My messenger, Webster-Wilde, described her experience thus:

“At night a barn owl shrieked, and once, stepping outside the door of the cottage, I saw her floating in the dark on her long white wings” (2002, p17)

Near the start of this study my partner gave me an exquisite eight-inch tall porcelain model of a barn owl. I wondered if I told my cyclical version, where the owl represents the coming of winter (Sohmer 2019, p60-1), alongside the medieval MB4 (see Appendix 1b) whether something new might emerge in ensuing discussions, and took her along as a centrepiece to each research event.

2.10.ii. The Owl Motif

For Terri Windling the owl represents death, initiation and dark wisdom, and is the crone aspect of the triple goddess (2019).

Ann Ross (1996 p344) claimed the owl motif was likely of European origin, belonging to earlier Celtic tradition, whilst others asserted her place as the oldest animal in Celtic tradition (Jackson 1961, p76, Heinz 1999, p67, Bromwich 2014, p36), and as an ancient international theme (Bromwich 2014, p235, Winter 2017 p81).

The connection between the owl and the feminine can be seen in the Sumerian figures of Lillith (Graves and Patai 1989), and Innana (Baring and Cashford 1993), seen below (fig. 2) in the oft-cited relief as a bird woman “with great wings and claw feet” (George 2018 p50), and, in the Greek Pandora, who, in the earliest *written* version, was

created by 2 gods and dressed by “owl-eyed Athena” with “lovely fresh-budding garlands, the flowers of a meadow” (Hansen 2013, p20-3).



Figure 2: Inanna in Baring & Cashford (1993) c.2300-2000bce, terracota plaque

Both Neumann (1963, p271, 335) and Markale (1975, p112,115) referred to owls and flowers as matriarchal symbols of death and transformation, a theme reiterated by Yarnell (1994), Heinz (1999) and Ross (2001). Baring and Cashford maintained that:

“The owl [...] continues to be the messenger of death and also comforter of the bereaved even to the present day” (1993 p60).

Lysaght argued the case for the banshee (*ban síde*) as the Irish Otherworldly female, still extant in the twentieth century, a supernatural grieving female who brings the message of death with a wail (1996, p152-5).

*Dressed in white
To kill?
Ugly-beautiful
Youthfully old.* (Bodley S., in Lysaght, p153)

The poem illustrates the shape-shifting guise of the banshee who can “appear as an old woman, a young girl or as a washer-woman prophet” (Green 1996 p6). Many descriptions of the banshee are of a bird woman with long white hair (Lysaght 1998, McLaughlin 2019). Interestingly, Ross (1996, p346) gave the Welsh for owl as *aderyn y corff* (corpse bird).

The old woman, representing winter and the land, is known in Gaelic tradition as the *cailleach* (Hutton 1998 p403-4). Ó Cathasaigh remarked on the ebb and flow of her self-renewal *over ages*, as well as her jurisdiction over death (2014, p161-4). Ó Cruaíaoich (2015 p29) recognised the wise-woman and the keening-woman as two of her triple-aspects. In Welsh she is *y wrach* (the hag) (1998, p404) and though Wynne

believes she has no name, she speculates if the wailer *cyhyraeth* is connected to her (in Blackie 2019c: 34:20).

In 2.7 I compared the epic of Gilgamesh, with its connection to death, a wise old woman and a failed search for immortality (George 2003 pxiii), to MB4. van Dijk-Coombes (2018 p70-1) cited Abusch suggesting that the encounter with Shiduri would have been the last part of that myth, where the goddess asks Gilgamesh to accept his mortality and marry, before later masculine overlays degenerated the original meaning.

Is Blodeuwedd the remnant of a Welsh Otherworldly female to Lleu's Otherworld journey, mirroring Gilgamesh's story?

In MB4 Lleu is transformed into an eagle after a ritualised killing. Several scholars have commented on owl and eagle motifs; Ross (1996 p345-6), Green (2001 p204, 211), and Stevens, from a psychological perspective (1988 p362-3), since Mircea Eliade made numerous references to them as spirit birds, representing guides or catalysts to an inner journey, with shamans even wearing their feathers (1972). Nearer to home Lysaght (1991,p32) referred to an old Irish story that describes the fairy wearing a white owl feather in their hat.

Sabine Baring-Gould and James Frazer claimed a Celtic belief in transmigration (1913, p18, 1993, p688-9) and gave nineteenth century examples where the owl represented female ancestors whom it was taboo to kill. Green maintained that Otherworldly females could shape-shift into animals (1996, p85-88), and birds, including owls, often figured in transmigration (Heinz 1999 p258-9).

Herbert (1996, p149) cited Donohue in saying that the Irish goddesses were associated with birds of prey, and Lysaght that the banshee were often associated with water (1996, p155), and their shriek likened to that of a bird.

Is the solitary reference to an owl (Ross 1996, p344), beside the lake her maidens return to, portraying Blodeuwedd as an Otherworldly keening-woman in theriomorphic guise?

On the theme of the otherworldly woman as messenger of death Herbert explained “the horror instilled by the message attaches itself also to the medium” (1996, p147). MacLaughlin (2019) reported an example from her research of a farmer who had been terrified by a banshee. Perhaps, this explains international motif Q 551 3.2.2: the punishment of a woman by transformation into a bird (Winter 2017, p81).

2.10.iii. The Multi-Faceted Feminine

In some parts of Ireland the banshee is called *badhbh*, (Lysaght 1986 p154), the death aspect of the ancient triple goddess. In Celtic lore however, there are many tales of Hag-Maiden shape-shifting (e.g. Green 1995, p41-2, McCone 2000, p109, Blackie 2016, p19) which hints at the dual-aspect quality of the Enchantress. In these tales most men fear and reject the hag. If accepted, she is transformed and he is rewarded by her beauty, and sovereignty of the land, which depends on him being healthy for its wellbeing (McCone 2000, p129). In her other aspect she is the washer-woman or bird waiting to tell him of his death (Ross 1996, p318). Acceptance of this death is seen in a canticle by St Francis where he calls death his sister (Dalarun 2016).

Neumann (1963, p336), in his discussion of the psychological stages of the feminine, in women, men, and collectively, explained that psychological development includes *four* stages of the Great Goddess, from primitive mother to the transformational figure who embraces both inner and outer aspects of life (p334) and that “spiritual transformation, i.e. a fundamental change of the personality and consciousness, occurs only through the crucial emergence of an archetype” (p78). Harding illustrated the Gaian theory of emergent self-regulation as being cyclical (2013, p70) and illuminated his thinking showing the Jungian four ways of knowing (Jung 2002, p92-3), where the feeling element, represented archetypally as Woolf’s medial woman, is often unconscious in scientific thinking (2013, p36-7). De Jongh, who equated the archetypes with the four elements, described the watery nature of this archetype as *Deep Lake* (2014 p56-8) and Stewart, in his work on *Aquae Sulis*, discussed the Celto-British cult of water, death and rebirth connected to place (1981).

According to Abram, citing Eliade, Hebraic tales are linear because they were written in exile (1997, p194). I deconstructed MB4 (figure 3) to re-tell it as a story of the land, in cyclical time (Gunzburg 2019, p48), which for Blake (2018 p178) is feminine and

imaginal. Ó Cruallaoich outlined how awareness of different levels of narrative in old story can provide meaningful and relevant insight (2015, p15). In figure 3.i the feminine influences on Lleu in MB4 are shown, with the wise-woman added, and thus possibility of rebirth/individuation.

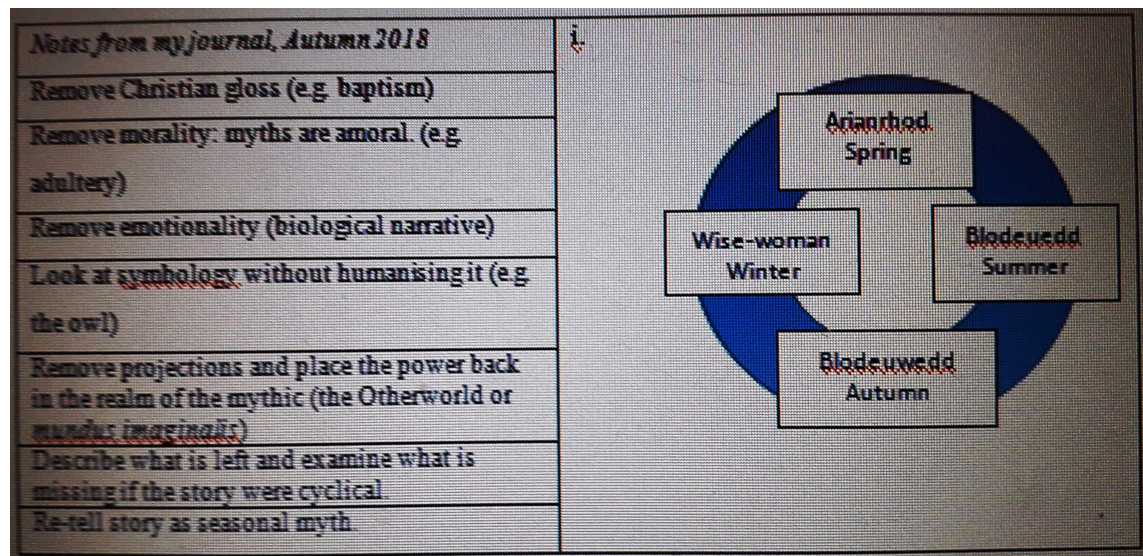


Figure 2 De-constructing and Re-constructing MB4, Author's image

2.11 Healing in the Dark

Higgins believed in “a world where we embrace the shadow and give it name so that the healing can begin” (review in Eisenstein 2013). For Nanson (2011) death is the unacknowledged element. Why do so many refuse the challenge and seek personal immortality? I began this study wanting to reclaim the enchantress, and in that echo the work of Blake, who professed that Blodeuwedd was haunting and stalking her in her performance *Blodeuwedd Unbounded* (2017). As another performer claimed by this powerful archetype, I can understand the metaphor.

Has the wise-woman aspect of ‘Gaia [...] come home out of the outer darkness of our collective unconscious and into the light of modern awareness’ (Harding 2013, p64)?

Interestingly, Sjöö, reported that the Kogi *Mamas* (priests) are initiated in the dark, in caves, (1992, p10) whilst Mann described the essential role the Clan Mothers play in the First Nations’ matrilineal Haudenosaunee as “political, economic, judicial and shamanic” (2011, p16).

Eisenstein (citing Norberg-Hodge 2018 p262-3) described female elders who mediated between activists and police in Australia to good effect and in twenty-first century Britain several Devon elders were amongst the many arrested in the Extinction Rebellion protests in London.

The shamanic role can be seen in figures such as Jackie Juno (ex-bard of Exeter) who celebrates many ceremonial rites upholding Celtic festivals (2019) and generally promotes the tradition of the wise-woman, and Blackie (2019) who runs *cailleach* retreats in Ireland. The grief-tending role is exemplified in the work of Macy (2008, 2016), Thome (2019) and Gunzburg (2019).

Cultural anthropologist Marinel Gerritsen (1998), following Geert Hofstede's model of cultural values, situated the UK in the individualistic and masculine orientated sector. For Emma Jung the separation between spirit and nature was within masculine-orientated individuals before their *anima* (soul) was integrated. C.G. Jung, whose work involved bringing that which was in shadow, causing "neuroses in individuals and *in cultures*" (von Franz 1999, p11) into consciousness, cautioned that those "who would fathom the [soul] must not confuse it with consciousness" (2002, p74). When we consider the end of MB4; feminine wisdom outcast and masculine rule, it mirrors both medieval Britain, *and* the current dominant narrative. Washburn (1990) and Baring (2013), however, predicted the integration of the feminine and masculine in the coming age which, according to Campbell (2017), is predicted by South African elders to be one of water.

I asked for research participants' response to the owl at the ending of MB4 and what that might say in response to the perceived split.

Chapter 3 – Methodological Considerations – Giving Voice

As specified in chapter 1, the aim of this research is to give expression to counter-culture voices, from an insider perspective, to offer insights into what might be gained from an inquiry into Blodeuwedd at the end of MB4, to contribute to a New Story.

It took some time to clarify this aim. I became aware that the “clear question” (University of Reading, 2019) that my research was to answer was more complex than I had realised. A proposal exploring the archetype of the enchantress in MB4, and how it manifests in the storyteller, slowly narrowed into a focused inquiry catalysed by Nagy’s comment on the satisfactory ending of MB4 (2013) and why it was relevant to a study of Ecology and Spirituality now. During the research process I made many changes, which are documented within this chapter, where I outline my methodology, introduce the research voices, and clarify my data collection and analysis procedure.

I chose to collect data by asking participants to respond both to the linear medieval-framed myth and my re-telling of it as a seasonal cycle, framed by an autobiographical tale of my relationship with Celtic myth to catalyse discussion (Appendix 1).

3.1 Selecting Methodology

Focusing on qualitative methodology over quantitative (which seeks measurable patterns) “can [...] give credible ‘voice’ to [...] study participants to highlight *their* issues from *their* perspective” (HHB 2011, p269). Given that oral storytelling was to be the medium through which I explored my subject, it seemed the best choice. It allows for a more right-brained response, which echoes my stance in regard to a solution-based response to the ecological crisis which provided the initial impetus for my thesis.

I selected a mixed-methods approach including three paradigms; *participatory* because participation is central to counter-culture doing and being, it involves trust, and has a social change aim, though not, as in PAR, to *change* the group’s behaviour (Kemmis & Taggart 2000, p590, Brydon-Miller et al 2011, p398, Altheide and Johnson 2011, p583) but rather to co-create responses to challenge the dominant story, from a cultural eco-feminist *critical* stance. The methodology I used *within* the participatory framework was *constructivist* in that I collected data from discussions which, in the words of Denzin & Lincoln, I wanted to “make sense of, or interpret [...] in terms of the meanings people [brought] to them” (cited in Gamson 2000, p353). This approach, sometimes known as ‘a community of scholars’, encourages diversity of method ‘at all levels’ (Teddle & Tashakkori 2011, p287, 291).

Specifically, I chose to use a Grounded Theory key concept strategy to “develop a coherent narrative” (HHB, p279) because it is an organized and structured approach to data (Bertone cited in Durdella 2018 p140) which would enable me to analyse multi-faceted responses, alongside a Narrative Inquiry approach where I could identify and describe a “core ‘story’” and the “several ‘storylines’” I might find in the data. I was aware that, according to Durdella, (2018, p113) “an inherent risk that remains in [research] storytelling is the imposition of our own cultural meaning on the stories that others (our participants) share.” Insider researchers need to be aware of hidden assumptions. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2011, p290-1) cited Merton et al in placing the axiological assumption of a mixed methods approach at the heart of the system because it is concerned with the “ethical implications” of power dynamics. I address this by being explicit about my epoché and by including many voices in my findings in the form of quotations.

3.1.i. Voices

I chose to explore responses from the culture with which I identify because in times of crisis alternative sub-cultures are often a source of fresh insight (Eisenstein 2013 p262). This group are generally open-minded, have some interest in ecology and/or spirituality, and storytelling, and an audience must be willing to listen.

In order to do this research effectively I needed to select a study population that was small enough to be able to conduct and analyse discussions and interviews (HHB 2001, p16). By naming the storytelling events *The Re-emergence of the Enchantress* (Appendix 2) and advertising amongst my peers on social media as well as by direct invitation, I was able to select participants who would be open to exploring a figure that it had been suggested to me did not exist. The drawbacks to this selection process were that there would inevitably be a bias on the results, and that my presence as an insider-near would likely influence responses. Thus, I make my epoché transparent in order to show what lens this research is seen through.

I am a white, mid-fifties English woman from an upwardly mobile working-class Lancashire background, with some Celtic ancestry. I grew up reading the mythologically-based fiction of my generation; J.R.R. Tolkien, Alan Garner, C.S. Lewis, et al. After many years living and teaching abroad, I finally settled in Devon,

where I worked for the Transition movement (Hopkins 2010) before taking a sabbatical to walk around England collecting Transition Tales (Bradley 2013). After many years of somatic and spiritual practice my values are cultural eco-feminist and neo-pagan.

What does it mean to be an insider-near? Clearly there are advantages to working with a group whose norms are understood and accepted, and it is easy to get focus groups and interviews (Naughting 2002, p299). However, the challenge lies in playing a role that is *simultaneously* insider and outsider, as a researcher, but also in my case, as the storyteller. It requires conscious application to retain certain boundaries, professional and ethical, as well as to preserve the integrity of the data. Pelias discussed the importance of emic researchers acknowledging the influence they have on a study as a ‘contaminant’, (2011, p662) however, Letcher (2004, p18) speculated if an emic/etic divide is ever a valid distinction, in that “to observe is to participate” (p35).

Considerable years of living in an intentional community, where weekly meetings would see dynamics shift as members played different roles, has taught me caution around labelling anyone too definitively. There were moments during my research when a participant was assuming a role of leadership, and I would be considering a point. My choice of participatory methodological approaches considered participants as co-creators. As Tedlock noted, “experience is intersubjective and embodied, not individual and fixed, but social and processual” (2000, p471).

As an insider-near I was aware that the process would be time-consuming and that my results might not be as expected. In recompense I would be able to be reflexive during the process, have “an ‘insider’ perspective,” and hone in on aspects such as emotions and beliefs (Bell & Waters 2018, p26).

Considering my central role as storyteller, I was aware that reflexivity, the act of making explicit one’s own process, was both desirable and potentially de-railing to the research. I turned to Charlotte Aull Davies for guidance. I was particularly interested in her discussion of the use of autobiography in reflexive ethnography (A-D, 2008, p228). Attempting to walk the fine line between honest reporting on self- experience within the insider group participants, and ‘navel-gazing’ would require self- discipline. Still for A-D (ibid):

“it is in [the] process of interaction between ethnographer-as-self and ethnographer-as-other that social knowledge of general interest and significance is produced.”

There are considerations, however, that must be taken into account. The researcher must be careful to challenge and make visible her assumptions, and be conscious of her effect on the group and its effect on her (A-D 2008 p217-218). These considerations are very similar in nature to the work of an artist and in fact Aull concludes that:

“The ethnographer’s task is to recognise, encourage and make use of the [creative] tensions” [...] “between abstract explanation and grounded description.” (p272)

This dichotomy echoes for me the role of the artist as changemaker (Berman cited in Ferguson 2019, Abram in Nanson 2007, p33) and thus appropriate for my dual role as a researcher near *and* storyteller.

3.1.ii Emergent Performance

Though my research included a performance it is *not* performance ethnography as McCall defined it (2011, p421-33). There is no script for an oral storyteller, and the listeners gave input in focus groups *afterwards*, not as part of the performance, although they *were* both audience and participants (Blain 2000, p2).

In 2.3 I highlighted the haecceity of the oral tradition, which has its challenges when conducting research. If the story is never exactly the same, how can responses to it be valid? Sherman (2015) described a phenomenon I know well; that of stories ‘telling themselves’ (Letcher 2004, p15) which seems to happen when teller and audience are in sympathetic resonance, to borrow a musical term. This ‘intangible increase in intensity’ (p17) has a spiritual quality to it.

Lincoln et al intimated (2011, p125) that we are “entering an age of greater spirituality within research efforts.” Certainly in new paradigm inquiry it is the honesty of the researcher’s interpretation that seems to be paramount (Olesen 2000, p219, Blain 2000, p4-5, LLG 2011, p120) and an individual’s single experience or insights are valued (Lincoln et al *ibid*) so here I simply state the case for oral storytelling in research by making its peculiarity explicit. After all, it could be argued that no two research events will ever be exactly the same; every group has its own dynamic.

In choosing to tell a story I had to consider the fear of magic that Grimes (2015, p503) suggests is beneath the reluctance to place performance and ritual in the same place. Letcher also refers to this dualism, describing the all-important liminal space that exists in rites of passage, and in society, where certain events can create “renewal and the possibility for social change” (2004, p21). I was hoping for that magic, and chose to inhabit the guise of enchantress for the event. Like Nanson, who describes the work of Ana Adnan, I believe the participatory workshop style of storytelling yields more than performance (2007, p50). According to Adnan, time, place and story are chosen by the teller as a container for inspiration and whatever unfolds (ibid). I was looking for a truly participatory effort in finding something pertinent to add to the New Story in the way that Blaine, cited in Letcher, calls ‘the real thing’ (2004, p29).

Finally, as A-D claims (2008, p272), the very notion of being both separate and interdependent must be recognised, which seems to me to be at the heart of the current debate on if or how we impact on our eco-system.

Having chosen a phenomenological approach, using elements of Grounded Theory and Narrative inquiry, and an autoethnographic thread exploring my role as storyteller, I looked at how I might best collect data.

3.2 Data Collection

A mixed methods approach seemed to be the most comprehensive. Although HHB (2011, p52) explain that it is possible to mix methods from within qualitative methodology alone, I felt that it was important to include a quantitative aspect in my collection process because data about who made up my counter-culture sample would allow the research to be both replicated and extended. Mostly, however, I was aware that qualitative methods; focus group discussions and follow-up interviews, would yield the most fruitful results, given my knowledge of the type of person who would participate, and that I was looking “to identify individual perceptions, beliefs, feelings and experiences” (HHB, 2011, p53). I disagree with HHB (ibid) that a focus group is “less suitable for personal experiences” based upon 30 years of experience as a teacher, trainer and facilitator. My choice of follow-up interviews was to allow more in-depth discussion to take place than time constraints permit in a group setting.

3.2.i. Honing the Inquiry

Having chosen my data collection methods I created a questionnaire to hand out along with consent forms at the start of each event. This ensured an almost 100% return. Within this first stage of data collection I was interested in predominantly quantitative information though I also asked a preliminary opening question about the enchantress (Appendix 3). I was interested to see if there was any correlation between participants' background and beliefs concerning the Enchantress.

As the research process progressed I revised the open exploration of the enchantress to an inquiry into the motif of Blodeuwedd as owl, rendering this early open question redundant.

The second stage of data collection was participant observation to address my initial objective to examine the impact of the storyteller. I had planned to follow a 'listener' response approach where the emphasis is on the perceiver and not the perceived (Rollo 2000xiii), or in this case, the effect the storyteller had on the participants. I designed a simple tick box form (Appendix 4) but found that my role as storyteller prevented me from being able to observe effectively. At the next event I asked my partner, who had joined in the first session as a participant, to try. Although he had been trained in the use of the form, he found it too difficult to observe people when they were engrossed in something as emotive as a storytelling.

When it became apparent that I needed a narrower focus I abandoned this line of inquiry. There is, however, scope here for further work incorporating performance ethnography and 'listener' response theory in the manner of Blake (2017), using video, with participants' permission, though there would be the added challenge of changed behaviour when people know they are being filmed.

The next stage of data collection was focus group discussion. As my inquiry was phenomenological in nature, open questions were posed, which were exploratory in nature (Fontana and Frey 2000, p653), and based on Clandinin and Connelly's time - space-interaction model (2000, p50) (Appendix 5). In fact they were often not needed. Participants were eloquent and I found it useful to allow the discussions to unfold in

real time and minimise my input in the discourse. This did not always happen the way I had intended as I was sometimes inadvertently, as an insider-near, drawn into the discussions. I found my inquiry evolving from critical to more participatory processes that allowed something new to emerge. Although the questions were in response to MB4, the story was acting as catalyst for personal reflection.

At the end of each event I invited participants to add visions for 2050 to a scrapbook (figure 4) where a collective story was gradually accumulating, which I drew on for inspiration when I came to analyse my data. Contributions varied from poetry, drawings, wishes, mini-stories, and wisdom imparted from inspirational others. Visioning as a participatory tool is a technique I learnt from Macy (2008), and Hopkins (2008, 2010) and have used successfully in community projects.



Figure 4: The Black Book of 2050, Author's Image

The most in-depth data that I collected was in 1:1 interviews and follow-up focus groups. Reinharz argued for the use of interviews because they “allow participants to express their ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher” (1992, p289). For these I used a different set of questions, which I did, for the most part, adhere to (appendix 6). I was especially interested in personal experiences that the earlier exploration of the Enchantress archetype had recalled. For example, I asked if or how the enchantress had manifested in their life, within themselves, or in another, and of the effects of that, and/or their interpretation of it. Questions were based on my understanding of the role of the Otherworldly female (2.8). Once again, this highlighted the breadth of my proposal, prompting me to e-mail a set of follow-up questions to participants who had not been previously contacted for interview, following the grounded theory approach of “using the emerging patterns from coded data to sample additional participants for interviews” that Durdella describes (2018, p103).

My questioning process had moved from the exploratory to the very structured and these questions marked the realisation that my inquiry needed to centre on reactions to the ending of the myth and Blodeuwedd's transformation, as well as clarifying perceptions on a perceived need for a New Story (appendix 7). I echo Reinharz in acknowledging that, being a novice, I was inevitably going to find the journey different to that anticipated and indeed that the learning along the way revealed as much as the findings (1992, p297-8).

Finally I kept a journal, initially intended as an autoethnographic record of the role of the storyteller. Instead I noted down the process as it unfolded, and my own insights into the questions being asked.

3.3 The Research Process

After some weeks of planning, my initial broad sweep of England and Wales in search of a cross-section of counter-culture participants, narrowed itself down to 7 storytelling events in central and southern England. Both time and financial restraints had dictated this final selection. 5 out of 7 of those events took place in the SW, in Devon, within a 9 mile radius of my home. Given that this is located within the epicentre of the Transition movement as well as a magnet for counter-culture thinkers, artists and healers of all description, I was likely to have reached participants that suited my purpose. One further event took place in Gloucestershire and another in Norfolk. The events were held on new or full moons between February and June 2019 (Appendix 8).

Venues were selected for being cosy, intimate, and atmospheric where possible, where participants and storyteller could sit "in the round" together, and typically in places where counter-culture people tend to feel comfortable. At each event we had complete privacy. I was often assisted by my partner in terms of logistics, and indeed he was a participant on one occasion and acted as observer on another.

I had planned on a maximum of 12 participants at each event. In reality I had between 4 and 10. This was ideal in terms of my workload of collating, coding and

selecting themes. In total I sampled 44 participants, mostly counter-culture females over 40 with a spiritual and/or ecological bent, and interest in, or curiosity about storytelling.

The format of the research events was sent out in an invitation for a storytelling performance where there would be a storytelling circle, refreshments and a follow up discussion in the form of a focus group.

Consent forms and questionnaires were handed out and completed by participants before the performance started. No-one objected to these. (As I had not planned for latecomers who arrived once the storytelling performance had already commenced, their consent forms were distributed during the refreshment break.) The events were audio recorded from this point, stopped during refreshments, and re-started for the focus group session. At the end of the event participants who volunteered to discuss the themes further in a 1:1 interview signed another consent form. Six people were interviewed initially and a further five answered a second set of questions by e-mail (Appendix 7). I also interviewed eco-storyteller and writer Anthony Nanson (2007, 2011) by telephone.

Several more chose to work in two intensive further focus groups, in order to learn from one another as well as to deepen their collective understanding and act accordingly. In allowing this adaptation I was engaging in a form of PAR which HHB (2011, p51) suggest is appropriate when social change is the goal. Brydon-Miller et al include “willingness to reflect on the process” as a factor in this type of research (2011, p391).

3.3.i. Data Analysis

Audio recordings of all focus group discussions and interviews were anonymised using the format A1 A2 A3, B1 B2 B3 etc., where A represented the venue and 1 the participant (Appendix 9). Transcripts were then made using Transcribe.com software providing me with a rough transcription of each recording, which I edited to produce final transcripts.

The transcripts were put through the free software Quirkos.com which required me to identify themes, (emergent, and based on my aims) and highlight them within the

transcripts before the programme grouped the codes into highly visual circles of varying sizes representing key concepts and how often they were expressed.

Selecting the key concepts that I would focus on to discuss my findings, given that the material I had amounted to 193 pages of coded discourse, was time-consuming. Though I had narrowed my original search down to a single archetype within a single myth I now narrowed it down to one element present within the ending of the myth. It was at this point that I contacted 16 participants who had agreed to follow-up interviews. Five responded to a set of structured questions (Fontana and Frey op cit) that focused in on the theme of Blodeuedd's transformation into an owl and the abrupt nature of the ending of MB4 (Appendix 7).

Using grounded theory for the analysis of data has its detractors, who, according to Charmaz, find it selective, and, citing Reissman, 'insufficient' to represent participants' stories, and Richardson, who found it "alienating and turned to literary forms" (2000, p521-2). However, Charmaz adds, it can be expanded "by adopting a constructivist [...] approach" where "the analysis tells a story about people, social processes, and situations" and "the researcher composes the story," which "reflects the viewer as well as the viewed"(ibid). This last is close to what I aimed for in my desire to contribute towards an emergent cultural story.

Having followed grounded theory protocol throughout the analytical process, when writing up, from a participatory perspective, I, like Richardson, found it constraining. Charmaz, although she later claimed that coding "preserves the character of the data" (2011, p369) wrote on the objective nature of grounded theory that "data remain reconstructions" (2000, p514) and that qualitative researchers will either "revisit" or recreate" their ideas and data, citing Clandinin and Connelly (Charmaz, p515), or even leave data aside when writing up, citing Lederman (p530). At this point, I abandoned the coded responses for the narrative analysis style of inquiry described by Polkinghorne as synthesising and configuring "descriptions of events and happenings [...] by means of a plot" (in Durdella 2018, p112). As an emic researcher, the words of Pelias (2011, p666-7) spoke deeply to me; how am I to tell you of what I have learnt?

'Listening' for the narrative from an intuitive place felt more in keeping with the emergent (Blake 2017) meaning within the collective output of both discussions and

settings, a perspective acknowledged by Blain (2000, p1), Heron & Reason, and Kilgrove (cited in Bryden-Miller 2011, p102, 114). In chapter 4 my use of participant quotes serve to enable me to tell that narrative, from their perspective and my own, both as researcher and as self-as-oral storyteller (Lincoln et al 2011, p125). I chose to borrow from performance ethnography a creative method of displaying the voices; as discussions in liminal space, inspired by Blake, who cites Puotinen, on storytellers creating “meaningful narratives outside and beyond the system” (2017, p69).

Utilising participatory, constructivist and critical paradigms I have attempted to give voice to respondents, and acknowledge my cultural eco-feminist stance in “an examination of human existence” (Creswell in Bryden-Miller 2011, p113) “that reflects ecological values” (p125). I wanted meaning to emerge from inclusive and authentic discussions that could affect social change. With hindsight I would say that my inquiry was inherently personal from the outset and yet the ensuing discussions enabled answers to develop that were wholly collaborative. I learnt a lot from respondents and consider this research co-created. I am but the storyteller.

Chapter 4. Counter-Culture Responses

The aim of this research was to inquire into the ending of MB4 to explore insights into the transformation of Blodeuwedd to contribute to eco-feminist and Gaian arguments for the role of the feminine in New Story discussions.

In this chapter I will describe the participants and setting for seven focus-group discussions conducted from February to June, 2019, and two further in-depth focus groups and eleven interviews conducted between March and September. I will use a narrative style to describe, discuss and interpret findings, considering themes discussed in chapter 2. Finally, in chapter 5 I will draw conclusions, based on a synthesis of my data and review of the literature.

4.1 Participants and Settings

51 people, almost all over the age of 40, listened to a telling and re-telling of MB4. 44, mostly women, participated in focus groups, sharing stories, insights and experiences in response to the myth. Individual profiles by venue can be seen in appendix 8. Responses to the pre-event questionnaire (appendix 3) can be seen graphically in appendix 9.

From cosy yurts, to walled gardens, gatherings around an ancient fireplace in a historic building and a variety of classrooms and meeting rooms, discussions ranged from anger and frustration, to fear, hope, and excited inspiration as groups explored an ancient myth with and without a medieval frame tale, grappling with philosophical ideologies, asking and answering questions. Enthused, several asked to attend further events, which A1 and B4 did.

A total of 28 people agreed to follow-up interviews. Of these, 7 were involved in further focus group discussions, and 6 granted interviews soon after attending the event. 16 more interviewees were contacted at a later stage of the research when the final themes had been established, and 5 responded (see appendix 10).

4.2 Narrative Journey with the Data

I followed a mixed methods approach throughout. When I analysed the key concepts my software had collated I noticed that the significance of comments made wasn't in how often a theme was mentioned, but in insights that developed out of discussions and occurrences that related to a theme that hadn't been in my initial literature review. I understood that using key concepts alone was not going to be sufficient.

I needed to look at the discussions that took place as a whole, and consider my respondents as co-creating this paper (Tedlock 2000). I approached the data with a narrative inquiry to find the story that wanted to be told. I will relate that narrative partly in the form of a dialogue in liminal space, where participants' quotations are arranged to form meaningful discussion, which I facilitate, outside of the events in

which they were uttered, inspired by Puotinen (in Blake 2017). These dialogues are italicised and indented from the main discourse.

4.3 Divided Story?

I began with separation. My literature review showed many scholars are concerned with issues arising from a perceived separation between ecology and spirituality (2.1).

Is there a disconnect between ecology, spirituality and everyday life?

“Yes, a social disconnect...but not for me. I am merged with nature... I detect a polarisation of society at the present time.” F4, male in his 60’s (e-mail interview)

And why might that be?

Spirituality [...] became a form of dogma rolled out by the church, and nature, natural events and our natural selves, became merely physical stuff, devoid of meaning or deeper relevance. [...] Even though now we live in a mostly secular age, those underlying belief systems are still running in our collective unconscious. E2, visual artist, late 50’s (e-mail interview)

But

“There is still sacred energy to tap into, in nature, music, poetry and stories ... we find them in the bible too.” C1, female, horticulture, nature, St Bridget of Sweden spirituality, (e-mail interview)

Spretnak, Merchant and Sjöö (2.2) wrote of the connection between nature and the feminine, and their rejection, and Harding describes the earth as an animate being.

What do you think about the fate of the feminine?

“The strength, intuition, [&] knowledge of women [...] has been repressed by the aggression of the male, who didn’t understand and were frightened by that power instead of embracing it with appreciation!” G1, retired housewife and gardener, 80’s (questionnaire)

“One has the feeling that the subjugation of women has gone on for 2-3000 years and is still going on”. F1 Male psychologist, 70’s (focus-group)

“I was just wondering whether the power of the feminine is blocked because people don’t believe that the Earth is alive.” D9 Female transition activist, 70’s (focus-group)

“I think it’s a repression of the sacred.” “My perception is that women, by both women and men, are seen as naturally having more access to those realms and as we move into times when we’re kind of denying the existence of anything beyond what we touch, feel, see, women have been oppressed alongside that, because they would have kept that belief alive and haven’t been allowed to because [...] there’s a lot of fear around. D1, poet in her 40’s (focus-group)

Eco-psychologists have looked at this fear (2.1). Some of you have a deep relationship with the spirituality of Wales, where this myth originates...

I think the landscape [there] creates a particular culture. A lot of mountain landscapes do, you have to take Tibet, for example. When Nature is awesome, it kind of makes people feel a bit smaller, [laughs] because you really clearly, in places like this, you’re really not in control. B3 male engineer in his 40’s, (interview)

So...

What led to a mistrust of the feminine, the Earth? [...] major natural disasters would leave a mark that we’re not safe on the planet and puts us in flight/fight response, we act in a very linear way as our focus narrows to dealing with the threat we perceive. [...] We talked about cataclysmic floods at the end of the Ice Age, and flood legends abound in every culture. Water is usually attributed feminine qualities so that seems to hang together as a possible traumatic event. B3 (E-mail follow-up)

Stewart (1981) described the Celto-British cult of death and rebirth associated with the healing waters of Aquae Sulis, yet Ó’Cruaíoch (2015) described fear and awe of nature personified in the cailleach (wise-woman). Is fear of death then an agent in the gradual suppression of aspects of the feminine, as Paul Shepherd believed?

I was wondering about societal level trauma, you know, about us being locked in a state which doesn’t allow the feminine to flow in a way that

we think it might be better if it could. B4, a male in his early 60's (focus group) referring to McCartney (2018)

Other writers also believe that trauma is systemic (2.7, Levine, Hopkins). Where does that leave us now?

"There is a dire need for both the masculine and the feminine side of each of us to play a part in society to connect to nature." F4, (e-mail interview)

Jungians would agree with that, from the perspective of individuation (Jung 2.1, Neumann 2.10.iii), and Washburn (1990) and Baring (2013) have said it is on its way.

4.4 The Ending of MB4

I asked what respondents thought of MB4.

"It's about the objectification of women in our neo-liberal paradigm where commercial values trump all else." Anthony Nanson, (telephone interview)

"I didn't really feel a strong response or connection with the myth, to be honest." D1 (focus-group)

"[It's] mirroring the imbalance of male and female energy." F6, female, 50's, (interview)

"I didn't like any of the characters" D1, (focus group)

Responses confirmed Hopkin's reservations (2.3) regarding the use of old stories.

However, in a telephone interview, Nanson, whilst cautioning that patriarchal influences can have agency on them, declared that:

"Myth is a hugely important source" for understanding the values of the divine feminine, and death and transformation, "for what else do we have?" (15/10/19)

I asked for responses to the ending of MB4. Comments were in sharp contrast to Nagy's and Lewis' responses quoted in 2.9:

"I was feeling really uncomfortable. I really didn't like that."
A5 a Welsh woman in her 40's (focus group)

"I felt it was traditionally unjust towards the females."
F6 a Scottish woman in her 50's (email interview)

However, F4 felt that Blodeuwedd was punished rightly; she “will have time to reflect on her murderous ways” and that “obviously Lleu should find love again” (*e-mail interview*), echoing Griffiths’ sympathy for Lleu (2017).

From an Individualistic and Masculine orientated cultural perspective this response could be justified (Gerritsen 1998). However, several women’s responses demonstrated that this viewpoint is not universally shared amongst everyone living in this culture. Their responses echo Blackie (2019a 230).

There is certainly material here to make a case for MB4 qualifying for Wilson’s biological narrative (2016). It has been suggested that the biological nature of a myth can change us (2.3), yet it was in response to the seasonal version that B1, a woman in her 40’s, indicated a change within her:

That’s how I understand life a bit more...yeah, I can relate to that way of telling and [...] I palpably felt a presence in my system...it altered my perception, you know, of reality, actually altered, where it was this magical realm in lived experience and it reminded me of many moments ...that I have experienced that in the past and how I’ve not really valued that. (*interview*).

Where the biological narrative and frame-tale had caused reactivity; the cyclical version had validated this respondent’s experience. Many responses showed a preference for this version:

“when you changed it to the feminine telling the story... wow... that just turned it on its head and I was completely like Yes, Yes! Yes, that’s what she would say.” B1 (*focus-group*)

“[...] somehow it was [...] more alive to me” G3 *female workshop facilitator, 40’s (focus-group)*

“I remember that when you told us [the myth] I didn’t get the original story at all, but the second version completely landed.” B3, (*interview*)

“[it] felt better, less black and white.” F4 (*interview*)

There is some evidence here that it is in the treatment and perception of actions of female characters that the cultural narrative displayed in MB4 falls short, at least for some counter-culture listeners. What is striking is that when we engaged with the myth

as it was framed in medieval Wales, the perceived injustice affected us. When the story was reframed, and told cyclically, respondents engaged differently.

It is interesting to return here to the argument in 2.2 for an acknowledgement of both affective and logical knowledge. If we wish to consider a narrative that includes all voices then perhaps the framing we give our myths needs to reflect this.

“the past for me [was] the repression of the feminine principle, and the present was your story which I found to be reclaiming the feminine by your quest” D4, *female gardener, 30’s (focus group)*.

Considering mythic elements aside from the medieval framing allowed discussions to move on to consider what the symbolism might represent.

4.5 The Owl Motif

There was an owl at the centre of our circle (figure 5), and an owl in the myth. How does that speak to you?



Figure 5: Owl as Centrepiece, venue F, May 2019. Author’s image.

“The owl is to do with wisdom and being in touch with the otherworld, like they’re spiritual sort of messengers, aren’t they, seen as?” A1, gardener, 60’s (focus-group)

Yes, Nanson explained that in a Haida story he is working with, it is a shamanic figure:

“The mediator is the screech owl. [She] is the only one who can travel in both worlds” (telephone interview)

[Ah],

A friend of mine [...] said to me [...] you know you’ve got a wonderful owl keeping guardian of your place, and I didn’t really connect with it, and now

you've said that, I literally need to take time to connect with this owl in my space... I saw an owl when I was driving last night, an owl swept by the car...
D10 female lecturer in storytelling, 40's (focus group)

[I had a dream after the end of a relationship where I had felt I had been living my partner's life]

I walked out into the back garden and (I actually feel quite emotional [now]) two big beautiful owls swooped, and one [...] came and opened wings right in my face. [...] So powerful, I can still remember it, and this is about 7 years ago. So it was a bit like ... what I'm getting here is like that need to connect. B7, a female support-worker in her 50's (focus-group)

[I want to describe a journey]

It was a bit windy and blowy and lots of leaves on the roads and I was going quite fast, to get back and suddenly I saw a car in front of me so I put on the brakes and I was skidding slightly and he braked as well and we stopped within millimetres of each other and we both got out and oh, you know, he was obviously one of these sort of New-Agey people and sort of saying we were blessed, and at that moment - this is really true – a white barn owl flew silently over and that just felt [...] all this feels like magic. [...] I felt it like my sister, because she was magical and she'd passed on. [...] So that felt very, I suppose, enchanted and magical and special. B5, Astrologist, late 60's (focus-group)

McLaughlin (2.7) described how references to the Otherworld in Ulster folksongs are recognised by the presence of enchantment.

The owl seemed to be perceived as a messenger for liminal space, often appearing at times when death was close, or when a transformational experience was needed. Webster-Wilde (2003), Garner (2017) and I all experienced the owl as messenger.

What message has the owl for us now?

"the owl can navigate the dark, time to go really deep." D4 (focus-group)

"[on my vision quest with Wendl-Berry] it was like so good just talking to this dark nightness and it was telling me, responding with wisdom" B1 (interview)

"maybe [the owl, which can hear and see in the dark is] exactly what we need in these dark times, [something] that feels comfortable in the night, isn't afraid of it." D1, (focus-group)

Responses suggest that some women have a connection to liminal space; expressing the medial feminine as described by Pinkola Estés & Woolf. Is this archetypal energy

suggested in the figure of Blodeuwedd? Is the role missing in MB4, missing in the current dominant narrative?

4.6 Wise-Woman Territory

A4, a female activist in her 40's asked:

“Who is this enchantress that society has so repressed and what are those parts of ourselves?” (*focus-group*)

I had asked that question myself. I wrote in my journal:

‘She calls to me in the guise of an owl...
There she is, there she is...’

For B7 “the enchantress is very much part of the inner world.” (*focus-group*)

‘She was in us all along
We just fell into unknowing
And all of our futile seeds grew disenchantment’
B7, from a poem about the enchantress (Black Book)

Is disenchantment, the signature of our times (Weber, 2.7), the result of rejecting the medial, feeling feminine archetype (Harding 2013)? E2, who studied with De Jongh (2014), explained that the enchantress is taboo because it represents what is unconscious,

“it is water and earth [and represents] deep, deep water [represented] by the Chalice [...], at a mythic level, it represents [...] our psyche [...] it's mystical and magical.”
(*focus group*)

In the weaving of MB4 and the cyclical version with the account of my pilgrimage to Bardsey Island I recounted the experience of finding nothing but a dead sheep in the crystal cave said by some to have been where Merlin had taken the 13 treasures of the Old North (Appendix 1c).

E5, a writer in her 50's, remarked on the significance of that dead sheep:

You said there was nothing in the cave, well there was, there was death, and then as a result there was transformation; you went into the chapel and became transformed.
(*focus group*)

She was right. The chapel had been founded by a Sister Helen, and in the palpable silence of that tiny stone structure it had finally come to me that my search for a key to sharing the importance of inner transformation lay within the feminine, and hence the theme for this dissertation.

Mostly female respondents discussed the dark as a healing place, and were open about grief and death and their regenerative power, although A1, a man in his 60's shared; "we were at a funeral the other day and I was like in floods of tears, but it's just I can't stop it now." (*focus-group B*)

B1 expressed her vision for 2050 pictorially (see figure 6) as children connecting with the dark as a way of learning, rather like the Kogi *Mamas* (Sjöö 2.11).



Figure 6: Learning from the Dark and from Dreams. B4 & B1, venue B, March 2019. Author's image

"In the dark, you know, things that ferment in the dark, that's very feminine, isn't it? B7 (*focus-group*)

"There's something about that darkness of the feminine which feels like ... is [...] the enchantress' domain, you know, this kind of unseen kind of presence that's ... witnessing, if you like." B1 (*interview*)

B6 cited her deceased sister's words; "everything is part of me, even pain and misery" (*black book*) which mirrors the perception of death, personified as feminine in St Francis' canticle (Dalarun 2016), as something to be accepted. My literature review indicated that it was not always so perceived (George 2003).

In Ireland, however, there is an extant belief in messengers that foretell death, as McLaughlin (2019) found. B2, an Irish woman in her 60's shared:

In the area I live around there's this thing around with death, [...], the banshee fascinates me.
If there was a death a banshee will appear two weeks before and my sister saw a banshee and her friend died two weeks after. (*follow-up focus-group*)

The banshee, according to B2, “is a little [old] woman combing her hair” with a “luminescent” quality about her. This matches McLaughlin’s and Lysaght’s descriptions of one of the aspects of the *ban síde* or otherworldly female (2.10.ii.).

The connection between an otherworldly female and death and transformation is perhaps best illustrated by the seasonal myths of hag-maidens who change state on the acceptance of a worthy man, or foretell his death (2.10.iv.). As Elder (in Weber 2017 x) observed, there is a connection between love and death, and in shamanic rituals, (Eliade, 1972). Interestingly, D4 interpreted the owl and the eagle motif in MB4 in a very similar way to Stevens (2.10.ii.):

They kind of transcended their human form to [...] go into this different realm, like an Otherworldly realm where they are birdlike [...] he gets reborn, but she's an owl [...] in my mind that's an initiation itself, going through the realm of...into nature. (*focus group*).

The theme of death, an element our cultural narrative often disassociates from (2.11), occurred at event C when the focus group consisted of 6 women, 3 of whom had lost partners, two very recently, who talked of their grief. One recently bereaved woman was held in an impromptu grief-tending circle by the remaining women, all of us post-menopausal. Everyone gave undivided attention, listening and offering practical advice of where to go for support as well as acknowledging the process:

“Grief doesn’t necessarily diminish with the years. It comes in waves. You can still have horrendous grief after 20 years.” C2, *female, 50's (focus-group)*

an awareness found in the work of both Macy (2008) and Grunzberg (2019). At the end of the session we noticed that we all had owls with us; see figure 7.



Figure 7: All Our Owls, venue C, March 2019, Author's image

Were we representing the medial archetype acting as intermediary when death has occurred, and holding the process, just as Baring and Cashford described in 2.10.ii? For D1, echoing Harding's (2019) stance:

maybe the ultimate enchantress is Mother Earth, is nature, is the seasons, and is that complete willingness to hold the whole thing; the death, the destruction, the violence and also, you know, the giving of new life, and in fact [...] those two are so very, very close. (*focus-group*)

A2, a female designer-maker in her 40's described the challenge of embodying that tension:

"I think I've had this inner conflict, it's like wanting or trying to shut down this access to this maybe otherworld realm" (*focus-group*)

whilst others acknowledged the challenge of dealing with the feelings Harding (2013) posed as the scientist's dilemma:

"You can't control your emotions, you can only hide them." B4 (*focus-group*)

"Sometimes we have to sit with [...] uncomfortable feelings and [...] sadness."
F2 Social worker, 50's (*focus-group*)

In an almost perfect response to Harding, D9 describes her vision of the future:

We're not afraid of experiencing the whole spectrum of feelings. [...] This doesn't make us any less rational than we are today. Far from it! Since our feelings function in a positive way and we're well aware of them, they don't have the same negative power to disrupt or subvert our thinking. (*Black Book*)

The effortless ease with which we had assumed the grief-tending role was marked and pointed to an inner sense of integrity that can develop with age and experience. Perhaps this integrity lends itself not only to acceptance, but also to assess situations and respond wisely.

B4 gave two examples of this in action. The first were the Clan Mothers and the concept of "being in right mind" in the Haudenosaunee tradition, the matrilineal society referred to in 2.11.

In the Haudenosaunee tribal coalition [...] you had the leaders of the tribe that were mainly men, and I think they were exclusively men, but around them were the Clan Mothers who basically held the highest level of authority in that society and they would sit around while the men debated and if they saw a man acting out of integrity or overbearingly they would say to that man; "you must leave now [...]" and go to the

healing tent and don't come back for a month, you have issues of grief or aggression, or, you know, a whole bunch of things, and I know it wasn't really a question.... So ...they kind of identified when men were out of balance, somehow, and gave them space to get back in balance ...such a powerful story, but it's not a story, it's historical. *(follow-up focus-group)*

The second example was at the intentional community, Tamera, in Portugal, as experienced by his brother:

there was a man giving a talk to a lot of people and he started getting a bit jittered, was slightly losing his way, and a woman stood up and she just said 'stop there, breathe, when you're ready start again' and that's what happened and he got back, he centred himself and he continued, so there's something about their role of [...] making people the best they can be, somehow.

These examples are mirrored by the elders who mediated between activists and police in N South Wales, referred to in 2.11.

Finally, B4 wrote in the black book:

I wake up suddenly, alarmed by a dream whose message is hidden in metaphor and image. I get dressed quickly and while the dream is still fresh, I jog to the wise woman's tent, hoping she'll be able to see me. She opens the tent door and I step into the smoky and fragrant atmosphere. "Sit down" she says, "and tell me your dream and together we'll uncover its message. (*Black Book, Figure 6 p49*)

Here, in a vision for the future, we are thrust back 4000 years to Ninsun's role in Gilgamesh, as goddess and shaman (see 2.7) and reminded of Shaw's claim for the value of ancient myth (2.2). Perhaps the best summary of the power of the wise woman was by D1:

"The power of care, compassion, and deeply rooted peace to resist and transform and dissipate aggressive, negative energy, when it walks through the dark and the unknown without fear". *(black book)*

In 2.11 I gave examples of this from the counter-culture world (Blackie 2019b, Juno 2018) and B4 shared that Pat McCabe, indigenous first nations teacher, spent time on Dartmoor with a local group:

to start the healing process that was all about the witch, the witch hunts, the witch genocide [...] that was the collective wound in this country that we could never [...] were never going to get far until we address that wounding. *(focus-group)*

Several participants at event B described Grief-Tending retreats also being held on Dartmoor, perhaps based on the work of Joanna Macy (2008). Is the wise-woman, the

dark winter face of the summer enchantress, emerging out of the darkness and into conscious awareness (Harding 2013 64)?

4.7 New Story

For D1 “re-connecting to the sacred will be absolutely essential to the success of any future action” (*e-mail interview*) whilst E2, a male visual artist in his 50’s, echoed the voices in 2.7: “The divine feminine is returning” (*Black Book*).

Baring and Washburn (2.11) believed the new narrative would include the integration of feminine and masculine. Many respondents agreed:

“We just need love - just the [...] masculine and feminine come together” B2, (focus-group)

“The next workshop would be good to do on the sort of less polarized sort of female male” E6, Female, 50’s [the] “inner unity of male and female” E5 female, 50’s (focus-group)

But...

an awful lot of people I’m really close to, you know, men I know, who are total male chauvinist pigs, you know, and just sort of relish it, when they’re with other[s] D2 a retired performer in her 70’s (focus-group)

“You know there are a lot of lovely men [...] taking part in ultra-peaceful process [...] all over the country. I mean there’s a rise of this sort of thing” A1, (focus-group)

I think there is a definite role for our feminine, intuitive, instinctive, feeling side, balanced with our logical side. Especially speaking as a man, growing up in a macho, logical, head-centred world. E2 (email interview)

Reclaiming of the feminine is true for the feminine within the masculine as well, so to actually be able to, for men, to be able to reclaim and truthfully have their feminine acting within them to balance the male is going to be a good thing for our future A1, (focus-group)

“That’s what I do with my clients, most of them are engineers who are totally logical, but needing/feeling a craving or lack of the feminine in their lives” E3 Tantric Priestess (interview)

How does this play out today?

“I saw this in some kind of Catholic document. [...] There can be no social justice without environmental justice” C5, Female storyteller and contemplative Christian (interview)

“Greta, she’s powerful” D10, (focus-group)

...protesting, and this rebellion, it’s about purpose, and in a way that’s very masculine, but then it needs to have, it needs to be balanced and that it’s being executed for others because there is heart there, the caring and nurturing, empathy and all of those things... put them together. D1 (focus-group)

Unfortunately, Thunberg’s actions are not welcomed by everybody (O’Connell 2019). Yet, the message from this group inquiry is to name Nanson’s elephant in the room (2011). Death is the aspect of the feminine that is re-emerging. Perhaps allowing the “grief [which Gunzburg (2019) says] lies in the fade out between the old season which dies before the spring” is Blodeuwedd’s message, and a fitting one for these dark times.

Chapter 5. Conclusion – Re-emerging Through Dialogue

The aim of this inquiry was to explore responses to the ending of MB4 with counter-culture groups, to contribute to eco-discussions centred around the perceived need for a new cultural narrative by turning to the spiritual knowledge held within Celtic mythology, following Eisenstein (2018), Blackie, and Shaw (2016), that when a culture is in crisis it is to its ancient myths that the counter-culture movement turns. In particular, it examined responses to the motif of the owl.

This chapter summarises the findings in chapter 4 and draws conclusions based on them. Recommendations for further research are made and some reflection on the research process.

5.1 Summary and Evaluation

My initial inquiry considered the role of the Enchantress. Fieldwork drew out feminine themes of death, grief and transformation. There is scope for another paper on its implications for the dominant narrative.

5.1.i. The Ending of MB4

Emotive and polarised responses to the ending of MB4 were found in the literature (Nagy 2013, Gower 2013, Blackie, 2019) and in my data, revealing the power of the biological narrative contained in the medieval framed tale as discussed by Swimme (in Spretnak 1992), Ó'Cruaíoch (2015) and Wilson (2016). However, responses to a cyclical re-framing were positive. Comparing the two opened up discussions relevant to today.

Some respondents preferred to focus on the positive aspects of a society with genderless feminine and masculine energies available to all, rather than dwell on a story where one or both protagonists were portrayed playing less than positive roles, which partly confirms Nanson's (2007) and Hopkin's (2008) reservations around the relevance of old stories' contributions today. Others, however, discussed the importance of understanding what has been degenerated. I conclude that when telling myth in this context storytellers need to be aware of the power of frame tales (Ball 2103), and use them wisely.

5.1.ii. The Owl in the Dark

In 2.7 I speculated if the figure of Blodeuedd was a remnant of the Celtic Enchantress, expressing Woolf's medial woman (1956). It has been suggested (Telyndru 2016) that she represents the alluring burgeoning start of summer, whilst Blodeuwedd the owl is the wise winter awareness of the transformative possibilities within death, a dual aspect that Sjóó (1992), Elder (in Weber 2017) and Harding (2019) have argued is present within Gaia.

Several respondents in this research have found the owl to be a messenger to liminal space, appearing at times when death was close or when a transformational or spiritual experience was needed, rather like the banshee (Lysaght 1996, MacLaughlin 2019) or otherworldly female (in *Echtra Thaidg*, *Máel Dúin* and *Immram Brain*). An Irish respondent described an experience with the banshee in the 21st century, as did one of McLaughlin's (2019) respondents. Webster-Wilde (2003), Garner (2017) and I

experienced the owl as the messenger that catalysed explorations into re-integrating the wisdom of MB4 into our times, suggesting its prophetic aspect.

Generally, women found the dark to be nurturing, and were comfortable with the role of grief tending (as Macy 2008, McLaughlin 2019). Whereas some men focused on the reintegration of the feminine, others spoke of the role of trauma in distorting our perceptions of the world (as Hopkins 2019). One man in particular recognised the role of the wise woman as positive, as in the matrilineal cultures described by Eisenstein (2013), Sheridan and Longboat (2006) and Mann, (2011).

5.1.iii Blodeuwedd Revealed

To my knowledge, this is the first time MB4 has been the stimulus for insights to contribute to a New Story in a research context. The inquiry revealed uncomfortable emotions towards the medieval frame tale, suggesting a need for such literary devices to be recognised and reframed by storytellers and New Story proponents looking to myth for inspiration.

An association with water, feeling, and fear around death has been recognised as a possible reason for the suppression of the enchantress archetype, thus depriving the dominant narrative of the feminine attributes of grief-tending, guiding the soul to the Otherworld, interpreting dreams and messages from the liminal consciousness that exists between and within us, and upholding the integrity of decision makers. These are still attended to by some counter-culture proponents, and yearned for by others.

Blodeuwedd is given no opportunity to share these gifts in MB4, however, an inquiry into her theriomorphy enabled discussions that highlighted the degeneration of that role which arguably still affects our culture, possibly indicating a direction for healing the shadow that Emma Jung (1957), Washburn (1998), Baring (2013) and Higgins (2019) believed was the way forward:

“maybe [the owl, which can see and hear in the dark, is] exactly what we need in these dark times, [something] that feels comfortable in the night, isn’t afraid of it.” D1

These dark times were highlighted by a perception amongst some respondents that many within the western cultural paradigm appear disconnected from Ecology and Spirituality in their everyday lives as Eisenstein (2013) et al propound.

5.2 Limitations, Recommendations and Reflections

My proposal, exploring the enchantress in MB4 *and* as the storyteller, was over-ambitious. Initial responses to the inquiry highlighted a need for new questions that later interviewees answered (appendix 7). Fortunately a key concept strategy allowed me to revise the process until I could use narrative inquiry to extract meaning from my data, limiting the focus on the enchantress to her owl guise at the end of the myth. In the discussion of my findings I found stepping in and out of reflexive and researcher roles, as A-D (2008) and Lincoln (2011) advised, a challenge. As Letcher observed (2004) the lines are blurred between emic and etic research. For me, in the writing up of this paper, the role of self-as-researcher and self-as-participant were also not clear cut.

Further research is recommended to test the outcomes of this small study, which took place in southern and central England. Sampling different storytellers' tellings, exploring their role as catalyst, considering different aspects of MB4, and videoing performances and focus groups to enable participant observation following a *listener-response* approach (Rollo 2000xiii) would all be valuable in exploring this area in more depth.

As a novice researcher I found my project both hugely absorbing and challenging. I would suggest to researchers going forward that there is scope here for continued and in-depth PhD study, on the ending of MB4 alone.

I feel both excited and overwhelmed by the avenues and questions uncovered, rather as if I have been exploring an inverted Pandora's box with Hope at the top, excavating elements to be reincorporated from the inside out, both personally, metaphorically and culturally. Far too grand a task for a new researcher to have considered, but perhaps, it has signalled a new direction to be explored.¹

¹ Word count: 15,621.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – The Performance Piece

An oral storytelling performance is a little like improvised music. No two performances will ever be the same. Below is the framework that I followed, in summary.

1. Setting the context. My pilgrimage around England looking for positive stories in our times. Collecting Transition Tales. Being told the myth of Blodeuwedd for the first time.
2. Narrating the myth.
3. Telling the tale of my storywalk across Wales to Gwynedd and Bardsey Island.
4. Re-telling the myth as a seasonal tale.

Appendix 1a – a summary of Math son of Mathonwy; the fourth branch of the *Mabinogi*

Wizard-King of Gwynedd, Math, must sit with his feet in the lap of a virgin, Goewin. Gilfaethwy, his nephew, is in lust with her and becomes lovesick. Gwydion, his wizard brother, starts a war with the neighbouring kingdom of Powys in order to give his brother chance to woo Goewin whilst Math is fighting. The war is started by Gwydion tricking Prince Pryderi into giving up his Otherworld pigs in exchange for some stallions created from enchanted mushrooms. When the spell wears off, Pryderi wages war against Gwynedd. Gilfaethwy seizes his opportunity and takes Goewin against her will. Meanwhile Pryderi and Gwydion fight in a duel in order to prevent more deaths in both armies. Gwydion kills Pryderi.

Math returns to his throne and calls for Goewin who tells him she can no longer be his foot maiden as she is virgin no more. He marries her to save her honour and punishes Gwydion and Gilfaethwy by transforming them into beasts for 3 years. Each year they assume different gendered forms and must mate and produce progeny. They are stag and deer, boar and sow and wolf she-wolf and between them produce 3 sons whom Math has baptised.

Once the punishment is over Math asks Gwydion to find him a new foot maiden. Gwydion brings his sister Arianrhod but when Math tests her virginity with his staff she gives birth to Dylan, who returns to the sea and a small thing whom Gwydion hides in a chest.

Eventually the small thing becomes a boy child whom Arianrhod refuses to name or arm and says he will never have a mortal wife. Gwydion tricks Arianrhod twice and succeeds in getting her to name the boy Lleu Llaw Gyffes, (the skilful armed) and to arm him.

In order to get Lleu a wife he and Math fashion a woman out of flowers, including broom, oak flower and meadow sweet; her name is Blodeuedd (or flower queen). Lleu marries her and they rule over a kingdom to the south of Gwynedd. Then Lleu goes on a trip with his men leaving Blodeuedd behind. A hunter, Gronw Pebr, from a neighbouring kingdom come hunting and is invited in for a feast. Blodeuedd and Gronw fall in love and spend 3 nights together. They plot to kill Lleu so that they can be together. When Lleu returns Blodeuedd asks him how he can be killed and he tells her. A spear must be fashioned over a year and a day and this Gronw does. On the right day Blodeuedd asks Lleu to show her how he can be killed and the circumstances are set up.

Lleu stands with one foot on the rim of a bath or cauldron, straddling a river with his other foot on the back of a goat. Gronw sends his spear and Lleu falls to the ground. The lovers reign over his kingdom as he has vanished.

Gwydion looks everywhere for his nephew. He follows the trail of a sow, which goes into the forest every day to eat flesh falling from a tree. Gwydion calls up into the tree 3 times and eventually receives a feeble answer. Lleu is in the tree in the form of an emaciated eagle.

Gwydion nurses the eagle back to health and then goes looking for Blodeuedd. Blodeuedd and her maidens run away and the maidens are so busy looking back that they fall into a lake and drown. Gwydion catches up with the Flower Queen. He transforms her into an owl so that she will only fly by night and all the other birds will shun her.

Lleu kills Gronw in the same way that he himself was killed. Gronw asks to hold a stone in front of his chest to protect him. Lleu agrees to this but when he throws his spear it pierces the stone and kills Gronw. Lleu now rules alone.

Appendix 1b – The Cyclical Version: Re-telling of the tale of Blodeuwedd as a seasonal myth.

Blodeuedd is the flower maiden, appearing when meadow flowers are blooming, the start of summer. Here Ross (2001 pp 39-41) provides an interesting clue to a possible connection to the Otherworld. She describes a folkloric tradition in N Wales akin to the maypole, of gathering flowers and bringing the summer branch [y gangenhaf] at Calan Mai. Calan Mai along with Calan Gwaef and Midsummer, she continues, were all ysbrydnos or spirit nights, where the veil between the worlds was thinner. At Calan Mai they danced around a birch tree and collected meadow flowers “according to what was available” and two teams of men from different parishes played football “in opposition to each other.”

Blodeuedd’s marriage to Lleu, who may have been born at the spring equinox, could perhaps represent the honeymoon or summer solstice, if we accept the premise that Lleu was perceived in a similar way to the Irish Lugh (or light) (Parker 2005 504, but see Williams 2016 17 fn47). The next Celtic festival is Lughnasadh or Gwst Awst in Welsh, harvest time, when the crops are cut down and the last sheaf, the cailleach or y wrach (the hag) is set aside as a token of abundance (Hutton 2001). Here Blodeuedd marries her new lover, for this is when people would choose their consort for the next year. Lleu perhaps also represents the corn that is cut, the sacrificial king (Baring & Cashford 1993). Maybe Lleu is found in the form of an eagle at the autumn equinox, and here we may make sense of the killing, on a riverbank over the bath and goat as ritualistic, as rivers represent liminal space (Green 1995 77) or an astrological reference (Griffiths 2017). At Calan Gwaef Blodeuwedd assumes her winter guise, the owl, the huntress of the night, and this winter aspect is the part of MB4 that is left out of the tale as we have it. This latter part of the cycle of the seasons, and of the female menstrual cycle, the menopause, represents the dark enchantress who rules over inward journeying, rest from action, composting the old to prepare for the new. It is a powerful time. It was thought of as New Year by the Celts. If we again include the later solar festivals, we could consider Math as the king at Winter solstice, the clue for that being the virgin Goewin is resting at his feet, giving counsel at night, (Green 1995 62-3) waiting for Imbolc, her season, to come round again, to lose her virgin state and for the fertile stage of the year to commence once again. Green (ibid 59), discussing the Irish belief that killing a wren symbolised the death of winter and the beginning of spring, has

speculated that Lleu's killing of the wren is a possible indication of there being a seasonal myth hidden in MB4.

Appendix 1c – Summary of the story walk across Wales to Gwynedd and Bardsey Island.

The 3 peace warriors – Rob Hopkins, (Transition Network http://transitionnetwork.org/people/rob_hopkims/ Ben Brangwyn (<http://transitionnetwork.org/people/ben-brangwyn/> Transition Network) and Mac McCartney (<http://macmarcatney.com>) who, respectively, enabled me to take 6 moons away from my work at Transition Network to walk around England, asked me to keep a blog of the story of the walk, and told me that feminine power was needed now in our times and that was different from masculine power.

The 3 wise women – Fern Smith (*Emergence* magazine www.emergence-uk.org) who shared her story of cycling to Bardsey Island for her 50th year, Marion McCartney (*Dream the Future* www.dreamthefuture.org.uk) who told me the wisdom of celebrating a decade birthday by taking that amount of days out to do something meaningful to me, and Emma Osbach and the women of *Tir Ysbrydol* (<http://brithdirmawr.co.uk/about/>) who told me that my purpose was to share the wisdom of the Inner Journey far and wide across the land.

Reading the Brythonic myth of *Merlin and the 13 Treasures of Old Britain* and finding it guiding my storywalk across Wales in my 50th year in real time, so that I came off the route of the Wye Valley way to follow the high road across the mountains, where Iron Age people would have walked, and finding Iron Age settlement after Iron Age settlement.

Finding qualities that represented the 13 treasures by a process of identifying found objects in the landscape with insights that came to me as I walked. E.g. the Cauldron of Plenty, an old goat's horn and the quality of Abundance, after visiting a Catholic nunnery where the incumbents had embraced a multi-faceted acceptance of all religions and spiritual traditions.

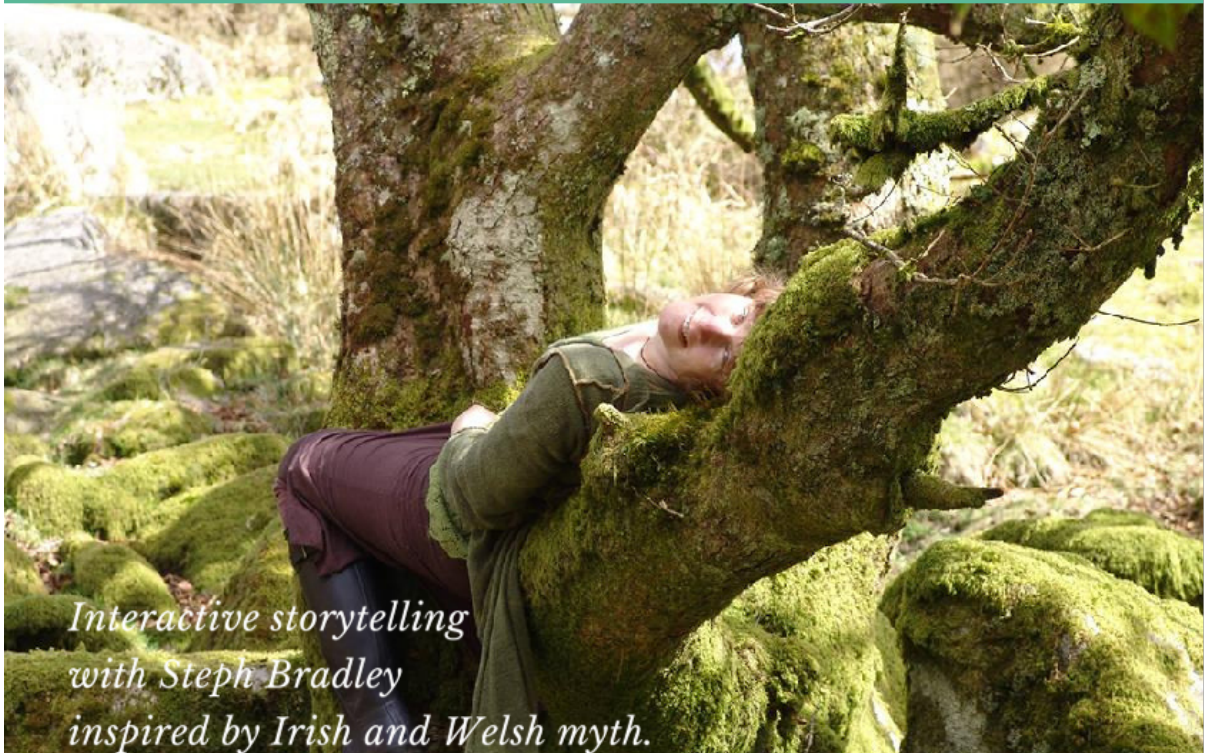
Feeling a sense of total interconnection with nature in the region of *Maentwrog*, part of the region of Gwynedd where the tale of the fourth branch is said to take place, at the base of an oak in the wild Welsh woods.

Arriving on Bardsey after a perilous crossing, with the 13 treasures encapsulated in 13 found objects, visiting *the Crystal cave* said to be where Merlin left the treasures, and is also said to be buried, according to the myth of Merlin and Nimue, and finding only a dead sheep, feeling let down and disappointed.

Visiting the chapel, a tiny stone edifice founded by a sister Helen, and realising that it wasn't Merlin's wisdom I needed now, but to find the *feminine power* and wisdom that Mac McCartney had pointed towards during my first pilgrimage. Understanding that the myth of Merlin and Nimue represented the masculine passing on the power to the feminine, rather as Math does to Goewin in the fourth branch, when taken as a seasonal tale.

TALES OF OUR TIMES PRESENTS

THE RE-AWAKENING OF THE ENCHANTRESS



*Interactive storytelling
with Steph Bradley
inspired by Irish and Welsh myth.*

DATE:

TIME:

VENUE:

**THIS EVENT IS FREE BUT LIMITED TO 12
SPACES. BOOKING ESSENTIAL:**

TRANSITIONTALES@GOOGLEMAIL.COM

More info at

<https://www.facebook.com/events/213095276299619/>

Re-emergence of the Enchantress.

Appendix 3 Participant Consent and Questionnaire

Participant Questionnaire

COVER SHEET

THANK YOU for agreeing to participate in my MA dissertation research.

The aim of this research is to examine the role of the Enchantress as she appears in Welsh & Irish myth, and how participants in storytelling events today respond to her.

The format of this event is as follows:

- ▽ Storytelling performance
- ▽ Sharing circle
- ▽ Optional follow up interviews

The event will be recorded using a TASCAM voice recorder. By signing this declaration you agree to being recorded as part of the event and to your contributions possibly being used as quotes in my final paper and to the content of your contributions, both on this questionnaire, and during the storytelling and sharing circle, being collected as data to refer to in my paper. If, at any time, between agreeing to this and the paper being submitted (by December 2019) you have the right to change your mind about your contribution being used.

All data will be securely and anonymously stored on memory sticks and deleted at the end of the project.

If you agree to a follow up interview, there will be another consent form to sign at the time.

Please note that there will be some observation of audience response during the storytelling performance. This will be noted down anonymously in this way: *person laughed, person listened with eyes closed*, etc.

This cover sheet will be stored separately from your questionnaire in order to prevent personal details from being recognised. All questionnaires will be destroyed at the end of the project.

Please note that you may use a pseudonym or nickname on the questionnaire if you prefer. If you are happy for me to refer to you by name please write only your first name at the top of the questionnaire. (Please note that non-identifying codes will be used in the final paper to protect your anonymity.)

If you would like to receive a copy of my finished paper please provide your email address. This will be deleted once you have acknowledged receipt of your electronic copy.

I agree to my contributions being used as part of this research, and to be recorded and observed as a participant. I understand that I can withdraw my agreement at any time.

Signed: Date:

.....

Printed Name: Email address:

.....

Questionnaire

Venue:

Date:

Name: (How can I refer to you in my research?)

NB (In the body of the paper I will use anonymous codes rather than names.)

Year you were born:

Profession/main interest:

Background: Tick any/all that apply.

Known Celtic ancestry (one or more parents or grandparents with Irish or Welsh ancestry)	
Other Celtic connection, please specify:	
My family have a scientific background	
My family have an arts background	
My family have a spiritual background	
I have an interest in, or have a spiritual practice/life	
I have an interest in, or am active in Ecological issues	
I am familiar with some Welsh mythology (e.g. the <i>Mabinogion</i>)	
I am familiar with some Irish mythology (e.g. the Otherworld or Voyager tales)	
I am familiar with other mythology. Please specify:	
I am interested in, or have an involvement with Eco-Psychology	

What is your interest in the Enchantress?

Thank you
for participating
in the
Enchantress
Project.

The aim of this research is to examine the role of the Enchantress as she appears in Welsh & Irish myth, and how participants in storytelling events today respond to her.

At the end of 2019 I will submit a 15,000-word dissertation to the University of Wales, TSD.

You will receive an electronic copy of my final paper in 2020.

You can contact me at: 25000970student@uwtsd.ac.uk

MA CSPH7068 Ecology and Spirituality.

Supervisor: Dr Nick Campion

Appendix 4. Observation Form

The Enchantress Project: Observation of Audience

Tick any/all behaviours observed.

Add any behaviours noticed that are not mentioned.

During the storytelling:	1	2	3 etc.
Person smiled			
Person laughed			
Person cried, welled up			
Person frowned			
Person closed eyes			
Person appeared to sleep			
Person was very still			
Person seemed absorbed			
Person appeared distracted			
Person displayed wonderment			
Person left the room and didn't return			
Person left the room and came back			
Person responded verbally. Specify:			
Person responded non-verbally. Specify:			

Observer:

, venue:

, date:

Feedback Circle Questions²:

Title:

The Archetype of the Enchantress in Brythonic Myth and Its Role in the Storyteller's Relationship with Meta-Modernist Listeners.

Aims:

To research the role enchantment plays in catalysing transition on a personal, and consequently societal level, with specific reference to the Otherworld Enchantress in Brythonic myth.

To examine how participants respond to the archetype of the enchantress during oral storytelling events in post-modern Britain, both in the role of the storyteller, and as a story character.

To explore how inner realization can be activated through the experience of hearing a story in real time and how that might provoke a change in the perception of any beliefs and stories listeners may have internalised which no longer have validity to them.

Principal Researcher: Stephanie AW Bradley

1. What was your inner experience? (sensations, feelings, insights)
2. What was/ere your outer response/s? (spoken thoughts, body language)
3. What past event/experience comes to mind?
4. What present situation does this experience relate to?
5. How can this experience inform/influence your /the future?

² Questions formed considering Clandanin & Connelly's "three dimensional narrative inquiry space" in Clandanin D.J. & Connelly, F.M. (2000) *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass, p50

Appendix 6 – First Series of Interview Questions

Used in face-to-face 1:1 interviews and follow-up small focus groups.

The Enchantress Project

Interview Questions

1. What do **you** call that which connects you to a sense of the divine, inner peace, spirit, to nature?
2. How would you describe that quality that does the re-connecting?
3. What is the myth of Blodeuwedd about for you?
4. Who is the enchantress?
5. What does enchantress energy mean to you, if anything?
6. The enchantress is rarely spoken of nowadays. Why do you think that is? *Later amended to:* Why do you think that energy has been silenced³?
7. How does/has the enchantress manifest in your life?
8. How, if at all, can you see her supporting/guiding future action – your own and on the local /global stage?

³ In response to A4's initial question: "Who is this enchantress that has been so hidden and repressed?"

Appendix 7 Final Interview Questions

Sent by email.

Dear,

Thank you so much for agreeing to an interview with me after attending the Enchantress storytelling event earlier this year.

I have now begun to write up my findings from the focus group you were part of and have devised the final questions that will help me to write my main argument, which is based around the ending of the myth. The final paper will be submitted to the university at the beginning of January and I will hear back by April 2020. I will then email a copy of the finished paper to you.

I would be really grateful if you would reply to some, any, or all of the following questions. You can do this by email (preferable) - briefly or at length as you feel moved to, or if you would rather speak we can arrange a Zoom call in the next 2 weeks which would be better than a phone call as it can be recorded so that I can transcribe it.

As a reminder, below is a brief summary of the part of the myth involving Blodeuwedd as I first told it.

Blodeuwedd is created from flowers by 2 wizard kings; Math and Gwydion. She is made as a wife for Lleu whose mother Arianrhod has told that he would never have a mortal wife. Sometime after the marriage Lleu goes away and in his absence Blodeuwedd entertains the leader of the neighbouring kingdom who is hunting nearby. The two fall in love and spend 3 nights together. After this they know they must be together and realise that because she is married the only way they can is by killing Lleu. Blodeuwedd tricks Lleu into telling her how he can be killed, which is in a ritualistic way. A spear must be made over a year and a day and then used to kill Lleu whilst he is straddling a river with a foot on the back of a goat and a foot on the side of a bath or cauldron of water, with a thatch over it all. Gronw, the hunter leader fashions the spear and Blodeuwedd has Lleu show her how he can be killed and the scene is set. Gronw spears Lleu and he falls. The lovers return to his palace and he vanishes. Gwydion his uncle searches for him and eventually follows a pig, who is eating flesh at the bottom of a tree. Lleu is atop the tree in the form of a scrawny eagle. Gwydion nurses him back to health and then goes looking for the lovers. Blodeuwedd and her maidens run away and the maidens drown in a lake. Gwydion catches up with Blodeuwedd and asks her to return to Lleu. When she refuses he turns her into an owl as a punishment. He says that the owl flies by night and is hated by the other birds. Lleu then kills Gronw in the same way that he himself was killed and then continues to rule, as the king alone.

1. How did you feel about the ending of the myth the first time you heard it?
2. How would you have liked the story to be resolved differently, if at all?
3. What does the transformation of Blodeuwedd into an owl mean/represent to you?
4. What, if anything, does the myth mean to you in your life?
5. Has anything changed for you since you heard the myth at the event?
6. What, if anything, does the myth say to you about the culture we live in?

At the event I re-told the myth as a seasonal myth where Blodeuwedd the Flower maiden (or lover) represented the start of the Celtic summer in May and Blodeuwedd the Owl represented the old wise woman of the start of the Celtic winter at the end of October. Lleu and Gronw also represented different aspects of the year.

7. What response did you have to that alternative ending?
8. How far would you agree/disagree that there is/has been a disconnection between Ecology and Spirituality, for you, and/or in the culture around you?
9. How far would you agree/disagree that there is a role for the feminine side of us, &/or of myth, in connecting the logical side of us to nature?

Thank you so much for participating in this research, which will also inform my writing of the novel I am writing in 2020 about the Utopia of 2050, along with the visions you contributed in the Black Book of 2050.

Appendix 8 - Participant Profiles, Venues and Dates.

Total of 44 *active* participants. All participants British unless otherwise stated.
Participant descriptors taken from questionnaires.

KEY: Participant from a background in:

Art	Art & Science – Art/Sc	Background in all three: Art/Sc/Sp
Science (Sc)	Science & Spirituality – Sc/Sp	
Spirituality (Sp)	Spirituality & Art – Art/Sp	

Event dates chosen as significant times of the month.

Venue A - a cosy, intimate back room with a fireplace in an atmospheric historic building, SW Devon. Cushions on floor. 4th February 2019. Afternoon. New Moon.

- A1 - Male, early 60's - Gardener and builder, childhood in Wales, Art/Sp
- A2 - Female - 40's - Designer-maker, known Celtic ancestry
- A3 - Female - 30's – Nature and Forest Therapy Guide, Celtic spiritual background
- A4 - Female - 40's - Transition activist, Ally to the most marginalized.
- A5 - Female - 40's - Welsh
- A6 - Female - 40's – Environmental Artist and Poet, Welsh & Scottish, Art/Sp

Venue B - An English Language School classroom, with ceiling high tree murals, used in the evening when the school was closed, SW Devon. Chairs in circle. 6th March 2019. New Moon. Some noise from street.

- B1 - Female - 40's – Supporting people healing and return to wholeness
- B2 - Female - 60's – Drama/Singing, known Celtic ancestry
- B3 - Male - 40's – Geologist, West country, arts and scientific background
- B4 - Male - early 60's - Transition activist, Equitable World, Welsh surname, Arts/Sc
- B5 - Female – early 70's – Astrologist, Arts, Scientific, & Spiritual background
- B6 - Male – late 60's – Musician, Celtic music
- B7 - Female - 50's – Support Worker
- B8 - Female - 60's - Counsellor, Irish mother, some spiritual background
- +A1

Venue C - as Venue B. 9th March. Saturday afternoon - an extra event for those who couldn't make previous dates.

- C1 - Female – early 70's – Horticulture, Nature, St Bridget of Sweden spirituality, Art/Sc/Sp
- C2 - Female, 50's, Art & Writing, Celtic ancestry, lived in Celtic country for a time
- C3 - Female, 50's counsellor – signed a consent form but didn't complete a questionnaire
- C4 - Female - 50's – Shamanic Practice, Celtic ancestry, Scientific background
- C5 - Female - early 70's – storyteller, contemplative Christian, ex-spouse Irish, Art/Sc
- C6 - Female - 40's - '*epileptic oracle*', Celtic ancestry, Art//Sc. * *Left before discussion*
- C7 - Female – late 80's - deaf, retired, Spiritual* - *Left before discussion*
- C8 - Female – early 80's - retired radiocaster, Art/Sc/Sp, * - *Left before discussion*
- C9 - Male - 90's – retired teacher, countryside, agriculture, Art/Sc/Sp* - *Left before discussion*
- C10 - Female - arrived late. Signed consent form but didn't complete questionnaire

Venue D - A small event room in a village owned community centre. SW Devon.
19th April. Evening. Full Moon.

- D1 - Female – early 40's – Poet/cook/carer, lived at Findhorn. Sc/Sp
- D2 - Female – early 70's – Retired performer, Scottish ancestry, Art/Sc/Sp
- D3 - Female – early 50's – Qigong teacher, Celtic ancestry
- D4 - Female - early 30's – gardener, Sc/Sp
- D5 - Male (age unknown) * *Left before the discussion (family emergency)*
- D6 - Female (age unknown) * *Left before the discussion. Partner of above)*
- D7 - Female - 60's American, carer, Celtic ancestry, Spiritual
- D8 - Male - 80's - retired toy maker.
- D9 - Female - early 70's – Transition, climate change activist, Irish and Scottish, Art/Sp
- D10 - Female - 40's – Lecturer in Storytelling, Celtic ancestry, grew up in Wales, Art/Sp

Venue E - A bookshop cafe, central England (private hire). 5th May. Afternoon.
New Moon. Polly Higgins had died on the full moon and her funeral had just taken place. Some Pp had attended the funeral.

- E1 - Female – early 50's – Gardener, Celtic ancestry, Art/Sp
- E2 - Male - early 60's - Visual artist, Art/Sp
- E3 - Female - 40's – Irish. Spiritual awakening through Tantra, Born in Ireland, Catholic
- E4 – *Invalid form*
- E5 - Female - 50's – Writer, counsellor, teacher, activist.
- E6 - Female – 50's – Health/Well-Being. Spiritual.
- E7 - Male - mid 50's - Storyteller, writer. Love of Celtic stuff. Spiritual.

Venue F - A yurt on private land. SE. 18th May. Morning. Full Moon.

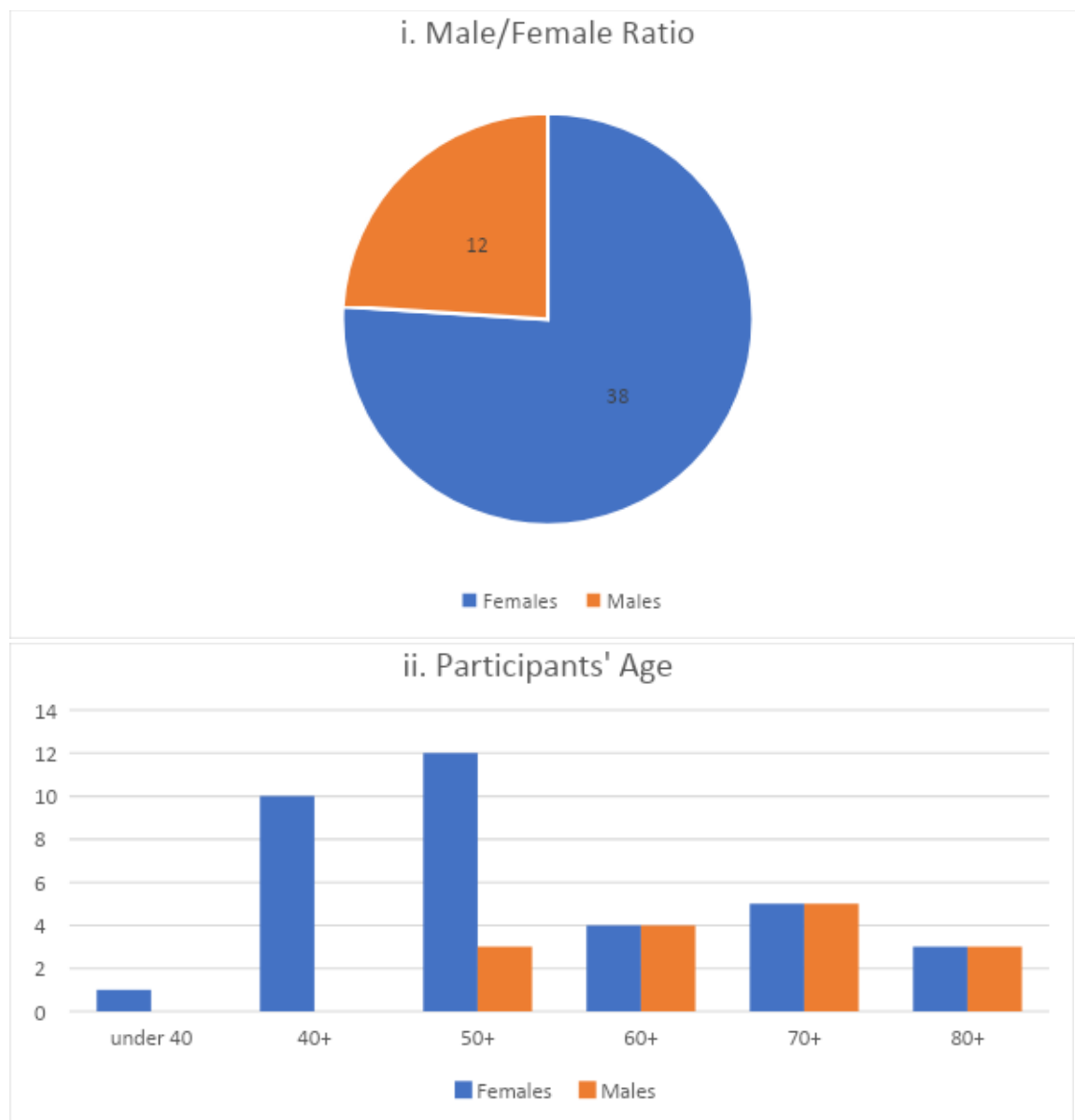
- F1 - Male - 70's – Psychologist, Artist, Writer
- F2 - Female - late 50's – Social worker and Storyteller
- F3 - Female - 70's – Mythology/Storytelling. Eastern European ancestry. Art/Sc. Quaker Minister: First spiritual member of family (*Blind - had questionnaire read to her*)
- F4 - Male - 60's - Countryside Issues, poet. Art background.
- F5 - Female - 60's- Scottish. Retired. Gardening, Ecology, Writing. Art/Sp
- F6 - Female - 50's, Scottish holistic healing centre owner, Healing Mother Earth, Art/Sp

Venue G - an orchard in a walled garden of an intentional community* (SW Devon)
* A community of people who choose to live together to explore communal living (in this case to follow New Paradigm principles). 17th June. Afternoon. Full Moon.

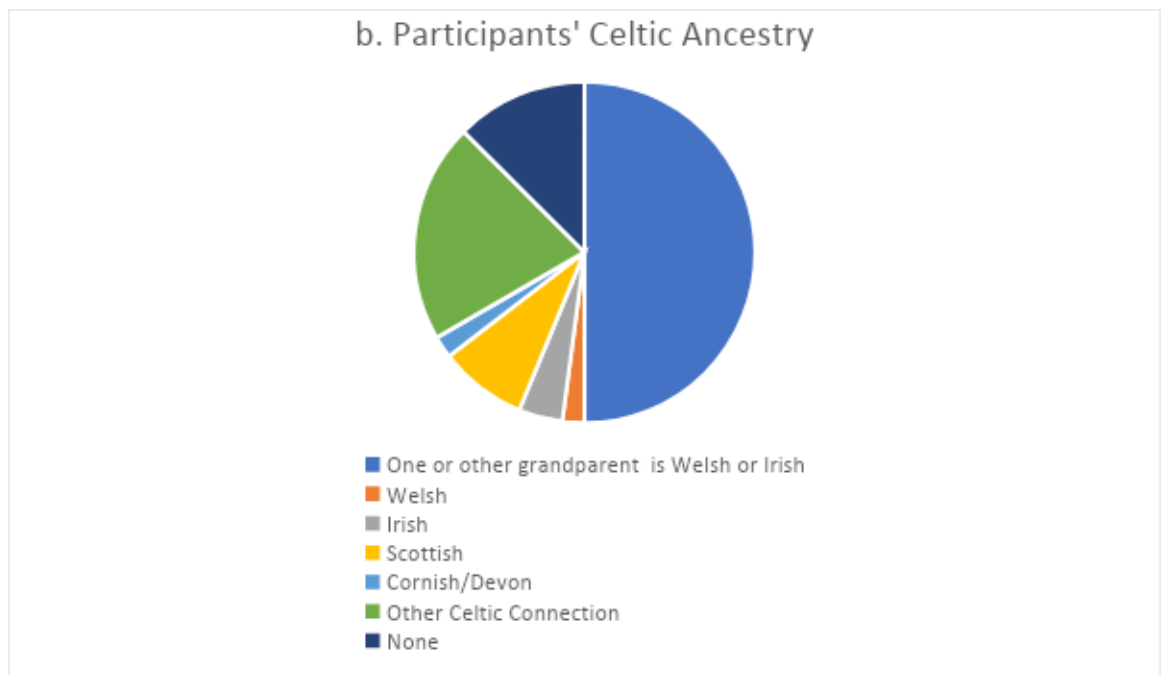
- G1 - Female - early 80's - retired housewife, gardener, Welsh and Irish ancestry.
 - G2 - Male – late 70's - Homeopath
 - G3 - Female - 40's Workshop facilitator. Celtic ancestry. Scientific background
 - G4 - Female – 50's – Artist. Spiritual background.
- +B3

Appendix 9- Questionnaire Data

a. Participants' Gender & Age



b. Participants' Celtic Ancestry

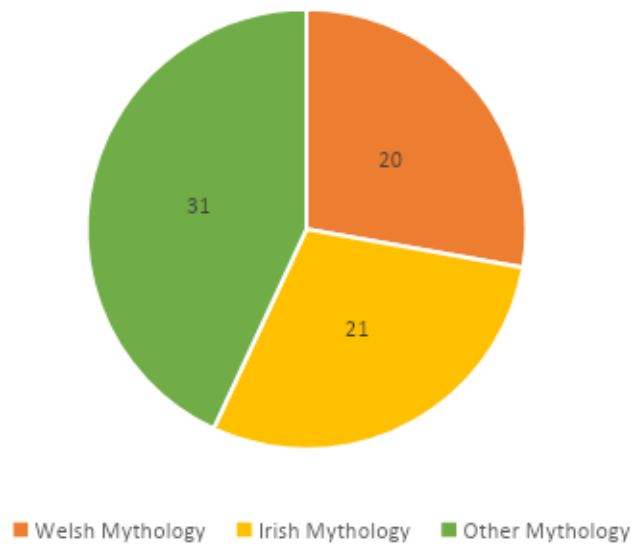


c. Participant's Familiarity with Mythology

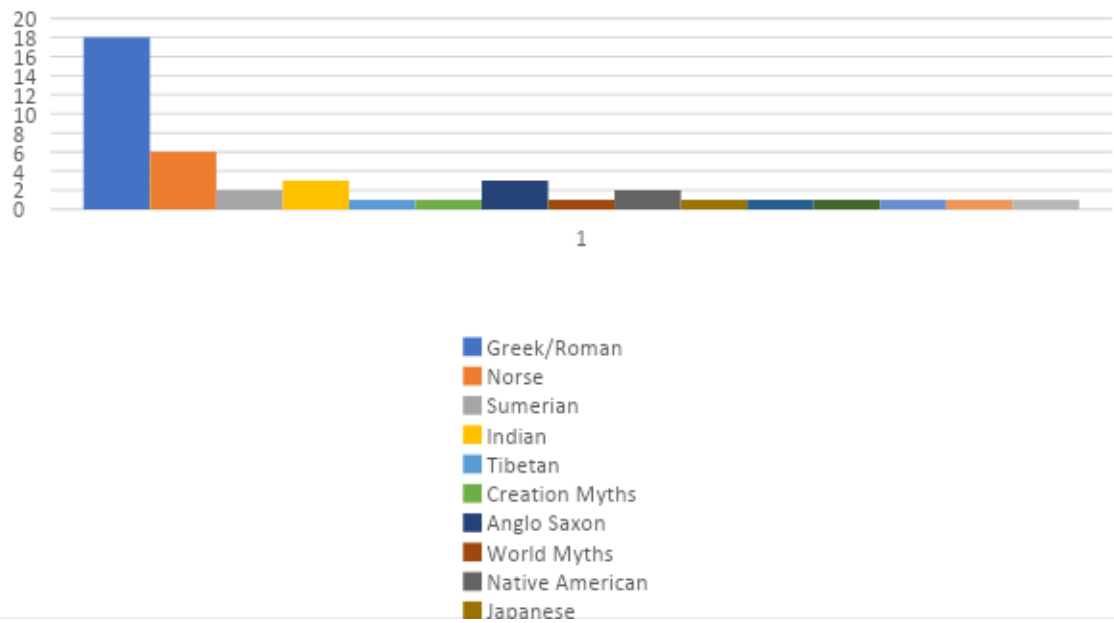
i. By Venue



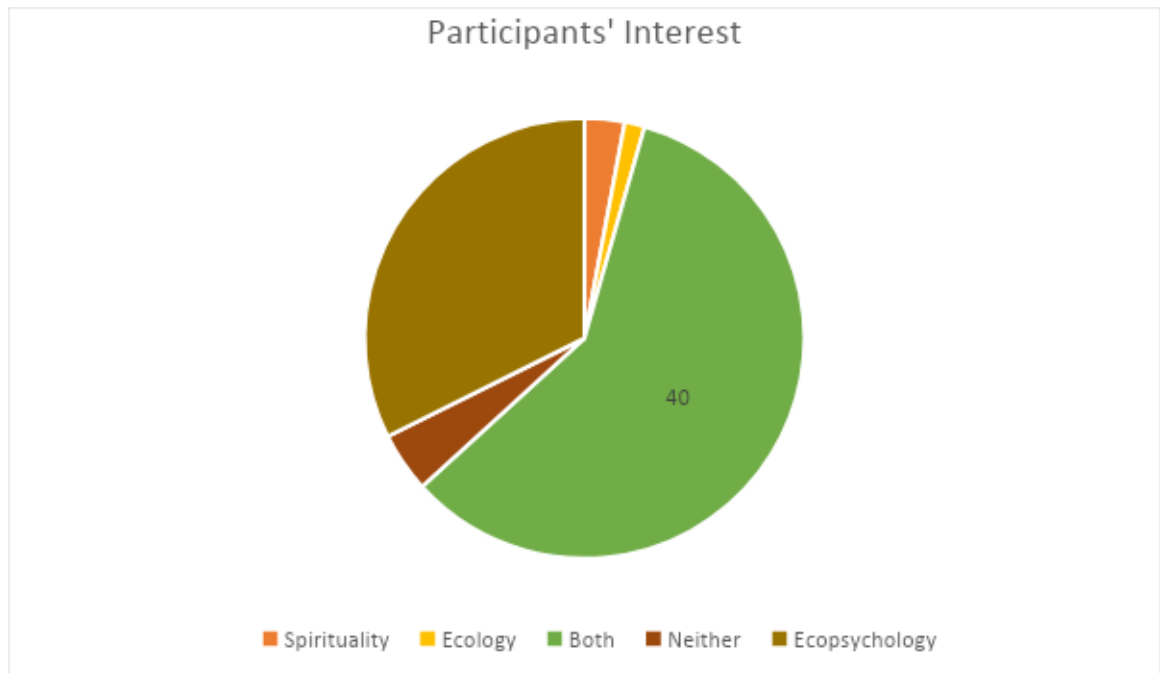
ii. Familiarity with Mythology



iii. Other Mythology: A Breakdown

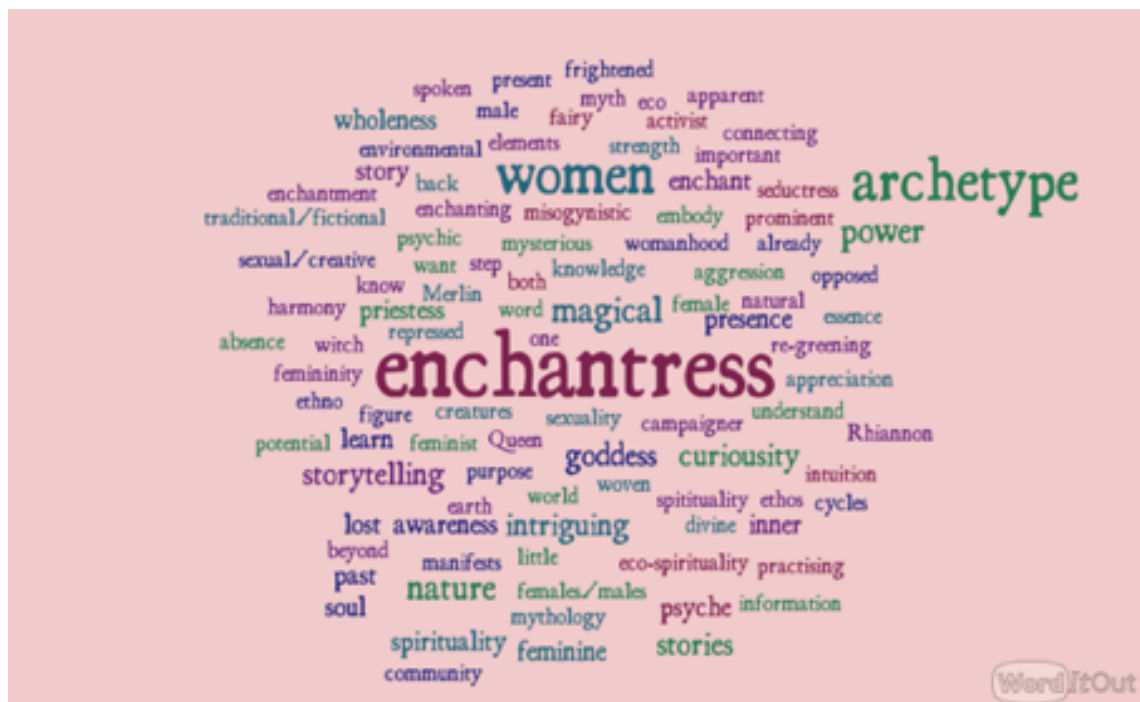


d. Participants' Interest in &/or knowledge of Spirituality & Ecology:



NB 'Neither' responses possibly due to Participants choosing not to complete the tick box section of the questionnaire.

e. Word Cloud generated from key word responses to the question “What is your interest in the enchantress?”



Appendix 10

Participants who took part in follow-up focus groups and interviews

	Follow-up Focus Group 1	Follow-up focus group 2	Interviewees
Interview Questions 1 (Appendix 6)	A1 B2 B4 B8 B9	B5 B6	B1 B3 C1 C5 D1 F3
Final Interview Questions (Appendix 7)			E2 E3 E7 F4 F6