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**Creative Work**

## **The body, nature and dialogue: A year of living cyclically, Samhain to Imbolc**

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### **Introduction**

These sketchbook pages are a visual exploration of my current PhD research which seeks to understand the language and narratives of ecological identity — what an ecological identity is; how an ecological identity is formed; and how expanding one's sense of self to include the ecological could be of benefit or bring about change to the individual, organisations or society.

I have begun my research guided by the intention to live 'cyclically', to first connect with, and experience my own ecological sense of self. I have chosen to use the eight pagan festivals, collectively known as the Wheel of the Year, as markers in this experience. The sketchbook pages represent the period between Samhain (31 October) and Imbolc (1-2 February); winter, in the northern hemisphere.

My greatest sense during the time between Samhain and Winter solstice, as I tried to immerse myself in the 'research', whilst still managing the final end of year work pressures, was of a grounding energy. As the trees started to lose their leaves in order to conserve energy for the dark winter months, so did I. Whilst for many, Christmas and New Year are a time of heightened energy and socialising, I realised this is counterintuitive to a period of time that calls us to rest and reflect. I found myself surrendering to this energy, imagining myself as a hibernating bear in a cave of warm leaves. I stayed in, read, slept, and demanded less of myself. I took inspiration from the stillness of nature, the bare trees, recognising this is a time for vulnerability and being able to truly see ourselves. During this time, I was particularly inspired by the writing of Katherine May (*Wintering*), Jay Griffiths (*Pip Pip*) and Robin Wall Kimmerer (*Braiding Sweetgrass*). Whereas, previously January would be a month that left me feeling flat and slightly depressed, this January became a time of great healing for me. I felt I truly experienced the *Wintering* that Katherine May so beautifully writes about. As I move closer towards my ecological sense of self, I am finding the pressures of the colonial, patriarchal, linear concept of time, as described in *Pip Pip*, increasingly

challenging. Allowing ourselves to rest and reflect goes against the heavy weight of the human-machine narrative of consistency, productivity, efficiency; of always showing up each day the same. Throw in the pressure felt by some to make ‘new year’s resolutions’, to continually set goals and improve ourselves, it is no wonder that people find January hard. Not to say my January wasn’t ‘hard’. I cried, multiple times. I was confronted by myself. During the darkness, I made space for the feelings that surfaced. I recognised patterns of behaviour that needed to be processed and released. I uncovered wisdom. As daylight hours slowly increased and Imbolc arrived, I noticed new energy stirring in myself. A desire to emerge from my cave and meet new people, attend evening activities, seek community, share new ideas. I feel supported by the wisdom and inner transformation that slowing down and embracing the darkness enabled me to access. I felt the joy of planting seeds for a new beginning.

As I continue through the Wheel of the Year, I hope my research will reveal an emergent positive discourse on ecological identity; a language that can counter the dominant language and narrative of technology and the machine in relation to our human identity and ecological sense of self. Words such as reciprocity, gratitude and gift, from the very nature of the things they are describing, require an embodied, creative experience to truly understand their meaning. Experiencing language in an embodied sense supports the transformation towards something; a language that is both nurturing and activating; that can reconnect us to the web of life, and our interdependent relationship with nature and each other.

## References

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- Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. London: Penguin.
- May, K. (2020). *Wintering: The power of rest and retreat in difficult times*. New York: Riverhead Books.

## Biography

I am a creative facilitator dedicated to working towards positive social and environmental change through transformative learning, dialogue and the value of creativity. I have worked with a diverse range of organisations across sectors from corporate and international development to education and charities. I am currently studying a part-time PhD in ecolinguistics at the University of Gloucestershire.

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