Document généré le 19 oct. 2024 21:25

Art/Research International
A Transdisciplinary Journal

ART | RESEARCH international A Transdisciplinary Journal

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Margaret McKeon et Kedrick James

Volume 9, numéro 1, 2024

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1113659ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.18432/ari29780

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Éditeur(s)

University of Alberta

ISSN

2371-3771 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

McKeon, M. & James, K. (2024). The Poetics of Kinship. *Art/Research International*, *9*(1), 22–38. https://doi.org/10.18432/ari29780

Résumé de l'article

We write about the poetics of kinship with birds, trees, stones, and places as an act of resistance to neo-literal, neo-liberal destruction of refuge for non-human beings. Through research in which we situate ourselves in relation to the more-than-human, we take up kin as a verb. We offer experiences of kinning—that is, being present with that which is alive, has agency, and gives voice—as an invitation to readers to open themselves to listen in life and in research. We write in dialogue, through letters to each other, and we write poetically. With poetry's attention to metaphor, embodiment, and vision, it is the natural language for describing the experience of kinning. Inquiring poetically helps us regain a communicative being-in-relation with wild, more-than-human others at a time of ecological distress, and to seek to better appreciate mystery and understandings that exceed human forms of knowing. Through this paper, we theorise from within our understandings and experiences about poetically kinning with the more-than-human.

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THE POETICS OF KINSHIP

Margaret McKeon
margaret.mckeon@gmail.com

Kedrick James
University of British Columbia
kedrick.james@ubc.ca

Dr. Margaret McKeon is an outdoor educator, poet, and sessional lecturer. In her research, as a settler person of Irish and German ancestry, she considers land relationship, ancestral knowledges, and colonialism through story and poetry.

Dr. Kedrick James is a Professor of Teaching in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia. He is a long-time contributor to poetic inquiry and sees eco-poetics as extending notions of social justice beyond the human realm.

Abstract: We write about the poetics of kinship with birds, trees, stones, and places as an act of resistance to neo-literal, neo-liberal destruction of refuge for non-human beings. Through research in which we situate ourselves in relation to the more-than-human, we take up kin as a verb. We offer experiences of *kinning*—that is, being present with that which is alive, has agency, and gives voice—as an invitation to readers to open themselves to listen in life and in research. We write in dialogue, through letters to each other, and we write poetically. With poetry's attention to metaphor, embodiment, and vision, it is the natural language for describing the experience of kinning. Inquiring poetically helps us regain a communicative being-in-relation with wild, more-than-human others at a time of ecological distress, and to seek to better appreciate mystery and understandings that exceed human forms of knowing. Through this paper, we theorise from within our understandings and experiences about poetically kinning with the more-than-human.

Keywords: kinning; poetic inquiry; confluence; more-than-human; mystery; language

The Poetics of Kinship

As humans, we are dependent beings that rely on many other forms of life to provide for us (Kimmerer, 2021). We depend on the nourishment of water and on the fecundity of soils and oceans. Our wellbeing (along with that of other beings) is profoundly reliant on the balance and integrity of ecosystems and climate, balances that are critically imperiled.

What are we doing as the world boils? To what are we giving our attention? Nigerian scholar and poet Báyò Akómoláfé (2022) invites us into a confluence of kinship and poetry as he challenges us to seek:

> words we don't know yet, and temporalities we have not yet inhabited. May we be slower than speed could calculate, and swifter than the pull of the gravity of words can incarcerate. And may we be visited so thoroughly, and met in wild places so overwhelmingly, that we are left undone. Ready for composting. Ready for the impossible. (para. 2)

In this article, as an act of research as resistance, we dialogue through an exchange of letters about the poetics of kinship with wild places, with birds, bears, trees, and stones.

Through research in which we situate ourselves in relation to the more-than-human, we take up kin as a verb (Van Horn, 2021). We share experiences of *kinning*—that is, of being present with that which is alive, has agency, and gives voice—as an invitation to readers to open themselves to their own listening experiences. Gavin Van Horn (in Kimmerer et al., 2021) offers the invitation to "think of yourself as a drumhead when you go outside. You're not 'out there' observing the world through a myopic lens, from your own perspective. The world is actually playing you" (para. 13). Through our own undoing, through allowing ourselves to be played, we seek relational repair in an era of apocalyptic damage in the relationship between dominant Western knowledge and society and all that which is alive and gives us life (Donald, 2021). We strive to "remember who we are by remembering to care for the others around us" (Kimmerer et al., 2021, para. 33).

Our commitment to kinship further encompasses diverse humans and each other as co-authors; we find ourselves entering relationships governed by reciprocity. We write relationally through a letter-exchange because "letters, unlike journals, are written to another person with the expectation of a response" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 167. We do not write in a relational vacuum (as with dominant academic discourse), but to each other. Letter writing has been used in social science research as an interpersonal data collection method (Harris, 2002; Stamper, 2020) and in the form of a researcher writing through letters to their child (Flemming, 2020; Wilson 2008). It has served as a mainstay of humanities discourse, offering insights that are more personal and confidential than what is presented in published works. We come to our letter exchange from relational arts-informed methodologies such as

life writing (Chambers et al., 2012; Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009), in which authors interweave autobiographical texts to highlight points of affinity and difference. Through letter-writing as research, we seek the opening of our psyches to intimate realms of personal correspondence and across temporal scales of becoming, and to invite the same for our readers.

We bring the gifts of poetry to our letter exchange. Poetry's attention to metaphor, rhythm, embodiment, and vision makes it an ideal medium to convey the language of kinning. Inquiring poetically "invites a way of uniting the heart, mind, imagination, body, and spirit" (Leggo, 2008, p. 5). It offers "one way to mediate the shadows of our [linear and divided] cultural dream and return home to our embodied, mortal human existence" (Galvin & Prendergast, 2016, p. xiii). Poetry speaks in the spaces between words, between the in-breath and out-breath. Poetry opens us up to the impossible transgression of human limitations, to the ineffable, the understanding of life-as-we-don't-know-it. And it makes possible the reach of our perceptions beyond our mere mortal frames, allowing us to experience otherness in close, even intimate proximity. When you listen closely to the world, the world listens back. Through writing poetically, we seek a summons-to by way of slippage, falling, landing upon significance unintentionally.

Our writing is an act of love and an act of resistance. Through an exchange of letters, through attending to the gifts of language, and through sharing sensible and sensuous experiences, we seek to resist the "objectification and commodification of the world" (Kimmerer et al., 2021, para. 32). We understand that we must not look only at what is lost and is being lost, but love fiercely that which is still present.

Kedrick (Writing from Interior Salish Territory / Greenwood BC)

Dear Margaret,

I want to start off from a place of what we don't, or even can't, know. I am going to use a term, the *Mysterium*, which invokes the idea of speaking to the Great Unknown as a form of meditation; it is a dialogue with inner and outer selves, dialogue that is deeply connected to poetry, which Bataille (2001), in *Method of Meditation*, calls "the closest effusion to meditation" (p. 95). Mysterium is not at some abstract distance from our daily lives—it is within everyone; by everyone, I mean the whole non-human world as well. One can't break into the Mysterium by force. You have to conjure it rather than treat it as something locked inside needing to escape. In fact, it energises everything, but that's too vague and deific. Mysterium, as I invoke it here, is not some kind of capital D deity. Nor is Mysterium as simple as not knowing, or being ignorant about something. That is a wasteland seldom growing anything of real value.

Margaret (Writing from *Mohkinstsis* / Calgary AB, Treaty 7 Territory)

Dear Kedrick,

I'm so glad that we finally have a chance to write together on a topic that we have long enjoyed conversing about. Many years ago, as I began to learn about my ancestral Irish teachings on relating to the land (the more-than-human), I learned about thin places, places where the veil between *this world* and the *other world* is thinner, looser, more porous. Maybe this otherworld has kinship with your description of the Mysterium. In Ireland, mountain top cairns, portal tombs, and stone circles designate and amplify thin places. But so, too, is any place where worlds converge—a boundary or meeting place—considered a thin place. A spring emerges from dark earth; a mountain top meets sky; a rocky headland meets a calm or roaring sea. A cave, a mist, a confluence.

What about interactions between species, say where a human interacts with a crow or a tree? What is opened in this confluence of relationship? And in the relationship between you and me, Kedrick, and our readers—can we understand our dialogue here, the confluence of our voices and our histories, experiences and understandings, as a thin place? I hope our readers will experience our stories as different sediments and sources that spiral together, touching, separating and re-meeting without combining.

I write from a long-storied place of confluence. *Mohkinstsis* is the Blackfoot name for this place in the grassy foothills of the Rocky Mountains where the Bow and Elbow Rivers meet, a place in Treaty 7 territory now also known as Calgary. I moved here recently and have so much to learn. As a settler to this place, and as part of the Irish and German diaspora, my body is a confluence or bridge between the clay and breath of my ancestral lands and the river water that cycles through my body each day.

I have been working to understand how my body is a thin place. The convergence of stars and clay? Of darkness and sunlight? Of matter and time? If this is so, how then might I open myself to listening as a way of learning my responsible "place in the family of things" (Oliver, 1992, p. 110)? When I sit in stillness in the cocoon of my home or when I lie beneath an arching tree stretching between soil and sky, how do I open myself to the interconnectedness and teachings of diverse worlds? Alongside learning from the stories, ceremonies, and protocols of the peoples Indigenous to this place, how do I transform my listening to hear the melody that sings through all life?

Kedrick

The Mysterium initiates internalized growth of awareness in the absence of certainty about the known world. Harold Rhenisch (2016) reminds us as settlers to North America that one important component of Indigenous creativity in the Pacific Northwest:

> is that it relates to two lands at the same time: a timeless one, in which all beings are equal and speaking to each other, and one created by them, in which coyotes are wild dogs, deer are four-legged grazing animals, and "the real people" (to distinguish them from the coyotes and deer and so on, who are also people) are humans. (para. 5)

This meeting place of worldviews is a well-spring of creativity. I believe this fits your description of the thin place, where the porosity of typically fixed realisms lets us peer into something other—imagined and yet vividly presencing, deeply personal yet also consensual; not like hallucinations, more like shared experiences of otherness.

In conversing meaningfully with undomesticated beings, regardless of whether one speaks with animals, plants, or stones, one admits a deep reliance on the Mysterium; however, *the Wild* is a very western and colonial construct. In Chinook Wawa, the confluence language of Indigenous and European settler populations in the Salish territories I'm writing from, it's just called *the sticks*, meaning trees, generally the woods (Gibbs, 1863, p. 8-9), where cities are notably absent and where a wild being might seek refuge. Such wild places are in symbolic opposition to civilization, and by extension, beings in the Wild are assumed to be without civil qualities. This un-becoming prejudice saturates relationality throughout Western civilization generally, and is replete in regional histories here in British Columbia and Washington, named after the agents of civilizing in the so-called Wild West.

The notion that the wild beings exist without relations of conduct and have nothing to offer civilized humans except for their bare bodies is pervasive in contemporary society. Any thesaurus will associate words like fierce, violent, uncontrolled, undomesticated, brutal, and yet, civilized humans continue to murder wild beings for sport and money. But now civilization is in a heap of trouble. For all our civilized qualities, we have brutalized the earth. There are hardly any sticks left. Not only have we made wild beings homeless, we have also destroyed the very mechanism by which nature can repair itself and sustain life in civic places. Furthermore, we elect ourselves to come up with solutions, to fix the mess without changing ourselves.

As an artful mode of resistance, and as an application of inquiry to the pressing matter of ecological sustainability, poetry has a role to play if it can enable dialogue with the non-human, or, more appropriately, the more-than/greater-than-human. The "more" part of that equation is within the Mysterium. How do we learn from the more-than-human? How do we re-energise a connection with nature that transcends humanity's grasp and desire to

recreate nature in our own image, for our own purposes? So far, we've failed. Every solution introduces a heap of new problems. We just aren't listening to anyone but ourselves.

Margaret

Through the traditions of my Irish ancestors, I have learned about journeying, a process that enlists the imagination as portal to the unknown. When I journey, I lie down in a place, sink into my bones, and travel—travel to where I might be again in this place but with new vivid senses. What is the nature of this other world? I have heard many stories and seen some things, but really, for myself, I don't know. My eyes looking out and looking inward are my unique vantage. I am spirit, the breath of life in a body. I am a body, but that is not all I am. I was reared on the colonial and capitalist cultural soups of Euro-centred North America, but that is not all that I know. I have been growing from the teachings of my Irish ancestors and from the Indigenous teachings of the places where I have lived. As I learn to listen and pay attention, that which was fixed begins to flow. That which was flattened begins to breathe. That which was mute begins to echo.

I am learning to lean into the teachings of the Wild, as you describe, and I have found both the journey and the end are uncertain because they do not belong to me. When I enter a forest, even before I bend my skin to listen, I am in relationship. Niitsitapi scholar Leroy Little Bear (2000) teaches that "if everything is animate, then everything has spirit and knowledge. If everything has spirit and knowledge, then all are like me. If all are like me, then all are my relations" (p. 2). As I have been taught, when I walk the land, I offer a pinch of tobacco to the keepers of this place. At the base of a tree, an opening in the forest or the reveal of a watery spring, I express my intentions to travel in a good way. Ask permission. Listen for the answer. Listen: will a raven call out from a branch behind my head? Will permission and instruction come as an image, a colour, an indescribable but tangible feeling?

Kedrick

Relations with the more-than-human can't happen if we approach wild others with the idea that we have something to get, to extract or to analyze. Western science is all about control, and control is a paradox: the more you want it, the less control you have. We try to bend other beings (animal, vegetable, mineral) to our will and the primary weapon in our arsenal is language. I wonder how we can converse (meaning turn together) with the more-than-human without imposing human language on every outcome? So profoundly does that rot the aim of discovering the unknowable and fostering a deeper relationality! Donna Haraway (2016), touting her futurist slogan of "Make Kin, Not Babies" says "Go outside English, and the wild multiplies" (p. 103). Yet I go outside with my grammar boots on,

wrapped up in my warm syntax, my rubber phones and jaunty lexicon, and seek a friend. Oh, I'm not picky about which friend, though I love to meet a familiar and catch up on their gossip. But I impose no expectations on these more-than-human relationships. It might be a fleeting connection, but it could also break trails into eternity. As you indicate, Margaret, these relationships are rooted in specific places and times of year. We make kin where and when we can, as an act of love but also of survival.

Conversing with the more-than-human takes time. It's built on relationships of trust, no matter how shiny an aura you spew from your cranium. And still, there is a different ethical concept taking place. There's no reason more-than-human beings should trust humans at all. We have for millennia prided ourselves as apex predators, even preying upon ourselves. In the Mysterium, we confront the self in others. There are no veils, lies, or deceptions that can be spoken and believed by the self in conversation with the Mysterium; approach with wild honesty. Learning to do so takes time.

Even in wild places, the Mysterium never responds right away. It might provoke with a flash of hide or a swirl of fin, and then only when you least expect it. We must wait until the preoccupied logic of arrival subsides. The wild needs to accept you. You need to sleep in that place. The truth is, the whole time the more-than-human is speaking with you, but you can't recognize it. Your senses aren't attuned because you are too sensible, you're importing predilections, you're too busy thinking human.

Margaret

I agree with you, Kedrick, that trust in relationships can take time to build. I always start with a good introduction. Potawatomi ecologist Robin Wall Kimmerer (Kimmerer et al., 2021) teaches that knowing names for the plants in a place facilitates an introduction. When we can call those around us by name, we feel more like we are in relationship. We are not alone. Neither are we among strangers with no obligations to each other.

For many years, when I lived in Vancouver, I would make an early spring visit to Saturna Island, the most easterly of the Canadian Gulf Islands. I felt grateful to find renewal in the bountiful territory of the W̱SÁNEĆ (Saanich) peoples. Coming off the ferry, although I was often offered a ride by kindly islanders, I would always walk the 8 km road from Lyall Harbour to Echo Bay, which was on the south end of the island. My walk was a ritual of coming into relationship, my surrender into wildness and experiences of which I would not be in charge. As you discuss, Kedrick, surrendering some will and control is vital to relationship with the more-than-human.

Once I passed the store and crested a long hill, but before the intermittent small farms with daffodils along the roadside turned to deer-grazed forest, I descended a small trail. Rough stairs cut into the steep slope take the keen walker through a second growth forest to a cascading waterfall. Here is a singular remaining old growth tree that escaped the earlier cutting. A tree that remembers a time before clear cuts and chainsaws. A time before Spanish and a time before English was spoken on this coast. A time before my own ancestors fled their homelands, carried by hopes of their survival and a better life across the sea. This relationship helps me release the hold of colonial narratives on my life and surrender to that which is other. This tree is called a Douglas fir in English.

At this tree, whose precarious position on the edge of the steep watery slope must have offered protection from industrious colonial men and their axes and long saws, I laid down my laden backpack. I gathered my heart together and offered a pinch of tobacco. I leaned my head on spongy old bark and filled myself with a spiral breath. On each island pilgrimage, I introduced myself again to the spirits here. I let the city and university drain from my body as I entered the island and entered myself.

Kedrick

I cheat. I bring snacks for my kin and my go-to is black oil sunflower seeds. When I wander my favorite trails in the upper Kettle River grasslands where long ago Sńʕaýckstx (Lakes) Interior Salish people hunted and gathered food, I sprinkle seeds in my path to speckle the trail my scent leaves in the grasses, through wild rose bushes and Ponderosa pines, on boulders scattered with lichen older than humanity. Out of the midst of nowhere—in other words, fresh from the Mysterium—a voice will accost me. It doesn't speak human, but it is definitely talking to me. It's not hubris to think so. If we listen closely, the whole earth speaks directly to us, for we too are its kin. So, I stop, and with humility and joy, offer a greeting. Hello buddy. It looks weird in print. Hello buddy. Exactly as I will greet my Maker.

Talking with wild beings requires us to rewild language, to empty its semantic load of codified human baggage. As with poetry, nonsense vocables can be highly meaningful. But mobile beings are not the only ones that communicate. So, how to talk to trees? People have different ways of going about it. Some just want to hug a big old trunk, arms outstretched like a squirrel. That makes sense in the Canadian rainforest where trunks tower branchless 100 feet into the canopy. My way is to wander around, crossing my eyes slightly like Don Juan's protégé (Castenada, 1973), looking for a power spot where I can put down roots amidst the mothers. And I stand straight, looking skyward, but I communicate through the soles of my feet, because my thoughts go underground if I want to talk to a tree. It's better barefoot, but not necessary. And it takes time. We are just a blur, we mobile beings.

Margaret

On one visit to Saturna Island, as I arrived at the campground, a young family was enjoying an afternoon walk, so I slipped down to a small, shaded beach. I laid my back against the trunk of a large cedar overhanging the tideline. A fresh dampness blew through the breeze and threatened rain. It felt clear, suddenly, that I should set up my tent on the bank above, and a tarp under this cedar on the beach where I could have an afternoon sleep, well-tucked away from rain and further visitors.

In my Gore-Tex, I lay on the damp sand under the tarp. I slept as it started to rain. When I woke, a merganser was grooming in the water near the shore. She was vigorously working the feathers under each wing. Her cinnamon crest scrunched and sprung free. She reached back to her oil gland with her beak. Flapped about in the water. Back and forth she was pacing in front of the outlet of a small stream. It occurred to me, as she picked up water in her beak to work in with her feathers, that the fresher water here was helpful for her effort. I was feeling chilled and would need to move soon. She stopped preening and clambered up onto the beach near me, settling in. There was a rounded stone pressing hard into my lower back. A second merganser glided in and joined the first. I was hungry and needed to pee. Not far from my head, they tucked orange beaks and cinnamon heads under wings for a rest.

Building trust takes time but also stillness. When I paused in stillness, not talking or rushing, other beings stepped in to their own movements. I watched herons systematically fish the full length of the shoreline instead of flying away. At night, otters flashed slivery in the moonlit darkness along the shallows of the beach. As the hours turned into days of sitting and sleeping, eating and walking, I began to feel the place breathing in me. All places are special, but some are very thin places where gusts of wind become your own breath. I always left the island with a message: some instruction about turning the boxes of life upside down to start again. Building trust and building relationship with the more-than-human is about commitment, a willingness to step out there into the unknown.

Alongside Paula Gunn Allen (1986), I too understand that I am “a moving event within a moving [or thinking] universe” (p. 145). Right action means learning to listen with my whole body. We must seek “a form of workshop that has yet been invented” (Akómoláfé, 2022, para. 3). These urgent times—of climate change, catastrophic pollution, and loss of biodiversity—call for urgent and profound listening. A fierceness of commitment to relationship and to doing things differently—a willingness to step out into the unknown.

Kedrick

When we move a lot, we lose connection to place. We have to begin again, listen closely to seek local more-than-human counsel, and acknowledge the beings to and through which this land already speaks. When I finally found a wild place of refuge, it was in the Boundary Country of British Columbia, where the Interior Salish have, for millennia, congregated to share the bounty of nature, specifically the Kettle River Falls Fishery (see Colville Tribes History and Archeology Department, 2017; Johnston & Colville History and Archeology Program 2021/2024). This is near Colville, Washington, and named after a Europeanization of the word *cavel*, which means a long, pointed stick used for spearing salmon. The Indigenous practice of land acknowledgement is one way, finally, that settler humans have begun to honour the land and the people who once cared for it. But acknowledging the land is not only about who owns what. Asking permission to reside in relation, to belong in a place and benefit from its providence extends beyond human relations.

Some species are more likely to connect with humans, don't fear us as much. Take the hummingbird, for example. Imagine you are having a great chat with a hummingbird. That's entry level because they are brave, curious, and talkative, they barely know you and you're already old friends (James, 2017). (Okay, some sugar water might be involved.) That's what you play for, and they really deliver. The wild more-than-human universe has no better emissary. Take me to your feeder. Everything is going great. You catch a split-second-glimpse in a different direction. Gone. You wait, and wonder. Finally, you give up, ready to wander off and *baff*, back again, like no time, or maybe a lifetime has passed. So, you need to slow down when you are coming from the city, shed not only its scents and sounds but also the sensory buzz. You have to wake up on the trail, in loud silence. The Mysterium will be staring right at you. But just because you have to slow down, it doesn't mean time doesn't exist, or that it moves more slowly in the Mysterium. Time flies like the hummingbird. Good luck keeping track.

Poetic words help. No point asking for the weather forecast. Instead, state the obvious. "Hello buddy, thank you for the greeting. I am here. I was walking aimlessly to find you. I feel good about becoming you." Use poetic words like *scandalous*, which, to me is a word full of joy. "You have a scandalous song," I jibe. Or maybe you are sitting on a more-than-human stone, chucking pebbles into a valley of ancient Ice Ghosts. Wot! It stops drawing down your heat. It buzzes under your ass. That boulder sits there, hardly moving in a thousand years. Now it's buzzing beneath you. "Hello buddy. I see you have strong shoulders." Put a hand down to pat it and get zapped. It's like grounding out a high voltage current. Muscles stiff. This stone is supercharged in the Mysterium. Sometime later you return. It's completely lifeless. Lie back, look at the sky. Right overhead clouds are tying

themselves in knots, wrestling like spawning salmon. Ask the sculptor where the Stone has gone. “It is out playing with the Wind” you are told.

Let me tell you about a yearling bear that came to live with me because there was no forest left for a home. They ate my fruit, tore down a whole tree to get at the highest, juiciest apples. Could I begrudge a hungry buddy? I have a grocery store, the bear-person has my yard. Last summer this yearling moved in and slept in a ball between the potted plants. When I would go out on my deck, my friend would come lie down, back toward me, teasing the bees that supped at boundary daisies, goading them to dance the secret of their honeyed hive. My friend never looked at me, not once, always back turned, several feet away, butt on the deck and head in the garden. I spoke, “Buddy, eat your fill. It will be a long winter.” And I’d see an ear twitch to say I hear you. Now there’s no greater compliment than an animal who turns their back on you, and gives you their full attention. In the grip of the Mysterium, trust is a miracle, an unexpected gift. You never turn your back on the enemy unless you are a porcupine or fast on your hooves.

Margaret

When I moved to Vancouver from Newfoundland to take up doctoral studies, I began my networking by making friends with the crows. The Northwestern crows in Vancouver were different from the American crows I knew in Newfoundland. With far less winter than on that opposite coast, they remained year-round, they lived in greater density, and they seemed to have smaller territories. Further, they seemed ready to be in relationship with me. I would give them a few nuts from my own snack stash in my bag. They knew about people and backpacks and snacks. They had met someone like me before, but I had much to learn.

I learned to drop a few nuts and walk away rather than throw them. I learned to recognize the crows—one crow in particular, with a haphazard wing, and her mate. They learned my face and I learned the width and breadth of their small territory. Even when I moved away from campus, I looked forward to bringing them a few nuts, and checking on their young, only one of which survived that summer. One day, I found small bodies of the non-dominant young who had fled the nest. The parents ignored me as I moved these light carcasses from the open lawn to the shelter of a shrub. I was learning about survival and death, of which crows already know well.

When I moved off campus, the pair of crows at my new place readily took me on. From a near distance, I introduced myself, made eye contact, showed them the nuts and walked away, not looking back. Trust, with the more-than-human and among humans, is sometimes about knowing when to look away, when to leave. Letting a gesture speak for itself.

One morning, I was late, riding my bicycle to the university, pumping hard on the pedals. I sensed a change and turned my head—a crow was flying right alongside me, matching my pace pump for pump like we were dancers of an old dance. It is the only time I have felt like I was flying. Over that summer, I watched their young one mature and later witnessed the drama of this one bringing home a partner. Not only my species had relational hurtles to work through.

When I eventually moved away from Vancouver to complete my dissertation, I think maybe it was the crows I missed the most. I still miss who I was with them. With crows, I lived at the edge of curiosity and awe. Always there was something new that I didn't understand. I witnessed their daily habits and extended family dynamics. A band of crow teenagers at the beach roughhousing. Crows tracking seagulls foraging the low tide and young gulls tracking foraging crows: here was a competitive and interdependent relationship as old as the coast itself.

One week in the fall, for the first time their young one would make the long trek across town to this community's overnight crow roost in Burnaby. Now still, when I return to Vancouver and witness the long streaming mass of birds, I imagine the excitement of a young bird's first trip, joining thousands of others in this thing that crows do. This being a crow. I do not wish to be a crow, but through my relationships with them I am keenly interested in what it means to be a crow, how they fit in the broader network of a landscape. What is good and bad for the lives of crows? What is good for the lives of bees? Of bears? Of stones? Of the symphony of soil beings that support all life on land (Eberle, 2022)?

I have felt the breath of crows on my skin. Been washed through with the essence of crow. One evening at Jericho Beach in Vancouver, I watched as the crows assembled to begin their evening cross-town migration. There were hundreds. I offered a couple nuts to a pair near me. Suddenly, the flock took to the air. Circling my head. Gently grazing my head. My eyes blurred and ears swam with sound. I pulled up my hood and let myself enter a whirlpool of relationship. A whirlpool of bodies. A whirlpool of crow.

Later, on a walking pilgrimage in Ireland, I came across a flailing crow on the edge of the road who had been struck by a vehicle. Cradled in my rain coat, I gently carried her from the busy roadside to the grassy base of a nearby tree where she could die in more peace. Her mate approached her from another tree as I left. I had related to crows for many years but never in my hands. This intimacy of a small warm and pained body and thick feathers still fills my hands. Caretaking fills my hands and my spirit. In the face of this loss and, more broadly, on the edge of widespread and catastrophic ecological change, grief and resolve fill my hands and spirit. As poet Jane Hirschfield (2020) offers: "Let them not say: it was not spoken, not written./ We spoke,/ we witnessed with voices and hands" (p. 3). Be still. While

the engineers also reimagine their tools for ecological rebalancing, may the poets speak boldly, loudly, and everywhere.

Conclusion

Just as Kimmerer et al. (2021) describe kinning as a verb, so we utilise letter writing and the gifts of poetry to explore the poetics of being present, or presencing, attending to the more-than-human kin/d with our whole being in relation. In this sense, poetry resists the neo-literal, neo-liberal attitude toward normative communication, undertaken in order to take something from the discursive environment, to extract knowledge. And this speaks to a much greater issue in the academy and in qualitative research as a whole—the notion of mining data carries on an exploitative tradition. Instead, we dwell in the uncertainty of language/presence and its imminent significance, which cannot be reduced to functional exchange value.

We propose that inquiring poetically is needed if human beings are to regain a being-in-relation with the more-than-human. The urgency to do so is that, as a species, our perception of the world is becoming ever more narrowly focused on ourselves and our own needs for discourses of care and survival—exacerbated by the use of personal technologies that mediate direct engagement—to the exclusion of the common ground we share with other beings. Living poetic inquiry, a noetic state of awakening to the living spirit of rock, plant, and aquatic or terrestrial persons, serves us a form of close contact with the unknown universe, where we entrust safekeeping of the generative mysteries in language: for poetry bears this burden to summon the Mysterium and become the thin place, to be refuge in a world we have overexposed and under-protected from avarice and profit. By dwelling in language not to tame it with conventions but to experience it as a wilderness of connotations and intimations, researchers begin a conversation with the mystery inherent in all things. In a sense, through inquiring poetically, we are able to re-wild language to bond in kinship with all our relations.

Acknowledgements

Margaret McKeon's portion of this paper draws on research supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

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