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**In Search of Sophia:
Seeking wisdom in adult teaching and
learning spaces**

An Autoethnographic Inquiry

by

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Canterbury Christ Church University

Thesis submitted

for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2013

Dedication

To my first story-tellers, Bel and Greg Fraser and in memory of Greg (1916-1996). And to the owners and staff of St Helier's Residential Hotel, Folkestone, Kent; their love and concern for Bel during the past four and a half years exemplifies the best the caring professions could offer, my heartfelt thanks.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the relatively under-theorised relationship between wisdom and adult teaching and learning. Whilst studies of wisdom are usually couched within a psychological framework, and/or one related to gerontology, this work poses key questions about what wisdom means, whether it can be taught, and the extent to which its elusive and allusive character has rendered it marginal to the design and delivery of adult and lifelong learning. Using autoethnography as both method and methodology, and by drawing on a diverse range of sources, including six interviews, this pursuit of wisdom is anchored in the reflexive relationship between the author and her subject of study. Key ontological and epistemological questions are posed as I seek meaning in relation to my lifeworld and lifespan. I also examine autoethnography's efficacy whilst acknowledging criticisms within the academy, including accusations of narcissistic irrelevance. This study also incorporates the use of 'writing as inquiry' by way of offering a further challenge to the more traditional bounds of the social sciences. The interview material is couched within a fictionalised framework, and the whole thesis unfolds, conterminously, as both analysis and quest. In keeping with the methodological approach, the thesis concludes by offering a synthesis of certain of its propositions, rather than resolution.

By adopting Sophia, the ancient goddess of wisdom, as metaphorical guide, the basic proposition that is shared across the text is the epistemologically fragmented nature of our understanding of wisdom and her relegation in a frenetic world which can be obsessed with the measurable as against the deepening of understanding. Yet the paradoxical nature of wisdom's manifestations might also offer a degree of hope, should we heed her call...I argue that she is intimately intertwined with learning itself and with the potential for heartfelt and imaginative openness to the wisdom of 'unknowing' and the possibility of transcendence. However, Sophia demands our imaginative, authentic, loving and courageous attention in the process: in writing; in the classroom; in understanding the play of history, culture and the self. This autoethnographic inquiry is my response to that demand.

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This journey of almost six years has involved a number of people whose support, encouragement and belief has sustained me throughout. I would like to thank the following:

My supervisors, Professor Linden West and Dr Hazel Reid who have weathered *Sophia's* appearances and disappearances since the outset, and for their running of the auto/biographical and narrative theme group whose members have brought so much warmth, reinforcement and commitment to pushing at the boundaries; and to Dr Tara Hyland-Russell for that 'initial conversation', for the nautilus, and our on-going collaboration. I would also like to thank Professors Viv Griffiths and Petra Engelbrecht, and Dr Angela Voss for their readings and reviews; Andy Armitage and the Department of Post Compulsory Education and Training at Canterbury Christ Church University for the term's study leave which enabled that necessary period of concentration towards the end of this search; Liz Pichon, Jane Evershed and Jacki Cartlidge for looking after CAE in my absence; and Jacki and Ian Jasper for keeping faith with our small study group. My thanks are also due to Dr Elizabeth Hoult whose generous sharing of her own work and her readings of mine were hugely encouraging, especially when Sophia was proving particularly elusive; and to Elaine Crawford for her magical typesetting and for turning a cumbersome document into a print-ready copy.

Particular thanks must go to the interviewees who gave with such patience, generosity of time, spirit and belief in the importance that Sophia should be heard: 'Jane', 'Hannah', 'Sean' and 'Susanne', I am forever in your debt; as I am to Peter Jarvis and Tricia Wastvedt whose wisdom, creativity and insight have helped so much with both conceptualisation and articulation.

But my deepest thanks must go to my 'readers'; and friends and family whose careful judgements, proof-reading abilities, challenges, reassurances, and the willingness to keep their faith despite my long absences and neglect of the social round have moved, nourished and sustained me: Jenny and Dave Cross, Stephen Kirby and Linda Kushner, thank you for your patience; Ann Harrison-Brooks, Jacki Cartlidge, Agnes Douglas, Jenny Knight, Melanie Lewin, Joy Pascoe, Catherine Robinson, Tara and Tricia, again, Kim Wellard and Rosie Williams; I really could not have completed this without your empathic readings, suggestions, reminders, corrections, and your general fortifications of mind, body and spirit.

I now turn to Dr Chris Scarlett. Thank you, for you know what you have done and you also know that I would not have finished this without your light and guidance showing me the way, and helping me to keep faith with what 'writing as inquiry' might reveal...

Prologue

At a time in history when our connections with one another and with the earth itself are threatened with destruction, we look with hope toward Sophia.
(Cole, Ronan, Taussig, 1996, p.14)

As an autoethnographer, I am both the author and focus of the story, the one who tells and the one who experiences, the observer and the observed, the creator and the created. I am the person at the intersection of the personal and the cultural, thinking and observing as an ethnographer and writing and describing as a storyteller.
(Ellis, 2009, p.13)

It was a frosty Saturday morning in late autumn, but the sun had greeted my early awakening and alleviated, to some degree, the darts of anxiety which accompanied thoughts of the day ahead. Our university department was holding a conference on the potential futures for lifelong learning. I was one of the organisers and I was also giving a presentation.

I shared the journey into work with a colleague; we were both to attend the morning session and then drive to another forum concerning adult education's fragile future, this time organised by a national education charity for which I used to work. The day was, therefore, already tinged with misgiving, and my colleague and I swapped, after our fashion, the kind of desultory comment which reflected our levels of quiet concern.

On arrival, we were soon thoroughly taken up with the last minute tasks that any conference demands, and it was only a few minutes before the key note session was due to begin that I noticed that a line had been drawn across the notice for my workshop, and the word FULL emblazoned underneath. It was then that participants began to approach and ask if I "could just squeeze another in"; "it's a big room, no-one would notice". I glanced at my colleagues' notices, most had a few names attached, but one was completely blank and I had a moment's wave of sympathy for the rejection this seemed to announce. But this was not a popularity contest; to many of the participants our names meant nothing. My success was due to my title: 'Wisdom and Adult Learning'.

The room was, quite simply, overflowing; both with numbers and with anticipation. The session went well. I drew energy from the expectation of the crowd and we generated an atmosphere which beat its own rhythm between input, discussion, exploration and analysis. I showed them the picture of Michelangelo's Creation of Adam and asked them to reflect on what exactly was being passed from God to Man in that iconic, forever held, moment of connection.

Figure1 Creation of Adam
www.forerunner.com/blog/uploaded_images/create

I revealed the rest of the picture - and the woman in God's embrace. Eve? Surely not, at the moment of Adam's genesis, then who might she be? I enjoyed the moment when realisation, thence preconception were both challenged by the possibility of a new thought taking shape. I enjoyed, in other words, the delight of teaching...

Figure 2 Michelangelo's Creation of Adam (<http://www.italian-renaissance-art.com/Sistine-Ceiling.html>)

Art historians Hall and Steinberg (1993) argue this figure to be none other than the feminised personification of wisdom (*sapientia*), also known as *Sophia*¹ and her half-hidden nature reveals much about her contested presence in prevailing Western discourses. This suggestion for her identity is supported by theologian Karen Armstrong, who notes, 'In the third century BCE, a Jewish writer personified the Wisdom of God that had brought the world into being. He imagined her at God's side, like Plato's *demiourgo*' (2009, p.79).

The rest of the workshop was taken up with an exploration of some of the themes that are now incorporated in this thesis and, in the days following my presentation, three participants told me how they had drawn upon our session on wisdom within their own tutor training sessions, gratifying to hear at the very least, but especially within the range of the tutors' contexts: training bricklayers; Royal Engineers within the Army; and members of the police academy. My colleagues explained that they had felt impelled to take a risk; they wanted to share some of the energy created in the workshop, but they could not have anticipated the welcome with which their words about wisdom were greeted by their student tutors. "It's real you see" the tutors said, "it's so much more real than the stuff we normally deliver."

¹ *Sapientia* is the Latin; *sophia*, the Greek. Throughout most of this thesis, I have used the italicised and capitalised term as a means of illustrating my use of 'her' as both metaphorical and personified as feminine.

But what was meant by these distinctions between differing levels of reality? What was being offered that could attract so many participants, and inspire some to carry the flame and draw on its light to illuminate some of the shadows of their own teaching practices? Other colleagues offered the promise of rebellion in their titles (for example: Strategy, Discipline and the Lifelong Learning Body; The Future of Skills for Life: Differentiation or Disgrace?) But the word ‘wisdom’ in my title held out the promise of something more, and the opportunity of connecting with each other in a different kind of pedagogical space.

‘Sean’ retired from the the police force after thirty years’ service and attaining the position of Detective Chief Superintendent. He now teaches within the Department of Post Compulsory Education and Training at a University in the South of England where his roles include national teacher-training for the police force. He talks of the environment that pervaded the police service before he left and he connected that environment with the current situation in some fields of adult education:

A lot of the issues were the management mantras...‘value for money, ‘efficiencies,’ ‘economies,’ ‘more for the same’ and ‘the same for less’ and it appeared to me that we were actually beginning to lose focus from what we were here to do and we very much got into instrumentalist sort of policies, and works, and targets and performance which skewed a lot of the real purpose of policing. But the thing that surprised me is that some of the things that I railed against in the police force, I still rail against today [in Education] because the aims and objectives, the intended learning outcomes, the lesson planning is so defined they’ve actually lost the plot of what they’re here to do.²

Sean’s words resonate with those of Abbs (1979, pp.11-12), who argued so cogently over thirty years ago that,

the instrumental view of education is recorded faithfully in the mechanical metaphors and grey abstractions of current educational discourse [...]The effect of such language is to numb the mind [...] It is not an accident that many of the metaphors, dead as they are, derive from mechanics [...] from military manoeuvres [...] and from behavioural psychology [...] It is the language of stasis, leaving education without a subject, without a history and without a future.

The grey, static language of mechanics and the military is a far cry from the dynamic potential for meaning-making that I see inscribed in my image of Sophia. But to what extent might she serve as restorative metaphor for a re-vitalised framing of certain teaching and learning policies and practices? Sean and I, and others of our colleagues who responded to my workshop, would seem to be in accord in perceiving some kind of

² ‘Sean’ is the first of the six interviewees whose input will be drawn upon throughout this document. These words are taken from an interview with WF on 8th Nov 2010. Permission has been sought, and granted, to locate Sean within his past and present fields of practice.

disjunction between the delivery of packaged units of learning and the opening of the mind and soul to the potential for greater knowing that cannot always be predicted. Is it possible to posit a view of wisdom that concurs with Abbs' definition of 'Education [as] to do with educating, with releasing, with liberating' (1994, p.15)? As Edmondson notes, 'It is a perennial feature of wisdom [...] that it eschews dogmatism or certitude' (2005, p. 342). If instrumentalist, consumerist or bureaucratic forms of rationality become dominant rationales for social world-views, the idea that a life could make sense outwith these discursive frames becomes less and less of a possibility. And it is because of its power to help in deeper meaning-making that, I would argue, the pursuit of wisdom is so crucial. I am reminded of the poet Keats' urging for the ability to live in 'negative capability, that is when a man [sic] is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason' (from a letter to his brothers 21st December 1817)³. Paradoxically, we are more likely to encounter the wisdom of Sophia if we are willing to abandon such 'irritable reaching' and embrace, rather, a stance of curiosity and openness; if we can also foster an attitude of attentiveness and encouragement towards the potential for 'unknowing' as both antidote and opportunity for change.

The thesis that follows seeks Sophia, and her metaphorical power, to help in understanding the different potentiality she seemed to evoke in colleagues such as those who attended my workshop, and to explore her resonance in articulating some of the tensions within the prevailing discourses which shape and frame particular kinds of educational practices. That pursuit also entails understanding what Sophia represents for me, and why I feel I must heed her call. Without that understanding, I fear that the integrity of this thesis would be significantly diminished. In what follows, I am striving to find connections between certain aspects of my own biography and their resonance with larger concerns. In this, I am reminded of, and inspired by, C. Wright Mills who urges precisely this connectivity in *The Sociological Imagination*:

What are the major issues for publics and the key troubles of private individuals in our time? To formulate issues and troubles, we must ask what values are cherished yet threatened, and what values are cherished and supported, by the characterizing trends of our period. In the case of both threat and of support we must ask what salient contradictions of structure may be involved.

(Wright Mills, 1959/2000, p.11)

³ www.mrbauld.com/negcap.html

It is in the spirit of asking these questions that my search for Sophia is framed. And it is with her invocation, that I now turn to the next stage of my exploration:

You who are waiting for me, take me to yourselves.
And do not banish me from your sight.
And do not make your voice hate me, nor your hearing.
Do not be ignorant of me anywhere or any time. Be on your guard!
(Hymn of praise to Sophia, from The Nag Hammadi Library, in Simon, 2004,
p.222)

Introduction

That is, relating to Sophia means learning. The commitment is not to a certain kind of knowledge or to a certain secret dogma. It is commitment to the task of learning constantly. Sophia calls people to be learners. She can in this light be easily seen as that which is to be learned and the one who urges people to learn. She is, in fact, the learning process itself. She calls us to a life of seeking understanding of the world in which we live.
(Cole, Ronan and Taussig, 1996, p.23)

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and [...] try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answers.
(Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet, in Hollis, J., 2003, p.22; original emphasis)

Words do not signify things but intimate relations.
(Martin Buber, I and Thou in Gergen and Gergen, 2002, p.11)

Researcher as seeker

The title of my thesis reveals the nature and spirit in which it is undertaken. It is a search, a quest: for meaning, elucidation and for the potential to find wisdom in adult teaching and learning spaces, but also for the impetus behind its gestation and articulation. The quest is a personal one; it stems from the preoccupations and predilections of its author and chief narrator. In short, it is couched within an autoethnographic frame and with a particular emphasis upon ‘writing as inquiry’, and it is important from the outset to stress the form in which the thesis is expounded. Its unfolding must be understood as coterminous with its search: the quest and its articulation are one. ‘It is a form of research that uses writing both as a research tool or craft in its own right [...] It is, at best, a balancing act between form and content’ (Speedy, 2008, pp.138,9). For these reasons, all of which will be explored in succeeding pages, the writing and thence reading of the thesis pose some particular challenges. As I begin my search, I know neither the shape nor full content of what might transpire. I do not mean to be disingenuous. The more traditional format of ‘writing up’ my ‘findings’ and completing an argument or proposition by proving or disproving an initial premise runs counter to my intention and exploration. At this point, I cannot know what the conclusion might offer, or what my quest might reveal. My search for Sophia is both construction and mediation; my intention is that it is offered with integrity, however difficult that aim might prove in its articulation. As Cole, Ronan and Taussig (1996, p.19) point out, ‘The relationship a person has to Sophia is virtually the same as their own relationship to the process of understanding.’ And that is the key to this project. I seek some kind of understanding of how the meaning and pursuit of wisdom might be fostered in certain professional and pedagogical spaces, and in my own relation to both, but my ‘quarry’ is elusive and perhaps the best that I might hope for is an occasional glimpse of Sophia between my pages.

On the other hand, I am engaging with this exploration within the strictures pertaining to a particular level of academic research and undertaking.⁴ I shall therefore elucidate the stages of this journey with due attendance to the epistemological and

⁴ One of the most difficult aspects of writing the thesis has been the constant level of negotiation between this genuine degree of openness at the outset and the need to offer signposts to what unfolds at a later date. In other words, whilst ‘writing as inquiry’ has been the *modus operandi* throughout, there has been, of necessity, an inevitable compromise wrought by the need to proffer a ‘finished’ text for adjudication. I have remained true to the spirit of my endeavour to the best of my ability.

methodological underpinnings to my whole endeavour. I am fully aware of certain critical rejoinders to the pursuit of autoethnography within more traditional academic confines, and I intend to offer robust and coherent responses in support of my claim for this kind of approach within the academy.

Autoethnography as method or methodology?

I shall begin by posing one of the questions which is often levelled at the use of autoethnography and that is whether it might claim the status of a methodology, or whether it can only be used as a method in the service of a methodological approach which has to be framed in rather larger terms. The difference in meaning has been neatly summarised by Moses and Knutsen (2007/2012, p.5), who warn against the false elision between the two which has characterised much research within the social sciences, ‘because ‘methodology’ is sometimes used as a fancy synonym for ‘method’; and they make clear distinction between: ‘method refer[ing] to research techniques or technical procedures of a discipline’ whilst ‘[m]ethodology, on the other hand denotes an investigation of the concepts, theories and basic principles of reasoning on a subject’ (ibid.). Whilst not eliding the two in meaning, I would argue that my use of autoethnography combines both. As the thesis unfolds, I utilise its component parts as ‘research techniques’ whilst simultaneously striving to interrogate those elements within the broader ontological and epistemological frames of reference that underpin the whole. Moses and Knutson place methodology ‘as one member in a trio from the philosophy of science [with] ‘ontology’ and ‘epistemology’; calling them the ‘three musketeers of metaphysics’ (ibid.). I have a rather different emphasis: I intend to illustrate that my use of autoethnography as both method and methodology arises from the particular ontological and epistemological dispositions and preoccupations which comprise my lifeworld, and which are explored in later chapters. Thus, and contrary to traditional ‘custom and practice’ in doctoral theses, there is no single chapter elucidating my methodological approach. Instead, and in keeping with my chosen process of ‘writing as inquiry’, four ‘notes towards a methodology’ emerge as the text unfolds, and in synergetic relationship with the material generated.

Whilst the paradigmatic framing of the whole will be revisited in succeeding pages, it is worth noting at this point, and by way of introduction, that the nature of my search does not totally lend itself to the constructivist paradigm which would usually

encompass an autoethnographic approach. This is not to place my quest within a naturalist framing (cf Moses and Knutsen (ibid.)), as my ‘unveiling of the thesis’ will illustrate. But there are consequences arising from my epistemological and ontological biases which both lead me towards an almost essentialist position whilst I also enjoy some of the freedoms offered by certain post-structuralist framings, particularly in relation to my use of narrative. As I hope to show, this rather paradoxical position is quite in keeping with wisdom’s articulations through the ages... But for now, it is with Muncey’s (2010, p.148) guidelines at my side that I turn to the next stage of this exposition:

In short, an autoethnography consists of:

- identification of a meaningful experience that you are prepared to share
- an engagement in an iterative relationship between your research and your personal experiences
- a selection of creative means to transform the experience
- showing, not telling
- an expectation of criticism and the ammunition needed to counter it
- recognition of the role of synchronicities in steering the development of your work
- immense satisfaction from the personal growth that ensues.

The rest of this introduction presents some of the key components which I then explore and interrogate throughout the rest of my text. I begin by unveiling the thesis and offering an initial account of my lines of inquiry. This is followed by a brief summary of elements of my quest which form the backdrop to the main discussion. These include my metaphorical use of *Sophia* and my search for wisdom within certain adult learning paradigms.⁵ I acknowledge the contested nature of adult education and lifelong learning and the attendant challenges for the adult educator. Given the weight I attribute to *Sophia*’s metaphorical power, I then draw upon the work of McGilchrist (2009) and others to deepen my understanding of the importance of the language we both employ and proscribe. This is followed by further notes towards my methodology, including my use of a range of literature and other data⁶. I conclude with an outline of my overall structure.

⁵ It is only as I come to the final stages of this thesis that Hunt’s (2009a and b) ‘personal journey’ and her use of autoethnography come to have such resonance. In my intention to make clear distinctions between wisdom and spirituality, I had only made scant reference to the latter. Those resonances make themselves felt in later chapters

⁶ Although the term ‘data’ is usually used within a more traditional approach within the social sciences, I employ it here to include the broad range of material upon which I draw.

Unveiling the thesis

By 1597, the original meaning of thesis as ‘the setting down of the foot or lowering of the hand in beating time’ had been adapted, in the language of logic and rhetoric, to mean, ‘A proposition laid down or stated, esp. as a theme to be discussed and proved, or to be maintained against attack’ (Oxford English Dictionary (OED), 1979, p.3288). But by 1697, a further layer had been added which is equally relevant to my purpose, ‘A Thesis, whose Truth is not known by the meer [sic] Signification of the Words only; but by the Judgement of the Senses, or some other way of Declaration’ (OED, 1979, p.3288). There are three elements, here, which need further clarification in order to establish the tone and tenor of the methodological approach which underpins my pursuit:

a) ‘*A proposition laid down or stated*’ – Notwithstanding my comment on page sixteen above, it is my ‘proposition’, and thence my line of enquiry, that current articulations of, and emphases upon, skills and competence-based outcomes are constricting our teaching and learning spaces. In other words, I argue that many of our educational processes are so limited by outcome-based imperatives that we are in danger of limiting education’s potential for the kinds of multi-dimensional learning that was described as ‘more real’ in the prologue.

b) ‘A theme to be discussed and proved, or to be maintained *against attack*’ – Further, it is my contention that certain educational discourses are being reduced to mainly emphasize forms of knowledge that lead to economic competitiveness and not to wisdom. Trowbridge’s analysis of major policy reports in the UK on lifelong education supports this view and he notes that, despite the rhetoric about lifelong learning, ‘There is little social support for accomplishing tasks such as deepening self-knowledge, achieving ego-integration and transcendence, and gaining wisdom’ (2007, p.165). My thesis will develop this theme in the interests of promoting deeper discussion. It is not my intention (see c below) to offer proofs of my argument. This is neither possible nor appropriate; rather I seek to cultivate a space where my explorations into the potential to heed *Sophia*’s call might be ‘maintained against attack’.

c) ‘A Thesis, whose Truth is not known by the meer Signification of the Words only; but by the *Judgement of the Senses, or some other way of Declaration*’ – My propositions are not subject to the kinds of empirical proof which accompany a more positivistic world view. Whilst the epistemological underpinning to my methodology will be explored and interwoven throughout my text, it is important at this point to note my acknowledgement of the inherent limitations of my main medium of articulation. The

extent to which ‘Truth’ might be known beyond the ‘meer Signification of the Words only’ poses a question which goes to the heart of my endeavours. As Eliot reminds us, ‘Words move, music moves only in time’ (1969, p.175); and language’s temporality problematizes its potential as purveyor of ‘truth’ in essentialist or fundamental terms. The issue highlights the distinction between practices that acknowledge the representational nature of their articulations and those that assume that the medium and the message are one. It is the distinction between veracity and verisimilitude; and the extent to which, however we might strive for the former, our representational medium must inevitably point to the likeness of the thing, rather than denote the thing itself. Its relationship to ‘life’ is not mimetic, it is ‘written up’ as construct. Such questions concerning the nature of ‘re-presentation’ will be further explored in succeeding pages, as will an exploration of the process of ‘writing up’ research data as part of my underpinning methodology. However, at this point I am suggesting that such questions are particularly relevant if I am engaged in the search for Sophia as metaphorical guide to wisdom, in terms of openness, embracing possibility and multi-dimensionality. My contention is that wisdom is broader in scope than cognitive knowing and includes aspects of the sacred, divine, intuitive, and experiential. This notion of wisdom finds echo in the words of Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1990, p.29), who stress the paradoxical nature of ‘her’ pursuit, ‘What all the ancient thinkers seemed to realize is that without wisdom, ways of knowing are constrained by a tragic paradox: the clearer the view they provide, the more limited the slice of reality they reveal.’ Thus, I suggest that the ‘truth’ of my thesis might reside within the ‘Judgement of the Senses, or some other way of Declaration’, a position I shall return to as the thesis unfolds. But there are other related issues which need mention at this point in order for the scope of my quest to be more clearly articulated.

Outlining the terrain: contested frames and spaces

a) Searching for Sophia

The working title for this thesis was originally ‘adult education and the cultural imagination’: reflective of my initial desire to try and understand the relationship between adult education as a movement (and its apparent demise) and the cultural contexts in which the movement had found context, expression and, ultimately perhaps, rejection. But in conversation with a colleague about the possibility of co-presenting a

conference paper⁷, I was struck by the profound paradox at the heart of so much Western thinking concerning Eve's disobedience and our exile from the Garden. Her sin of disobedience, the desire to know, became the marker of our humanity; and our overweening pride, in this regard, one of the key tropes of Western art and literature, of which Goethe's Faust and Shelley's Frankenstein are but two examples. What struck me during our conversation was not my feminist anger at the misogyny played out in this foundational narrative, that was all too familiar. No, what suddenly occurred to me was the sheer jealousy of the god who could make such an injunction against our desire 'to know'. Earlier feminist studies had introduced me to the intriguing idea that Eve was Adam's second wife; the first, Lilith, banished for her refusal to 'lie down under him'⁸. It was time that I revisited these narratives, and it was in this pursuit that I began to learn about Sophia.

To do justice to the range of the world's wisdom literatures goes far beyond the scope of this thesis. I am neither philosopher, theologian nor classicist. My adoption of Sophia is largely metaphorical. But it is based, nonetheless, on her use and appropriation by a number of scholars across a range of disciplines with whom I can argue both resonance and relevance. These discursive elements include her role as the feminine personification of wisdom in certain Judaeo-Christian writings, as the supreme aim of Aristotelian philosophy, and as the representation of the repressed 'other' in many feminist discourses. My aim will be to show how my appropriation of her chimes with that of Cole, Ronan and Taussig. I hope that the unfolding of this exploration will illustrate their claim, albeit metaphorically, that, 'She is, in fact, the learning process itself. She calls us to a life of seeking understanding of the world in which we live' (1996, p.23). But in order to substantiate that claim, I must also consider the role of wisdom in relation to my research quest which is to seek Sophia within adult teaching and learning spaces.

b) Wisdom within adult learning paradigms

Writings on wisdom within adult learning paradigms have tended to draw upon psychological accounts which emphasise a developmental model embracing life's chapters and trajectories. In her introduction to her co-edited volume (with Ann L. Swartz) on *Adult Education and the Pursuit of Wisdom* (2011), Tisdell has noted the

⁷ This became Fraser and Hyland-Russell (2009) 'In search of Sophia', ESREA, Milan

⁸ Figes, 1970/72, pp. 42-44

relative paucity of writings concerning wisdom in relation to adult learning and education. She provides an overview which acknowledges the literatures and influences of the world's religions and cultural traditions, especially those of the East, and she also notes the legacy of Greek philosophy. All of these discourses, she suggests, stress the paradox at the heart of the search for wisdom, but she links this, interestingly, to a further paradox, and thence potentiality, within the declining field of adult education. 'The more that one knows, one realizes the limits of one's knowledge; within scarcity there is abundance; to lose oneself is to find oneself. Paradoxically, losing our identity as a field may also be a way to find it anew' (2011, p.10).

Tisdell notes the work of Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007) who draw upon cognitive psychology, and she also refers to the work of Sternberg and Jordan (2005) in relation to broader educational discourses. But Edmondson (2005, p.343) is another who notes that,

It is among psychologists (rather than philosophers or sociologists) that research during the last quarter-century has re-focused on wisdom as uniting forms of intelligence that are acquired and developed during the lifecourse. This work echoes ancient approaches to practice-oriented forms of wisdom, and has seen thought, feeling, morality and experience as combined in wise discourse and decisions.

The emphasis on the trajectory of wisdom over the lifecourse in turn has led to recent work on wisdom and gerontology (Randall and Kenyon, 2004) which draws upon narrative framings and assumptions similar to those discussed in adult education (Rossiter and Clark, 2007). Indeed, such assumptions are in line with many cross-cultural constructions of the wise elder or sage: a construction familiar to us from many myths and fairy tales in the West, and from the wealth of writings from the East such as those ascribed to Lao Tzu, whose view of the 'way' (Tao) turns on the paradox that the more it is spoken of, the more out of reach it becomes.

The way that can be spoken of
Is not the constant way [...]
The way conceals itself in being nameless
There is no name that is applicable to the tao because language is totally inadequate for such a purpose. And yet if the tao is to be taught at all, some means, no matter how inadequate, must be found to give an idea of what it is like.
(Lau, D.C., 1963, pp. xiv, xv)

The subtleties of thought accompanying such a paradox are predicated on the ability to hold the potential for both knowing and unknowing within the same frame of reference. This is both skill and predisposition which, I fear, are inimical to the current

pedagogical emphasis, in so many educational landscapes, on encapsulating learning within pre-specified aims and outcomes. An appropriate question at this stage might be the extent to which the potential for gaining wisdom in later life is largely dependent on the kinds of cultural and personal mind-sets which make its acquisition more likely. In other words, I am suggesting that our roles as adult educators should entail the practice of nurturing wisdom's spaces with adults of all ages if we are to provide the confluence of factors wherein wisdom might find expression. As Trowbridge (2007, p.166) has noted in his analysis of adult participation in later life through organisations such as The University of the Third Age (U3A) and Institutes for Lifelong Learning in the US (ILLs),

These findings raise a question concerning the claim that people tend to turn inward as they age. It may be naïve to expect that people in our societies, who get little experience with introspection for the first 50 years of their lives, would be able to respond adeptly to any urges in later life toward introspection, life review, or the development of wisdom.

c) 'Adult education' or 'lifelong learning'- threatened discourses?

I am also arguing that it is not just a matter of current educational predispositions and imperatives that limit our opportunities to invite Sophia into our classrooms; the literal spaces in which she might be invoked are also under threat. There are many discursive framings which shape, and have shaped the fields of adult education and/or lifelong learning (for examples of their interrogation see Armstrong et al (Eds) 1997; Bron, et al (Eds) 2005; Crowther, et al (Eds) 2008; Davidson et al (Eds) 2003; Denis and Halsey (1988); Edwards, 1997; Field, 2000, 2003; Goldman, 1995; Merrill, Armstrong (Eds) 2010; Rose, 2001/2; West et al (Eds), 2001⁹.) But however these frames are enunciated, it is important to note the literal decline in the spaces in which some of these fields are articulated and experienced, and in which wisdom might be encouraged to find expression and flourish. Trowbridge's (ibid.) findings gain urgency when read against the backdrop of the closure, during this last decade, of the majority of university extra-mural departments in the UK which formed part of the 'great tradition' – an amalgam of universities, local education authorities and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) – for the provision of community and liberal adult education¹⁰ (West, 2010),

⁹ I am aware that this is but a fraction of the papers, conferences, books and journals that have been dedicated to the decline and/or demise of the terrain. These texts are offered as illustration of the wealth of material being written. I shall return to certain of the tensions inherent in competing discourses within the terrain in succeeding pages.

¹⁰ The term and terrain of 'liberal education' are also highly contested and both shall be revisited in later chapters.

and against the increasing rationalization and instrumentalisation of lifelong learning that is occurring in Canada and the United States (Grace, 2000). One of the questions which this thesis will explore is the impact that such closure has had on the ways in which certain epistemological traditions, or avenues of expression, have been couched, espoused and expressed.

However, it would be simplistic to argue that education has been reduced to skills-based outcomes solely in response to economic factors. The pedagogical pursuit of wisdom has not simply fallen foul of ‘the relentless tendency to reduce education’s purpose to employability’ (West, 2010, p.328). Edmondson (2005) views the contemporary demise of wisdom spaces as due to an increasingly less relevant religious world view for the majority of people and a cognitive model of psychology that dominated the 20th century. To this I would add the shift in emphasis towards greater attention upon particular framings of reason and rationality, what Dirx calls the ‘rationalist doctrine’ (2001). This shift towards rationality and away from faith arose in part during the Enlightenment period, and was accompanied by lessening attention to the deeper meanings that our souls and spirits might seek in the face of increased emphasis on ‘factual information and the use of reason and reflection to learn from experience’ (Dirx, 2001, p.63). Of course, I am not suggesting that the Enlightenment functioned simply as some kind of reductive blanket which suffocated thought that was both complex and integrated, that is patently absurd. Rather, as I shall argue in chapter four, there has been a tendency in the development of particular Western epistemological discourses which has privileged certain ways of knowing over others, thereby marginalising those for which I posit Sophia as metaphorical carrier. My argument is that such marginalisation has had, and continues to have, profoundly deleterious consequences for our educative practices, for ourselves and for our broader communities. As Deane-Drummond (2007, p.174) so cogently reminds us in her timely reclamation of the importance of Newman’s vision for the university:

Indeed, the search for truth as evidenced in the modern university is one dogged by the legacy of the Enlightenment and a utilitarian attitude to knowledge, reflected in methodologies that are there to provide rules and systems of analysis, but are thereby constricting in their perception of epistemology.

d) The challenge for the adult educator

The emerging work in Adult Education on spirituality and authenticity (e.g. English, 2001; English, Fenwick & Parsons, 2003; Hunt, 1998, 2006, 2008, 2009a, b, c; Hunt

and West, 2006; Tisdell, 2003; Willis et al, 2009) might encourage theoretical and pedagogical spaces for Sophia to enter the classroom in either formal or non-formal educational settings. This opening up of pedagogical spaces is to be welcomed but, in terms of my thesis, I feel it is important to be clear about the areas where definitions of wisdom might intersect with those concerning the spiritual, as well as those where the two projects are quite distinct. Some of these areas of commonalty and difference will be explored as the thesis unfolds and as I become clearer about what Sophia represents for me. But there is another, slightly more pressing, issue to which I now turn, and that is the extent to which wisdom can be taught. Jarvis (2011, p.92) is not so sure, 'While we can teach both about the manifestations and the characteristics of wisdom in schools, we have to recognise that this approach to formal education will only allow learners to have knowledge of wisdom rather than to be wise.' This introduces a key question concerning the differing epistemological bases which have been ascribed to wisdom. As Jarvis (pp.90,91) points out, 'Wisdom, then, assumes at least two different forms – one explores the mystery of being, and the other provides a foundation for becoming. The former is philosophical/theological (Sophia) and the latter is ethical/cultural preservation (phronesis)'. In a further telling sentence, Jarvis makes the related point (p.91) that, 'It is, therefore, difficult to regard wisdom as a single, integrated whole except inasmuch as it is a response to the unknowns of existence itself.' Whilst Jarvis goes on to say (p.91) that, 'It is, therefore, difficult to research wisdom per se, although it is possible to research some of its characteristics in personality-type studies or even its socially recognized manifestations', I have found some encouragement in his caveat that (p.91), 'However, biographical research projects may also prove a resource for wisdom studies.' Indeed. I would also suggest that Jarvis's distinction between Sophia and phronesis as 'the mystery of being' and 'the foundation for becoming' offers much potential for unpicking and unpacking the extent to which the different routes to wisdom might be articulated in our pedagogic practices. Once again, I would like to stress the importance of paying heed to the metaphors and discourses we use in our teaching, research, and scholarship from the outset. Can we deliberately choose language that resonates with the possibilities of intuition and wisdom, rather than reductive metaphors of instrumentality and outcomes? By the very act of invoking or inviting Sophia into our educational discourses, can we confront the hegemonic power of the prevailing and limiting narrative framings, and enhance other pedagogic challenges to 'conventional academic criteria [which] expressly prohibit combining moral and emotional stances with cognitive analysis, seeing this as bias or lack of

impartiality' (Edmondson, 2005, p.345)? Is there space in our classes for direct refutation of many of our current discourses which privilege the instrumental and the utilitarian? I shall explore certain kinds of anxiety within the academy about encouraging spaces in which to posit alternative narratives to those predicated upon linearity, hierarchy and simplistic enunciations of progression. I shall argue that we need to learn to tolerate the uncertain, the unknown, the unpredictable. For it is also the potential for unknowing that marks Sophia's call to us. And it is because of her power to help a life become more meaningful that I am suggesting the pursuit of her is so crucial. I am reminded of the joy with which I came across the work of Angela Brew (1993) when struggling with the potential for 'meaning-making' in a different context, and many years ago:

Wisdom may come through experience, but it does not come through an accumulation of experience [...] I think what I am referring to is the process of unlearning: the attempt to access our inner knowings; the coming face to face, again and again, with our ignorance; with our not-knowing. The highest point of knowing is not knowing. Herein lies the paradox of learning from experience.
(In Fraser, 1995b, p.60)

Metaphor as key

Given the metaphorical weight that I am asking Sophia to carry, it might, at this point, be helpful to link my interest in the role of metaphor with my methodological approach. In the prologue, I contrasted 'the grey, static language of mechanics and the military'[as] a far cry from the dynamic potential for meaning-making that I see inscribed in my image of Sophia. And I asked, 'to what extent might she serve as restorative metaphor for a re-vitalised framing of certain teaching and learning policies and practices?' Any potential answer has to include some analysis of the role of metaphor and its power to shape and frame our lifeworlds and the narratives we elect to live and explain them. Whilst more detailed discussion of language use in relation to my chosen methodology will be found in chapter six, it is important to acknowledge some more general features of the role of metaphor, the better to encourage 'Judgement of the Senses, or some other way of Declaration' (op cit. pp.9,10).

Metaphors profoundly shape our language and the ways in which we perceive the world. Hill and Johnston (2003, p.21) go so far as to assert that, 'Reflecting on the effects of the language choices we make as adult educators is perhaps a deceptively simple yet the most transformative action to undertake' (emphasis added). It is likely

because of its ‘deceptively simple’ nature that we often disregard the ways that our language use shapes our theories, ways of becoming as people and teachers, and our teaching practices. Thus, metaphor’s use is a powerful tool and, once we acknowledge that power, we can begin to see how the nature of the language which describes our current educational discourses can have such limiting effects.

Metaphors actively forge connections between our inner, personal meanings and the outer contexts in which we live our lives. According to Richardson, ‘We become the metaphors we use. We construct worlds in our metaphoric image’ (1997, p.185), and this, for me, represents a key challenge for the adult educator: to find ways to engage our students in vibrant metaphors of learning that provide multiple options and growth, for both educator and learner, and that animate perceptions of learning as active and agential.¹¹

‘Waiting on’ as metaphor for wisdom

It is not only the literal and metaphorical spaces that facilitate the development of wisdom but also the attitudes in which we approach learning. Our pedagogical stances have great capacity to foster the kinds of spaces in our classes where aspects of ‘our [and our students’] unique wisdom stories’ (Randall and Kenyon, 2004, p.342) can be nourished and encouraged. Urging alternative to the heavy certainties which characterise much adult learning and teaching, I suggest, instead, the kind of careful attentiveness so evocatively captured by McGilchrist, after Heidegger (2009, p.152). He urges a ‘stance or disposition’ which is ‘one of “waiting on” (nachdenken) something, rather than just “waiting for” it; a patient, respectful nurturing of something into disclosure.’ And he invokes George Steiner who ‘compares it to ‘that “bending toward” of spirit and intellect and ear’ to be seen in Fra Angelico’s Annunciation in San Marco.’

In *The Master and his Emissary* (2009) McGilchrist’s magisterial exploration of ‘the nature of the divided brain and the making of the Western World’, he includes an analysis of how the left and right hemispheres of the brain have developed. His challenge to certain neuroscientific framings might be summarised as a re-thinking of the relative importance of the hemispheres in responding to our worlds. Many have assumed that the left hemisphere is the more important because it is the site of language

¹¹ See also Willis et al (2009), whose work on Mythopoesis will help inform later chapters.

and, thence, verbal communication. McGilchrist argues that this marks a profound misunderstanding of how we frame ourselves in relation to our experiences, and he reclaims the right hemisphere as the site of metaphoric generation. This fact, he argues, is crucial to how we both story ourselves, and of how we are storied: ‘Metaphoric thinking is fundamental to our understanding of the world because it is the only way in which understanding can reach outside the system of signs to life itself. It is what links language to life’ (2009, p.115; original emphasis). In other words, our embeddedness in the world, and our apprehension of that experience, is mediated via the right hemisphere. The left, McGilchrist argues, is responsible for turning that experiential reality, at the connotative level, into the denotative systems favoured by the intellect, and framed by language:

Where the left hemisphere’s relationship with the world is one of reaching out to grasp, and therefore to use, it, the right hemisphere’s appears to be one of reaching out – just that. Without purpose. In fact one of the main differences between the ways of being of the two hemispheres is that the left hemisphere always has ‘an end in view’, a purpose or use, and is more the instrument of our conscious will than the right hemisphere (2009, p.127).

McGilchrist’s thesis is that the development of key Western discourses has become increasingly dominated by the model of utility favoured by the left hemisphere, and he brings a formidable array of evidence from the fields of philosophy, art, psychoanalysis, history, anthropology and neuroscience to support his view of a hemispherically left-leaning cultural bias:

It has nothing to do with the idea that, for example, one hemisphere might be subjective and the other objective. That’s obviously untrue. Rather the point is that philosophy in the West is essentially a left-hemisphere process. It is verbal and analytic, requiring abstracted, decontextualised, disembodied thinking, dealing in categories, concerning itself with the nature of the general rather than the particular, and adopting a sequential, linear approach to truth, building the edifice of knowledge from the parts, brick by brick (2009, p.137).

McGilchrist sees this left-dominated cultural view as exemplifying the mind-set of modernism¹² and the Anglo-American world, and he notes the challenge presented by the European phenomenologists, for example, Husserl, whose warning is redolent of my concerns:

According to Husserl, the roots of the European crisis of modernism lay in ‘verirrrenden Rationalismus’ and ‘Blindheit für das Transzendente’: a sort of mad rationalism and a blindness to the transcendental [...] He came to the conclusion that there was an objective reality, but that it was constituted by what he called intersubjectivity. This comes about through shared experience, which is made possible for us by our embodied existence alongside other embodied individuals. (2009, pp.143, 144)

¹² Certain writers use ‘modernism’ and ‘modernity’ interchangeably. The distinction will be explored in chapter two.

Of course, McGilchrist's final point here has echoes with a number of sociological theorists from Mead onwards who drew on the work of Dewey and William James to develop the theory of symbolic interactionism and thence other social constructionist avenues which were predicated on the basis that we learn in relationship (cf Bruner, 1996; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Dimitriadis and Kamberelis, 2006; Merrill & West, 2009; Pascale, 2011; Plummer, 2001; Richardson, 1997). One can see how McGilchrist's thesis echoes the potential for a number of different epistemological possibilities, and thus for different ways of conceptualising how we come to know and the relative merits of how these knowledges are articulated.¹³

For argument's sake, I am going to assume the reader's concurrence with the thesis as expounded by McGilchrist; that our initial experiences of the world are embodied and 'intersubjective'; and apprehended by means of our 'reaching out'. Their metaphorical weight (stemming from their substantive reality) is 'carried across' (meta-phor) to the left hemisphere which attributes linguistic and intellectual cognisance to their relative importance in terms of the sign systems within which the left hemisphere is operating. Without regulation, the system becomes self-perpetuating and our experiences of the world are caught and shaped within the dominant discourses available to us. Peter Abbs (1979, pp.8, 9), drew upon the work of George Orwell's 1984 to remind us of the power of language to shape and contain our understanding of the world, and of some of the consequences:

If such a state was ever achieved a thinking beyond existing realities would be all but impossible because the major means of thought, language, objects, would not allow, or rather support, such a movement. Each time the mind tried to escape, the corrupted symbolism would draw it back into its windowless cage [...] Education is now almost everywhere defined in terms of functions, markets, services, needs. Indeed, so much so that it is becoming an imaginative effort to think, feel and act in other terms.

This is not to suggest that we must remain trapped within the solipsistic mind-frame within which the left hemisphere repeats its articulations; rather we must find ways to challenge the prevailing orthodoxies and subvert their discursive power. At one level, this might seem both rather obvious and perhaps arch reminder of our *raison d'etre* as educators. But the nature of the challenge before us cannot be underestimated, as an exploration of some current pedagogic messages will reveal:

What we find increasingly in educational documents is a functional discourse which makes the educational status quo appear as the only conceivable reality. The sense of possibility, of ethical choice, is thus entirely erased.

¹³ As we have seen, his sense of 'embodiedness' also draws upon the work of key phenomenologists – a point to which I shall return in later pages.

Education becomes merely the sum total of current practices. This is the subtle tyranny of instrumental pragmatism.
(Abbs, 2003, pp. 3, 4; original emphasis)

Indeed, the very notion of ‘delivering’ programmes of study speaks volumes about the discursive framing within which this articulation resides. It is consistent with the idea that knowledge is reducible to digestible units of consumption; and this is consistent, in turn, with a prevailing cultural orthodoxy that privileges profit and the material over other forms of mental and spiritual nourishment. In short, it represents the triumph of the left hemisphere’s ‘grasping’ of the world, rather than being in attentive relationship with it. Although McGilchrist’s analysis is primarily philosophical, I am grateful for the metaphorical resonance which chimes with the framing of our teaching and learning practices. Surely there could be no better hint of how we might find and foster Sophia than in the following extract in which Steiner draws on the work of Heidegger:

Thus, our question as to the nature of philosophy calls not for an answer in the sense of a textbook definition or formulation, be it Platonic, Cartesian or Lockean, but for an Ent-sprechung, a response, a vital echo, a ‘re-sponion’ in the liturgical sense of participatory engagement [...] For Descartes, truth is determined and validated by certainty. Certainty, in turn, is located in the ego [...] For Heidegger, on the contrary, the human person and self-consciousness are not the centre, the assessors of existence. Man is only a privileged listener and respondent to existence. The vital relation to otherness is not, as for Cartesian and positivist rationalism, one of ‘grasping’ and pragmatic use. It is a relation of audition. We are trying ‘to listen to the voice of Being’. It is, or ought to be, a relation of extreme responsibility, custodianship, answerability to and for.
(Steiner, in McGilchrist, 2009, p.152)

Of course, I am not suggesting that all teaching and learning practices might be contained within this wonderful framing of attention. The art of training for very specific purposes, for example when particular skills and competences are required in the fields of health and social care, or within the emergency services, probably provide instance when the delivery of another’s knowledge needs to involve an element of transmission which the relationship of attention would not necessarily include. But, in a sense, I am suggesting that that is the very challenge which is there before us: at an incalculable cultural cost, we have eschewed the balance of certain educational practices away from a basis of apprehension, of paying attention to, in favour of a ‘one size fits all’, reductive practice of unitised packaging and dissemination. Indeed, I would argue that even the exceptions which I have mentioned above, for example in the fields of health care, might also benefit from having as their foundation this particular way of

fostering ‘extreme responsibility, custodianship, answerability to and for’ (ibid)¹⁴. Whilst mindful of Willis and Morrison’s reminder¹⁵ that, ‘Learning is never simply an isolated mechanical behaviour but rather a personal and social act,’ I am certainly not sanguine about the extent to which I can concur with the conclusion to their sentence, ‘in which morality and ethics are necessarily implicated’ (2009, p.1; emphasis added).

Notes towards a methodology – part one

The field of educational research traditionally lies within the bounds of the social sciences which, as Scarlett (2004, p.6) argues, arose as the ‘third culture’ positioned between the ‘scientific and humanistic’ dualities which were inscribed by the Enlightenment. I shall explore some of the reasons for the development of this polarity in chapter four but, for my current purposes, it is important to note Scarlett’s additional comment that as a result of sociology’s cultural emplacement it became ‘inexorably pulled towards the scientific paradigm as empirical positivism gained ascendancy as the legitimate site of knowledge production’ (ibid.). This somewhat ambiguous position gave rise to a number of epistemological challenges, not least those associated with the ‘narrative turn’ which has striven to offer a measure of coherence in the light of ‘one of sociology’s core contradictions: an interminable tension between the subjectively creative individual human being acting upon the world and the objectively given social structure constraining him or her’ (Plummer, 2001, p.4).

As noted above, historically that contradiction had pushed the measure of sociology’s relevance against a benchmark of the scientifically, thus ‘objectively’, verifiable. At its most extreme, this led to the kinds of colonising practices abhorred by, among others, Denzin and Lincoln (2008, p.1), ‘Research provides the foundation for reports about and representations of ‘the Other’ [...] Colonizing nations relied on the human disciplines, especially sociology and anthropology, to produce knowledge about strange and foreign worlds.’

The battles between quantitative and qualitative approaches did not, in their first articulations, address the growing political concerns that the recipients, the researchees, of such ‘othering’ processes might be able to talk for themselves. Gradually, with the rise of feminist, post-colonial and other ‘minority’ voices clamouring in dissent, the

¹⁴ Many of these arguments have been reiterated in Fraser, W. and Hyland-Russell, T. (2011)

¹⁵ In their Introduction to Willis et al 2009

potential for qualitative paradigms to embrace the ‘other’ in more egalitarian and creative ways began to be addressed. (cf Ryan, 2001; Hennink, et al 2011; Silverman, 2011). Denzin and Lincoln outline, to date, ‘eight historical moments’ in the history of qualitative research in North America. As one might expect, these moments do not function as discrete epistemological units, or movements. There are many overlaps, both in terms of discourse and of practice, but there is sufficient distinction for me to be drawn to the eighth and current manifestation;

the fractured future, which is now (2005 -). [It] confronts the methodological backlash associated with the evidence-based social movement. It is concerned with moral discourse, with the development of sacred textualities. The eighth moment asks that the social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalization, freedom, and community.
(Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p.3)

I am also grateful to Denzin and Lincoln (p.5) for helping me to assemble an appropriate methodological palette with which to paint the colours of my quest:

The many methodological practices of qualitative research may be viewed as soft science, journalism, ethnography, bricolage, quilt making, or montage [...]The interpretive bricoleur produces a bricolage - that is, a pieced-together set of representations that is fitted to the specifics of a complex situation [...]The qualitative researcher as bricoleur, or maker of quilts, uses the aesthetic and material tools of his or her craft, deploying whatever strategies, methods, and empirical materials are at hand.

But the use of bricolage is complemented by another process of meaning-making which draws on the cinema as inspiration for both aesthetic and practice, and that is the use of montage, or ‘quilt-making’ in another form. ‘It invites viewers to construct interpretations that build on one another as a scene unfolds.’ For the qualitative researcher,

This process creates and brings psychological and emotional unity - a pattern - to an interpretive experience [...] works that use montage simultaneously creates and enacts moral meaning. They move from the personal to the political, from the local to the historical and the cultural. They are dialogic texts. They presume an active audience. They create spaces for give-and-take between reader and writer.¹⁶
(Denzin and Lincoln, 2008 pp. 6,7)

My attraction to the use of montage stems from my love of cinema; a love, in turn, that arose as a result of an earlier search for Sophia as I shall explain in chapter two. In other words, my predilection for a particular research method found its genesis in a learning process which took place almost forty years ago. At face value, it is perfectly understandable that this would be the case. Despite our semi-assertions about the

¹⁶ A key point, and one that I shall draw upon in my use of my interview data in chapter seven. The rationale will be offered in chapter six.

‘fluidity’ and ‘diversity’ of identity, which arise from helpful post-positive challenges to the notion of the unified ‘I’ of the Enlightenment consciousness, we nevertheless organise our lives according to assumptions about some form of narrative coherence which tells our story along some kind of linear trajectory; albeit one which, at times, might seem riven with regression, repetition and circularity! Or at least that is the case for those of us who eschew the further edges of structuralist and post-structuralist critiques which proffer, instead, the potential for the ultimate dissolution of the subject, as Plummer (2001, p.5) argues. Whereas,

such statements are supported by very sophisticated arguments, they do bring with them the spectre of a dehumanized collectivist idealism which can kill off any concern for the concrete joys and suffering of active, breathing, bodily human beings; they bring with them a denial of the root tension that has existed within sociology since its earliest days by co-opting ‘the subject’ into an ideology.

And he reminds us of the words of Simone de Beauvoir (1974/1993, p.1) as cogent illustration of this dilemma:

Tossed into the world, I have been subjected to its laws and its contingencies, ruled by wills other than my own, by circumstances and by history: it is therefore reasonable for me to suggest that I am myself contingent. What staggers me is that at the same time I am not contingent [...] Yet this necessary coincidence of the subject and his (sic) history is not enough to do away with my perplexity. My life: it is both intimately known and remote: it defines me and yet I stand outside it. Just what, precisely, is this curious object?

[Emphasis added in Plummer, 2001 post-preface]

Chapters two and three describe my attempts at trying to find some answers to this last question as it refers to my authorship of this text. But before moving on with that task, it is necessary to provide further elaboration of the set of contexts which frame the overall study.

Given the nature of my thesis, and my emphasis upon the search for Sophia, one of the greatest challenges in my endeavour has been in finding, and adapting, a suitable methodological approach and underpinning. I do not feel in a position to posit a definition of Sophia except as metaphor for wisdom. But to articulate what wisdom means to me is to suggest that I have reached a stage in my life when I am clear what wisdom is, even if I have not grasped her full potential nor live by the illuminations she offers. This might be my hope, but it is not my current case; the search is precisely that, a quest for meaning in arenas where the potential for meaning-making is, I suggest, being curtailed. Much has been written about the nature of the quest, and ‘metaphors of travelling and exploring have long underpinned the discourses of adult education and lifelong learning’ (Hunt, 2008, p. 303). This is my quest; and it remains to be seen to

what extent, and in what guise, I shall encounter Sophia on my journey. For as I begin this thesis, I am suggesting that the history of *Sophia's* articulations within certain Western epistemological discourses has led to her marginalisation, her almost invisibilisation, in ways which are illustrated in Michelangelo's depiction and noted in the prologue. If she is to be found, to be reclaimed in any meaningful sense, it has to be in ways which honour her standing as outwith the kinds of methodological approaches which privilege particular forms of enquiry dependent upon quasi-scientific notions of reliability or validity. My approach has to enable celebration of her that finds echo in the words of, for example, feminist theologian, Catherine Keller, for whom wisdom 'at least as practised in the indigenous and biblical traditions, is irredeemably implicated in the sensuous, the communal, the experiential, the metanoic, the unpredictable, the imaginal, the practical' (in Deane-Drummond, 2007, p.176). I have to find a means of expression which acknowledges the elusiveness of my quest and the limited nature of my vehicle of expression, as well as my challenge to certain prevailing epistemological and pedagogical orthodoxies. Given the personal imperatives which have prompted my search, I also need a theoretical underpinning which allows the subjectivity at its heart to be acknowledged and interrogated.

But that quest is, by the very nature of my inquiry, also part of a personal search for meaning at a particular cultural, political and historical juncture. And this fact leads to another challenge for the overall thesis: whilst I cannot separate the quester from the quest, I must remain alert to the dangers of losing the broader wood for the narcissistic trees. The very nature of such a reflexive endeavour as the one I have set myself is that it is balanced on a series of rather shaky equations, and relationships: between the self and the other; between the 'I' who writes, and the 'I' who remembers; and between the 'I' who coheres around a nexus of framing influences and the agential 'I' who articulates such framings within that broader cultural, political and historical nexus. And I have not even mentioned the role of the unconscious! These dilemmas in pursuit of coherence have been beautifully summarised by, among others, Gaston Bachelard (1988/2005, p.105):

Who will ever determine the ontological weight of all the imagined "I's" ?

A poet writes:

Is it ours, this dream in us,
I make my way alone and multiplied
am I myself, am I another
are we but imagined beings.

Is there an "I" which subsumes these multiple "I's"? An "I" of all others which has mastery over our entire being, over all our inner beings? Novalis writes: "*The supreme task of education is to take possession of one's*

transcendental self, to be at once the ‘I’ of one’s ‘I.’” [Original emphasis]

Such a task resonates with my search for Sophia as I am constructing her within the frame of this thesis and echoes the words of Cole, Rona and Taussig, (1996, p.23) which opened this introduction, ‘[Sophia] is, in fact, the learning process itself. She calls us to a life of seeking understanding of the world in which we live.’ The pages which follow represent my response to that call, but they also reflect my equal attempts to locate my ‘self’ within aspects of the nexus which have framed, and continue to frame, the ‘I’ who pens these lines. Without such location, this ‘quester’ would be adrift on a sea of abstraction and generalisation; an ‘absent presence’ and one that would mock the integrity of my search. On the other hand, by locating my ‘self’ within a series of particularities, I would hope that such rootedness might resonate with the reader and forge a bridge between us where further meanings are made, and ‘truths’ explored, rather than detonate such connection with an explosive mix of solipsistic self-indulgence (cf. Sparkes, 2002 a) and b) for a particularly helpful insight into this dilemma). I needed, therefore, to find a methodological approach which would help me to explore these issues within a framework which was also conducive to the act of writing itself. In other words, I needed an approach that functioned as both medium and message; hence autoethnography¹⁷ with a particular interest in ‘writing as inquiry’:¹⁸

I consider writing as a method of inquiry, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic [...] writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of “knowing” – a method of discovery and analysis [...] Form and content are inseparable.
(Richardson, 1994, p.516)

I was originally schooled in the humanities, and I have always struggled with the fact that the field of educational research resides within the social sciences; for me, literary ‘truths’ offer as much access to the minefields of the human condition as do other areas of excavation and exposition (cf. Clough, 2002; 2003; 2009; Hoult, 2012). I have also long been resistant to modes of research and inquiry which seem to map and name the terrain under investigation with the kinds of classificatory zeal that would have cheered the most assiduous Victorian entomologist. It is central to this thesis that my search for Sophia is precisely that; a search which is itself dependent upon a predilection which

¹⁷ For the purposes of clarity, I shall adhere to the spelling of ‘autoethnography’ throughout my text, even although the term is often hyphenated by other writers.

¹⁸ Itself part of the larger framework of narrative inquiry, ‘Grounded in interpretive hermeneutics and phenomenology...seeking to provide “insight that (befits) the complexity of human lives” (JOSSELSOON, 2006, p.4. In Traher, www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/rt/prINTERfriendly/1218/2653 - original upper case)

urges openness towards ‘unknowing’ as both progenitor and companion for my journey. This has been the case since I started writing this thesis over five years ago, although I have often struggled to remain true to this spirit of agnosticism which has driven my inquiry. When I began, my stated methodological approach chimed more with a particular form of auto/biography (e.g. West, 1996, 2001, Merrill and West, 2009). But the process of writing led me to shift my focus and to seek a means of pushing at the boundaries between social science and the humanities in ways which seemed to point more towards autoethnography and, thence, ‘writing as inquiry’. It is a process with which the words of Pelias (2011, p.600) chime so perfectly. They are worth quoting at length because they also function as rationale for my whole thesis:

Writers come to realize [sic] what they believe in the process of writing, in the act of finding the language that crystallizes their thoughts and sentiments. It is a process of “writing into” rather than “writing up” a subject. When writing up a subject, writers know what they wish to say before the composition process begins. When writing into a subject, writers discover what they know through writing. It is a process of using language to look at, lean into, and lend oneself to an experience under consideration. This “linguaging” unearths the writer’s articulate presence. It positions, marks a place, a material stance in the world. In short languaging matters.

It could be argued that there is such overlap in these areas that I am in danger of splitting semantic hairs and ascribing rather false distinctions, but it is important to acknowledge the degree of partisanship which can adhere to definitions of both auto/biography and autoethnography. I believe that my choice of autoethnography best suits the particular choices I have made in relating my reflexive inquiry to certain specifics pertaining to my ethnographic field, and I hope to show example of how, ‘A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus...autoethnography is both process and product.’ (Ellis et al, 2011).¹⁹ I am fully aware that some researchers might argue that similar practices are utilised in auto/biographical practices, and I have already acknowledged that there are many overlaps, but at this point, my concern is with the shifting nature of this thesis, and my inquiry, and my resistance to mapping my path in advance of my journey:

Rather, it emerged and evolved during the research process itself [...] Holding on to this ‘not knowing’ was uncomfortable but maintaining the position of the agnostic enabled me to recognise eventually the suitability of narrative inquiry and autoethnography for this evolving study [...] It would, therefore, have been disingenuous and inconsistent with the methodological paradigms that I espoused eventually to “plan my tactics in advance”, rather than “let them unravel as life does” (GABRIEL, 2003, p. 181) by separating

¹⁹ In keeping with Ellis’s et al (2011) overview of the autoethnographic field, I have also ‘used personal experience to illustrate facets of [my] cultural experience’ and ‘interview[ed] cultural members.’

out the research process into the discrete elements of more conventional studies.
(Traher, 2009 pp. 2, 3; upper case in the original)

A further word needs to be said at this juncture about the vehicles of expression which I have utilised throughout the text. In keeping with my methodological approach, which entails striving for reflexivity and personal interrogation, the thesis will present a range of voices and forms of expression. Personal circumstances will be depicted where their telling might enable the kinds of resonance which take them out of the particular and into the general. I shall draw upon various literary genres, including the novel and poetry, in an attempt to enrich the timbre and quality of the completed work. Others' voices will also inform my exploration whether they be from interviews, conversations or the written word. Throughout, I am consciously striving to create a dialogic space with all my sources in order to open up the potential for greater meaning-making as those 'conversations' resound one with the other:

Finding a style and a voice of your own, which silences the critics in your head, I believe is an important aspect of autoethnography. This style and voice might metamorphose into a poem or a picture, a story or a drama or a film, but it should allow the recipient of the piece, the reader or the viewer, access to the inner story that cannot be told by other more conventional means.
(Muncey, 2010, p.56)

Such an approach poses another set of issues in relation to how the finished project might be adjudicated. Whilst mindful of potential charges of 'narcissism or self-indulgence' (e.g. Delamont, 2009), I am also aware of the difficulties in judging texts, such as mine, which intend from the outset to dissolve the margins between different disciplines and methodological approaches. Speedy's (2008, p.xvi) wish resonates with mine, 'I hope that by experimenting with and moving between literary, scholarly, investigative, imaginary and personal styles of inquiry I will gently scrape away at the discourses of research.' The task before me, therefore, includes a kind of imperative towards a different kind of writerliness, and one which will be judged accordingly. I shall rise to the occasion to the best of my ability, but perhaps the most I can hope for is to meet the set of challenges that Muncey (2010) poses for the autoethnographic researcher and which I noted on page sixteen above.

There are two final points about my choice of methodology which need mention here. The first concerns yet another paradox accompanying my pursuit. My search for Sophia, as articulated to this point, might seem to point towards a kind of longing for

some kind of ultimate value-base which transcends the relativities of the contingent and the quotidian which I am interrogating in terms of *Sophia*'s potential as 'truth-bearer'. This might seem at odds with the post-structuralist framings within which 'writing as inquiry' enjoys its freedoms. My study, therefore, will include some kind of examination of modernism's limits, whilst posing some questions as to the relative 'depths' which postmodernism and post-structuralism can offer. But this putative sense of longing speaks of the second of my final points which needs mention here.

As I have suggested, my approach demands a different set of criteria regarding its efficacy and use and I intend to remain mindful of this fact as the thesis develops. But central to any form of adjudication is the extent to which the subject is able to offer a reflexive enquiry into her own predilections and motivations. *Sophia* offers a metaphorical vehicle for my quest, but she also seems, at this stage, to represent a profound sense of loss which I feel lies at the heart of this project. There are many reasons for this, and exploration of some of them will inform certain chapters. I suppose that one of the key questions I am pursuing is the extent to which such loss is personal, and my arguments necessarily limited by the shape and colour of the lens through which I view my thesis. If my rather jaundiced view of certain pedagogic practices stems largely from my own predispositions, then I have to guard against the kind of polarised extremism which finds expression in a kind of prelapsarian longing and crude darkening of the present. On the other hand, if such a sense of loss were to find echo and resonance in the hearts and minds of colleagues and others, then the value of my quest might, in the end, have greater and deeper resonance as my strivings for, and commitment to, a kind of 'heartfelt' authenticity meet their mark (cf. Pelias, 2004). Either way, there is a certain irony in Michelangelo's placing of the female figure in the Creation of Adam. If we concur with Hall and Steinberg (1993) and their suggestion that she is the personification of wisdom, her framing within this section of the painting has always been overshadowed by the iconic image of God's hand linking with Adam's. Perhaps it is time that *Sophia* came out of the shadow of God's embrace and claimed her place at the heart of the educative process.

It is customary within a thesis such as this to offer a **literature review**. However, the interdisciplinary nature of the project means that I could never hope to match the potential breadth and scope of my inquiry because it would suggest some kind of 'summing up' of current thinking which is antithetical to my project. It is also

impossible in the sense that no one thesis could possibly explore the heights and depths of each of the disciplines from which I draw. My approach is, of necessity, partial and contingent; as I have already stated, I am neither philosopher, theologian nor classicist, although I have drawn from these and other disciplines. The literature I have drawn upon is interwoven, analysed and evaluated throughout the text and the full reference list at the end includes all the resources used throughout the survey.

It is also crucial to note the importance of adhering to **ethical guidelines** throughout the journey and the process. I shall refer to these guidelines as the thesis unfolds and in connection with particular choices and challenges. In general terms, I have followed those governing post-graduate work at my institution and those suggested by Merrill and West (2009) and Ellis et al (2011). Each interviewee signed the confidentiality form which can be found at Appendix one.

Structure of the thesis

Drawing on Ellis and Bochner, Etherington (2004, p.140) offers helpful summary of the autoethnographic approach:

Usually written in the first-person voice, autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms – short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose. [...] concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories affected by our history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed through *action, feeling, thought, and language.*’
[Original emphasis]

Whilst most of the thesis is written in the first person, the occasional shifts in pronoun have been used as a deliberate means by which different voices and narrative strands might be introduced and interrogated. The thesis includes most of the media that Etherington refers to across a range of primary and secondary sources. It draws upon historical documentation as well as poetry, fiction, and the personal essay. I have also used photographs as both illustration and to evoke the sense of history as palimpsest by suggesting a kind of layered imprinting which challenges the notion of history as linear and progressive and opens the possibility of seeing the past in the present. In a move which, I trust, is also consistent with my approach, each chapter will continue the methodological conversation with the reader, ‘a single hand writes, but the self who inscribes, who is, is herself enmeshed with other lives which give hers the meaning it has’ (Stanley, 1992/2002, p.14). In other words, as I paint each rib of the multi-coloured

fan which comprises this thesis, I am not sure what final image, or images will emerge when the fan is finally opened to its fullest extent. My on-going discussions with the others whom I meet in the following pages will inform the unfolding of that dialogue; and the shaping of our conversations, and the methodological tools at my disposal, will make their presence felt at each stage of the composition. I shall be drawing upon interviews held with six colleagues. Whilst that material will form the basis of chapter seven, I shall offer a few words about each at this stage by way of introduction because their influence has been with me throughout.

‘Sean’ has already made an appearance. He works with me in the same university department but comes from a very different professional background, and this has been very helpful in understanding how certain discourses spill across disciplines and different arenas of training and expertise.

‘Jane’ is now retired but worked in adult education throughout her professional life and in a number of roles at middle and senior management levels. She has also been of immense support in helping me frame the methodological underpinning to my work. Having recently completed a Doctorate in Education from the University of Bristol’s Centre for Narratives and Transformative Learning Studies, Jane’s wise counsel and steady hand have been most welcome and very much appreciated.

‘Hannah’s’ help has also been incalculable. In her role as Director of extra-mural studies at a university in the South East of England, Hannah’s story covers the early days of her work in adult education through to the final chapter of her department’s narrative.

‘Susanne’ currently works for what used to be the largest adult education service in England. Her specialism lies in various aspects of information technology and she used to train within the National Health Service. She had just completed her Masters in Lifelong Education and Professional Practice as one of my students when her interview took place.

There are two other contributors to my series of interviews and I have permission to use their real names: The twice published novelist, Tricia Wastvedt, teaches at undergraduate and post-graduate levels at Bath Spa University. Her insights into the processes, heartaches and levels of consciousness which come into play in the act of writing have been both instructional and comforting at times of both jubilation and deep despair. Peter Jarvis numbers the Professorship of Continuing Education at the University of Surrey among the numerous roles and accolades which he has served or

been awarded. His contributions to the fields of adult and lifelong learning have accompanied and aided me throughout my journey in those terrains. Unfortunately, his illness during my work on my interview material meant that it was not possible to include him in that section, although I have drawn on his insights throughout.

In choosing autoethnography, to an extent as both medium and message, I am engaged in two overlapping endeavours: my search for Sophia and my interrogation of the efficacy of my approach. In pursuit of the latter, I have found it helpful to organise the development of my work within three overlapping trajectories by splitting the term into its three component elements. As I take it as axiomatic that, ‘All social science research is saturated (however disguised) with positionality’ (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012, p.10), chapters two and three concentrate on trying to elucidate some of the relevant strands comprising the ‘I’ who pens these pages, the auto element. The ethno, my particular field of inquiry, is interrogated throughout but particularly in chapter five. Finally, the graphy, the act of ‘writing up’ is problematised throughout but finds fullest expression in chapters six and seven.

In a text which argues the importance of attending to metaphor as reflective of our lifeworlds and our relationship to them, it might be helpful to offer a further image to elucidate the ways in which I see this thesis unfolding. Whilst Sophia acts as ‘carrier’ of both medium and message, I feel I have to find a further alternative to the traditional progression of narrative along linear lines. I am grateful to Tara Hyland-Russell for introducing a most apt analogy into our co-written chapter on Sophia;

the spiral nautilus can be a profound metaphor for the deepening awareness and integration of one’s personal, relational, and cultural stories. The [...] shell is constructed as a series of chambers that lead deeper into further chambers, spiralling around the inner self. Yet the chambers also open outward, connecting the inner creature with the surrounding sea. Using a spiral metaphor for wisdom learning processes provides a model through which to evaluate and mediate among conflicting discourses and social pressures, not least of which are the current economic paradigms, and values the wisdom that emerges from one’s personal and communal journey. (Fraser and Hyland-Russell, 2011, p.29)

As my quest unfolds, I take strength from the metaphorical power of the nautilus and from its place within the Sacred Geometry of the past. ‘This ancient science explores and explains the physical and energy patterns that create and unify all things.’²⁰ Perhaps it is this kind of pattern that I am seeking here.

²⁰ ‘The spiral is a common element of Sacred Geometry [...] Spirals in nature tend to follow the Golden Ratio (Phi)’. www.2muchfun.info/nautilusshell.html

There are two sections comprising chapters of differing length. As I have already noted, there is no single chapter on methodology; ‘notes towards’ its use are interwoven in four sections throughout the text. Chapter one offers more of the background to particular articulations of wisdom which are included for the sake of clarity and to outline the discursive emphases which comprise the particular palette colouring this composition. Chapter two extends the search for an appropriate methodology by exploring the role of the epiphanic, or ‘moment of being’ as progenitor for a particular world view and epistemological and ontological predilection. This offers a reminder of the complexity inherent in attributing some kind of foundational narrative to the project we call the ‘self’. This exploration then segues into key questions about ‘meaning-making’ which, in turn, lead to the rationale for adopting an autoethnographic underpinning to the overall thesis. This discussion therefore deepens that which was begun on the preceding pages because the challenges pertaining to the ‘moment’s’ ontological status will then open the discussion to a consideration of the kinds of epistemological framings with which I am operating, yet which seem at odds with the delivery of so much educational policy and practice.

Chapter three plays with the notion of the Gaelic term *duthcas*, as it refers to the author of this text, in order to explore the potential for what I term a ‘genea-mythic’²¹ approach to unearthing aspects of the past for their relevance in the present. Celia Hunt (2000, p.28) draws upon Seamus Heaney’s notion of the ‘country of the mind’ in the following terms, ‘a midworld between ourselves and the places we have lived in or visited that constitutes our own inner landscapes.’ If part of my search for Sophia requires my rising to the challenge to ‘know thyself’ to the best of my ability, it is important that the soul-work includes access to this particular country; the country of my heritage and the lifeworlds of my fore-mothers and fore-fathers, ‘It is an archaeological dig, the driving of a shaft into the self, which reveals the many different layers that constitute our personal identity’ (Celia Hunt, 2000, p.28)²². An interesting aside, perhaps, when reflecting upon the process of ‘writing as inquiry’, is the fact that this chapter was the first that I produced. There truly was a sense that it was writing itself despite the background research that I was obviously undertaking throughout. It is a chapter which, therefore, almost speaks my metaphoric use of the nautilus, ‘The ratio [phi] links each chamber of the nautilus to the new growth and symbolically each new generation to its

²¹ A neologism I have coined and explore in chapter three.

²² I have used the work of both Cheryl and Celia Hunt. Celia is named here; other references to Hunt apply to Cheryl’s work.

ancestors, preserving the continuity of relationship as the means for retracing its lineage' (Fraser and Hyland-Russell, 2011, p.29).

Chapter four traces the story of Sophia within certain historical and cultural narratives by way of a perceived shift from mythos to logos within particular Western discourses. Once again, in keeping with the shape and metaphorical power of the nautilus as my guide, chapter five serves as a kind of review of some of my main premises whilst simultaneously offering a further critique and, one hopes, a deepening and more subtle understanding. Chapter six concludes my analysis of the three elements comprising auto/ethno/graphy by moving the discussion towards the use of my interview 'data' which comprise chapter seven. Despite the convention that assumes that footnotes are not included in a work couched within the social sciences, I have used them throughout in the spirit encouraged by Richardson (1997, p.43), as 'a place for secondary arguments, novel conjectures, and related ideas.'

The quotations which introduce each chapter have been chosen to augment the other voices within my text. They are offered as added points of light, aperçus or promptings for further reflection.

Figure 3: Picture of a nautilus shell – copyright - <http://www.salonee-shesells.blogspot.co.uk/>

Section One

Chapter One

Tracing wisdom's roots in certain Western discourses.

This tension of wisdom as having knowledge, but recognizing that at the same time one does not have knowledge, since all knowledge is partial, connects wisdom (in the Sophia sense) to the notion of paradox.
(Tisdell, 2011, p.7)

But what exactly do I mean by wisdom?

Many definitions of wisdom converge on recurrent and common elements: humility, patience, and a clear-eyed, dispassionate view of human nature and the human predicament, as well as emotional resilience, an ability to cope with adversity, and an almost philosophical acknowledgement of ambiguity and the limitations of knowledge. Like many big ideas, it's also nettled with contradictions. Wisdom is based upon knowledge, but part of the physics of wisdom is shaped by uncertainty. Action is important, but so is judicious inaction. Emotion is central to wisdom, yet emotional detachment is indispensable. A wise act in one context may be sheer folly in another.
(Hall, 2011, p.11)

The wisdom-loving person – the philo-sophia – is one who searches for the timeless and unchanging truths, never content with the shifting phenomena of the material world.

(Sternberg, 1990, p.15)

Introduction

I have already stressed the paradoxical nature of my quest, and I have also made it clear that my search is precisely that: I share with my interviewees and other sources the sense that I recognise wisdom when I see it, but I certainly do not feel that I have achieved wisdom as a state of being or, indeed, ever could. This makes my pursuit even more paradoxical, and rather complicated in terms of my pleading that Sophia might somehow be invited into our pedagogical, professional and personal lifeworlds. So, where has she come from, why is she so important to me, and how might we invite her into our classrooms? What follows is an attempt to answer the first of these questions; the second and third are pursued in succeeding chapters.

‘Accounting for all things’

The first clue, of course, is in her name. We tend to take it as axiomatic that the history of Western philosophy (love of sophia – love of wisdom), indeed the history of Western approaches to comprehending our world and our place within it, stems from the Ancient Greeks. There are a number of reasons for this, not least that many of our most significant philosophers, and some scientists, have argued their descent from one or other of the key thinkers who inhabited a particular region around the Mediterranean between 650 and 300 BCE (Long, 1999). This is quite a significant time frame, and a point that is sometimes lost in a tendency to assume some kind of homogeneity in Greek thinking as precursor to certain key Western discursive principles. On the contrary, there were a number of different, and often opposing, schools of thought and it would be quite misleading to suggest anything other than a rich cultural ocean from which numerous shoals of differing size and colour might be glimpsed or caught. However, there was one underlying principle which might be accorded some kind of general consensus, ‘as a defining mark of early Greek philosophy’s scope’ and that was the aim of ‘accounting for all things’. Long (1999, p.12) continues,

By the later years of the fifth century, “wisdom” (sophia), the common denominator of the words philosophy and sophist, has acquired a more “professional” connotation than it had at the time of Thales – a connotation of acknowledged expertise in understanding and teaching the general conditions of the world and human experience. [Original emphasis].

Long (p.12) stresses the importance of this desire to ‘account’ as indicative of a significant cultural shift, ‘evident from the Milesians onward, that attempts to account for all things, as distinct from relying on trust and tradition, are humanly possible and desirable.’ This point is key to the manner in which my search for Sophia is

characterised. There has been a discursive thrust throughout the development of certain Western discourses that has assumed this philosophical and intellectual ‘turn’ to indicate a shift away from a more mythological/theological apprehension of the world and its meanings towards one predicated on the use of reason and rationality. Whilst this is true in ‘broad brush’ terms, it is a view which belies some of the differences in how that philosophical ‘turn’ towards the rational might be articulated. As Long makes clear, there was a radical distinction between Hesiod’s (8th or early 7th BCE)²³ presentation of his *Theogony* ‘in a poetic competition [...] an account, or at least a story, about “all things” ’ (Long, p.13), and the work of Heraclitus some three to four hundred years later for whom the act of ‘accounting’ is subsumed in ‘the multiple meanings of the word *logos* (discourse, account, reckoning, measure)’ by way of offering ‘a “rational” and systematic account of all things [...] coherent with our cognitive faculties, both empirically and conceptually.’ And Long (p.13) summarises what this discursive shift brings to the development of Greek thought. As he points out (1999, p.14), later appropriations of such strands within Greek thinking are, as we would expect, often articulated within the contextual and discursive framings suited to different times and epistemological requirements. Popper’s writing of the Presocratics’ ‘simple straightforward rationality (original emphasis)’ is contrasted with the more recent proposition,

that the entire Graeco-Roman tradition of philosophy should be construed, first and foremost, as practical and “spiritual” in its goals, advocating philosophy as a way of life. This characterisation will strike many people as appropriate only to some later ancient philosophies, but it has the great merit of asking us not to impute modernist conceptions of philosophy’s complete disinterestedness or “pure” inquiry to classical antiquity.
(1999, p. 14; original emphasis).

Long (p.14) reinforces his point about the nature of inquiry by quoting and then drawing upon the work of Euripides:

Blessed is he who has learned how to engage in inquiry
with no impulse to harm his countrymen or to pursue
wrongful actions, but perceives the order of immortal and
ageless nature, how it is structured.

In these lines we hear early Greek philosophy praised in contemporary words that capture its holistic ambition, scientific, speculative, ethical, and awe-inspiring.

These last lines are particularly important in highlighting an holistic embrace which encompasses the ‘scientific and the awe inspiring’. How does this further my quest for Sophia? There are two important points to bear in mind. It is so easy to fall prey to the

²³ See chronology in Long, 1999, p. xxix

seductiveness of certain ‘grand narratives’ which often suggest clearly demarcated pathways through historical epochs and forge linear connection between past and present. Such linearity is part consequence of those narratives of ‘progression’ which accompany the development of certain prevailing Western discourses. I must try and pay attention to some of the byways accompanying those major routes; indeed, remembering the nautilus at my side, I must remain open to the impact that such ‘progressive’ narratives have had in sometimes eschewing a spiral or cyclical apprehension of history in favour of a particular linearity taking us from the ‘darkness’ of myth to the ‘light’ of rationality. But I must also remember that I am operating within the English language and therefore I am limited to the translations offered which, of necessity, impose a further veil between the lived experiences of these ancient Greek writers and my own. Nonetheless, I shall return to some of these considerations in chapter four when I revisit aspects of Greek thinking in relation to a suggested shift from mythos to logos. But at this point, I shall turn to another of the key thinkers whose epistemological distinctions will help me remain aware of some of the shifts and shades which have coloured my perceptions of the relations between myth and reason, faith, belief and rationality.

In order to understand Aristotle’s distinction between four forms of knowledge: *techne* (skill); *phronesis*, (practical knowledge); *episteme* (scientific knowledge) and *sophia* (contemplation of the eternal) (Sternberg, 1990; Thiele, 2006; Tisdell, 2011; Treier, 2006), it might be helpful to explore, albeit briefly, the ways in which Aristotle drew upon and thence reviewed some major Platonic epistemological elements:

[I]t was not just the language of myth in Plato’s dialogues, but rather the underlying functional equivalence of deities and Ideas implicit in much of his thought, that made Plato so pivotal in the development of the Greek mind [...] For by speaking of Ideas on one page and gods on another in such analogous terms, Plato resolved, tenuously yet with weighty and enduring consequences, the central tension in the classical Greek mind between myth and reason.
(Tarnas, 2010, pp.14, 150)

This tension between myth and reason is one that will be played out throughout the history of the West in any number of historical, cultural and philosophical struggles for meaning and first principles. But there were key moments in the development of Greek philosophy when the distinctions were less clear than, perhaps, they are now, as Armstrong, in her exhaustive analysis of *The Case For God* (2009, p.78), also points out, ‘The rationalism of Ancient Greece was not opposed to religion; indeed, it was itself a faith tradition that evolved its own distinctive version of the principles that

guided most of the religious traditions.’ This synergy between rationalism and faith is important. Armstrong notes that Socrates’ purpose in engaging in dialogue was to lead his conversant to their point of unknowing, as a prerequisite for any search for truth. ‘The type of wisdom that Socrates offered was not gained by acquiring items of knowledge but by learning to be in a different way’ (original emphasis, 2009, p.67).

Plato would extend his master’s teaching and articulate a cosmological structure that would prove so influential in later Judeo/Christian narrativel framings. Plato, in his version of the creation myth, which he expounded in the *Timaeus*, distinguished between a supreme deity who was so removed from us that he was unknowable, and a demi-urge who had worked on the pre-existing, and ideal forms, to shape the world as we knew it. ‘The point of the story was to show that the universe, based as it was on the forms, was intelligible’ (Armstrong, 2009, p.74). Thus, Plato ‘had helped to lay the foundations of the important Western belief that human beings lived in a perfectly rational world and that the scientific exploration of the cosmos was a spiritual discipline’ (ibid.)

Aristotle extended Plato’s articulation of humanity’s ability to try and understand the rules of the cosmos by revisiting the notion of the divine spark within human intelligence. Thence his distinction between various forms of knowledge, and of his privileging of *theoria*, or *Sophia*, as the love of contemplation for its own sake, and in pursuit of the highest truths. Armstrong (2009) suggests that one of the key differences between these Ancient Greeks and ourselves was their lack of distinction between the subject and object of thought. Thinking about something was only possible because there was something ‘out there’ to draw the thought from the thinker; hence, the importance of *philo-sophia*, because it meant that the divine was, in some way, prompting such contemplation.

Aristotle was important in another respect and that was in bringing ‘philosophical rationalism down to earth’ (Armstrong, 2009, p.74; Tarnas, 2010). Despite the many contradictions that characterised his work and writings, Aristotle’s contribution to the development of Western science lay in his belief that, as Armstrong notes (2009, p.75),

a ‘form’ was not an eternal archetype but the immanent structure that determined the development of every single substance. Aristotelian science was dominated by the idea of *telos*: like any human artefact, everything in the cosmos was directed towards a particular ‘end’ and had a specific purpose, a ‘final cause’.

And as Tarnas suggests (2010, p.61), ‘In essence, Aristotle realigned Plato’s archetypal perspective from a transcendent focus to an immanent one, so it was fully directed to the physical world with its empirically observable patterns and processes’. But we must remember that this rational pursuit of ‘final causes’ was not to be seen as separate from, but rather intrinsically related to, ‘man’s’ pursuit of the divine, and its use led to an understanding of both the immanent and thence the transcendent. Our current separation of the two was both feature and partial consequence of modernity, as I shall argue in chapter four, in trying to understand what happened to render such a break from the transcendent in the pursuit of knowledge, reason and rationality. It is an issue which concerns Conway, and which echoes our earlier discussion with Long (1999). In *The Rediscovery of Wisdom. From Here to Antiquity in Quest of Sophia*, Conway argues that modern philosophy has forgotten its roots, and with that forgetting, has lost its link to its original Divinity:²⁴

Werner Jaeger, for example, points out that “Greek philosophy had been a means of recognising the “Divine” from its very beginnings, a fact of which our modern history of Greek philosophy has lost sight almost entirely during the era of positivism and naturalism”.

(Conway, 2000, p. 34)

In terms of my overall thesis, it is important not to lose sight of Aristotle’s other forms of knowledges, the practical, the technical and the more scientific (loosely translated as *phronesis*, *techne*, and *episteme*), because each must play its part in the totality of wisdom’s potential in our teaching and learning spaces. But, as my starting point, I am much more preoccupied with what Aristotle felt to be the higher pursuit, that of the ‘eternal’, that of *Sophia*. Whilst the reasons for this will be explored in chapter two, my pursuit of her in more general terms now takes me to Judaeo/Christian influences, including the wisdom literature of the Old Testament.

Judaeo/Christian influences

In my prologue, I described my use of Michelangelo’s depiction of the Creation of Adam in the Sistine Chapel, and I quoted Armstrong in defence of my claim that the female figure held in God’s embrace could not possibly be Eve. Armstrong continues (2009, p.79),

²⁴ There is another conundrum here and that concerns the difficulties inherent in understanding the notion of the ‘divine’ as experienced in early Greek thought. It cannot be assumed to hold the same resonance as that underpinning the Judaeo/Christian tradition. Comparisons with the development of Chinese philosophy are helpful in trying to elucidate the distinctions between ‘the way’, divinity and a close adherence to principles of immanence over transcendence (cf. Legge, 1882; Wilhelm, 1950)

She was identical with the Word that God had spoken at creation and the Spirit that had brooded over the primal Ocean. Word, Wisdom and Spirit were not separate gods but activities of the ineffable God that our frail minds were able to recognise - not unlike the 'glory' (kavod) described by the Prophets. Later [...] a Jewish writer [...] in the first century BCE would see Wisdom (sophia) as the human perception of God'.

It has been suggested that this personification of wisdom, as Sophia, arose partly as a result of the intellectual cross-over between Hellenistic culture and that of the peoples living in the Near East. Certain writers trace her lineage back to a range of manifestations of powerful female deities and creation myths; a lineage which then reappeared within the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, which included Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon (Hall, 2011), 'and the Wisdom of Solomon and the wisdom of Ben Sira, both of which are in the apocrypha' (Jarvis, 2011, p.87). As Perdue explains (2007, p.30), 'wisdom, associated with God, is often a personified and eventually hypostasized attribute seen in the activities of Woman Wisdom, originally a goddess in Israelite religion prior to the development of monotheism, and then a personified metaphor.' And it is probably in Proverbs that this personification finds fullest expression:

For this poet, Wisdom, portrayed as a goddess, is the giver of life, happiness, wealth and honor [sic]; possesses great value; and becomes the agent of divine creation in originating and sustaining the cosmos [...] Goddess Wisdom becomes a literary metaphor for identifying the sapiential tradition with the divine attribute used in creating the cosmos. Through the obtaining of Wisdom in studying and embodying the teachings of the sages, one possesses not only her bounties but also the means by which to understand creation and providence. By means of the artistry of this elegant poem, the poet shapes the order of the cosmos.
(Perdue, 2007, pp. 51, 52)

It is interesting to note the importance that Woman Wisdom held in the minds and hearts of writers such as the author of Proverbs because of her role in creating the cosmos, and in understanding such providence through study and teaching. It is also important to note, in passing, that the personification of wisdom, as Sophia, was included in many of the esoteric framings of symbolic cosmologies which drew on a range of Gnostic writings and on the works of Plato. Chapter four will examine some of these formulations, expressions and explorations whilst tracing the kinds of changes which have taken place and which have deepened the discursive turns away from contemplation of the divine to a far more secular articulation of wisdom's power and potency. It is a journey which, I shall argue, has led to the kind of marginalisation of Sophia mentioned in my prologue. But for now, I shall move to the present by way of reviewing the discussion thus far, and in order to lead on to the concerns of chapter two.

‘From Philosophy to Neuroscience’²⁵

Hall’s (2011) exploration of wisdom’s call through the ages provides apt introduction to the second of my main themes. Indeed, Hall’s discussion has been particularly useful in offering a wealth of material to illustrate the changing faces and fortunes of wisdom’s articulations as Western secularisation of its discourses, surrounding the gaining and giving of different kinds of knowledges, takes hold of the mainstream and renders Sophia that much more elusive.

Hall is primarily interested in tracing wisdom as a human construct, and thence seeking its genesis in certain of our neural pathways. In this, as he freely admits, he is adopting the same form of reductionism that characterises ‘the advancement of biological knowledge’ by ‘breaking down a scientific problem, or natural mystery, into its smaller, component parts and then designing experiments to tease apart the underlying biology’ (2011, p.16; italics added). Hall is aware of the limitations of this approach:

I plead guilty in advance to losing sight occasionally of the rich, ineffable, holistic essence of the idea itself. The problem with reductionism is that, at the end of the day, you need and want to put all the parts back together. I can’t do that with wisdom; no one can. The best I can do is respect its essential mystery whilst offering a peek at some of its neural gears.
(2011, p.17)

In a sense, I seek to reinstate some of *Sophia’s* mystery and to rescue her from such reductionist pursuits. Nonetheless, Hall is extremely helpful in offering a history of wisdom’s articulations through the ages and through many of the disciplines in which she has been invoked. As with other writers, (eg Sternberg, 1990; Jarvis, 2011), Hall notes the distinctions made throughout the history of Western discourses, between wisdom as ‘divine, and as ‘practical’, but it is wisdom as ‘human virtue’, viewed primarily in psychological terms, that interests him the most.

Sternberg splits his analysis into similar searches: the philosophical; those informed by folk conceptions (or, more practical articulations); and those ‘informed by psychodevelopmental conceptions of wisdom’ (1990, p.vi). As with Hall, Sternberg acknowledges the importance of the work of key theorists such as Baltes and Smith, and the seminal work of the Berlin Wisdom Project. Baltes and Smith (1990, p.87) make their preoccupation clear, ‘The conceptual focus of our approach is to conceive of wisdom as an expert knowledge system.’ Such categorisations might lead one to assume that the history of wisdom’s articulations in the West is resolutely reductionist and

²⁵ Hall, S (2011) *Wisdom. From Philosophy to Neuroscience*. New York: Vintage Books

confined to the cognitive. Indeed, as Shih-ying Yang (2011, p. 50) has noted, ‘A previous study found that Easterners tend to hold a more synthetic view of wisdom, stressing both cognitive and affective dimensions, whereas Westerners tend to emphasise only cognitive dimensions (Takashi and Bordia, 2000).’ I would certainly argue that there has been a reductionist thrust to certain Western discourses which would appear to limit wisdom’s potential to the practical and the cognitive. But I am also arguing that there is still sufficient space between such discourses for a more holistic reclamation to take place. Indeed, it is in pursuit of such reclamation that this thesis has been written.

Attributes such as reflectivity or the capacity for self-examination are seen as providing the needed impetus to escape from relativistic intellectualization. What remains the same in these ways of conceiving of wisdom (and the many other similar ones in different cultures), despite many other divergent aspects, is the insight that the specific knowledge of the world we have at any given time is only a pale reflection of reality [...] This message is as relevant today as it was 24 centuries ago in Plato’s time.
(Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde, 1990, p.31)

At this point, it might be useful to try and tease out some of the key themes, or elements, which have characterised articulations of wisdom and from which I might be able to construct my backdrop. To summarise my points thus far: it is the paradoxical nature of wisdom which pertains through the ages and across cultures. To this might be added the distinctions between different definitions of wisdom, along Aristotelian lines, which allow for its pursuit as contemplation of the eternal, (*sophia* – as transcendent potentiality), as well as acknowledging its practical and immanent manifestations in discursive traditions emphasising its basis within human limitations and articulations (*techne*, *phronesis* and *episteme*). As we have seen, it has been a factor of the development of certain Western discourses which has seen a decline in the interest in wisdom’s transcendent potential in favour of her more practical elucidations. Hall provides a reminder of one of the seminal figures in such a shift:

“The idea of wisdom,” Immanuel Kant wrote, “must be the foundation of philosophy [...]” Yet this foundation, in his view, rested on shaky, if not invisible, legs. Kant conceived of two different, mutually exclusive realms of reality that by definition constrain our embrace of wisdom; the phenomenal world, “where knowledge is possible,” and what he called the “noumenal,” which is transcendent and to which there is no access.”
(Hall, 2011, p.37; emphasis added)

This emphasis upon these ‘mutually exclusive realms’ represents a further complication in this narrative of wisdom’s many faces and manifestations. Hall goes on to note that Kant’s words are reminiscent of much Eastern philosophy which stresses its ‘conscious acknowledgement of limitation’ and Hall also argues that Kant prefigured the work of

Baltes 'in his belief that wisdom was an ideal, always to be aspired to but essentially unobtainable' (p.37). One can appreciate that this 'idealisation' of wisdom adds to the difficulty of articulation without recourse to words such as 'ineffable', 'mystery', or Baltes' 'fuzzy zone' as Hall reminds us, 'where human expertise never quite rises to an idealized level of knowledge about the human condition' (p. 8). And one can also understand that this difficulty of articulation, of finding a bridge between the more pragmatic epistemologies and those which aspire to the transcendent, would tend to shift the pursuit of wisdom towards the more rationalist epistemologies, the 'reductionist' approaches noted by Hall, often at the expense of other potentialities.

In trying to make sense of many trans-cultural adages about the getting of wisdom with the increase of years, it is hardly surprising that much attention would be paid to psychological studies which tried to understand why this should be so. In Orwoll and Perlmutter's study, for example, they 'propose an empirical approach to the study of wisdom that capitalizes on the integration of personality and cognition by intensively studying adults who are considered wise' (1990, p.160). They draw on the work of 'three personality theorists who have dealt explicitly with wisdom: Erikson, Jung and Kohut', and whilst recognizing their different orientations – 'Erikson's psychosocial, Jung's analytical, and Kohut's object relations' – Orwoll and Perlmutter nonetheless noted similar conclusions in that 'each discussed self-development and self-transcendence as key attributes of the wise personality' (1990, p.160). Whether adopting Erikson's 'phenomenological self, "I", or ego [coming] to full fruition as a result of the negotiation of the conflicts inherent in the final life stage, Integrity versus Despair', or finding greater resonance with Jung's 'individuation of the self' as 'the road to wisdom', which 'places the source of wisdom intrapsychically, in confronting progressively deeper aspects of the self' or in following Kohut's progression of the healthy narcissist as she moves towards 'empathy, mature humor [sic], and acceptance of transience' (p.161); each model 'entails uncommon levels of self-awareness and psychological growth' (p.162). But for each, the getting of wisdom also entails the importance of self-transcendence; whether that be through Erikson's 'expansion of the context in which the subjective sense of "I" is placed to a broader, more global, and philosophical perspective', or, for Jung, 'as precipitated by an inner shift toward collective consciousness, attainable through self-knowledge' and via the media of dreams and symbols by which the collective unconscious might be glimpsed which contains 'universal or archetypal information and is the source of wisdom.' Or it might

be via Kohut's 'sense of "cosmic narcissism"'. Wisdom is hewed in the process of expanding the self to a timeless, universal identity rather than with an individualistic and mortal one' (pp.162,3).

What I find particularly interesting about these three distinct views of the development of the human psyche is their shared view of the importance of self-transcendence. For each this is hard won, as is the path to wisdom generally, but each acknowledges the importance of the quieting of ego, in later life, as the needs of one's larger horizons become more discernible and more paramount. I use the term 'one's larger horizons' advisedly. Some might, like Jung, seek wisdom in the realm of the collective unconscious via the language of dreams, symbols or across a range of divinatory practices (e.g. Voss and Lall, 2007); others might urge the gaining of wisdom as a means by which we might attend to the threats to our broader communities and the future survival of our planetary home (e.g. Abram, 1997; Goodenough, 1998/2000); others, again, might find wisdom residing in the 'truths' of the body as it moves through such meditative practices as tai chi or yoga (e.g. Geddes, 1995, Lehrhaupt (2001). Whichever the case, there is still the predisposition which all of these writers share that wisdom entails a loosening of the ego in the pursuit of a greater, larger or more embracing necessity.

It is hardly surprising that the unprecedented advances in science and technology of the last half century would result in the rise of neuroscience and far more detailed analysis of the brain and its workings. To what extent might the findings of psychologists such as Jung, Erikson and Kohut find echoes in our neurological patterns and pathways? What might account for the predispositions of those who seek the deeper peace of meditative practices, or the greater resilience with which some overcome life's 'slings and arrows' and achieve some kind of resignation and integration with life's vicissitudes? What kinds of chemical checks and balances are in operation when some manage to loosen the ego's demands and reveal their acuity in appraising complexity and working towards the greater good? These are but a few of the kinds of puzzles and conundrums that have become the preoccupations of neuroscientists in recent years. Hall (2011) has explored many of them. As we have seen, his starting point was to try and tease out some of the contradictory elements comprising wisdom's various articulations and, by reduction, understand them. Thus, he takes the reader on an exploration of psychological and neurological accounts of: 'emotional regulation (the

art of coping’); ‘knowing what’s important’; ‘moral reasoning’; ‘compassion’; ‘humility’; ‘altruism’; ‘patience’; and ‘dealing with uncertainty’. He challenges one of the key shibboleths attending wisdom, its accretion in older age, by noting that some tests have revealed that wisdom might be found in the young, especially if they have had to overcome extreme adversity. He has included the wisdom of the sages in his journey through epochs and cultures, and he has acknowledged the role of divine wisdom in certain discourses and traditions whilst stating his particular interest in human wisdom and how we get it. I have found his work to be particularly helpful in four overlapping ways: in outlining many philosophical and psychological explorations of wisdom; in elucidating and exploring some of the strands and elements which it is generally accepted comprise her²⁶; in offering ways in which she might be invited into the classroom; but perhaps most importantly, if rather surprisingly, in his conclusion which shows us that she ultimately escapes his reductionism and retains that elusive quality which has beguiled her seekers through the ages. Towards the beginning of his book, Hall (2011, p.40) describes his meeting with Vivian Clayton who, ‘is generally recognized as the first psychologist to ask, in even faintly scientific terms, “What does wisdom mean, and how does age affect it?” ’ And yet her studies began, in time honoured fashion, by revisiting the past in order to try and understand her present:

Clayton flung herself into precisely the same non-scientific literature that represents the repository of human thought about wisdom: Eastern religion, Greek philosophy, and, perhaps most interesting to her, the venerable “wisdom literature” of the Old Testament [...] By the time she had finished [...] she had reached a kind of epiphany, one that has reverberated throughout psychology and, more recently, neuroscience. In Clayton’s view, wisdom was different from intellect and necessarily went beyond mere cognitive ability. “While intelligence”, she wrote, “could be defined as the ability to think logically, to conceptualize, and to abstract from reality”, wisdom extended knowledge to the understanding of human nature, of oneself as well as others, and yet operated on “the principles of contradiction, paradox and change” (p.41).

Clayton’s work was seminal in encouraging researchers to ‘bring some semblance of empirical rigour to the study of wisdom’ (p.47). Her work gave rise to the general consensus that ‘the cognitive, affective, and reflective’ were ‘central to wisdom’. And whilst acknowledging the importance of age as a potential factor in acquiring wisdom, nonetheless it was ‘not essential; the more experience you have, she believed, the more chances you have to be wise’ (p.47). Clayton also reiterated the moral dimension to wisdom that had informed many earlier philosophical writings, ‘the function of wisdom

²⁶ Hall does not personify wisdom in this way; this feminisation marks my return to my quest for Sophia.

is characterized as provoking the individual to consider the consequences of his [sic] actions both to self and others' (p.47).

Her subsequent career makes salutary reading for anyone seduced by wisdom's call and yet who must retain the ability to deal with the cut and thrust of the academy:

[She] left academia for good. Part of the reason, she says, was her distaste for the ruthless nature of academic jousting; and part was recognizing her own limitations in studying such an enormous topic. "I was lost in the Milky Way of wisdom," she admitted, "and each star seemed as bright as the next. Ultimately, that's why I didn't continue with it."
(Hall, 2011, p.48)

As someone pursuing her own journey through wisdom's foothills, I have only admiration for what Clayton achieved and for her humility in the face of her discoveries, and I shall conclude this introduction with her words. But just before moving on, it might be useful to summarise the topography of those foothills so that I might readjust both map and compass in the continuance of my search for Sophia.

This chapter has outlined some of the elements or strands which have comprised articulations of wisdom throughout the ages and across a range of disciplines. I have stressed the paradoxical nature of my pursuit and drawn upon a range of writers to support this assessment of wisdom as puzzle, enigma and, often, contradiction. I have noted that some writers have striven for psychological models of representation which emphasise the importance of the aging process; others have noted that wisdom might be found in the young if circumstances have demanded a kind of resilience which is another garment wisdom might wear. I have also noted a certain discursive turn in articulations of wisdom which has marked an increasing secularisation in the West and a distancing from seeking her links to the divine. However, I have also noted the transcendent nature of many theorisations even if they might refer to a moving away from the ego's self-preoccupation rather than towards, or in response to, a call from something 'other'. I have noted Aristotle's epistemological distinctions, which are still played out today, if we translate them as 'skill', 'experiential' or 'practical' knowledge, 'scientific knowledge', and sophia which he regarded as the most important because of its concern with the eternal. But what does that mean? I certainly feel no wiser than Clayton, but I do find some comfort in the words she offers to Hall (2011, p.272) and with which he closes his book:

"This timeless knowledge – it pulses. The wise person can harness it but doesn't own it. This pulse of the universe, this...I'm not sure of the metaphor," she continued, fumbling for the words that struggled to capture such an elusive prey.

Finally, she left me with a parting nudge of advice, with which I am happy to comply. “What I am trying to say,” she said, “is, Leave [sic] some mystery there.”

And this brings me back to my starting point, for it is with Sophia that I am most preoccupied. I still do not know where that preoccupation might take me, but I have come to realise that this is a quest which began over forty years ago; now it is time that I return to it and try to understand her original call.

Chapter Two

‘Moments of Being’: Methodological and Epistemological Challenges

Aristotle declared sophia to be the highest form of life because of its concern with the eternal and unchanging
(Thiele, 2006, p.40)

Is any light so proudly thrust
From darkness on our lifted faces
A sign of something we can trust,
Or is it that in starry places
We see the things we long to see
In fiery iconography?
(‘For the Conjunction of Two Planets’ In Rich, 1974, pp.11,12)

Always write out of those spaces and experiences that carry the sting of memory, those epiphanies, and turning point moments that leave a mark on you.
(Denzin, 2012 *Mystories: Connecting the Personal and the Political*.
www.dur.ac.uk/writingacrossboundaries/writingonwriting/normandenzin)

It must have been a little after five and the curtains were closed against the dark of the early winter evening. She was sitting at the table in the living room, pen poised over the lined and ink-blotched paper of her history course book. The stereo-phonic strains of *Bach's Air on a G String issued from the radiogram against the wall, offering some emollient to her pangs of adolescent anguish at the ineluctable mysteries of the University of London 'A' level syllabus. On the far side of the room her companion was locked in equally fraught combat with one of the literature questions; both girls thoroughly attuned and obedient to the particularised harmonies of their grammar school education.*

It was a particular moment, in a particular time and place; a moment freighted with the fears and desires, the hopes and longings of two studious schoolgirls. It balanced, as all moments do, on the edge of its successors – each a soldier of Chronos, and each felling *the last in the doomed battalions we call our 'history'*. *The next moment, for both girls, was still the future; their friendship yet to be tested, and torn, by the betrayals and recriminations which marked their lack of comprehension of both themselves and of each other. It was a moment like any other, and yet...*

She began to feel the weight of the fountain pen in her hand. She looked at, and saw, the marbled mosaic of the plastic casing, knew the strength and liquidity of the blue/black ink held within; a drop poised on the nib waiting to join the cursive script filling the space between those immaculate lines on the creamy/white paper. She saw and felt each finger and thumb as if newly sculpted, and for one sole purpose, to balance the weight of the pen. She heard her breathing slow to the metronome conducted by Bach, she became her breathing: no, she became the music and, as it filled the room, she was lost to the room, yet not lost in the room, rather found in the dissolving walls of the room, the room, too, lost to the street below. And the street both lost and found in the city; this city, her home and yet not her home, for her home, her place, her time were all dissolving and merging with *others' homes, places and times*: Chronos was defeated; this moment was all and it was filled with grace.

Gradually, self-consciousness returned and, with it, the shapes and frames of books and pictures, of table and chairs; of her friend still caught in text and linearity. It was a homecoming to be sure, yet she had returned from Home, and with an assurance that *behind time's beat there lay a perpetual present, and it was benign...*

Searching for Sophia - searching for self

I have chosen to continue my 'search for Sophia' with this autobiographical account of a 'moment of being'²⁷ which took place at my home, in South London, in the autumn/winter of 1970...or perhaps it was 1971. Mindful of the instability of that terrain we name the past, and of the differently positioned 'self' which recounts it, I have deliberately eschewed the use of the personal pronoun in its telling. The separation between the schoolgirl at her homework, and the middle-aged narrator of the tale, is already shaping and informing the process of this whole study. Classed and gendered, and inhabiting a particular urban, and Western terrain, the teenage recipient of this 'epiphanic' moment was already situated at the nexus of a number of contesting discourses and ontological framings. Privileged? Undoubtedly, but relatively so, in terms of her gender and class. Nonetheless, a white teenager, enjoying a grammar school education in a capital city within the United Kingdom, had only to turn on the evening news to be reminded that any restrictions, real or imaginary, were not to be confused with those besetting the world's majority.

And herein lies another dilemma for the teller of this tale. The previous sentence, whilst undoubtedly true in the literal sense, given the social and economic inequities pertaining to the time, has been imposed, in the re-telling, upon the mind and sensitivities of the teenage girl. In 'truth', and as far as I remember, she was far too preoccupied with the business of her own living to pay the kind of attention to the sufferings of the world that the sentence might suggest. Uncaring? No, but the particularities shaping her political sensibilities stemmed primarily from the daily 'slings and arrows' piercing her own adolescent skin, rather than those arising from a more disinterested appraisal of the world's injustices. In short, she was young; this speaker is over forty years older, and must revisit this earlier self via the myriad routes and pathways which have been taken, ignored, lost or explored in the interim.

But this revision is subject to yet another qualification, and that is the extent to which those pathways represent linear trajectories to the past, and to an earlier 'self', or must be seen as signposts, merely, which offer no more than directional aid to a different subjectivity, sharing only a black mark on a white page to suggest any link between the two. Whether that single graphic unit, that vertically linear 'I', can claim more than

²⁷A thorough exploration of Virginia Woolf's use of such 'moments' is to be found in Schulkind (1976).

spurious connection to an earlier 'I' is but one of the questions which this project is seeking to address. But there are sufficient causes for concern as to the status of that relationship for the current distinction between the third and first persons to remain, 'As texts of experience, personal stories are not complete before their telling, but are assembled in relation to interpretive needs' (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000, p.106). Thus, in the interests of interpretation and of moving this narrative forward, this 'I' has chosen to utilise the words of Norman Denzin to legitimise, in the short term, my shift in focus to the kinds of links between these two selves which might pertain:

The point to make is not whether biographical coherence is an illusion or reality. Rather, what must be established is how individuals give coherence to their lives when they write or talk self autobiographies. The sources of this coherence, the narratives that lie behind them, and the larger ideologies that structure them must be uncovered.

(Denzin, in Holstein and Gubrium *ibid.* p.106)

And it is these sources which will help form the basis of this study. In chapters two and three, I am seeking to 'uncover' certain pivotal moments in my autobiography, situate them within their narrative and discursive framings, and thence explore the 'larger ideologies that structure them.' The methodological underpinning to this project has been introduced in preceding pages where I mentioned, among others, the work of C. Wright Mills in order to help me summarise both the genesis and the framing of my endeavours. His words are worth revisiting here:

What are the major issues for publics and the key troubles of private individuals in our time? To formulate issues and troubles, we must ask what values are cherished yet threatened, and what values are cherished and supported, by the characterizing trends of our period. In the case both of threat and of support we must ask what salient contradictions of structure may be involved.

(Wright Mills, 1959/2000, p.11)

As I have already explained, my chosen approach is autoethnography; with an emphasis which moves me towards the discursive practice known as 'writing as inquiry' (e.g. Church, 2002; Ellis, 2004; 2009; Hunt, 2000; Richardson, 1997; Speedy, 2008; St Pierre, 1997). And it is important to note at this point that I needed the legitimacy offered to an endeavour which, by its very nature, is partial, contingent and inconclusive, 'autoethnography could be likened to an adventure; setting off with a map and compass and some understanding of the territory but not hidebound by expectations or predictability' (Muncey, 2010 p.63). This is why I have chosen to reflect on the threads of my methodological choices as they weave their pattern through the growing fabric of the thesis. As introduction to the epistemological challenges with which I am struggling, it is timely at this juncture for further articulation of the underpinning to my

approach, ‘In grappling with how to portray the process of doing autoethnography, I kept returning to the notion that it somehow emerges out of the iterative process of doing research, while engaging in the process of living a life’ (Muncey, 2010, p.2).

Autoethnography and its critics

The term ‘auto-ethnography’ was first used by anthropologists in the 1970s. Heider’s report on his work with the Dani, which was published in 1975 in the *Journal of Anthropological Research*, was concerned with understanding ‘the other’ in ways in which Hayano’s use of the term in 1979 differed. Hayano adopted the term to describe the role of the ‘insider’ in relation to the group being studied (Chang, 2008; Reed-Danahay, 1997). Central to the endeavour is the acknowledgement that ‘culture and individuals are intricately intertwined’ (Chang, p.44); a key premise that will provide the starting point for the ‘genea-mythic’ approach which I explore in chapter three, and for my analysis of an epiphanic ‘moment of being’ which frames this part. For it is this move from the ‘outer’ to the ‘inner’, from the ‘other’ to the ‘self’, from the ‘objective’ to the ‘subjective’ that has characterised the growth of autoethnography (as a particular form of interpretive inquiry) as both methodology and method over the last four decades. As I have noted in the introduction, such development has not been without criticism; be it through accusations of narcissism, self-indulgence or simply of woolly-minded and flabby prose masquerading as academic ‘proof’ and practice. But there has been a steady counter-attack including that from Laurel Richardson (1997, p.92) who draws upon the freedoms offered by postmodernism and post-structuralism to challenge traditional ways of framing social scientific research:

In traditionally staged research we valorize “triangulation” (Statham, Richardson, and Cook 1991). In that process, a researcher deploys “different methods” – such as interviews, census data, and documents – to “validate” findings. These methods, however, carry the same domain assumptions, including the assumption that there is a “fixed point” or “object” that can be triangulated. But in postmodernist mixed-genre texts, the writers do not triangulate, they crystallize. There are far more than “three sides” by which to approach the world. [Original emphasis]

I would agree that there are. Indeed, this is one of the key premises of my thesis. Yet, I am mindful of the fact that I may be accused of having my postmodernist/post-structuralist cake and eating it! For whilst embracing the freedoms that are offered to challenge those ‘same domain assumptions’ (ibid) as my quest unfolds, I am also suggesting the possibility of some kind of transcendental truth of which my ‘moment of being’ is but an echo. This seeming epistemological paradox that accompanies my re-

search from the outset is one that demands at least some kind of acknowledgement of the phenomenological underpinning to this quest. But perhaps it is worth mentioning, here, that this seeming paradox might actually offer a parallel to my methodology. In other words, the process of doing autoethnography remains wedded to the pursuit of uncovering underlying epistemologies whilst staying open to the potential for unknowingness...precisely that which defines my search for Sophia²⁸. But first, I shall return to my methodological choice and to the ways in which I have sought to deflect potential criticisms.

One of the problems with the term 'autoethnography' is that it has been used to cover such a wide range of endeavours within the social sciences, and at the borders with arts and humanities, that it is open to the kinds of criticisms noted above. Ellis and Bochner's labels that 'indicate an autoethnographic orientation' number thirty-nine. Elsewhere, Ellis (2004, p.40) talks of 'more than sixty terms in the literature with meanings similar to autoethnography.' They range from 'autobiographical ethnography' to 'writing-stories', and include: 'autobiology'; 'autopathography'; 'emotionalism narratives of the self'; 'ethnographic poetics'; 'evocative narratives'; 'indigenous ethnography'; 'lived experience'; 'opportunistic research'; 'radical empiricism'; 'self-ethnography'; 'socioautobiography' and 'sociopoetics' (Chang, 2008, pp.47,8). Chang notes that much of the criticism stems from autoethnography's leanings towards the subjective and self-reflexive and notes the kinds of distinctions which have been made by scholars wishing to root their practice within the safety of a more 'objective' embrace:

Anderson (2006) leans towards the objectivity camp. The autoethnography that he advocates is expected to satisfy the following conditions: the autoethnographer (1) is "a complete member in the social world under study" (p.379); (2) engages re-flexivity to analyse data on self; (3) is visibly and actively present in the text; (4) includes other informants in similar situations in data collection; and (5) is committed to theoretical analysis [...], whereas Ellis and Bochner (2006) and Denzin (2006) stand on the opposing end, arguing for "evocative" and emotionally engaging, more subjective autoethnography (2008, pp.45/6).

And she concludes that, 'Although some scholars straddle both positions (Best, 2006), this war between objectivity and subjectivity is likely to continue, shaping the discourse

²⁸ I am grateful to Chris Scarlett for helping me to clarify this methodological parallel - in conversation Jun 8th 2012.

of autoethnography’ (p.46). My approach within this thesis attempts to ‘straddle both positions’ as I shall now explain.²⁹

In my search for Sophia within the domains of adult education, teaching and learning, I am drawing upon three decades as ‘a complete member in the social world under study’; I am actively ‘(engaging) reflexivity to analyse data on self’; I am ‘visibly and actively present in the text’; and I am ‘committed to theoretical analysis.’ In terms of the ‘other informants’, I have utilised a range of primary and secondary sources including, as primary data collection, interviews with six others ‘in similar situations’. However, from the outset, I have also been striving to provide an ‘“evocative” and emotionally engaging, more subjective autoethnography’ (op.cit. p.56) by way of addressing my own need to challenge disciplinary boundaries, and to draw upon literary modes and tropes in hopes of evoking different kinds of echoes and resonances within the reader. In chapter seven, I offer a fictionalised frame within which some of my interview material is couched by way of further charging their individual contributions in dynamic relation to each other.

‘Moments of Being’

I shall continue by revisiting that adolescent self, who was so utterly transformed by her experience that she selected, and pursued, as many pathways as possible that might lead to further transportations, or, at the least, encounters with others who could validate that ‘moment’ and the astonishing simultaneity of its utter strangeness and its profound familiarity.^{30/31} It was this transformation that helped shape the course of her studies long after the ‘A’ levels had been forgotten.³² She chose undergraduate programmes that encouraged her pursuit of the transcendent: a course on the Romantics and a further homecoming to find in Keats, Wordsworth and Coleridge more glimpses of time’s defeat by a deeper kind of grace. She attended philosophy classes in the hope of finding

²⁹ Anderson, 2006; see also Armstrong, 2008

³⁰ William James (1902/2002) and Rupert Sheldrake (2012) are but two who attest to the fact that, ‘Experiences of unity with a greater being, or mystical experiences, are surprisingly common [...] and for most of these people, their mystical experiences had changed their lives.’ (Sheldrake, 2012, p.153).

³¹ I think it is important to note a distinction between Denzin’s (2012) use of ‘epiphanic moments’ as ‘turning points’, which has become a key term in auto/biographical studies, and my use of the term, here, to reflect its transcendent dimension.

³² There is another paradox at work in the ‘uncovering’ of this thesis. Whilst retaining the third person pronoun in this current recounting by way of acknowledging the distance travelled between the 17 year old self and the middle aged writer there is, nonetheless, in the very telling of this ‘moment’ and its lifelong resonance, illustration of a need and desire for some kind of subjective continuity between the self who experienced and the self who narrates.

answers to the deepest questions her ardent young mind could muster. Philosophy failed her, but film didn't; as the room darkened, the tickety, tick of the projector heralded further transportations to Time's battlefield, and other moments of stasis such as those that filled Pasolini's visual hymn to the Messiah in his *Gospel According to St Matthew* (1964), or the notes of quietude which counterpointed the clamouring political urgencies of neo-realists such as de Sica in, for example, *The Bicycle Thieves* (1948). In her late teens and early twenties, she joined classes on Buddhism and meditation in the hope that such spaces might offer access to further communion with that greater embrace that she 'knew' lay somewhere behind the veil of daily life, its demands and expectations.

With post-graduate studies came a deeper understanding of the limitations of the word or image to hold, or even convey, 'The point of intersection of the timeless/with time' as T.S Eliot, and other Modernists reminded her. Her Master's dissertation (1976) explored the use of 'moments of being' in Virginia Woolf's fiction as, once again, she sought meaning, validation and companionship with those for whom,

It (was) difficult to find words strong enough for the sensation which came over me; Milton's 'enormous bliss' of Eden [...] comes somewhere near it [...] It had taken only a moment of time; and in a certain sense everything else that had ever happened to me was insignificant in comparison.
(Lewis, C.S., 1955/2008, p.16)

But it wasn't simply the strength of the words that was the problem. To recapture the moment was to hold it in time, but it was precisely its timelessness that made it what it was, and as Eliot reminds us; 'Words move, music moves only in time (1969, p.175); their very temporality rendering them unfit for the task. And it is precisely this problem of rendition that confounded the artist's struggle to 'say the unsayable'; to capture the ineffable and to pin it down. Inevitably, 'This sort of writing dwells on borders between things and awareness of things, between sensing and naming, between chaos and the mind's order.' (Bradbury, 1973, p.124)

And it was this struggle to articulate that borderland that characterised much Modernist art and fiction because, for its exponents, many of the assurances of post-Enlightenment thinking had been further assaulted by such a range of psycho-social challenges that classic theories of representation had been blown asunder. No longer might we assume a relatively direct relationship between the referent in the so-called real world, and the observer's apprehension of it; an assumption which underpinned the classic realist

tradition³³. Our worlds were prisms of refracted light, each shaped and coloured by the particular tones and hues with which our hopes and fears angled and shadowed our perceptions. As she noted in her post-graduate dissertation,

Woolf wanted to portray the absolute but was acutely aware of the difficulties of communicating even the experience of everyday life. In *The Waves* Bernard illustrates the problems of one's subjective response to the world:
'and when a pretty woman enters the restaurant and comes down the room between the table I shall say to myself, 'Look where she comes against a waste of waters'. A meaningless observation, but to me, solemn, slate-coloured with a fatal sound of ruining worlds and waters falling to destruction'.
(Fraser, 1976, p. 3)

As with the retrospective construction of any artistic or intellectual 'movement', there is always the risk of homogenising both major contradictions and the more subtle and nuanced changes in emphasis which characterise any tectonic shift with the past in order to claim degrees of coherence where much greater complexity reigns. Mindful of this, I must stress that the elements and characteristics of modernism pursued here are selected for their relevance to my theme, and should not be taken as indicative of the total realm of modernist expression. (It is also important to distinguish between 'modernism' and 'modernity'. The latter term refers to what Habermas calls the 'project of modernity [which] came into focus during the eighteenth century' (Harvey, 1990, p.12) and to which I shall return in chapter four.) As for 'modernism', what might be broadly claimed is that the period between the 1880s and the 1940s, in both Europe and America, witnessed a range of artistic, intellectual and technical explosions which radically altered our ways of seeing and of comprehending our world (e.g. Harvey, 1990; Hughes, 1980; Humm, 2002; Milner, 1971):

Virginia Woolf concerns herself both with visible and 'invisible' vision, with what contemporary physics was recognising in Einstein's theory of space-time, as kinesis, that is the flow of differing perspectives (Beer 2000)[...] G.E. Moore, encapsulated this issue of epistemological and cognitive uncertainty about materiality and sensation [...] What Moore's speculation pinpoints is the gap between our modes of cognition, the socially agreed designation 'blue' for a particular material hue, and our subjective experience.
(Humm, 2002, pp.1,3)

³³ This is not to simplify the struggles for meanings, relative or otherwise, which preoccupied pre- and post-Enlightenment thinking; Bacon, Locke, Hume and Kant were but a few for whom the nature of representation, the relationship between the 'knower and the known', were sites of deepest contestation.

Modernism's pre-occupation with such 'borders between things and awareness of things, between sensing and naming' (Bradbury, 1973, p.124) inevitably led to an outpouring of contested spaces and artistic expressions. Many artists, such as T.S Eliot, resolved such epistemological uncertainties by seeking the fount of transcendent possibility within the realms of the Anglican faith. Woolf, on the other hand, eschewed a religious interpretation in terms of understanding her 'moments', or 'shocks', for one she termed her 'philosophy':

at any rate it is a constant idea of mine that behind all the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we – I mean all human beings – are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art [...] we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. And I see this when I have a shock.
(Woolf; in Schulkind, 1976, p.72)

Whether the artist adopted a humanist or a religious interpretation for their 'shocks', or 'moments', both were positing, and struggling to articulate, the notion of a transcendent truth which lay behind, or beyond the limits of the material world and the language to express it. How can one communicate what one's medium is inadequate to articulate, except by framing a particular, and new, aesthetic? This means, in effect, an attempt to constitute an 'inner symbolism [...] certain portions playing in relation to the whole, the same part that the whole plays in relation to reality' (Bradbury, op cit p.23).

Woolf strove to shape her novels into some form of consummate whole that they might reflect, and prompt, a similar appreciation of the greater wholeness of which they were a part.³⁴ Eliot, on the other hand, sought both to shape and to signify further symbols of aesthetic completion so that their contemplation could afford us some apprehension of their transcendence:

Words move; music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness.
(Eliot, 1969, p.175)

The key point for my current purposes is that, whether the knowledge of transcendence was God-given or not, both artists held to the belief that some form of reality existed beyond the mundane. Whether divinely inspired or otherwise, perhaps these 'moments

³⁴ And in this I am reminded of Perdue's point in relation to studying wisdom which I noted on page 36 above: 'By means of the artistry of this elegant poem, [Proverbs] the poet shapes the order of the cosmos.' (Perdue, 2007, pp. 51,52)

of being', these 'shocks', afforded both Woolf and Eliot glimpses of what Aristotle, in talking of Sophia, 'declared [...] to be the highest form of life because of its concern with the eternal and unchanging' (Thiele, 2006, p.40).

I am not sure how far I can push this point, but I can confirm that Woolf's and Eliot's articulation of those moments afforded my youthful self both validation and another form of transportation; and for this adult self... perhaps... a place of homecoming:

Art lasts because it gives us a language for our inner reality, and that is not a private hieroglyph; it is a connection across time to all those others who have suffered and failed, found happiness, lost it, face death, ruin, struggled, survived, known the night-hours of inconsolable pain [...] Through the agency of the poem [...] I am no longer dumb, not speechless, not lost. Language is a finding place, not a hiding place.
(Winterson, 15.11.2008)

Or is it? Winterson is talking of language's power to reflect, to shape and to transport, but both Eliot and Woolf were clear about the limitations of its power to transcend. I shall now return to the personal nature of this writer's quest in pursuing her own 'finding place'; struggling as 'she' has been, during the intervening years, with both language's limits and its paradoxical promise of different ways of knowing.

Epistemological challenges

As I have already noted, our teenager, seeking the meaning of her 'moment of grace', chose to study philosophy as well as English literature, for surely, philosophy, 'the love of *sophia*', or loving wisdom, might show her the way. But it was not to be. Peter Abbs has spoken of a similar naivety in pursuing philosophy as a route to wisdom at a time when logical positivism and the modified logical empiricism held sway. In part rejection of Modernism's preoccupation with the transcendent, A.J. Ayer's, *Language, Truth and Logic*, had originally been published in 1936, yet the sweep of its denial of metaphysics, and any reality which could not be linguistically contained, was still much in evidence in the late 1960s and early 1970s:

Whenever I tried to speak about being or consciousness [...] I was curtly informed that what I had just said was 'non-philosophy'. The words I used, apparently, had no meaning. They were, apparently, private utterances and, unlike scientific statements, apparently, quite unverifiable.
(Abbs, 2003, p.65)

Our young student hadn't heard of Abbs in the early 1970s, but when her older self came across these words in 2005, a further link with her past was revived in the language of another. Such is the power of words, and what fitting refutation of Ayer's

particular form of empiricism that forty year old experiences should leap the bridge of time and live again in the mind of a stranger. Indeed, how else does art and literature 'work' except by transgressing the boundaries of our limited subjectivities, our refracted prisms, and demanding that further joint meanings are made?

But that very point goes to the heart of my struggles here: what is the relationship between the 'word' and our understandings of our place, time and history? To what extent does language circumscribe the limits of the 'knowable', and where does that leave the struggle to articulate the transcendent? If it is, literally, indescribable, then what status does the transcendent have as a place of knowing? I do not doubt the quality of the 'moments of being' described above, but should their articulation reside within the religious sphere and walk with faith and belief, rather than with 'truth' and 'logic', assuming the latter to require a degree of literal circumscription which, as we have seen, is not possible? If that is the case, then must we relegate those moments to the mystical, quasi mythical realm, and if so, what historical and cultural circumstances have prevailed to render that action a relegation rather than a promotion? This is a question which I shall pursue in chapter four, but for the moment, I shall try and connect the epistemological struggles of our teenager and young adult with the middle-aged adult educator who pens these pages.

In the almost four decades since the completion of her/my Masters, there have been fewer glimpses of such 'moments of being'. Modernism's acceptance of 'borders between things and awareness of things, between sensing and naming' (Bradbury, 1973, p.124) has been assailed by certain of postmodernism's conceits which would privilege endless signifiatory deferral rather than acknowledge the potential for a framework of transcendent referentiality. I must inject a note of caution at this point. Lest it appear that I am eliding the particular (and personal) with the general in some kind of empty and grandiose gesture, I must stress the difference between my own sense of loss in relation to accessing 'moments of being' and the signifiatory deferrals which characterise postmodernist and post-structuralist articulations. I am not eliding the two, but I am trying to articulate an ontological predisposition which inevitably shapes my epistemological choices. In other words, one of the key experiences of my seventeen year old self has reverberated across a lifetime in attributing meaning, and the search for meaning, within particular frames of reference. It is a disposition which is closer to home with the phenomenological and existential concerns as outlined by, for example,

Gendlin (1997) and Todres (2007) who draw, in turn, on the foundational works of Heidegger, Husserl and Gadamer:

My need to say a few words about Heidegger comes from my sense of how he at times, stood in the mystery of Being [...] and the extent to which he grounded the 'said' in the 'unsaid' – of how being-in-the-world always transcended its forms and intrinsically exceeded linguistic capture. So there is insight in understanding that sees through language to the excesses of living and being-in-the-world. The 'said' points to the 'unsaid': 'what is sayable receives its determination from what is not sayable' (Heidegger, 1975, p.78). (Todres, 2007, p.19)

There is a further difficulty, here, in that some might argue that the endless 'play' characterising postmodernist and post-structuralist potentialities for meaning-making is not at odds with the tension/balance between the 'sayable' and the 'unsayable' as outlined by Todres. I do not wish to become side-tracked by the limits, or otherwise, of post-structuralist articulations. I am more interested in the ways in which Todres' words seem to resonate with those of McGilchrist in the opening pages of this thesis:

So human experience has an open dimension that is 'more than words can say'. Within this tradition, Gendlin is very interested in this 'more than words can say' of experience and asks the question: What kind of knowing can be more faithful to the 'more' of the lifeworld? He was afraid that, in our Cartesian tradition, we would become prematurely abstract in the ways we categorised and divided up our experience, because this is what words do. Yet, like Heidegger, he is very respectful of the role of words in understanding, if language is given its proper place. (Todres, 2007, p.178)

However, I am suggesting that with meaning, and the potential for meaning increasingly understood to be constructed by the languages available to us, the potential for hearing and being mindful of, 'the breath of the impalpable' (Kelsey, in Fraser, 1976, p.1) has been significantly threatened. A possible rejoinder is the crude, but obvious, 'so what?' What use is the pursuit of the 'impalpable', when the suggestion of its existence is dependent upon a leap of faith that its 'breath' is anything other than the projections of artistic neuroticism masquerading as 'truth'? My response to the challenges posed by rejoinders such as these is that there is so much more at stake in this individual story of a 1970s schoolgirl than the mere telling of it implies. This is not to suggest that her experience is in any way representative of a more generalised and profound claim to meaning-making. Rather her experience offers a context within which to explore some of the consequences of the kinds of reductionism suggested above. And this brings me back to my concern as stated in the introduction. It is my contention that the framing of particular educational discourses is becoming so circumscribed that we are in danger of reducing our teaching and learning experiences to less 'than we can say'(op.cit). But I am also aware of the fact that my predisposition towards a belief in some kind of

transcendent potentiality, for which Sophia stands as metaphor, might tend me towards a kind of ‘splitting’ or unfounded polarisation which valorises the transcendent by caricaturing certain educational discourses as more reductive and limiting than others would find them. In other words, I must be mindful (as already noted) of the possibility that my ontological disposition, suffused with a particular sense of loss, could lead me into a kind of epistemological fundamentalism which is entirely at odds with my underlying quest.

Consequences for educational discourses

Bearing this in mind, it is important that I remain alert to my own totalising tendency towards extremes as my argument unfolds, and it is as much in the spirit of self-inquiry that I suggest that what I mean by ‘reductionism’ within educational discourses refers to a prevalence in the field of lifelong learning to diminish epistemological generation and exchange to the level of utility and instrumentalism, in the interests of economic gain. ‘In the house of the mind there are many mansions – and the aim of education must be to occupy and furnish all of them’ (Abbs, 1994, p. 44). My plea, therefore, is for a more holistic endeavour, which allows consideration of essence, immanence and transcendence; of mind, body and spirit. Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1990, p.36) offer a summary of their concerns which mirrors my own:

Unfortunately, wisdom is no more a priority now than it was at the time Socrates was invited to drink his hemlock. While specialized knowledge shows immediate effects, the benefits of wisdom are by definition slower to appear and less obvious. Knowledge is expressed in declarative certitudes, whereas wisdom must compare, raise questions, and suggest restraints. Hence wisdom rarely gets much respect and is seldom popular. Yet an evolutionary analysis suggests that unless we cultivate an interdisciplinary knowledge of our systemic needs, we shall not be able to understand what is happening, and we shall not be able to see what is good or bad for us in the long run.

I am suggesting that our key Western discourses have become increasingly constrained by the linearity of their progressive trajectory, (cf. Armstrong 2006; Davis-Floyd and Arvidson 1997; Grayling 2003; Mayne 2001), and this has been accompanied by an equally aggressive othering of non-Western lifeworlds. This ‘abyssal thinking’ as De Sousa Santos (2007) terms it has had, and continues to have, the most deleterious effects on our relationship to ourselves, our communities and our lifeworlds. It is also my contention that our current educational climate is exacerbating, not alleviating, this crisis. In order to analyse the ‘values’ which I regard as both ‘cherished yet threatened’ (C. Wright Mills op.cit.) it is necessary for me to try and re-research their inception and the factors which framed them. Only then might I be able to understand ‘what salient

contradictions of structure may be involved' (ibid.) and relate these to my concerns about adult education. I shall develop this particular strand in much greater detail in section two but, by way of introduction, I offer the following reflections.

It is forty years since my teenaged self experienced the 'moment' described above, and in the interim my professional life has largely been spent in the field of adult education. Firstly, in working for an educational charity where my roles included providing liberal education courses and thus the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, as well as promoting community education programmes which sought to generate opportunity for study for those who had been previously excluded. But the impact of socio-economic shifts throughout the seventies, eighties and nineties resulted in a narrowing of the discursive possibilities, and thence the real opportunities, within which to articulate educational provision. Commitments to fostering 'knowledge for life not livelihood' foundered on the Scylla and Charybdis of instrumentality and economic efficiency.³⁵ Recent years brought, for me, a move to higher education and the promise of greater research opportunities, but also demanded tutor training within an increasingly reductive educational framework. As Stephen Ball (2007, p.186) reminds us, 'Within institutions – colleges, schools and universities – the means/end logic of education for economic competitiveness is transforming what were complex, interpersonal processes of teaching, learning and research into a set of standardised and measureable products.' What follows provides a brief example of what Ball is referring to within my own professional purview.

In a prior exploration of experiential learning (Fraser, 1995b) I explored the impact of what I have later termed the 'tyranny of the learning outcome' (Fraser, 2009, 2011). In the earlier text, I outlined some of the impact that Bloom's (1956) taxonomy had had on formulating ways of measuring educational attainment. I was writing about the introduction of learning objectives within the pedagogic practices of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), and their later adoption by an extra-mural department of our local university. Both institutions were seeking ways of addressing the threats to non-accredited liberal provision following the curtailment of ring-fenced government

³⁵ I have to be mindful of a tendency towards 'golden age thinking'. Rose (2001/2) and Roberts (Ed. 2003) provide cogent reminder of the tensions inherent throughout the history of adult education in terms of its 'true' potential for change and liberation. This is a point I shall return to in succeeding pages.

funding in 1992. The impact of the changes that were wrought at that particular university will be further explored in chapter seven. At this point, I shall bring the discussion into the present and to the latest articulation of the learning outcome discourse as it affects my own Post Compulsory Department within the Education Faculty.

Current teacher training packages as delivered within our department are largely circumscribed by the, sometimes conflicting, demands of the inspection body, the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and the regulatory body currently called the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS). Thus, the two year tutor training course contains a number of current training shibboleths which must be delivered (and seen to be delivered) within the remit of the programme. Included in their number is the requirement that schemes of work and individual session plans, which detail the delivery of the programme and which we are obliged to model for our students, must contain SMART learning outcomes. The acronym is anything but, if we are to believe that learning comprises anything more than the delivery of pre-packaged units of knowledge which have been weighed and found appropriate to their mode of delivery. SMART stands for: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely. The session plan states the number of learning outcomes which will be met by the conclusion to the lesson. The formula is as follows: By the end of the session, *the student will be able to...* and the ideal outcome is couched in the language of action verbs or competences. Such pedagogic practices have been neatly summarised by Henderson and Kesson (2004, p.205) who point out that, ‘These sorts of mandates exemplify what we mean by disempowerment or deskilling and represent what we consider the triumph of the standardized management paradigm.’

There are obviously a number of problems with this, not least the fact that the discourse within which this particular requirement is couched assumes a number of propositions which frame our mode of educational delivery. The model suggests a behavioural conception of the human subject, its competence-based framework privileges (as the nomenclature demands) outcomes or products at the expense of process, and it is fundamentally utilitarian in intention and execution. Let us not forget that the word ‘education’ is derived from two Latin sources: educere and educare. The first privileges the process of ‘drawing out’ the learner, and might be seen as more reflective of an androgogic style of delivery. The second privileges ‘training’ or ‘inputting’ and was

originally reflective of the practice of ‘training someone to take their appropriate place in society’ (Jarvis, in Fraser, 1995b, p.43). As Henderson and Kesson also point out, one of the results of such a shift is that, ‘the present climate is not conducive to the pursuit of democratically liberating educational purposes’ (2004, p. 205).³⁶ Indeed, and in summary, these emphases on the means by which we, as teacher educators, are required to deliver the learning goods are directly antithetical to any potential for ‘unknowing’, or finding Sophia within our classrooms. I am aware that some might argue that a distinction between ‘education’ and ‘training’ could explain such reductive packaging of our tutor-training programmes. I would reply that if we are in the business of training teachers, then we should be availing ourselves of the best means of ensuring the potential for liberating our students, and that means revisiting the educere element in our understanding of our educational practices. Only then might we have the potential for, ‘a strong sense of an opening out of the mind that transcends detail and skill and whose movement cannot be predicted’ (Abbs, 1994, p.15). My fear is that such emphasis on technical up-skilling has stripped educational delivery of much of its meaning, mystery and magic:

Such deeper meaning, we argue, requires thought that is both complex and integrated – thought that cannot be packaged as items of skill-sets but that is imaginative and metarational. But how might we encourage such a shift in attention, which could assist in the recovery of wisdom and in the spaces where Sophia might be nurtured, nourished and encouraged?
(Fraser and Hyland-Russell, 2011, p.28)

My attempts at responding to such questions will comprise section two of this thesis. But I shall now turn to chapter three, and to the reasons why I feel that the shape of my thesis is helped and informed by what I term the ‘genea-mythic’. In Merrill and West’s (2009, p.156) analysis of *Using Biographical Methods in Social Research*, West draws on Hoult’s (cf. 2011) and my early struggles, ‘to find authentic authorial voices in an academic context when combining the personal with an intellectual register.’ As he says, quoting my work (p.157), ‘If the hand penning the lines is hers, as is the unifying sensibility, she is nonetheless part of an imaginative community, building on the inspiration and insights of many others.’ It is to this community that I shall now turn.

³⁶ This is a discussion that I shall return to in chapter five.

Chapter Three

In search of the 'genea-mythic'

'Co` leis a tha thu?' – 'Who do you belong to?'

Always, from those scattered white houses, it had made sense to go out and become a scholar or a poet or a teacher.
(Williams, in McIlroy and Westwood, 1993, p. 90)

In an effort to explain (duthcas) in English, the Royal Irish Academy's dictionary of the common Old Gaelic languages uses such terms as 'inheritance, patrimony; nature place or land; connexion, affinity or attachment due to descent or long-standing; inherited instinct or natural tendency'. It is all these things and, besides, the elevation of them to a kind of ideal of the spirit, an enduring value amid the change and erosion of all human things, all the more cherished in cultures like ours with the unbearable pain of past overthrow and present decline, and the spectre of imminent dissolution.
(Devlin, in Ross and Hendry, 1986, p.85)

Who is this, who is this in the night of the heart?
It is the thing that is not reached,
the ghost seen by the soul,
A Cuillin rising over the sea.

Who is this, who is this in the night of the soul,
Following the veering of the fugitive light?
It is only, it is only the journeying one
Seeking the Cuillin over the ocean...
(Maclean, S. 1988, p.129)

Introduction

As I noted on pp. 28 and 29 above, this chapter was the first to be written although, at first glance, one might query its relevance in a study of wisdom in adult teaching and learning. But in keeping with the spirit of ‘writing as inquiry’, I include it by way of exploring the potency of narrative in shaping a lifeworld; in this case, my own. The chapter concerns aspects of the lives of a particular extended family who were born on the Isle of Skye off the northwest coast of Scotland over a period of around seventy years. Their stories are located within a series of social, political and historical events, of greater and lesser magnitude, and they are re-told here, in part, and via access to a range of primary and secondary sources. Their stories are interwoven with the work of one artist, and mention of another, whose oeuvres add potent aesthetic and cultural dimensions to some of those conditions framing the family’s lives and experiences, whilst also providing thematic links to the broader concerns of my overall thesis. This offers a broader reading of what I term the ‘genea-mythic’ which itself poses further questions as to the potential for meaning-making of the autoethnographic approach. By exploring some of the experiences of one crofter and of his extended family, I hope to be better able to understand my own responses in relation to them. In this I am guided by Eliot; if I can forge some kind of meaning from such past experience, then that meaning,

Is not the experience of one life only,
But of many generations – not forgetting
Something that is probably quite ineffable:
The backward look behind the assurance
Of recorded history.
(Eliot, T.S., 1969, pp. 186,7)

As I say in my Introduction, my searching is not for the ‘right’ kind of narrative, however that might be articulated. I am seeking, instead, a different kind of truth and one which plucks the strings of that elusive instrument called ‘authenticity’. The data comprising this chapter are drawn from a number of different sources and operate across a range of registers: primary sources include the verbatim transcripts taken from the Minutes of the Napier Commission’s Report of 1884; memories and tales from within the local community; the census records of 1841; a first person narration; poetry; and photographs of the main ‘protagonists’ owned by one family member. Secondary sources include a diverse range of critical texts, histories, biographies as well as a novel cum autobiographical and philosophical exploration of particular ways of knowing. My intention is that together they combine to provide a nexus of opportunities for meaning-

making which are in keeping with the methodological underpinning to the whole thesis as I have argued in the Introduction. There, I acknowledged my debt to a number of writers who had helped me to explore the nature of the paradox which, I feel, characterises my relationship to my lifeworld and my attempted articulations of it. To reiterate that paradox, I feel a tension between my partial adoption of the relativisms of post-structuralism (an adoption undertaken largely in acknowledgement of the freedoms that such relativity might offer hitherto marginalised voices) and my ‘deeper’ need for a more coherent and sustainable base note. My challenge is to offer a fluid, partial, tentative, reflexive and subjective series of accounts whilst positing the potential for an epistemological underpinning which transcends these various partialities. The paradox, therefore, might be termed that between the development of a post-structuralist methodology to explore the potential for a content base which could offer certain ‘truthful’ readings. This is why I have chosen to work with autoethnography, and in particular, ‘writing as inquiry’, because I believe that there are sufficient grounds within these approaches to encourage different ways of seeing and knowing. In writing of the importance of reflective practice, Cheryl Hunt (2009d, p.130) states her belief that,

one of its key functions is to enable practitioners to grapple with their own meaning making so that they can say: ‘This is where I am now; this is how I got here, and these are some of the reasons why I think/feel/act as I do.

It is in this spirit that I now turn to a particular locality, and at a particular historical juncture, the better to understand how, ‘my subjectivity is filled with the voices of other people’ (Church, in Sparkes, 2002, p. 216). The choice of locality, historical juncture and the personalities involved will become apparent as my narrative unfolds.

A crofting family on the Isle of Skye

On a narrow stretch of land between the sea and Benlee, in the region known as Braes on the Isle of Skye in Scotland, there has been a home for at least two hundred and eighty years. In the late 1800s, the planting of hawthorn and rowan reflected the vestigial paganism still discernible within the Christian crofters’ cosmology: the former, ‘if cut, mustn’t be taken indoors’³⁷, the latter - the ubiquitous protection against evil spirits. At some point towards the end of the nineteenth century a large porch was added to the original three rooms, the better to accommodate successive families of between

³⁷ There are a number of tales and direct quotations throughout this chapter which are not attributed. They are taken from conversations with family members especially Bel and Greg Fraser and Agnes Douglas.

seven and nine people. When poet Sorley Maclean lived here, after his retirement and until his death in 1996, the house had more than doubled in size. Fellow poet and travel writer David Craig (1990, p. 37) enjoyed the

delicious civilisation of Renee and Sorley's sitting-room - walled with livid innocent paintings and with poetry of all vintages, its end window looking straight across and up the loch to Sgurr nan Gillean's fretted profile (the 'fire dragon with its four rugged headlong pinnacles', as he calls it in 'The Woods of Raasay'), the main window looking out across the Clarach to the dark length of Raasay.



Figure 4. The old croft house in Braes, Skye, in the foreground, with part of Sorley Maclean's extension behind it. (Photograph by WF 13/2/2006)

It was Sorley's great-great uncle who had 'planted the Hawthorn trees which stood beside the gate' (Hunter, J., 1999, p.314). 'A man of immense moral courage', Sorley called him (ibid), Angus Stewart had been the first witness to give evidence to the Napier Commission, of 1883, which had been charged by Prime Minister Gladstone to inquire into crofting conditions in the Highlands and Islands.

The 'Battle of the Braes', in April 1882, had become a cause celebre throughout Britain. It marked part culmination of the social unrest that had stirred the inhabitants of the three townships comprising the Braes' district. Seventeen years previously, in 1865, the ancient and traditional grazing rights to the pastures on Benlee had been taken from these poor crofters and given to a single tenant farmer on the orders of Lord Macdonald. Macdonald's actions added further insult to the crofters' already aggrieved sense of

justice. By the time of the Battle of the Braes, and as a result of the Clearances, the crofting townships comprising the area had been forced to embrace a number of dispossessed from other localities. Their available land, quite simply, was having to support a larger number of people. Macdonald's failure to return the rights, as promised, had resulted in the crofters' withholding their rents and putting their cattle to pasture. Writs were issued and threats of eviction made, but the crofters, encouraged by the passing of the Irish Land Act in 1881, stood their ground and, in April 1882, met the fifty policemen who had been sent from Glasgow to arrest the ringleaders (Cameron, A.D., 1986; Hunter, J, 1999; Mackenzie, A, 1883; Maclean and Carrell, 1986; Richards, 2002/2005):

With rain still lashing down, with yells and screams echoing all around, and with blood pouring from broken heads on both sides, the scene - as afterwards described - quickly took on the character of one of those conflicts in which the clans of three or four centuries earlier had so often engaged. (Hunter, 1999, p.310)

The 'battle' might have gone unnoticed, except in the locality, but 'improved communications' brought news of the fray, and of the crofters' grievances, to the growing numbers of newspaper readers throughout Britain (Hunter, *ibid.* p.311). And as Devine (1999/2006, p. 428) notes, there was a shift in attitude which could not be ignored;

the Battle of the Braes has come to be regarded as a historic event because it also signalled a decisive change of direction from past episodes of protest [...] (It) was proactive rather than reactive [...] The Battle of the Braes and other disturbances suggested that landlordism was now encountering a different type of opposition.

As unrest spread to other parts of Skye, Gladstone felt impelled to act, and the Napier Commission held its first meeting at the school house in Ollach, Braes, on Tuesday May 8th, 1883. The Commissioners on that day comprised: Lord Napier and Ettrick; Sir Kenneth Mackenzie; Donald Cameron (MP); C. Fraser Mackintosh (MP); Sheriff Nicolson and Professor Mackinnon. Mr Alexander Macdonald, factor for Lord Macdonald, was also examined (Highlands and Islands Napier Commission 1883). Such was the gravity and importance of the occasion that 200 of the local people 'managed to squeeze into the church used as a schoolroom' (Cameron, A.D. 1986, p. 7). But apart from representing a political milestone in the history of local and national land reform, the Minutes of the Napier Commission offer an unprecedented record of life in the north and west of Scotland. Between 8th May and 26th December, 1883, the Commission travelled the length and breadth of the Highlands and Islands; held 61 different

meetings; listened to the evidence of 775 people; recorded the evidence verbatim (often in translation from the Gaelic) which amounted to ‘3,375 pages of oral answers to 46,750 questions, placing on record everything the crofters and other witnesses had to say. This is something else, which in the Highlands and Islands at least, had never been done before’ (Cameron, A.D., *ibid.* pp. x, xi). The value of such documentary evidence cannot be overestimated; here were the stories of,

men who had been chosen by their fellows to speak for them on their conditions as crofters and who, but for this royal Commission, would have passed away, unrecorded in the pages of history [...] they gave details about their methods of farming and fishing, their stock and their crops, seasonal work and other work, their homes, their food and their fuel, family relationships, their community the township and, all too frequently, unfortunately, their poverty. What they said as individuals could be of interest to people searching for their ancestors: collectively their testimony is a uniquely precious body of evidence about crofting as a way of life which deserves to be better known.
(Cameron, A.D. *ibid.* p. xi)

The first witness, Angus Stewart, was one of four elected by the people of the townships of Peinchorran, Gedintailor and Balmeanach to speak on their behalf. After beginning in English, he then chose the Gaelic to relate his testimony, all of which is to be found in the *Minutes of Evidence Taken by Her Majesty’s Commissioners of Inquiry into the Condition of the Crofters and Cottars in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (1884) from which the following extracts come (pp. 1-10). In the interests of giving voice to this people’s representative, I have drawn upon his words at length in the following pages. This is his opening testimony and bears eloquent witness to the courage and integrity for which he was known:

I would wish that I should have an opportunity of saying a few words before I tell that, and that is that I should have the assurance that I will not be evicted from my holding by the landlord or factor, as I have seen done already. I would not have a fire in my house at Whitsunday. I want the assurance that I will not be evicted, for I cannot bear evidence to the distress of my people without bearing evidence to the oppression and high-handedness of the landlord and his factor.

Stewart’s fears of eviction were not without substance. The Clearances in the Highlands and Islands involved the forcible removal of people from their homes and lands. His comment that ‘I would not have a fire in my house at Whitsunday’ referred to the fact that such removals were effected both literally and symbolically; each home always kept a fire burning, a home without a fire was one without a soul. The common practice of the evictors was to pour the inhabitants’ precious milk supplies over the fire, thus performing a double act of desecration. The reference to Whitsunday illustrates the

speed with which Stewart feared his family's removal could take place; the date was Tuesday May 8th, Whitsunday was only five days away on May 13th.

After much procrastination on the part of the factor, Donald Cameron finally got the assurance that Stewart sought. Addressing Alexander Macdonald, Cameron stated that,

We have been appointed by the Queen to investigate this subject thoroughly, and it is impossible that we can do so unless we get proper evidence from witnesses such as Mr Angus Stewart. Now, I am sure you would not wish that the evidence should fail to be recorded from any disinclination on your part to give the assurance which has been asked by the chairman?

Macdonald acquiesced and Stewart bore witness. He spoke of that distress: he related the poverty,

The smallness of our holdings and the inferior quality of the land [...] and the best part of the land devoted to deer forests and big farms [...] I have seen myself compelled to go to the deer forest and steal thatch – to steal the wherewith to thatch our houses.

'Give us land', he urged, 'out of the plenty that is about for cultivation [...] Give us land at a suitable rent – at a rent within our power to pay'. Stewart spoke further, he asked that the people's fate be taken from the landlords and put under the government.

Kenneth Mackenzie continued the questioning:

What do you mean, or what do the people of the Braes understand, by 'being under Government'? – That the people, if they were under Government, would not be shuffled here and there, as they are now, and that they would not be huddled on top of each other.

Do you mean that the present landlords ought to be replaced by the Government? – What I mean is that the land laws should be altered.

Do you mean that the proprietors should be replaced by the Government? – Yes, that is what I mean. The queen should be the landlord.

Do you wish the queen to take possession of the whole country, or only the part of the land where the crofters are? – What I mean is that good landlords should be put on the land, and that the people should have the land given to them.

The results of the Commission's work have been documented elsewhere (see Hunter et al op.cit). It is Stewart's testimony which moves me here. The measured cadences and biblical references speak of the simple dignity and courage which so impressed Sorley Maclean. If 'culture is ordinary' (Williams, 1958/1989) then Stewart was a cultured man. His fears of reprisal were not unfounded. After concluding his evidence, there was some exchange between Stewart and Alexander Macdonald,

as Malcolm MacNeill, the Secretary discovered when he received this terse note: 'During the interval our factor cursed me to the face
angus stewart, Delegte.' (sic)

As a result, the factor felt obliged to make this further statement in public, guaranteeing the immunity of witnesses: 'I wish to say that witnesses have the very fullest opportunity of saying whatever they choose, true or false – I

leave it to themselves – without fear of anything whatever from anybody’.
(Cameron, A.D. 1986, p.9)

Of what Angus Stewart might have made of the suggestion that falsehoods might be uttered, history has left no record, though we are at liberty to speculate...

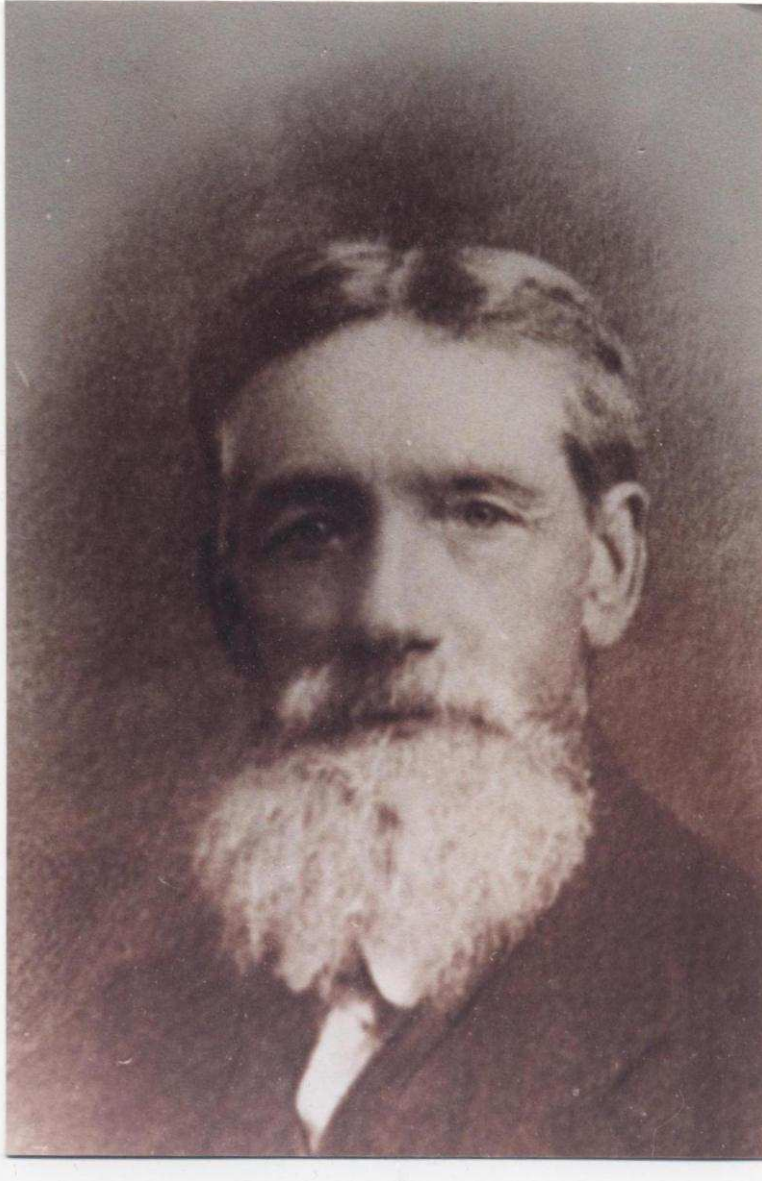


Figure 5. Picture of Angus Stewart – family possession (date unknown)

The Rent Roll of 1733 places the Stewart family in the township of Peinchorran, one of the three that comprised the district of Braes. It was the same croft that Angus was trying to defend one hundred and fifty years later. It is the same croft that was captured in the photograph on page 76 in 2006. According to the Census of 1891, Stewart was both crofter and ‘dealer in groceries’. Stories abound of the herring girls from North Eastern Scotland who were employed by him to help with the packing and exporting of the herring to Russia, although the term ‘dealer in groceries’ might leave the modern reader with the impression of both plenty and variety which was not the case. His

warehouse in the village housed the two staples of meal and herring but of what else might have been available there is no record. More stories tell of Stewart's generosity; when members of the community couldn't pay, the meal would be left at the house, the price would not be extracted. A literate family (his daughter, Shonac, wrote letters for her less literate neighbours), the Stewarts were known for their brains, 'more brains than most people had' Sorley attested (quoted by Macdonald in Ross & Hendry, 1986, p. 215). Shonac attended the school at Ollach as her children later did, in the same converted church building that had housed the Napier Commission. Certainly she was an avid reader, and one of her greatest pleasures was to receive the boxes of books that came regularly to the house from outwith the island.

It is tempting when looking into the eyes, and reflecting the measured gaze, of the 'spokesman crofter' to embrace the kind of elevated sympathy and respect that Sorley Maclean obviously felt for his ancestor. His words for the Commission were of undoubted importance in helping to establish a unique record of crofting life towards the end of the nineteenth century, and the fact that he was one of four chosen by his community suggests the man of courage, honesty and unimpeachable character that Maclean so respected. My intention is not to challenge that view, merely to acknowledge the extent to which the narratives I am drawing upon offer a particular kind of portrait which is consistent with the bravery and heroism applauded by Maclean. This is a narrative where the oppressed 'speak back to power' but I am also aware of the tantalising glimpses of the deeper complexities of the man illustrated in the following extract. If we return to the evidence of the Minutes of the Napier Commission, an exchange between Stewart and Lord Napier (as Chairman) gives further insight into the kinds of community tensions that reflected the realities of the Clearances. These are Stewart's words:

I remember the factor clearing a township and devoting the township's land to the purposes of the deer forest, - clearing them out of their houses and settling them down among the Braes, - from Tormichaig, Sconser. He settled a widow and her family down on my father's lot with the intention that my father would share with her the peats and the half of the croft, and that without my father being duly warned, being in arrears of rent. When he went to the factor to complain of this proceeding that factor told him that if he would not give her room he would not have a sod on Lord Macdonald's property by the term.

What is striking at this point is the fact that, despite such threat, Stewart's father remained adamant:

When he could not force this widow and her family upon my father there was a poor weakly man in our township who was put out of his holding for her

with his family. He was put out of his holding for this woman, and the woman was installed in his place. The poor man, with his weak family, was evicted, and he got the stance of a house outside the enclosure of the township.

One can only guess at the effects that such a series of events would have had on the young Stewart who was about nine or ten at the time. The fact that his father was not prepared to compromise his own family's resources, and to withstand the real threats of his own eviction, nonetheless resulted in the forced removal of a near, 'poor' neighbour. The needs of the widow must not be overlooked either, but the effects of her family's arrival must have had a profound impact upon the delicate network of affiliations and allegiances that characterised the lifeblood of such crofting communities. Stewart's words to the Commission, as translated and quoted here, suggest that his sympathies lay with his father and with the 'poor, weakly man' in his township. But three decades had passed since the events he describes, and his words also bear emotional testimony to the loyalty of a son, empathy for a near neighbour and a concomitant distance from the plight of the widow. What moves me, particularly, is the tension that these words convey between Stewart's political astuteness and courage in laying ultimate blame at the door of Lord Macdonald and his factor, whilst betraying some of the emotional complexity, resentment and, perhaps, even guilt that the sequence of events had wrought. Again, one can only guess at their impact, and at the ways in which they shaped Stewart's growing character and moral universe.

As we have seen, the Stewarts were better off than many but Angus had only daughters, seven in all, and four emigrated to Canada as so many had done before. Theirs would not be the fate of so many island women, 'The wives and children are the horses, the creel is on their back continually' (Cameron, A.D. 1986, p.87). Shonac inherited the house from her father and bore eight children, all of whom grew up in the older part of the croft house illustrated in the photograph. The thatch roof was replaced by felt, then by slate before Sorley's time...Angus Stewart died around the age of 76 in 1919³⁸; victim, with his sister, of the Spanish flu that swept across Europe after the First World War. Shonac's family remained in the house until finally selling it in 1941 and moving to the main town of Portree at a distance of about nine miles. This was a decision partly made so that the younger siblings might attend the high school, a privilege denied the

³⁸ The 1841 census states that Angus Stewart was then 3 months old; this would have made him 42 in 1883, not 40 as he claimed.

middle offspring because after paying for the two eldest, there was simply not enough money for board and lodgings in the town that school attendance there would demand. The house returned to a member of the extended family when it was bought by one of the, now generally acknowledged, greatest poets of the twentieth century. I shall return to Sorley Maclean in the second half of this chapter in my attempt at linking some of the themes and elements of his work to the themes, aims and intentions of this thesis, and in pursuit of what I term the 'genea-mythic'. For now, I shall stay with the family to whom he was related and who resided, before him, in the croft at Peinchorran, in the Braes. I had left them just as they had sold their house and moved to Portree in 1941. But it might add further flavour to the narrative were I to try and illustrate some other aspects of life on the croft at Peinchorran before that move by taking, as example, a few of the events which shaped the daily life and character of the third offspring.

Isobel, known as Belac in Gaelic, and then Bel in English, was born on October 9th, 1917 after her eldest sister Catriona and their brother Archie. She had been named after one of her mother's sisters who had emigrated to Canada in the first decade of the twentieth century. Bel's father, another Angus (Matheson) and a seaman had married Shonac in 1913. The tempo of their lives was measured by Angus's regular absence, as he worked on a steamer in the Clyde, and the demands of their croft. Self-sufficiency was still the aim of both individual families and the larger community. Each croft, or small holding, including Shonac's, usually had at least one cow and several sheep which were grazed on the common land on Benlee. Shonac and Angus's family also had a donkey, a labouring animal whose ultimate fate is lost to time. As Bel's grandfather, Angus Stewart's statement relates, 'the inferior quality of the land' (Minutes, pp.3, 4, 5) meant that,

all our earnings at the fishing we have to put into meal for the support of our families [...] because we have not land which will yield a crop [...] we will always need a Joseph in the south country to send us seed unless we get an extension of our holdings in that way [...] I think the crofter would be very well off who would have enough cultivated land to support his family in comfort, and that he should get as much money as would enable him to put between fifty and a hundred sheep on the ground [...] Four or five cows would do much good.

Whilst the results of the Napier Commission improved the security of the crofters' lives, Stewart did not see the desired improvement in the available land or an increase in individual families' numbers of cows and sheep. However, Shonac's management of the croft yielded cabbage, carrot, turnip and potatoes. The warehouse was gone by this time;

her growing family demanded all her available energy and resource. There was plenty of fish: herring, cod and salmon (poached) from nearby Loch Sligachan. The family also had a peat bog by the croft which provided year round fuel and a 'play place' for the children. Angus, when home on leave, enjoyed working with the wood and tools in his shed, and the making of household objects included the toy boats for the children which were sailed on the oily waters of the bog, as well as in the rock pools down by the shore.

Angus worked as a seaman for David MacBrayne Ltd, a steamship company that plied the waters of the Western Highlands and Islands. He was sometime 'acting first mate', and was based at Greenock on the Clyde. In 1935, the company bought the King George V:

Requisitioned for King and Country in the Second World War, KING GEORGE V served as a tender on the Firth of Clyde and also as a troop-transport in the Dunkirk evacuation, making six desperate dashes in May 1940. She further tendered on the Clyde when the mass-landing of Dominions and, later, USA troops were under way and she proudly carried the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, to his battleship en route to the celebrated Atlantic Conference with President Franklin D Roosevelt-where they drafted the "Atlantic Charter" that underpinned the Allied effort against Hitler and the subsequent rise of the United Nations. For their heroism at Dunkirk her master, Captain Maclean, and her chief engineer, Mr W Macgregor, were awarded the DSO and her bo'sun, Mr Mackinnon, the DSM.

(http://www.shipsofcalmac.co.uk/h_king_george_v.asp)

The part that ordinary seaman, Angus Matheson, played in this stirring narrative of history-making and 'derring-do' I shall explore below. But now, I shall return to the daily round at the croft in Peinchorran in the second and third decades of the twentieth century.

The children went daily to the school house at Ollach, a distance of almost three miles each way, and a journey undertaken in either bare feet or, in the winter, in big, 'tackety' boots. For Bel, school was a mixed blessing. There were two teachers looking after about 32 children. One of them, Alistair Finlayson, who also served as headmaster, was Shonac's first cousin. This meant that any misdemeanour perpetrated by the Matheson children would be reported to their mother, and punishment, comprising a hearty slap to bottom, was as inevitable as night follows day. This was particularly challenging to Bel, for whom the word 'mischievous' might have been invented. One of her favourite games was to throw the thick leather straps, kept and used by the headmaster for the disciplining of the boys, up and into the wooden rafters of the vaulted roof. Aim and

intention were clear; successful throws meant that the straps would remain hooked in the rafters and the headmaster would be thwarted in both intention and execution when next tempted towards a thrashing. Other pastimes included climbing onto the roof of the house of one of Peinchorran's most 'grumpy' old men and throwing snowballs down the chimney and into his pot of porridge which would be hanging by the fire.

At the age of fourteen, and despite the appeals of the headmaster who claimed that Bel was cleverer than her two older siblings, high school was not an option. There was simply not enough money to cover the costs for a third child to be educated in the main town of Portree, even if she had won a bursary. She left the school in Ollach and was sent as housekeeper to another of Shonac's cousins, Donald Finlayson, Alistair's brother, who was headmaster at Kilmuir, a village in the north of the Island. The fact that Donald had to teach her how to boil an egg may or may not provide a clue as to her housekeeping abilities at this age. A year or so later, and with some more experience to call on, Bel went as housemaid to General Harry, another Macdonald and established member of Skye society, who lived in a large house called Redcliff by the bay in Portree. At the age of sixteen, but still too young to begin nurse training, Bel went to stay with her Aunt Peggy in Glasgow. One of the highlights of her visit was watching the launch of the Queen Mary from John Brown's shipyard at Clydebank on September 26th, 1934.



Figure 6. The school at Ollach. Bel is second row from front, third from left. (Family photograph).



Figure 7. Some of the children of the Braes in approx. 1926. Bel is the one on the donkey - note the bare feet and 'tackety' boots. (Family photograph).

Meanwhile, back on Skye, another family had moved on to the Island. William Fraser, like his father Norman before him, had been a gamekeeper on the Duke of Sutherland's estates in Kildonan in the County of Sutherland on the Scottish mainland. William applied to the then Lord Macdonald to act as gamekeeper for his deer estate at Sconser, on Skye, just across the loch from Braes, and in about 1932 with his wife, Alexandra, and their three sons, he came to Skye to take up his post and moved into the gamekeeper's cottage near the hunting lodge. Sources vary, but the lodge had been built sometime between 1871 and 1884 to accommodate various parties from the south who came to the extensive deer forest which, by then, had been effectively cleared of people. Indeed, this was the deer forest that Angus Stewart had stolen thatch from for his roof, and it was the clearance of the people from the adjoining villages, including Tormichaig, that had brought the widow and her family to Peinchorran.

In 1896, in 'The Deer Forests of Scotland', Grimble described the 'Forest of Macdonald, or Sconser, Broadford in the following terms,

This is an ancient forest of nearly 10,000 acres, belonging to Lord Macdonald, and at present let to Mr. A.H. Sharp, in whose rental is included the wages of four keepers, all rates and taxes, and the up-keep of the lodge. It is mostly rough, bare, black, moorland ground, cut up by precipitously rocky hills, of which the highest is 2,600 ft. [...] There are no crofters on this

property, but the tourists are very troublesome, keeping the deer constantly on the move, and spoiling many stalks, so that the average kill is but twelve stags a season [...] This property has been in the hands of the Macdonald's of Sleat for several centuries, and although there have been other claimants to the proud title of "Macdonald of the Isles", the honour rests at this day with the present owner of Sconser.

www.archive.org/stream/deerforestsofsco00grimrich

When the Frasers arrived in the 1930s, and despite the tone and tenor of accounts such as Grimble's whose class allegiances are quite clear, Sconser supported a small village. The economics of the time meant that employment was taken where it was available; even Angus Stewart's brother had worked as a gamekeeper on the mainland, and one of Angus Matheson's siblings served Lord Macdonald in the same capacity on another part of his estates in Braes. But the Frasers were to provoke a degree of resentment when they took over the management of Sconser Lodge, at the behest of Macdonald, and ran it as a hotel. Alexandra was chiefly employed in its running, with her sons, whilst William retained his job as gamekeeper. This was a rise in fortunes that rather irked some good people of Sconser, and some in Braes across the water, who described William as 'having an air about him'.

The history of Scotland is marked by a number of splits and schisms not least that which drew a fault line between the Lowlands and the Highlands and Islands. The various threats which Jacobinism had posed to the security of the government in Edinburgh, and the interests of the English monarchy throughout the first five decades of the eighteenth century, had resulted in the extirpation of thousands of Highlanders and their way of life. After 'Bonnie Prince' Charlie's defeat at Culloden on 16th April 1746, revenge was swift and merciless. William of Orange's son, the Duke of Cumberland, known as 'the Butcher', went to work. Devine (2006, p.45) notes that:

At first Cumberland was attracted to a strategy of wholesale transportation of the clans to the colonies, but then he opted instead for a scorched-earth policy of burning, clearance and pillage [...] Even clans loyal to the Crown were not immune from the relentless depredations which lasted for nearly a year after Culloden.

Another fault line was that between the Catholics and the Presbyterians. Devine (p. 47) goes on to argue that,

by far the most effective propaganda agents for government were the Presbyterian clergy of the west, central and south-east Lowlands, effectively the economic heart of Scotland. They stoked up fears that the return of the House of Stuart would bring in its train an autocratic papist regime that would threaten both the 'liberty' and 'true religion' of Presbyterian Scots.

But fault lines are never clear cut; the influence of Presbyterianism spread throughout the Highlands and Islands bringing with it a different kind of allegiance and a commitment to the importance of education, an emphasis for which Scotland is still known today. By the time of our current story, at the beginning of the 1930s, there was room on Skye for Catholic, Protestant and Presbyterian worship. But one might also posit a genetic disposition, firmly rooted in a symbolic if not literal double-helix, which marked a complex conservatism yet one tinged with more than a flavour of the individual spirit, commitment to community and potential for radicalism. The notion of 'class' as usually discussed south of the border, or even south of the Highlands, was not articulated in quite the same ways. In the 1880s there had been clear distinctions between the crofters, such as Angus Stewart, and the cottars; the latter were sub-tenants of the former who, in turn, were 'confined to those who possessed holdings of more than £6 and less than £30 per annum' (Devine, 2006, p.430). The differences between these two were ones of small degree; the largest distinction remained between both and the landlords. By the 1930s, and partly as a result of the effective spread of education, the communities in Skye and elsewhere could envision the possibility of their offspring aspiring to the professional middle classes if, as we have seen, there were sufficient resources for their schooling. However, such potential aspirations did not obviate a concomitant potential for some small degree of envy and resentment. Such were the feelings of some towards the rise of the Fraser family who now managed one of Lord Macdonald's properties. However, this was a feeling which might have been exacerbated by the predisposition on William Fraser's part to believe in the existence of fairies. Now such a statement is not reflective of a problem per se; acceptance of second sight and of ghosts were, and are, commonplaces to this day, and predispositions from which even this writer is not immune. (Whilst holidaying on Skye in the summer of 2011, I was disturbed by the late night arrival and then disappearance of a large white vehicle by the window at a trajectory which, in the broad light of day, could not have happened. Visiting the council offices the following morning to pay a bill, I asked if there were any sightings of ghost cars at present on the Island. 'Well, there's one over in Edinbane', replied the council officer, 'and another was spotted by Uig', added a customer in the queue. This is not the stuff of conversations in council offices in other parts of the UK with which I am familiar.) But to return to William, it was not the fact of his belief that was the main problem, it was the fact that he accused Shonac's brother-in-law of putting a hex on a cow that William had bought from him. Rory Nicolson was married to Shonac's sister Agnes, and they farmed at a place called

Shullishader just outside Portree. William had bought the cow from Rory which had then refused to yield milk. The hex was the only available conclusion, and William demanded recompense. How the affair ended has now been buried with the main protagonists, but a certain suspicion remained in Angus Matheson's heart about the reliability of the Fraser family. Nonetheless, and in the way of these things, the youngest son fell in love with Bel when he first saw her getting out of a rowing boat in the pouring rain at the jetty by the hotel, 'looking like a drowned rat', and determined to marry her.

Donald Fraser, or Greg as he was usually known after another of his patronyms, Macgregor, had also left school at fourteen, but had been tutored at home for a number of months prior to that because of a long-standing illness which was only later acknowledged as probably having been Tuberculosis (TB). Greg lost the use of one lung, although the cause was not spoken of because TB was thought to be an illness brought on by poverty and therefore of something to be ashamed. Throughout the thirties, and deeming the hotel to be unable to support all three sons and any potential families, Greg did what so many Highlanders had done before and moved south to Glasgow. He took a variety of jobs, including working in a mental hospital, and stewarding on a transatlantic cruise ship where he learned to be a wine waiter in even the 'stiffest' gales. But with the declaration of War in 1939, he and his brother Norman joined the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). The following story was sent by him to his niece by marriage who had asked for war tales of her grandfather, Angus Matheson. It is repeated *literatim*:

Dear Catherine,

Now, my dear, you ask me for the story of Grandad's trips to Dunkirk. I fear it would take a more gifted writer than I to do justice to that story but I will try to tell you how he rescued me. You will understand that it all happened forty-two years ago and I can't be too sure of exact dates, but my story starts early in May 1940 when, after nine months of a very peaceful war, everything went haywire. My unit was suddenly ordered into Belgium and, for some three weeks we were constantly on the move. The War Office described the situation as "fluid", it sounded better than "chaotic" which it really was! Anyhow we eventually arrived on the beach at Dunkirk on the night of 28/29 May. It was dark when we got there and were told to "dig in" and wait for daylight when ships would arrive to take us home. My brother and I and two pals who had been with us from

the start dug a nice big hole in the sand, lined it with groundsheets, sat down in it and went to sleep. German bombers were hammering Dunkirk and it was blazing. There was quite a bit of noise but we were too tired to bother. I wakened at daylight to see the beach looking like Brighton on a summer weekend: you could see thousands of people standing, *sitting or lying on the sand. I said, "There must be a hundred thousand men down here"*. I was told to shut up and stop talking rubbish as that would mean almost the whole British Army. However, I actually underestimated the number as there were somewhere around 335,000 officers and men taken off that beach in the next four days. We had no food or water and, by the end of that third day we were kind of thirsty. All we had to drink was a jar of service rum. The more we drank the greater our thirst became but it was good anaesthetic! German planes were bombing and shooting at us all the time but we viewed them through a rummy fog and were not too worried. We watched ships coming and being sunk and our hopes of seeing the mountains of Skye again began to grow dim. However, on the fourth day we were told to join one of the queues which had formed at the water's edge and, under the direction of a naval officer, we made our way to a jetty where a ship was waiting. As we walked along my brother and I saw a soldier lying on a stretcher, he had been wounded and left on the sand. We picked him up and took him aboard with us. He was in a bad way and gasping for a cigarette. I lit one and gave it to him and then went to look for a cup of tea. As I stood *up and looked round the first man I saw was granddad. I just couldn't believe it but my* hopes of seeing Skye again got a real boost. His ship had made at least eight trips, maybe more, and this was the last. By this time there were very few men left on the beach. The wooden pier to which the King George V had tied up had been smashed by *bombs and we literally had to "walk the plank"* to get aboard. There were almost five hundred small ships, cabin cruisers, pleasure boats and launches and the real heroes of Dunkirk were the men who crewed them. To sail repeatedly through mine fields and under constant attack from German bombers and fighters into the inferno that was Dunkirk took a special kind of courage. It is a story that, to my mind, has still to be written. The captain of the King George V received a medal, but every man aboard deserved one.

It was a long time later that we discovered that the chap we picked off the sand was a brother of a great friend of ours.

Well, my dear, that, very briefly, is the story of Dunkirk. I am no great shakes as a writer and could tell it better or in more detail if I were speaking to you. Maybe when we meet again!

Greg

28 January 1982

Whilst Greg was waiting for rescue from the beach at Dunkirk, Bel had already completed her four year nurse training at Western District Hospital in Glasgow, although she wasn't awarded her Certificate until 31st May 1940. She had followed her sister, Catriona, into the profession partly because, with free training, board and lodging, nursing was one of the very few careers open to women who had left school at fourteen, 'that's why there were so many nurses'. With the outbreak of war, Bel's duties took on a new dimension. Convoys of wounded Polish soldiers arrived at the hospital; on one occasion, their arrival was predicted by Lord Haw Haw who described the crack in the wall of the ward that was to house them, whilst also describing the German bombers that would obliterate the now empty ward once the soldiers had arrived. As many nurses as possible were evacuated to a pub just outside the city, where they spent the night singing, dancing and having fun, "We were young", Bel said later, "we never believed anything would happen to us". This was an attitude that Bel claimed remained with her throughout the War, even when serving on ambulance duty during the worst of the Glasgow blitz.

Bel and Greg were married in the city on March 26th, 1942. Greg was later posted to Colchester in Essex where his duties included training soldiers in the use of small boats. Bel went with him and carried on nursing. After the War, Greg joined the civil service and began a career with the Ministry of Defence which took him, in 1957, to Helmstead, on the East/West German border, with Bel and their three year old daughter.



Figure 8. Bel and Greg's Wedding Day March 26th, 1942

Figure 9 Dunkirk in May/June 1940 and in 2010-top three pictures
Copyright Dunkirk Museum, Dunkirk, France, others photographed by WF



Such juxtapositions serve as poignant and potent reminder of history as palimpsest...

Sorley Maclean and his poetry

Sorley Maclean, Angus Stewart's great, great nephew, was born on the neighbouring island of Raasay in 1911. Seamus Heaney, in his introduction to a critical assessment of Maclean's legacy (in Ross & Hendry, 1986, p.5), writes of his 'epic poet's possession of ground, founders, heroes, battles, lovers, legends, all of them at once part of his personal apparatus of feeling and part of the common, but threatened ghost-life of his language and culture.' Maclean's choice to work in Gaelic rather than English was a profoundly political decision, and further marked the integrity with which he articulated the sufferings of his people. His bardic role as chronicler, and the intensity of his sometimes chivalric love poems, might suggest an anachronistic, even archaic singer of worn out songs. But this is to belittle the immensity of his contribution to the Gaelic Renaissance of the twentieth century and of his standing as one of Europe's greatest voices. He turned down an OBE in 1976; he was awarded the Queen's Medal for Poetry in 1990; and nominated for the Nobel Prize in 1992 (which was won by Derek Walcott); he was writer in residence at Edinburgh University; and the focus of various films of which the most important are 'Sorley Maclean's Island' (1974) by Douglas Eadie and 'Hallaig' (1984) by Tim Neat (cf. Mackay, 2010, p.25).

The existential anguish at the heart of much of his work is one of the markers of his modernism. His 'urgency to name springs from a sense of crisis, either personal or communal' (Heaney, *ibid.* p.5). Another is the ways in which words, language, metre and rhyme embody his meanings in a material sense: for Maclean, the act of 'naming' is a crucial one and reflects the importance of the poet's responsibility to his community. But Maclean was interested in more than reviving the vibrancy and importance of the language of the Gaels; his choice of subject matter reflected his profound belief in, and commitment to, a political and cultural enterprise which sought to challenge and confound the marginalisation of his people and his community on the literal and metaphoric fringes of the British Isles and Europe. As Mackay (2010, p.30; original emphasis) explains,

Maclean's work compounds Gaelic models with themes, styles and motifs taken from European literature, history, philosophy and politics. His work does not offer a rejection of the previous centuries of Gaelic literature, but instead functions as a conduit between different literary, historical and cultural traditions or milieu. As Ronald Black notes [...] Maclean provided a richly allusive way for his audience outside Gaelic civilisation to understand its dynamic, and for those inside Gaelic civilisation to set themselves and their traditional concerns in a larger international, even cosmic, perspective. (Black, 1999)

Even the best English translations fail to do justice to the full muscularity and sensuality of his verse. Yet the agony as he bears witness to the agon of his people through poverty, eviction, clearance and slavery³⁹ can be felt in lines such as the following:

Great Island, Island of my desire
Island of my heart and wound,
it is not likely that the strife
and suffering of Braes will be seen requited
and it is not certain that the debts
of the Glendale Martyrs will be seen made good;
there is no hope of your townships
rising high with gladness and laughter,
and your men are not expected
when America and France take them.

Pity the eye that sees on the ocean
the great dead bird of Scotland.
(Maclean, S, 1981, p.74)

Thus, one of Maclean's greatest achievements, and gift to Gaeldom, was his ability to universalise from the local; his community, his culture, was his well-spring, but it fed and informed his responses to the horrors and madnesses of the twentieth century. Whilst family responsibilities prevented him from fighting Franco, he served in World War Two and was severely wounded at El Alamein, (Caird, in Ross and Hendry 1986, p.43). His hatred of fascism and colonialism and his early espousal of communism were also nurtured by an upbringing in the Free Presbyterian Church; his 'natural pessimism' was,

probably engendered by my religious upbringing and a hatred of elitism, social elitism and all that made me equate what was happening then to the politics I had learned from the traditions of the Land League, and especially the traditions in Braes.
(Hendry in Ross and Hendry, 1986, pp.18,19)

An example of such 'universalism', of Maclean's ability to align global horror to the particularities of his own time and place, is seen in the following selected stanzas from the English translation of *A' Bheinn Air Chall*, The Lost Mountain:

The mountain rises above the wood,
lost in the wood that is lost,
and we have been broken on the board of our sun
since the skies are tight [...]

³⁹ 'poverty, eviction, clearance and slavery'. We are familiar with the horrors of the slave trade, but perhaps less familiar with the trade that was being carried out on the shores of our own islands. There are many documented cases of men, women and children being kidnapped as they worked in the fields, or on the shores, and being sold as indentured servants in the New World. There is the story, perhaps apocryphal, of the young woman taken as she gathered seaweed at the shore in Gesto, Skye. Years later a soldier in a Highland regiment in the Americas stopped to ask a woman the time. He asked in English, then in French. Finally he tried Gaelic; she turned to him and replied that it was the time the sheep were enfolded on the mountain at home...

Because Vietnam and Ulster are
heaps on Auschwitz of the bones,
and the fresh rich trees
pins on mountains of pain.

In what eternity of the mind
will South America or Belsen be put
with the sun on Sgurr Urain
and its ridges cut in snow?
(Maclean, 1981, 85 pp.165,6)

The levels of sophistication in Maclean's work are exemplified in his struggles to find appropriate ways in which his art might do justice to the profound metaphysical and existential challenges which had shaped his own lifeworld within the broader political seas and oceans of history. Those challenges were threefold: his need to bear witness to the fortunes of his people and their sorrows; to relate such particular suffering to what might be termed, 'the broader human condition'; and to find means of artistic expression which evaded the easy seduction of works and attitudes characterised as the 'Celtic Twilight' which he disparaged: 'lack of realism usually comes not from emotion but rather from a lack of emotion, whose place is taken by mere fancifulness, day-dreaming, wish-fulfillment (sic), or weak sentimentality' (Maclean quoted in Mackay, 2010, p. 96).

As Mackay has so clearly elucidated, these struggles were lifelong. Maclean's earlier fervent espousal of communism found expression in poems such as 'An Cuilithionn' which was criticised for a political stridency which destabilised its integrity as art. His later renunciation of communism was thence marked by a poetry which strove to articulate 'the deepest and barest truths about the Highlands, as if their desolations spoke through him' (Smith quoted in Mackay, 2010, p.88), but without the possible consolations of a crude political optimism. Loss is at the heart of Maclean's work; it is a measure of the man, both as poet and as witness, that such intensity of loss found expression in some of the greatest literary art of the twentieth century. But before I explore his work in a little more depth, there are other epistemological and methodological challenges besetting his oeuvre which are also relevant to my broader thesis. Once again, I am indebted to Peter Mackay's excellent critical biography:

This historical poetry operates on a spectrum between a purportedly personal relationship with the past – acts of remembering, whether through personal memory or an imagined 'communal' memory stretching back centuries – and a formal, bardic evocation of the past (especially when the past is presented as a means for interpreting the present) [...] for the average twenty-first century reader the poems' emphasis on the clan as a significant trans-historical entity is alien and alienating.
(Mackay, 2010, p.86)

Mackay's point is that were we to substitute the idea of 'race' for that of 'clan', then we are alerted to the 'troubling overtones' which might be read into Maclean's work. Of course, the kind of clannish exceptionalism suggested here, never mind the more sinister racist implications, ran totally counter to Maclean's intentions, as Mackay goes on to show, but it is important in terms of the methodology of this thesis that I remain alert to potential accusations of either exceptionalism or the kind of foggy nostalgia associated with the Celtic Twilight. I shall return to the issue of 'an imagined 'communal' memory stretching back centuries' (ibid) in my conclusion to this chapter; whilst I have adopted its use as both literary and methodological tool, I can only do so by proffering robust defence of its potential epistemological usefulness.

But for the moment, I would like to return to one of the key themes of Maclean's work, and of this thesis; the issue of loss, in terms of both cause and representation, and of what such experience of loss might mean in relation to the kinds of knowledges available to us. I am not a Gaelic speaker and, unfortunately, I must rely on translations of Maclean's work in the hope that the tone and tenor, at least, of his power and meaning comes across to the reader. Once again, I am particularly indebted to Mackay's (2010) critical assessment which I shall pick up again with his analysis of 'Cuil-Lodair 16.4.1946 (Culloden 16.4.1946) which was written to mark the bicentennial of the carnage which marked the end of Bonnie Prince Charlie's attempts to wrest the throne for the Stuarts:

‘Ach ‘s e bh’ ann ach am bristeadh
do chinneadh nan G’aidheal
is cha d’ dh’fhas air an raon seo
ach craobh sheargte an `anraidh

[but it was a breaking/ to the race of the Gaels/and there grew on this slope/
only the withered tree of misfortune.] (Maclean 1999a, pp. 222, 3).

The poem goes on to question whether it was the disaster of Culloden that marked the beginning of the dissolution and desolation of the Gaels, but '(leaves) the question hanging. The overall effect, rather, is of cumulative sorrow' (Mackay 2010, p.88):

‘n call aig cuil-Lodair
thug an grodadh ‘s na faoillich
a dh’fh’ag G’aidhealtachd na h-albhann
‘na dachaidh gun daoine

[the loss at Culloden / that brought the rotting in midwinter / that left the
Gaeldom of Scotland / a home without a people.] (Maclean 1999a, pp.220,1)

One of the ways in which Maclean manages to avoid a tendency within aspects of the Celtic Twilight towards that ‘weak sentimentality’ that he criticises, is to root his poetry of loss into a tight symbolic use of landscape:

This technique of grounding historical consciousness in the Highland landscape is used throughout Maclean’s historical, political and visionary poetry [...] to the extent that [...] the social history of the Highlands becomes implicit in and synonymous with the landscape [...] Again and again in Maclean’s work it is in specific places that history is re-membered and kept alive, and – similarly – it is only through attentiveness to history that understanding of place can come.
(Mackay, 2010 pp. 90,91)

Nowhere is this tight use of symbolism used with more effect than in his most famous poem ‘Hallaig’ which was written in 1952 and first published in 1954. Although the work for which he is, perhaps, best known, the poem is nonetheless one of the most difficult for both Gaelic and non-Gaelic admirers. Maclean had been drawn to the work of the late nineteenth century French Symbolists, and to some of the more uncompromising imagism of Eliot and Pound. The attraction lay in aligning meaning to metaphor with such intensity that the reader is transfixed by the adamant demands of the poet’s vision. Here, simile is abandoned as offering too poor a construction to do justice to the artistic needs of the composition: ‘Tha tim, am fiadh, an coille Hallaig’ / Time, the deer, is in the wood of Hallaig’ (Maclean, 1981/85, pp.142, 3). ‘Time’ is not like the deer, ‘time’ is the deer, and thus can be halted at the end of the poem by the final pen stroke of the poet. For reasons of space, I shall limit my reference to the last four stanzas to Maclean’s own English translation (ibid. pp.144, 5):

From the Burn of Fearnas to the raised beach
that is clear in the mystery of the hills,
there is only the congregation of the girls
keeping up the endless walk,

coming back to Hallaig in the evening,
in the dumb living twilight,
filling the steep slopes,
their laughter a mist in my ears,

and their beauty a film on my heart
before the dimness comes on the kyles,
and when the sun goes down behind Dun Cana
a vehement bullet will come from the gun of love;

and will strike the deer that goes dizzily,
sniffing at the grass-grown ruined homes;
his eye will freeze in the wood,
his blood will not be traced while I live.

Of course, the symbolism here is operating at a number of levels, and many are not available to a reader who does not share the cultural framework within which the powerful metaphor of the deer is held, and which ‘has an ever-shifting place in the ecology, history and song-literature of the Highlands.’ (McCaughey quoted in Mackay, 2010, p.141). But there is another realm in which the symbolism is operating which offers a point of view to the general reader which transcends the limitations of cultural specificity, if we are willing to be so transported:

The poems create symbols which can be seen to touch a communal or – in the case of the most powerful, ‘Hallaig’ – a universal nerve; this is despite – or rather precisely because of – the fact that their complex symbolism does not work on the level of conscious understanding or reason.
(Mackay, *ibid.*p.96)

This theme of the potential universality of art echoes some of the preoccupations of chapter two, and of an appeal beyond ‘conscious understanding or reason’; but I would also wish to point to the means by which Maclean’s use of his art offers some consolation, however transient, for the cultural, historical, political (and personal) losses he portrays. As John Macinnes notes, the poem is ‘redemptive in that destructive time is itself destroyed in the vision of love that transmutes experience into the timelessness of art; but tragic, too, in that this transcendence is bounded by mortality’ (quoted in Mackay, 2010, p.141). Or is it? Perhaps, one of the paradoxes of Maclean’s relationship to the power of art lies in its potential to outlive the pen of the poet. And yet, the extent to which Maclean can ‘stop time, by love’s shooting of the deer’ is surely dependent upon the appreciative readership of his fellow Gael; thus, the fortunes of the poem are aligned with the potential longevity of the Gaelic tongue. Maclean’s intellectual sophistication, and his power as poet, is also illustrated in his analysis of the kinds of knowledges which are available to us. Whereas the artist might strive to offer some kind of transcendent possibility concerning the power of art to both stop time, whilst lamenting the loss of time’s effects on a dying culture, Maclean also saw the artist as elucidating the limitations which characterise the human condition. In articulating these concerns, Maclean’s cultural and religious inheritance, as well as his gendered embodiment, finds expression.

Maclean is also renowned for his love poetry and, in particular, for a kind of courtly idealisation of the unattainable female. Based on his personal experiences with two particular women, Maclean utilises these poetic tropes to explore the nature of desire and its consequences. Whereas we have noted his symbolic transmutation of the

landscape into loss, he has also appropriated his environment as a means of exploring the relationship between desire and knowledge:

‘Coilltean Ratharsair’ [The Woods of Raasay] is Maclean’s most extended poetic exploration of (this) relationship [...] Desire, pride [‘ardan] and burgeoning sexual awareness disrupt a Paradisal state in which the narrator is at one with the natural landscape [...]The narrative is not, like that of Genesis, of a fall into knowledge; rather, the hunt leads to the repeated negation of knowledge: ‘chan eil e’ol air an t-slighe...chan eil e’olas, chan eil e’olas’

[there is no knowledge of the course...there is no knowledge, there is no knowledge] (Maclean 1999a: 182-3). As grasping after knowledge precipitates the fall, so after the fall knowledge is impossible. (Mackay, 2010, p.122)⁴⁰

This series of accounts of aspects of individual lives in relation to the larger events of history which both framed and shaped them, have been related from a number of sources including the personal anecdotes of the people concerned and their families. Before returning to the question of methodological legitimacy, I would like to draw upon another narrative strand which can also throw light on the kinds of experiences and preoccupations that coloured the lives of crofters in the north of Scotland in the latter part of the nineteenth century and into the first decades of the twentieth.

Neil Gunn

Neil Gunn (1891-1973) wrote a number of short stories, essays, plays and novels, of which the best known include *Highland River* (1937) and *The Well at the World’s End* (1951). *The Serpent* was written in 1943, and I have chosen to include it here for two reasons: because of the resonances and echoes within its covers to the kinds of tales and anecdotes that have flavoured my description of life on a particular croft on Skye; and because of Gunn’s preoccupations with the meaning of art and the potential for different kinds of knowing that artistic representations can offer.

The Serpent, a bildungsroman, concerns the growing to maturity of the main protagonist, Tom, whose path to spiritual enlightenment at the end of the book is only achieved after a series of cataclysmic assaults on his egoism, his masculine framing of the universe, and upon his adherence to the creed of reason and rationality. Another literary example of the autodidact, Tom’s life is lived out between his crofting

⁴⁰ This paradoxical response to the consequences of the ‘Fall’ reminds me of my conversations with Tara Hyland-Russell which part-prompted my search for Sophia. (See p. 11 above)

community on the Northern Scottish mainland and the gritty, urban challenges of the city of Glasgow. Lack of space precludes detailed analysis of the novel more than to highlight a few of the themes and vignettes which, I trust, add a further layer to the overall thrust of this chapter:

It was Halloween, when the rein is withdrawn from the hallowed and licence takes the bit in its teeth. Horses were removed from stables, carts run down hills, turnips heaved down chimneys, wheels sent hurtling, the painfully gathered gear of civilisation broken up and cast away in the night by youth reverting in wild glee to primeval freedom.
(Gunn, 1943/1997, p. 49)

Echoes of Bel and of her throwing snowballs down the chimney, but echoes which have been taken up in the service of art and transmuted into a reminder of the ‘vestigial paganism’ which I noted at the beginning of our visit to the croft at Peinchorran... The spiritual battle for the minds and souls of Tom’s community is played out in several ways during the course of the book, but it reaches a climax in one terrifying exchange between the Presbyterian preacher’s fundamentalism and Tom’s equally assured rationalism. Tom, as the serpent of the title, (and as ‘symbol of wisdom’ *ibid.* p.220) carries not only the power that knowledge conveys, but has to suffer his own eviction from Eden in order to understand the level and consequences of his own hubris. At the end of his life, Tom, now known as the ‘philosopher’ by his community, reflects on the journey towards wisdom that he has undergone. It warrants quoting at some length:

Let the philosophers and political theorists build up their opposing systems, let science add to the pool of common knowledge its marvellous discoveries, but somewhere somehow the individual has to stand on his [sic] own two feet and reckon with it all. And the proof of this? That here he was a simple individual, a unit of the Crofting folk, nameless to the world, wandering across this deserted moor now and trying to bring a focus in himself, if not the meaning of the whole, at least some coherent apprehension of the whole [...] Perhaps amid the intellectual and spiritual efforts of man, literature in its detachment from any specific field of effort, as an observer in all fields, had the job of synthesising for and in the individual all the theses and anti-theses, and bringing the result with some coherence to walk on its own two feet amid the tall grasses. The ultimate of what is felt and thought and experienced by all, expressed in terms of life. The living essence of the communal whole. The living individual [...] Fantasy-making was no more than the flitting of errant butterfly-wings round the whin-root of being. But it could be amusing – and had...perhaps...something in it! [...] Often the simplest object would set up a train of thought that would reach astonishing heights or depths, or, rather, would confer upon him moments of illumination that stilled his humble being in beatified wonder.
(Gunn, *ibid.* pp.284-7)

In artistic terms one might object to the obvious didacticism in these extracts, but the point of their inclusion is to further the discussion about different types of knowing, and to note the echo of ‘beatified wonder’ that I described in chapter two. Both Gunn and

Maclean regarded art as a medium by which meaning is both made and sustained. But whereas Maclean constructed a kind of idealised femininity as part of his symbolic repertoire, Tom learnt a different lesson, and one worth noting here: ‘He began to perceive definitions of justice, beauty, chastity, truth, not as absolutes but as masculine conceptions, often obviously related to economic conditions or to property rights (as in the case of chastity)’ (ibid. p.272). And now I shall return to Sorley Maclean by way of bringing together questions of educational development, adult learning, the power of art and the ‘genea-mythic’ by way of deepening my own (auto-) understanding of the power of connection to certain broader resonances of loss.

Notes towards the ‘genea-mythic’

At Edinburgh University, a close friend of Sorley’s, and important influence, was George Elder Davie. Davie is best known for the seminal work, *The Democratic Intellect*, (1961), widely regarded as ‘the most important book ever written on the principles and development of Scottish thought’ (Hendry; in Ross and Hendry, 1986, p.13). Davie’s key contribution lay in articulating the generalist intellectual tradition in Scotland which contrasted with the greater degree of subject specialism south of the border. The trend was in keeping with claims that access to education had been encouraged far earlier in Scotland than in England. This was particularly true in the Lowlands: whilst the Education Act of 1872 prompted the building of primary schools throughout the land, often on Church sites, greater resourcing in the Lowlands meant that reasonably widespread primary education was available to many small parishes from the middle of the seventeenth century. One of the driving forces behind this early ‘democratisation’ of knowledge was the Kirk; the particular brand of religious zeal which characterised the spread of the Reformation in Scotland was intent on promoting literacy, ‘the better to read the bible’. It is understandable that Maclean would have been attracted to Davie’s interest in maintaining Scotland’s independent intellectual traditions, and in ‘the more obscure elements (of European thinking) such as phenomenology, largely ignored by English philosophers’ (Hendry ibid. p.13). As we have seen, Maclean’s hatred of fascism, his almost equal loathing of colonialism, nurtured a lifelong nationalism which saw Scotland’s future in Europe, rather than as appended to England.

Eschewing the life of the academic, despite suggestions to pursue post-graduate studies in Oxford or Cambridge, Maclean became a school teacher and ended his professional life as headmaster of Plockton School in the Highlands. The demands and strictures of the job too often frustrated his attempts to write but, as we have also noted, with retirement came international fame and recognition, and greater opportunities to ‘name’ his people and tell of their suffering, ‘it is impossible to separate the potency of Sorley Maclean’s art from this function of keeping and witnessing, being “true to the horizon that happens to encircle him”’ (Heaney, in Ross and Hendry, 1986, p.5).

But in relation to my thesis, and the auto genesis of my text, how far might I argue for a kind of inherited cultural and ontological sensibility which I term the ‘genea-mythic’? Angus Stewart was my great grandfather, Bel and Greg my parents and Sorley Maclean my third cousin. This might seem a little distant to the non-Highland reader, but not to this community for whom the question ‘to whom do you belong’ is central to one’s lifeworld and place within it.⁴¹ I am arguing that these interweaving links to the ‘hand’ that ‘pens’ these lines have helped form the particular subjectivity undertaking this current search for Sophia. Of course there is a distinction between the lines and the author of the lines; there is the consciousness which writes and the lifeworld which frames, shapes and informs that consciousness. There are the slips and assurances, the contingencies and contradictions over almost six decades of experience which form both my ‘spiritual geology’ as well as my ‘emotional geography’, all ‘at once part of (my) personal apparatus of feeling’ (Heaney, *ibid.* p.4). And it is these combinatory factors which, together, I term the ‘genea-mythic’: the ‘materiality’ of Stewart’s testimony is underpinned by ontological and teleological assurances that the world, and its design, is comprehensible through the lived experiences of his family, his forbears and his community. Maclean’s modernism, and existential agony, is shaped by the disparity between the contingent and the ideal; a paradox which neither Free Presbyterianism, nor Communism could accommodate. But however aspirational his language, he always accords it a fundamental materiality which anchors the naming of his objects to their historical and geographical place and time.

⁴¹ Our consanguinity was also a source of great delight to Sorley when I asked him to explain our family background. ‘You and I are the same generation’, he chortled, ‘even though I am the same age as your mother!’

One could almost envision a diagrammatic relationship between these, ‘my’, characters and the shifts in their relative epistemologies, the better to construct lines of connectivity between their concerns and my own. But what purchase does such an argument have; what merit might there be in arguing for such genea-mythic underpinning to my lifeworld and to my quest? The answer is both simple and complex: I respond to each in different ways, and belong to some in other ways. No diagram could encapsulate the *duthcas* evoked by my response to Stewart and Maclean or my engagement with modernism’s struggle between language’s ability to ‘name’ the ‘sayable’, whilst pointing to the ‘unsayable’ (see chapter two) and the occasional exhilaration which acknowledges the slips and conceits of postmodernist and post-structuralist signifiers. Such encapsulation requires acts of cultural and psycho-social imagination which might then further elucidate the shades of connection between aspects of these ‘lifeworlds’ and my own; and it is such an act of imagination that I am striving for in this thesis, an act and undertaking for which the term ‘genea-mythic’ stands. And I would like to continue by espousing common cause with the kinds of definition of *duthcas*⁴² quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Allowing, for a moment, the essentialist nature of this appropriation, I would also like to add a further definition offered by Mackay (2010, pp. 93,94):

As Donald MacAuley outlines, there were traditionally three distinct means of identifying the rights and responsibilities of each person: ‘d’uthcas’ is what is due as a result of where you are born, ‘dualchas’ what is due as a result of your bloodline, people or kin; ‘gn’athas’ is what is due as a result of your own actions and achievements (MacAuley 1994;39).

These are the kinds of ties to community which are also central to the art of Neil Gunn (op. cit p.77):

For here he was now back in his own environment, in his native place, where all the customs of his people, their immemorial mode of social life, held sway over even his most intimate emotions. Was this possible? Yes, it was not only possible, but much more profound than any mere quantitative analysis of possibility because it concerned the quality of emotion itself. His emotion was enriched and directed in its expression because of the way his own folk *had lived in the past.*’ [Emphasis added]

By evoking a sense of ‘*duthcas*’ as one of the underlying motifs of this thesis, I am aware that I am potentially falling foul of a similar ‘anachronistic attitude towards history’ which Mackay questions in relation to Maclean. But Mackay also wonders

⁴² The different spellings of *duthcas* reflect the differences between Irish and Scots Gaelic and the shifts that have resulted in translations from an oral to a written language. For the sake of consistency, I have adopted the spelling which is quoted at the frontispiece to this chapter, although the sense of *dualchas* is closer to my meaning.

‘whether this approach to history allows a personal and more immediate access to historical events (especially when personal elegies merge with historical narratives)’ (Mackay op. cit. p.26; his parenthesis). Such an approach has echoes of C. Wright Mills, and I would just like to add a further personal note to do with the theme of loss which has underscored so much of this chapter. I concluded the introduction by asking to what extent my own feelings of loss might be colouring my overall presentation. This chapter has located some of that sense within the broader familial and cultural ‘*duthcas*’ which has framed and shaped me. Other chapters will offer further pointers to some of the other losses which I carry. But what I am striving for, here, is some deeper understanding of how I might translate my particular understanding and experience of ‘*duthcas*’ into the rhymes and rhythms of this autoethnography; an understanding, perhaps, of why this chapter was the first to be written, and demanded to be so...

Few people articulate how the sociological categories of race, gender, class and ethnicity have shaped their lives or how the larger historical processes [...] have affected them. Yet as C. Wright Mills cogently argued (1959, 5), knowledge of the social context leads people to understand their own experiences and to gauge their “own fates”. This is the promise of the “sociological imagination.”
(Richardson, 1997, p.122)

I also argue that this is the promise of art and literature and returns us to the quotation from Eliot which opened this chapter, and which reminds us of the epistemological challenges ahead:

I have said before
That the past experience revived in the meaning
Is not the experience of one life only
But of many generations - not forgetting
Something that is probably quite ineffable:
The backward look behind the assurance
Of recorded history.
(Eliot, 1969, pp.186,7)

In a synchronistic coda to this chapter, and during my research on Maclean, I was both interested and amazed to come across the work of geneticist Bryan Sykes from Oxford University. My interest lay in his exploration of the genetic roots of several thousand inhabitants of the British Isles and the conclusions he draws. My amazement stems from the following quotations:

The emotional, almost the physical, attachment to the land is central to the poetry of the Celt. Out of term time, when I am not required to be in Oxford, I live on the Isle of Skye. My house once belonged to Sorley Maclean, widely claimed as the greatest Gaelic poet of the twentieth century. In fact, that is where I am writing this chapter and it is in his old filing cabinet that the manuscript will remain until I send it off to be typed.
(Sykes, 2006/2007, p. 71)

Sykes talks of the themes of 'loss and unquestionable sadness' at the heart of Maclean's work with which we are familiar, but of equal relevance, perhaps, is the following (pp. 76-77):

There have been, as you may have suspected, plenty of theories about what draws people to search out their roots. Behind the sociology- speak, such as the contemporary quest for roots is a response to the trauma of displacement associated with migration which has become a global commonplace and individuals are able to conduct meaningful, morally defensible and authentic self-narratives from the ambiguities and discontinuities of their migrant histories, thus recovering a sense of being 'at home' in the 'maelstrom' of modernity [...] are much pithier and more articulate reasons, as revealed in Paul Besu's survey [...] Another Australian, improbably called Anne Roots, told Besu: '[...]The process of evolution has failed to break the translucent thread that is mysteriously joined to the Isle of Skye. I cannot explain some of my experiences, or why I wanted to go to the Hebrides before I knew some of my forbears came from there. My only explanation is that the spirit of my ancestors kept calling me back.'

I have checked, it is the same house....

Entr'acte

In autoethnographic methods, the researcher is the epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process turns.
(Spry, in Muncey, 2010, p.28)

It is a beautiful Sunday afternoon in mid-September. I am spending time with my mother who now lives round the corner from me in a residential home in Kent. She had not been well, and I had brought a re-issue of Vera Lynn's Greatest Hits which had reached number one in the charts, some seventy years after their initial recordings. The songs are punctuating our afternoon rhythm. Occasionally, we'll sing along to the odd verse or two as the words of the 'forces sweetheart' reach through my mother's dementia and she recollects, however briefly, both phrase and context. "Have you ever seen a bluebird?" she inquires. "We're still not free, then", she concludes in response to my smile and shake of the head. "No, I guess not", I reply and we both return to our separate musings. Hers I cannot follow until her next interjection, but I return to the sanctuary of the book I am holding, and to the healing serenity of the words and pictures it contains.

I had been to Cambridge the previous day with the Charleston Trust, which had organised a visit to St Catherine's and Kings Colleges to see Duncan Grant's paintings and archival material relating to Bloomsbury. Whilst both paintings and material were of great interest, the highlight of my visit had been the day's conclusion at Kettles Yard. I had first visited this extraordinary place in the mid-1990s and I had fallen in love immediately. Subsequent visits had only strengthened my ardour, and on Saturday last I was impatient for another immersion in that deep space that affords me both peace and healing as well as refuge and refreshment in my search for Sophia. Now, on this following Sunday, I am losing myself in *A Way of Life, Kettle's Yard*, which was written by its creator, Jim Ede, in 1984, as both celebration of, and testimony to, his lifelong pursuit of those glimpses of the divine; a pursuit which, for him, characterised life's meaning and purpose.

Kettle's Yard was the name given to an artistic enterprise which is unique in both conception and design. Ede had worked as curator at the Tate, and his special passion was for early twentieth century painting and sculpture. His travels in Africa, the Mediterranean, and France, and his sojourns in each, formed the basis of a singular

collection of works of art that were both acquired and donated. Ede's celebration of the work of Gaudier-Brzeska brought the latter's attention to the art world in the early decades of the twentieth century; Ede's account of his turbulent life and early death, *Savage Messiah*, was filmed by Ken Russell in 1972. Brzeska was but one of the many twentieth century artists who were loved and celebrated by Ede, and whose works later found homes and exhibition sites in Kettle's Yard. It was Ede's intention that his extensive collection should be available to anyone who loved and wanted to study art. Finally, he was directed to a group of four condemned cottages in Cambridge, next to an almost derelict St Peter's Church; he had found the perfect site. The cottages were knocked through and rebuilt as both home and exhibition space for the Edes and their art works. Visitors could call any afternoon between two and four and Jim would delight in their delight at the treasures they found within.

This was to be the pattern of the Edes' lives from around 1957 until they left in 1973, when Jim gave the 'Yard' to the University of Cambridge. Today, it is much as he left it, with the addition of another exhibition centre which adjoins it. And today the visitor still approaches the old wooden door, along the path that skirts St Peter's, tugs at the bell which came from a stately home in Scotland, and is admitted to the whitewashed, and light-flooded interior. It takes a moment or two to adjust to the silent, yet profoundly palpable rhythm of the place. But if one can quieten one's soul, one might almost hear the music of the spheres as it plays through and around the art both found and made which inhabits the rooms' delicate spaces. Here one can study and enjoy works by, among many others, the Nicholsons, Ben and Winifred; David Jones; Christopher ('Kit') Wood; Georges Braque; Alfred Wallis and Constantin Brancusi. Here one can be transfixed and transported by the play of light as it cuts and weaves its own patterns across wall, glass and floor in endless, and natural, counterpoint to the constructed objects it falls upon.



Figure 10. Kettle's Yard c. Ede, 1984, p.70

The book I am holding comprises pictures, prose, poetry and prayer; each element combining to produce both testimony to, and hymn of praise for, the deeper reality which Ede believed to be both our source and our conclusion:

stray objects, stones, glass, pictures, sculpture, in light and space, have been used to make manifest the underlying stability which more and more we need to recognise if we are not to be swamped by all that is so rapidly opening up before us.
(Ede, 1984, p.18)

The music on the CD player comes to an end and I ask my mother if she would like something different. “No”, she replies; “I’m really enjoying this”; and I play Vera Lynn for the third time and wonder yet again whether I could have done more to slow the rate of my mother’s condition. ‘Dementia’ has become a collective noun for the diagnosis of the five doctors who have pronounced upon her memory loss: “vascular, as a result of her stroke”; “not Alzheimers, just gradual closing down of the oxygen to the brain”. “Can anything be done? She used to be such an avid reader?”...She was also nurse, wife, mother, homebuilder, gardener, dry-stone waller, chess-player, fisher, even poacher, but that’s another story...She is still my mother, although my status is sometimes elided with those of her seven siblings and she will comment on “our” grandfather whose picture adorns a nest of tables before her. “That’s Angus Stewart, isn’t it? He was well thought of...what did he do?” And I shall tell her the story, once again, of the Battle of the Braes, and of Gladstone’s inquiry into the conditions of the Highland and Island

crofters, and of Angus's testimony. "He must have been well thought of...what did he do?"

I return to the comfort of the book in my hands and read that Ede 'would have liked to call the book 'A way of love' as someone suggested, for what is life without devotion?' (1984, p.7) I look up. Friends and family tell me I'm 'devoted' to my mother; but the word carries a sense of clarity and purity I don't feel able to match. Love, of course; but also rage, relative impotence, and guilt; burdens, perhaps, of the only child...? My father died sixteen years ago, a fact with which my mother is only sometimes acquainted. Thus, he is condemned to die with such repetitive frequency that I forget the pain of the words my dulled tongue shapes. On another occasion, I leave my mother for half an hour in pursuit of her favourite treat. She smiles on my return, she's remembered! Her anticipation has bridged that thirty minute chasm, but then:

"Greg's gone for fish and chips!"

"Greg's dead. *I've* got the fish and chips".

Nothing excuses that brutality; her face crumples; "I'm sorry", she says, and we both know the words reflect not just the pain of the loss of her husband, but the stabbing agony of her momentary realisation of her unmoored self and its utter vulnerability in her sea of smashed memories.

There are times when I simply cannot bear it. I usually 'pop in' on my way home from work; if all is well, I might stay for fifteen or twenty minutes before I feel the pull of my own demands, and allow myself to listen to them. At weekends, and if the weather is favourable, we'll go to one of her favourite spots along the coast and count the ships on the horizon. "If you're born by the sea, you always need it nearby, I could sit here for ever...Where do you work? What do you do? Oh, that sounds interesting, but does it make you happy?"

If the agony of the human condition is its predication upon the contingent, then my times with my mother exemplify some kind of extreme. After being taken off Dunkirk, my father's remaining service days segued into the Civil Service and he spent the rest of his working life with the Ministry of Defence. I was born fifty-eight years ago in a small town in the Highlands of Scotland, my father came from Sutherland and my mother, a native Gaelic speaker, from the Isle of Skye. They had been married for twelve years before deciding that their lifestyle was stable enough to embrace a child. We moved

when I was two weeks old, then again when I was almost three years old, then at four and a half, then seven, then thirteen. Each move determined by my father's new posting and each necessitating new friends, new schools, even a new language. The move to the border between East and West Germany in 1957 rendered me, so the family story goes, a shocked and frightened recluse. Local children would scream through the window, in German, to come outside and play, and from my shelter inside I would scream back in English that they should go away. Then one day, I picked up Teddy and opened the door and joined the children in fluent kinder-deutsch...well, that's what the story says. There are photos of this time; my parents at cocktail parties, my friends and I at play. Apparently, when the adults got together the children were 'baby-sat' by British soldiers, wearing full uniform. At night we went to sleep against the sound of people being shot. The Wall had not been built, and the nearby forest was a favourite escape route for those fleeing the poverties of the East. One of my father's tasks was to assess the sincerity of those who managed to avoid the guns; this is not a euphemism for some kind of secret service interrogation tactic, his gift lay in talking and listening, primarily listening... They caught a spy who had been allocated to my family. Apparently, he spent half his time tracking my father and the other half, my mother and myself. This story made me feel very important, until I grew up and realised just some of its implications.

My father was scheduled for the offices in Moscow, but fearful of a repetition of my insecurity in a new land, my parents decided to return to Britain. There was an adult logic at work here, but one which must have escaped my four year old self. I had forgotten Britain, the cliffs of Dover were as alien to me as any Moscow landmark might have been, and so I made a decision. There were German speakers on the boat on the way home, they would address me in Deutsch and I would answer, politely, but resolutely, in English. This persisted in the hotel we stayed in on arrival where another German family tried to overcome my resistance. "I'm in England and I speak English" was, as this particular tale goes, my total and absolute refrain. My puzzled parents assured themselves that "she will pick it up again when she learns it at school", but such was my need to try and control some of my environment, and match language with terrain, that by the time I began to study German for 'O' level, any scraps and fragments had long been consigned to the dustbin of my own personal history.

When I was twenty-one, I came to Kent to study for my Master's degree; the idea being that my Kentish residence would last the length of the programme. Thirty seven years later, I am still here; my 'failure' to move perhaps indication of a profound need to lodge myself within a locality and to dig my roots deep. But the local earth is not my family's terrain, my roots are shallow here and I cannot yet call Kent 'home'.

When I was growing up, my parents and I, in later years accompanied by an assortment of friends, would spend every second summer on Skye. My father had moved there at the age of sixteen and loved it more dearly than his childhood home across the water; my mother's birthplace became our place of belonging; our duthcas. I was the only one of the cousins who spoke with an English accent. I was still the relative 'outsider', yet the soil of the island nourished my soul-roots as nowhere else could do and I tended to their growth with the avidity of the keenest gardener. But 'real life' was elsewhere; my 'garden' existed in holiday land and for the rest of my childhood and adolescence, it was this sense of impermanence that marked the base line to the tunes of my days and dreams. Perhaps this is the reason that I sought, and still seek, a more profound pattern to the rhythms of my life than that provided by the contingent and the quotidian. Perhaps this is why I seek, and gain, solace in Kettles Yard and in the book I am now holding. Ede (op.cit. p.18) writes,

I have felt strongly the need for me to give again these things which have so much been given to me, and to give in such a way, that by their placing, and by a pervading atmosphere, one thing will enhance another, making perhaps a coherent whole...

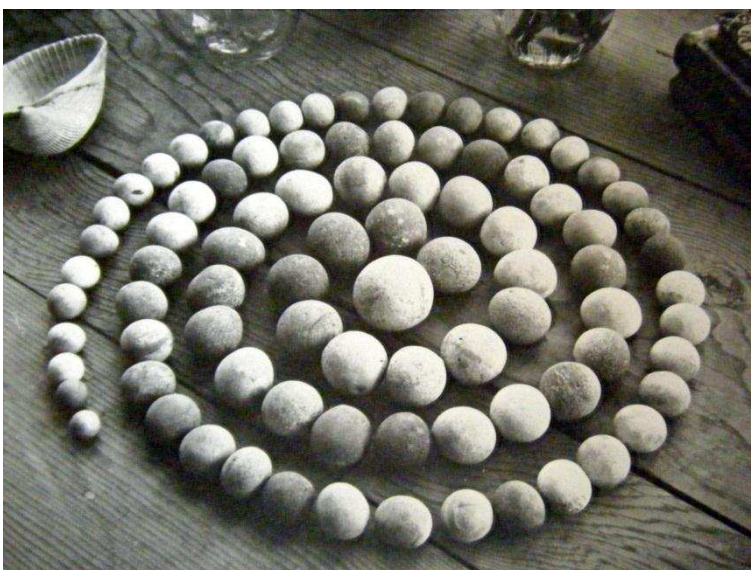


Figure 11. Kettle's Yard c. Ede, 1984, p.47

For Ede, the thread which weaves the pattern linking these stones is God-given, and he shares with St John of the Cross, whom he quotes extensively, the utter conviction that it is the Divine narrative that shapes all others:

This wisdom without understanding
Is of so absolute a force
No wise man of whatever standing
Can ever stand against its course,
Unless they tap its wondrous source,
To know so much, though knowing naught,
They pass all knowledge with their thought

If you would ask, what is its essence –
This summit of all sense and knowing:
It comes from the Divinest Presence –
The sudden sense of Him outflowing,
In His great clemency bestowing
The gift that leaves men knowing naught,
Yet passing knowledge with their thought.
(In Ede, 1984, p.82)

I am sure that my search for Sophia is for a shaping narrative that will help me make ‘perhaps a coherent whole’; I am less sure what the outcome might be. Quotations describing her in preceding pages suggest a rather easy elision between Sophia and wisdom. Indeed, as we have seen, many claim that she is its personification in the wisdom literature of the Judaeo/Christian tradition. My search is for her relevance in my personal and professional life. It is a search also prompted by a growing anxiety that the value we accord the importance of certain kinds of ‘knowing’ reflects a cultural mind-set in flight from wisdom, ‘What is needed [...] is the transformation of our concept of knowing so that it becomes inclusive of all the diverse ways in which we know and make a human world’ (Abbs, 1989, p.28). Of course, I am not eschewing the importance of pursuing the knowledges which shape our worlds and our place within them; I am rather seeking a re-visioning of some forms of knowing, and a greater tolerance of the realms of the ‘unknown’, for perhaps it is there that Sophia resides...

Notes towards a methodology - part two

The preceding pages comprising the ‘entr’acte’ have been included as further illustration of an attempted aesthetic with which I would wish to underpin my thesis,

if we restore to the term “aesthetic” the full range of meaning of the Greek word *aesthesis*, and if we grant to it the task of exploring the multiple ways in which a work, in acting on a reader, affects that reader.
(Ricoeur, 1988/1990, p. 167; original emphasis)

My invitation to the reader to engage in the re-presentation of a visit to a gallery in Cambridge, purporting to carry meaningful significance, is framed within the larger story of my mother's increasing loss of meaning as the lines of her subjectivity dissolve in the encroaching fog of vascular dementia. There are a number of epistemological, methodological and ethical questions located within this text. The first clear distinction between two types of 'knowing' concerns the differences postulated in the re-presentation of the stronger, more coherent self, seeking meaning and respite in both art and memory, as against the fractured self which is beset by the ravages of dementia. This first 'self' narrates a story which draws upon further linear tropes including the generational, the historical, and the familial. Both this story's telling and its aesthetic are placed within a broader narrative which seeks some overarching meaning within a spiritual/religious framework. The tone of this is less sure; dependant, perhaps, upon a similar quest articulated by the greater authority of Jim Ede and his creation of Kettle's Yard. The presentation is 'rounded off' with reference to the writer's search for Sophia which brings the reader back to the nature of the original thesis, whilst offering a more or less satisfactory link to the aesthetic principle underlying and underpinning the whole.

Such a formulation is familiar to most readers as following the linear trajectory of the average tale and conclusion. Its potential resonance is based upon a number of factors; not least, the sympathy of the reader to the tone and tenor of the tale, the familiarity of the material and the emotional response(s) elicited by it. Each of these represents a familiar strand in the process of meaning-making that takes place between individuals in conversation and between the reader and the text. Stories such as these are often found within the covers of 'confessional literature' and/or within the confines of the psychoanalyst's parlour. Such an account assumes a coherent self which tells the tale, a self, moreover, whose consistency is partially predicated upon a concomitant lack of linear cohesion suffered by the other key protagonist in the narrative. This representation is, therefore, functioning on a number of levels which both rely and play upon notions of self as relatively fixed and secure. For the tale to have resonance, such assumptions have to be foregrounded as both signs and signifiers of 'commonsensical' approaches to reading a text. In other words, they have to accord with the ways in which we narrate our lives and formulate our subjectivities. As Scarlett has noted (2006, p.2),

This view hangs on Ricoeur's notion of time as the universal, defining architecture of human existence and that it may only be made understandable through narratives. (Erber, 1998, p.14) Another philosopher, Alistair

MacIntyre adds further weight by arguing that 'narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterisations of human actions.' (Erber, 1998, p.15)

I suggested above that, 'Stories such as these are often found within the covers of 'confessional literature' and/or within the confines of the psychoanalyst's purlieu'. In choosing autoethnography as my methodological underpinning, I am mindful of the guidelines suggested by Chang (2008) in her study of *Autoethnography As Method*. She outlines four typologies of autoethnographic writings: the 'descriptive-realistic'; the 'confessional-emotive'; the 'analytical-interpretive' and the 'imaginative-creative' (pp.145-148). Whilst urging the researcher to find her own voice, which will probably include aspects of all four, she is nonetheless clear about the dangers of 'self-indulgent introspection':

Unfortunately, the methodological focus on self is sometimes misconstrued as a license to dig deeper in personal experiences without digging wider into the cultural context of the individual stories commingled with others. Autoethnographers should be warned that self-indulgent introspection is likely to produce a self-exposing story but not autoethnography. (p. 54)

It is a warning that I have tried to heed in both chapter three and in the entr'acte by placing both elements within the kind of overall aesthetic noted on page 113 above. But there is another danger in drawing upon my mother's dementia as a data source for this thesis. Whilst it clearly provides another theme of loss to the overall narrative, my mother is not able to give her consent for her inclusion in this way. My decision to bring my mother into the text is based on a careful reading of the guidelines of my institution as well as upon the many examples within autoethnographic literature which have utilised life's tragedies and traumas and thence deepened the author's reflexive understanding of her self and her lifeworld (eg Ellis, 1995; 2009; Frank, 1995). My mother's diagnosis was confirmed less than a year after I began this thesis and her gradual, and gathering, absence from me has therefore accompanied this journey almost since its inception. To have excluded her from the narrative would have obviated the need to deal with this particular ethical dilemma, but it would have rendered a disservice to the integrity of the whole. I trust I have made the right decision.

My search for Sophia now takes me to the art galleries of Florence, and to the power of painterly representation to encapsulate a further turn in the suppression of certain ways of knowing as a particular combination of religio/political discourses holds sway...

Chapter Four

From mythos to logos

People have always needed logos to make an efficient weapon, organise their societies or plan an expedition [...] But it had its limitations; it could not assuage human grief or find ultimate meaning in life's struggles. For that, people turned to mythos or myth. Today we live in a society of scientific logos and myth has fallen into disrepute.

(Armstrong, 2009, pp. 2,3)

He (Heidegger) always thought that in order to understand modernity one could read Holderlin, the 'poets in time of privation'. What he actually believed was that the great work of art par excellence is the Bible; and the Bible is effectively the institution of the West, with its disputes over how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, its bloodshed over the interpretation of scripture. That's the great classic.

(Vattimo, 2009, p.107)

The development of the logos pole of the mind probably was of extreme importance in the evolution of Western thinking about mind and human nature. The new concept of the mind was based on such opposites as mind versus body, self versus other, self versus society, objective truth versus subjective inclination, and so forth. Thus, as mythos became differentiated from logos, it also became subordinated to it [...] As a consequence, wisdom and mature reason were assumed to be aimed at a notion of universal objective truth that was, presumably, purged of subjective elements.

(Labouvie-Vief, 1994, p. 255)

The term mythopoesis is derived from the ancient Greek word mytho-poesis which means 'myth making'. Mythopoesis refers to a narrative process by which people seek to represent and make sense of life, with all of its joys, mysteries and hardships.

(Willis and Morrison, 2009, p. 2)

Introduction



Figure 12. Part of the 'Triumph of the Church' in the Spanish Chapel of Santa Maria Novella, Florence. Painted by Andrea de Firenze (Andrea Bonaiuti -1343-1377). (Photograph by WF Jun 09).

To stand before this picture of Thomas Aquinas, which forms part of a series of frescos executed by Andrea Bonaiuti, in the fourteenth century, to celebrate the Dominican Brotherhood's successful suppression of heresy, is to be faced with example of one of the most painful paradoxes in the history of Western Culture. The accompanying caption reads:

The Triumph of St Thomas Aquinas the great Dominican Doctor of the Church who, illuminated by the Spirit of Wisdom, as described in the book lying open in his hands, and supported by the Theological and Cardinal Virtues and the study of the biblical writers of both the Old and the New Testaments, defeats heresy, personified by Nestor, Arius and Averroes, and dominates the sciences.

On the opposite wall in the Chapel (Figure 13), suppression of the heretical is further illuminated through a painterly punning on the name of the Brotherhood: the black and white 'dogs of the Master' – Domini Canes – attacking 'the wolves of heresy' (Paoletti

and Radke, (2001/2002 p.161), whilst two men, presumably followers of Islam, kneel in submission, and a third destroys one of their own 'heretical' tracts.



Figure 13. Spanish Chapel of Santa Maria Novella, Florence. (Photograph by WF Jun 09).

This is not to suggest that the walls of the Spanish Chapel in the Church of Santa Maria Novella are in any way unique or particular in their artistic expression of the triumphalism of the Catholic Church. But what struck me on my first visit to Florence, one of the well-springs of the Renaissance, was my growing inability to separate the medium from the message. Relatively used to 'looking at' works of art in a number of both religious and secular institutions in many major European cities, this was perhaps the first time that I felt somewhat unprotected by that key preposition. My brief visit to the city in the summer of 2009 was accompanied by the burden of greater knowledge about the history of ecclesiastical orthodoxy. To 'look at' was no longer possible; there was a different injunction at work, and it was to bear witness.

To stand before such a beautiful portrayal of the suppression of the 'other', was to be transfixed by awareness of that agonising juxtaposition between art's power to both transcend and yet be bound by the propaganda of its narrative; and to realise that it was precisely this power that has been exploited so effectively by the Church in its pedagogic mission to both enthrall and, at times, ensnare. But what had happened in the

intervening centuries since the Crucifixion that had turned a series of marginalised and conflicting narratives about the meaning of Christ's life and death into one of the foundational platforms of Western cultural and political history? What had happened to bring both coherence and control of the Word, and to turn its message to dominance and suppression? And what relevance do such questions have for the thrust of my thesis?

In order to try and answer the latter, this chapter will return to the discussion introduced earlier about the development of particular epistemological discourses and of some of the influences which have shaped and informed those ways of knowing. I am neither classicist nor student of theology, I make no pretence to authority in either of these disciplines. I am reliant on certain secondary sources in what follows, and upon my own reflections and ways of seeing. This account is, of necessity, partial and subjective, but I trust that it lies within the acceptable bounds of my underpinning methodology.

This chapter begins with an exploration of certain epistemological strands within Western thinking which I have characterised as the shift from mythos to logos. I hope to illustrate one of the key elements of this thesis which is that some of the epistemological paradoxes I have been grappling with in previous chapters have arisen as a consequence of privileging certain ways of knowing; and that my search for Sophia is part plea that we might open our pedagogic practices to the kinds of epistemological opportunities she offers. This part of my argument will be developed in section two, but what follows, here, represents a personal reflection on how particular ways of knowing have been constructed historically, religiously and politically, and on some of the consequences of those constructions.

In keeping with the methodological underpinning to the whole, this chapter continues by acknowledging the importance of narrative as an epistemological framing device for the development of both ourselves and our species. It prompts a series of questions, not least the extent to which we might challenge certain prevailing formulations and thence find ways to invite Sophia in from the shadows and thereby heed her call, 'I was sent forth from [the] power and I have come to those who reflect upon me, and I have been found among those who seek after me' ('Hymn of Praise to Sophia' in Simon, 2004, p.222).

‘In the beginning’: From desert to city - and woman’s ‘Fall’

The struggle to understand our world, our place within it and the stories we tell to articulate that struggle has been a defining feature of humanity since our inception, (e.g. Armstrong, 1999; 2005; 2007; Bachofen, 1967; Bruner, 2002; Eliade, 1959/1987; Graves, 1961; 1969; Greene and Sharman-Burke, 1999; Simon, 2004; Sternberg, 1990; Whitmont, 1987). Armstrong (2005), and numerous others, have attested to the shared nature of our foundational creation myths and to their similarities in explaining our origins and our relationship to the natural world. For our earliest ancestors, there ‘was no ontological gulf between the world of the gods and the world of men and women’ and no ‘metaphysical gulf between the sacred and the profane’ (pp.5, 17). Thus, the sacred could reside, and make itself manifest, in the objects of the natural world. Such belief is still true for many of today’s peoples, but the development of religious thinking, as we know it in the West, might be characterised as the progression from such manifestations (or hierophanies) in the mundane, e.g. in stones and trees, to the personification of the sacred in the divinity of Jesus Christ (Eliade, 1959/1987, p.11).

The word ‘progression’ needs further elucidation here. Armstrong is one of many writers who have described the linear trajectory, so familiar to us in the West, of our species’ development on our planet:

In every culture, we find the myth of a lost paradise, in which humans lived in close and daily contact with the divine [...] At the centre of the world there was a tree, a mountain, or a pole, linking earth and heaven, which people could easily climb to reach the realm of the gods. Then there was a catastrophe: the mountain collapsed, the tree was cut down, and it became more difficult to reach heaven.
(2005, pp.15,16)

In these few sentences, Armstrong has encapsulated the journey of a significant number of the world’s peoples from a belief in a shared ontological space between humankind and the gods, to a geo-mythic separation, and distance, between our earth-bound selves and the realm of the gods in heaven. She argues that this journey has reflected the seismic shifts in our history from the early nomadic to the agrarian, and thence to the civic. It has been suggested that these epochal changes have been accompanied by concomitant shifts in the construction of creation myths to reflect the declining power of the feminine in the face of patriarchal onslaught (e.g. Fisher, 1979; Reed, 1975). The extent to which such anthropological examples of certain second wave feminist preoccupations might still have academic traction is not the concern of this chapter. Rather, I am interested in the changing nature of mythmaking and of how this reflected,

at the least, both a perceptual change in gender construction and the privileging of certain epistemological narratives over alternative ways of seeing and shaping our selves and our lifeworlds.

Simon (2004) traces the development of creation myths and notes, as Graves has done before him, that many vouchsafed the role of the feminine as ‘prime mover’ (p.55):

In the beginning, Eurynome, the Goddess of All Things, rose naked from Chaos, but found nothing substantial for her feet to rest upon, and therefore divided the sea from the sky, dancing lonely upon its waves. She danced towards the south, and the wind set in motion behind her seemed something new and apart with which to begin a work of creation. Wheeling about, she caught hold of this north wind, rubbed it between her hands, and behold! the great serpent Ophion. Eurynome danced to warm herself, wildly and more wildly, until Ophion, grown lustful, coiled about those divine limbs and was moved to couple with her.

(Simon, *ibid.* p. 53)

This story is interesting on a number of levels: aside from the feminine as ‘prime mover’, we see here the introduction of the serpent as a key figure in mythic interpretations of the world’s genesis. Later, as Simon points out, Eurynome is angered by Ophion’s boast that it was he who ‘author[ed] the universe’, and she banishes him to the ‘dark caves below the earth’ (p.54). Yet by the time we get to the Judeo/Christian version in the Book of Genesis, this gendered construction has been reversed, and with profound consequences for the framing of women under Judeo/Christian patriarchy. So, what happened in the interim? And what is the relationship between the feminine as ‘prime mover’ and my search for Sophia?

And when the woman saw that
the tree was good for food, and that
it was pleasant to the eyes, and a
tree to be desired to make one wise,
she took of the fruit thereof, and did
eat, and gave also unto her husband
with her; and he did eat.’

(The Book of Genesis 3: 6, King James Version)

As I noted in my Introduction to this thesis when exploring its genesis, I am suggesting that there is a fundamental paradox at the heart of Judaeo/Christian theology which has literally ‘be-devilled’ our Western approach to wisdom and knowledge for centuries. Eve’s temptation by the serpent, and thence her refusal to heed God’s injunction, led to the ‘Fall’ and to man’s expulsion from the Garden. Adam and Eve’s prelapsarian state of Paradisal innocence was characterised by their ‘un-knowing’; and their ‘Fall’, the defining marker of their humanity, was forever bound to their knowledge of good and evil, or at least, that is how the story goes... I have already noted the shift from certain

earlier foundational narratives which privileged the feminine as the ‘prime mover’ and which punished the masculine principle for his arrogance by banishing him to the lower regions of the earth. What had prevailed to render Eve the carrier of man’s ‘Fall’, and what versions of knowledge may have been sacrificed as a result? In other words, my concern is with that fundamental paradox which, I argue, has had such profound impact upon our cultural constructions of knowledge, and wisdom, and the relative constructions of gender as vehicles for both.

As noted above, it has been assumed that for our earliest ancestors there was no significant ontological distinction between humankind and the gods and between the sacred and the profane.⁴³ This is not to deny the ‘otherness’ of the sacred; its manifestation ‘shows itself as something wholly different from the profane’ (Eliade, 1959/1987, p.11), but this difference did not signify a metaphorical gap. Thus, the hierophanies, be they rocks, trees or stones, did not represent the idea of the divine, which somehow resided elsewhere, the rocks held divinity in a ‘mysterious act - the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of [it]’ (Eliade, op.cit. p.11). The ‘mystery’ was held in that confluence between the immanent and the transcendent, and thus, ‘In the ancient world, a symbol became inseparable from its unseen referent’ (Armstrong, 2005, p.72). This is an important point in terms of my thesis. The relationship between symbol, or mode of representation, and referent, i.e. object in the so-called real world provides the vehicle by which particular kinds of knowledge are constructed. The changing nature of language as symbolic purveyor of ‘reality’ will have profound consequences for how we are constructed in relation to our worlds, and for how we frame our pedagogies, and our ways of knowing. As I have argued in chapter two, for Woolf and Eliot the struggle to articulate the transcendent reflected the separation from symbol and referent to which Armstrong refers; my purpose is to try and understand some of the factors that rent the confluence between immanence and transcendence asunder.

Whilst beliefs in their conjoined mystery are still held by some peoples in the world, the journey for those who travelled the historical route from desert to city was accompanied by a concomitant shift away from such confluence (see also Romer, 1989). Divinity

⁴³ I am aware of the impact that the development of language, and in written form, had on this ontological distinction, but it does not fall within the current sphere of my inquiry. Abram’s (1997) evocative account is to be recommended.

resided elsewhere, and had less and less to do with the affairs of men. Armstrong (2005) has explored this separation between mankind and the gods in its articulation in the Babylonian poem, The Epic of Gilgamesh which was probably based on an historical figure living around 2,600 BC. The story is worth considering in some detail. As Armstrong (p. 76) tells it, the poem begins with Gilgamesh 'as a man who has lost his way'. He is treating his people badly and they have appealed to the gods for help. Reluctant to 'intervene directly in human affairs' the gods provide Gilgamesh with the challenge of dealing with Enkidu, 'a wild man who runs amok in the countryside' and needs to be tamed. Gilgamesh sends a prostitute to civilise him, 'but this involves loss as well as gain':

Enkidu has been 'diminished', but also has become 'profound', and 'like a god'. He has required the wisdom and refinement that will enable him to enjoy the sophisticated lifestyle of Uruk, (the city) which is so far beyond the natural state of humanity that it seems divine .
(Armstrong, 2005, pp. 76, 77; emphasis added)

The tamed wild man and Gilgamesh become friends and begin a series of adventures. They meet Ishtar, the Mother Goddess, but Gilgamesh rejects her. This marked such a significant step in the relations between gods and men:

In the older mythology, marriage with the Mother Goddess had often represented the supreme enlightenment and the climax of a hero's quest, but Gilgamesh turns Ishtar down. It is a powerful critique of the traditional mythology which can no longer speak fully to urban men and women. Gilgamesh does not see civilisation as a divine enterprise. Ishtar is a destroyer of culture [...] Gilgamesh, the civilised man, declares his independence of the divine.
(Armstrong, 2005, p.77)

To punish Gilgamesh, Ishtar brings sickness and then death to Enkidu. In his agony of loss, and the realisation that he, too, must die, our hero seeks solace from the only survivor of the Flood, Utnapishtim, whom he knew had been granted eternal life:

Utnapishtim explains that the gods will no longer suspend the laws of nature for favoured humans. The old myths can no longer serve as a guide for human aspiration [...] Instead of getting privileged information from the gods, Gilgamesh receives a painful lesson on the limitations of humanity [...] He has lost some illusions, but gained 'complete wisdom', returning 'weary but at last resigned'. He has fallen away from the ancient mythical vision, but history has its own consolations. (p 79)

Armstrong argues that such a re-evaluation also occurred in Ancient Greece, and she relates the story of Adonis, the failed citizen, who 'never separates from the world of women' (p 80). Although Armstrong does not labour the point, it is important for our purposes to note that, in both cases, we are witnessing a rejection of the female principle, allied with the natural world, in favour of the 'sober, male ethos of the *polis*' (p. 80). But this retreat from the power of the old myths, and 'man's' increasing reliance

on his independence from the gods, brought with it a vacuum, a spiritual malaise which, Armstrong argues, led to what she terms, after Jaspers, 'The Axial Age' (2005; 2006), which spanned the period from around 800-200 BCE, and marked; 'the beginning of religion as we know it' (2005, p.83).

The Axial Age saw the emergence of what we now regard as the world's major religions and philosophical systems; 'Confucianism and Taoism [...]; Buddhism and Hinduism [...] monotheism in the Middle East and Greek rationalism in Europe' (Armstrong 2005, p.83). We have already seen the beginning of the separation of man from his gods; the rejection of the ancient myths brought an accompanying ontological split which rendered the gods, and the sacred, even more distant. And, 'the history of religion shows that, once a myth ceases to give people intimations of transcendence, it becomes abhorrent' (p. 98). The rise of monotheism, in the form of Judaism in the Middle East, was accompanied by a violent suppression of the so-called pagan cults that had outworn their spiritual usefulness. The struggle was long and protracted, but its resolution, however partial, might be marked by the capture of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, by Nebuchadrezzar, and the destruction of the temple of Yahweh. The ensuing deportation of many of the Jews to Babylonia, and their exposure to the life of this alien city, prompted an articulation of their own, new, cosmology:

We see the new spirit in the first chapter of Genesis, probably written by a member of the so-called Priestly School, which can be read as a poised, calm polemic against the old belligerent cosmogonies [...] Unlike Marduk, Israel's god does not have to fight desperate battles to create the world; he brings all things into existence effortlessly, by a simple command.'
(Armstrong, 2005, p.101)

This is not to suggest a wholesale rejection of the power of the ancient myths. The Old Testament bears witness to the many struggles which accompanied the transition to monotheism, and belief in an all-powerful, masculine principle which would define the history of the West's articulation of religion until today.⁴⁴ But monotheism was but one characteristic of the Axial Age; another was an increasing interiority in the framing of religious practice. As the power of the ancient myths declined, and the ontological distance between 'man' and his gods broadened, the search for, and worship of, the sacred gradually became a matter for more internal consideration and individual contemplation. This increasing interiorisation was aligned with a deeper reliance on the human intellect which found expression in the changing philosophies of Ancient

⁴⁴ I am mindful of the other two 'peoples of the Book', Judaism and Islam, but it is the rise of Christianity which is the focus here.

Greece, as we have seen in the introduction, and to which I shall return later in the discussion. But at this point, I shall remain with the struggle of the Jews and explore some of the contradictions which the triumph of Yahweh had brought into being.

The influence of Gnosticism

Gnosticism, (from *gnosis* meaning ‘knowledge’ cf. Hoeller, 2002⁴⁵; Pearson, 2007) as a mystery religion, shares elements of belief with Zoroastrianism, one of the world’s oldest religions, and one that posited the almost universal belief in a fundamental polarisation between the forces of good and evil, with the world as their battleground (Simon, 2004). As we have seen, Judaism resolved some of the tensions arising from the ‘failure’ of the ‘old gods’ by affirming adherence to an all-powerful monotheistic, masculine deity. The Gnostics were not so sure, querying both genesis and prior habitation of the creator god in question (Simon, 2004,). They offered an alternative; a completely different cosmogony which appears to draw upon a number of older creation and foundational myths. In some early Gnostic literature, Eve was a daughter of Sophia, the goddess of wisdom, and her ‘Fall’ was commensurate with *Sophia’s* earlier ‘mistake’ of bringing evil into the world by ‘emanating’ a demiurge or false god (Simon, 2004).

This account echoes MacDermot’s (1978/2001, p.26) version. In this case, Sophia’s fall from ‘her place in the heavens, [the ‘fullness’; known as the ‘Pleroma’] to the chaos below’ resulted in ‘her separation from the divine order’ as a consequence of her ‘presumption in wishing to act independently of the celestial powers’ (ibid.). MacDermot sees the myth of the Fall as expressive of mankind’s ontological shift from a world view where divinity resided ‘in that confluence between the immanent and the transcendent’ as I describe in this chapter, p.122. ‘With the coming of individual self-consciousness [...] this experience of wholeness was lost’ (MacDermot, p.27). And it is this ‘sense of loss, experienced by individuals who were perhaps living in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Eastern Mediterranean world, [which] may be what is expressed by the myth of Sophia’ (ibid., p. 27).

⁴⁵ ‘Elaine Pagels, in her noted work, *The Gnostic Gospels*, indicates that in the sense that the Gnostics themselves use the term, one should perhaps translate it as ‘insight’, for *gnosis* involves an intuitive process that embraces both self-knowledge and knowledge of ultimate, divine realities.’ (Hoeller, 2002, p. 2)

And so, in summary, whereas, Judaeo/Christian narratives came to shape the 'Fall' in largely patriarchal terms, thereby blaming the woman for her weakness, Gnostic narratives offered a more complex analysis of relations between the feminine and masculine principles, and claimed the serpent as both benign force and victim of the jealous god, or demiurge, who could not bear that Adam's knowledge should match his own. Pagels (2003, p. 166) suggests that,

Intent on maintaining sole power, he tried to control his human creatures by forbidding them to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge. But when Adam and Eve disobeyed him, and chose to seek knowledge of the divine Source above, he realized that they had listened to their inner resource, the luminous *epinoia*. As soon as the creator-god realized what they had done, he retaliated.

In a letter to Freud written in 1912, Jung stated that, 'the Gnostic conception of Sophia was an embodiment of an ancient wisdom that he felt would appear once again in modern psychoanalysis.' And Hoeller (2001, p. 19) continues by quoting Italian scholar Fioramo's History of Gnosticism where the latter argues that, "Inasmuch as it involves research into the ontological self, a cognitive technique that anticipates the modern process of individuation, ancient, Gnosis [...] in a sense prefigured, and [...] helped to clarify, the nature of Jungian spiritual therapy." And the key to what this 'ancient wisdom' might comprise is found in Pagel's account of the 'inner resource, the luminous *epinoia*' noted above: 'We might translate this as 'imagination' [...] *epinoia* conveys hints and glimpses, images and stories, that imperfectly point themselves toward what we cannot now fully understand' (Pagels, 2003, p.165).

But what is the origin of these insights, and why do they differ from the script with which we are most familiar? They come from those Gnostic texts, both pre and post-Christian, which survived the purges of the fourth century AD (Pagels, 1979, 2003; Robinson, (Ed.) 1990; Simon, 2004). In 1945, an Arab peasant, digging for soil to fertilise his crops, unearthed a number of jars holding papyrus scrolls which had survived the best part of sixteen centuries. The collection, brought together as the Nag Hammadi library, after the region in which the scrolls were found, comprises: 'twelve codices plus eight leaves from a thirteenth and contains fifty-two separate tractates' (Robinson, 1990, p. ix). They include: The Prayer of the Apostle Paul; The Apocryphon of John; The Gospel of Truth; The Gospel of Thomas; The Gospel of Philip; On the Origin of the World; The Exegesis on the Soul; The Interpretation of Knowledge; The Gospel of Mary, and The Sophia of Jesus Christ. But why were they buried, and what

has their loss meant in terms of the West's construction of narrative routes to knowledge and wisdom?

The first two to three hundred years AD saw the rise of many forms of Christian worship throughout the Middle East, with some sects celebrating the important role that women also played in seeking the spiritual awarenesses of which we have spoken. The emphasis for many was on the unknowability of God, an acceptance of the 'via negative, recognizing what cannot be known' (Pagels, 2003, p.163; original emphasis). But this degree of openness became part of the intense struggle for the soul of the Christian church which would eventually lead to the suppression of such Gnostic views and the emergence of a much more literal basis to faith. The history of the early church is one of splits and schisms, as well as of toleration for many and diverse forms of worship and religious expression. But in the ultimate interests of clarity and control, such toleration could not be long endured. Irenaeus was one of the more influential of the competing voices, 'I suggest that the author of the Secret Book knew how Christians like Irenaeus challenged those who spoke of the 'God beyond God', and insisted that everyone worship only the creator.' (Pagels, 2003, p.166). And it would be the views of Irenaeus that would prevail, so that, as Pagels argues (p.167), the 'creator's hostility to *epinioa*' in the orthodox version of the Genesis story, 'then, is a parable, both comic and painful, of conflict between those who seek spiritual intuition and those who suppress it.' For it would be the views of Irenaeus, and others like him, that would eventually find ultimate sanction under Emperor Constantine's adoption, and later Justinian's avowal, of Christianity as the state religion. Suppression of alternative views was but one price that was paid for a supposedly coherent and accessible religious framework.

The struggle was also played out in equally destructive contestation about the nature of god's 'Word' (logos). In certain Gnostic narratives, logos was represented by Jesus, and it was his marriage to Sophia that would right the wrong of her Fall, and restore humanity to its lost wholeness; 'it will be the universal organism of "Godmanhood," the incarnation of Sophia as the Holy Spirit' (MacDermot, op cit. p. 85). But this was but one of the contesting narratives, and once again, the resulting conflict would prove disastrous for those who sought a more imaginative relationship with the divine. 'Around 318, [...] a popular Libyan priest named Arius, was preaching that the Word of God, (ie in its manifestation as Christ) while divine, was not divine in the same way as God the Father' (Pagels, 2003, p.172, my parenthesis). This view was declared

heretical, and Arius and his followers were excommunicated. But the controversy ignited further battles, and Constantine declared that the matter should be decided at Nicaea, in 325, where the bishops would meet ‘to formulate a creed for the universal church’ (ibid. p.172). The controversy did not end with the judgement at Nicaea, and Arius’s view would continue as a site of contestation for several more centuries, and its condemnation would find expression in the paintings in the Spanish Chapel of Santa Maria Novella, Florence. The die was cast for the history of the Western church, and for the creed that must be adopted by anyone who wished to belong. During the following few decades, the twenty seven writings which would form the accepted canon that we know as the New Testament would be chosen over the myriad other texts that had encouraged and celebrated other ways of knowing. These texts would be proscribed, most of them destroyed, save for those which were buried, for posterity, in the sands of Nag Hammadi. So, what were the consequences for the framing of knowledge, wisdom and ‘glimpses of the divine’ which comprise the substance of my quest at this point in the narrative?

As a result of the canonisation of biblical text, within the West, and the proscription of so much Gnostic literature, the ‘classic sequence’ of ‘Everyperson’s salvation history’ came to be shaped as Treier, (2006, pp.36, 37; drawing upon the work of Alonso-Schokel), explains:

“God’s initiation in giving, categorical precept, rebellion, punishment, mercy, and then the continuation of history.” Israel’s covenant story of being given a task and blessing, but then falling into a curse, is Adam’s story and vice versa: the Gen[esis] 2-3 account is both “paradigmatic” and “prototypical”.

I am suggesting that this discursive construction of ‘salvation history’ formed part of our Western framing of narrative and, by extension, much of how we frame our progressive ways of how to know. By progressive, I am not attributing a value judgement; rather I am suggesting the linear ways in which we frame our lifeworld narratives through time, and the kinds of cultural weightings we attribute to the trials and tribulations that accompany our journeys. ‘Adam’s story’, (Treier, ibid) has interesting resonances with Western fairy tales and myths; cf Maitland, (2012) and Godwin’s (1994) exploration of the Quest for the Holy Grail. But I shall now turn to another key element in the construction of certain of our major Western epistemological discourses and their framings of the particular ways of knowing that might be available to us.

The influence of Ancient Greece

As I have already noted in chapter one, the philosophies of Ancient Greece offered a range of potentialities in how epistemological framings might be expressed and pursued. But they also helped foster a particular ‘turn’ in how our apprehensions of the world might be shaped and articulated, and this reflected an increasing reliance on human intellect as the means by which we might perceive our knowledge of the workings of the world. However, as I stressed in my earlier discussion, by drawing upon Armstrong (2009, p.67), ‘The rationalism of Ancient Greece was not opposed to religion; indeed, it was itself a faith tradition that evolved its own distinctive version of the principles that guided most of the religious traditions.’ In other words, I emphasised the importance of remembering the synergy between rationalism and faith as important. I also stressed the need to be aware of a tendency to reduce the complexity and diversity of so much Ancient Greek thinking in order to suggest a more or less straightforward path from Greek ‘rationality’ to the ways in which we frame some of our own epistemological predilections. I do not wish to fall foul of my own earlier warning; however, I am interested in pursuing what I perceive as the ‘mainstreaming’ of rather more reductive framings of the interweavings between faith, belief, myth, reason and rationality; with the concomitant loss of *Sophia*’s potential for significant meaning-making in the light of today’s leanings towards a more instrumentalist and outcome-oriented epistemological bias.

By way of distinction, I would like, now, to return to some of the magic and mystery which surrounded early explorations of ways of knowing, and of our place in the cosmos, and which pertained in later manifestations of Greek philosophical thinking. I am talking about earlier pursuants of the mysteries, who sought transcendence through initiation in carefully orchestrated ‘psycho-dramas’, of which the most famous were held at Eleusis. Clothed in secrecy, the rites at Eleusis represented an elision between myth and mystery whose emphasis was the symbolic; ‘Mythos was theologia (‘speaking about a god’) [...] The fact that the myth could not be understood literally made it more effective’ (Armstrong, 2009, pp.60, 61). In other words, the search for truth was not framed within any rationalist discourse that we would recognise today. Rather it involved an, ‘ardent spiritual quest that would transform the seeker [...] the rationalism of classical Greece would not consist of abstract speculation for its own sake. It was rather rooted in a search for transcendence and a dedicated practical lifestyle’ (Armstrong, 2009, p.59). This ardent search for the divine involved a transformation, a

stepping ‘out of self’; an ekstasis, which led to kenosis; a self-forgetting, or emptying out which was a pre-requisite for enlightenment. And we can see how the later pursuit of ‘final causes’ was not to be seen as separate from, but rather related to ‘man’s’ quest for the divine and for an understanding of both the immanent and thence the transcendent. It was a quest whose interwoven elements would become separated as the shifts in discursive power and privilege played their part on the stage of Western epistemological history. We cannot underestimate the importance of Graeco/Roman influences upon the construction of Western epistemological narratives, and of their impact upon the shaping of Christian discourses articulating the kinds of knowledges with which we might engage (Armstrong, 2007). Whether we pursue Aristotle’s *sophia*, or seek greater understanding of Plato’s ‘ideal form’, the key point is that both seminal thinkers were articulating a shared trans-cultural acceptance of a divine realm beyond the mundane. The history of Christian mysticism, and the monastic ideal, were both predicated upon the fundamental belief that God’s spirit infused the universe and was available to us through faith and grace. Before resuming with the rise of the Christian Church, here is another glimpse of *Sophia*.

I have twice made reference to the Creation of Adam in the Sistine Chapel. I shall now return for a third time, but with reminder of the Gnostic writings discussed above; and of the personification of wisdom, as *Sophia*, and of her role in some of the mystical traditions of both Jewish and early Christian writings. ‘[A] Jewish writer [...] in the first century BCE would see Wisdom (*sophia*) as the human perception of God’ (Armstrong, 2009, p.79).

Figure 2-www.italian-renaissance-art.com/Sistine-Ceiling.html

I suggested that the woman has traditionally been taken to be an image of Eve, but that scholars have also suggested that the figure actually represents *Sophia* which would be in line with what is known about Michelangelo’s neo-platonic beliefs. The point here is that what was being imparted to Adam was a much more holistic interpretation of mind

or the intellect, than we might more conventionally imagine. It is also worth noting, at this juncture, that at the end of the nineteenth century a scientist noted the similarity between the shape which encloses God and the figures, and the shape of the human brain. Then in 1990, Dr Frank Lynn Meshberger argued that Michelangelo would have been familiar with the structure of the brain from the many dissections he performed, and he provided a graphic account to accompany his thesis (figure 14). Of course, this is pure conjecture; but we are left with the intriguing possibility that the symbolism in the painting harks back to the richness of both Hellenic and Jewish mystical/mythical traditions, that I have noted above.

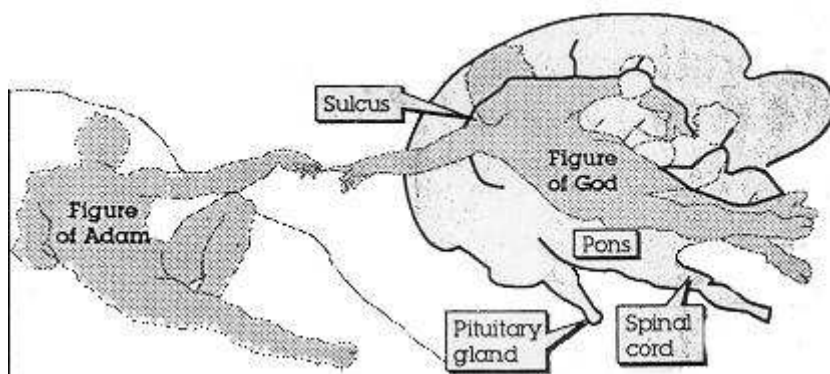


Figure 14 - www.thecaveonline.com/APEH/michelangelosbrain.html

And a further intriguing possibility is offered by McGilchrist (2009, p.169) who reminds us, in his plea for a privileging of right hemispherical apprehension of the world, that God's link to Adam is via the left hand, and therefore straight to the right hemisphere. Whatever the truth of these speculations, I am still left with the need to try and understand what happened to the diversity and profundity shaping the discourses framing mythos and logos to render them so distinct in our current framings of their relative epistemological potentialities.

The rise of the Early Church

What follows is a further exploration of that process. I am not offering an exhaustive account of the history of the Early Church; that has been explored many times and by many specialists in the field, of which I am not one. My purpose is to explore how certain historical and political changes shaped and informed the narrative telling of the tale, the better to understand what happened to tame and thence marginalise mythos, and to place logos centre stage. I am not suggesting a crude absolutism to either of these

categories, nor am I implying an easy synergy between notions of the ‘Word’ and those of logos. On the contrary, my brief exploration of aspects of the Early Church will show how the battle for the ‘Word’ shaped both its development and thence decline as a foundational narrative shaping Western culture.

One of the defining features of early Christianity, and one of its historical ironies, was the nature of its proselytising ethos as preparation for the coming of an un-earthly Kingdom. Whilst the Jews believed in a monotheistic God, they were more tolerated by the Romans on two counts: by and large, Roman rule acknowledged the rights of the colonised to worship the faiths of their fathers, as long as the empire was not threatened, and the Jews were also tolerant of other faiths (Chadwick, 1967/1993). For the Christians, on the other hand,

the *raison d’être* of the church consisted in its reconciling role for all mankind, including Jew and Gentile alike, religious and even irreligious alike [...]The paradox of the church was that it was a religious revolutionary movement, yet without a conscious political ideology; it aimed at the capture of society throughout all its strata, but was at the same time characteristic for its indifference to the possession of power in this world [...] this non-political, quietist, and pacifist community had it in its power to transform the social and political order of the empire.’
(Chadwick, 1967/1993, p.69)

Whilst recognition of this fact led to much persecution in the first two centuries CE, with Constantine’s ‘conversion’ we see the beginnings of an elision between church and state and of a highly ambivalent relationship between the two. As Chadwick notes (*ibid.* p.72), ‘There are Christian writers of the fourth century who assume without discussion that ‘Roman’ and ‘Christian’ are almost synonymous terms’. But at what cost to the Christian salvific mission? How was the Empire to manage the often conflicting demands between the temporal, the secular and ‘God’s other worldly kingdom?’ “‘The emperors have become Christian, but the devil has not” (as Augustine sharply told his people early in the fifth century)’ (*ibid.*p.73).

There was another factor at play in the construction and framing of a particular Christian narrative which deepened the salvific element at its heart. I have already noted how the Gnostic predilection for mystery and un-knowing, for the power of *epinoia*, became increasingly marginalised as the early church reduced the heterogeneity of its many discursive practices to meet the needs of a more accessible state religion. This is not to say that mystical pursuits were abandoned together with any tolerance for a Gnostic alternative to the prevailing orthodoxy. Indeed, the so-called ‘desert fathers’,

many of whom practised forms of extreme asceticism in their desire for mystical union with God, represented a discursive strand which could be accommodated within the church's framing of an overarching narrative. This was not always an easy accommodation, and the history of the desert fathers is also punctuated with accusations of heretical behaviour; episodes which were also marked by the divisions and strife between the Eastern and Western Empires (Chadwick, 1967/1993; Dalrymple, 1997/2005; Herrin, 2007/8). Yet the pursuit of an extreme ascetic sensibility would form a vital element in the development of the Church, and would find later expression in the convents and monasteries throughout Christendom as reminder that the Church must pay heed to its spiritual as well as its secular responsibilities. But how might we understand these changes within early Christianity as it became a state religion, and the shifting trajectories between mythos and logos?

'By the end of the fourth century the Church had virtually captured society', (Chadwick *ibid.* p.174). Whilst we remind ourselves that Chadwick's comments only refer to the countries we now term the Middle East and the West, it is none the less the case that by the end of the fourth century CE, Christianity was firmly established as both state religion and, thence, route to power for those seeking influence and prestige. Inevitably, this state of affairs would lead to complex questions about an increasingly paradoxical role for the Church in relation to its secular and spiritual responsibilities. What had begun as a movement in imminent preparation for Christ's Second Coming, with a concomitant and relative lack of regard for more secular pursuits, would inevitably shift its discursive focus as the centuries passed and Christ did not appear (cf. Holland, 2008). This fact, combined with increasing state power, inevitably led to serious questions as to 'whether the Church could occupy a position of influence in high society without losing something of its moral power and independence' (Chadwick, 1967/1993, p.175).

The problems were compounded by an increasing schism between the Churches in the East and the West; a schism which to some degree mirrored that of the fate of the Roman Empire. Jerusalem was traditionally regarded as the 'mother' Church, for obvious reasons; her fate was bound up in the internecine battles which characterised the history of the region throughout the period under discussion (and which characterise it to this day). Rome, on the other hand, was both 'mother' to the Empire and the site of execution of both Paul and Peter; hence 'her' increasing claims as alternative and equal

home to the burgeoning new faith. It was a schism which was also marked by distinctive discursive differences in the ways in which the faith should be followed. These included the centrality of the Trinity to Eastern Orthodox spirituality and the writings of the Cappadocian fathers, Basil, Gregory and Nazianzus (Armstrong 2009). In a further attempt to deal with the Arian controversy, Basil expounded the doctrine of the Trinity as a,

mythos because it spoke of a truth that was not accessible to logos and, like any myth, it only made sense when you translated it into practical action. The Trinity reminded Christians not to think about God as a simple personality and that what we call 'God' was inaccessible to rational analysis. It was a meditative device to counter the idolatrous tendency of people like Arius, who had seen God as a mere being.
(Armstrong, 2009, p.116).

The Cappadocian fathers' elucidation of the Trinity is important for a number of reasons. It marks a clear statement about the unknowability of the divine, and of its inaccessibility to reason and rationality. Whilst this might seem commonsensical, it becomes a matter of painful and ultimately destructive argument with the rise of modernity in the West, as I shall argue in succeeding pages. Another important element of the Cappadocian argument was the 'fathers'' distinction between,

the ousia of a thing, its inner nature, which made it what it was, and its hypostases, its external qualities. Each one of us has an ousia that we find very difficult to pin down but which we know to be the irreducible essence of our personality. It is what makes us the person we are, but it is very difficult to define it. We try to express this ousia to the outside world in various hypostases – our work, offspring, possessions, clothes, facial expressions, mannerisms, which can only give outsiders a partial knowledge of our inner, essential nature.'
(Armstrong, *ibid.* p.116,7)

This is very interesting in terms of my earlier discussions about the nature of the self and subjectivity, but of equal relevance here is Armstrong's further point about the subsequent and nuanced distinctions to be made between faith and reason. She points out that the 'mystery' or *mysterion* of the Trinity 'was an 'initiation' that inducted Christians into a wholly different thinking about the divine' (p 117). Armstrong also notes Basil's distinction,

between the kerygma of the Church (its public message) and its dogma, the inner meaning of the kerygma, which could only be grasped after long immersion in liturgical prayer. The Trinity was a prime example of dogma, a truth that brought us up against the limits of language but which could be suggested by the symbolic gestures of the liturgy and the silent practice of *hesychia* [spiritual disciplines of contemplation-WF].
(Armstrong, *ibid.*p.117)

These distinctions are important on several counts, not least to note, in passing, the impact of linguistic changes and the extent to which we have wrested the original meaning of dogma into its crude and brutish opposite. But what particularly interests

me, here, is the emphasis upon the ultimate unknowability of the divine and the paradoxical inaccessibility of the Word via language. As Armstrong (2009, pp. 118, 9) points out,

There is no selfhood in the Trinity. Instead there is silence and kenosis. The Father, the ground of being, empties itself of all that it is and transmits itself to the Son, giving up everything, even the possibility of expressing itself in another Word. Once that Word has been spoken, the Father no longer has an 'I' and remains forever silent and unknowable.

Apart from the obvious similarities to other religious traditions, such as Buddhism and Daoism, with their inherent unknowability of the divine, I am also struck by the immense difference between these early articulations of the 'Word', (as described by Armstrong) and our current preoccupations with its literality and fundamentalist potentiality. How far we have come from such profound acceptance of the limits to human learning and language and the acknowledged need for the silent practice of *hesychia*...:

[...] But to apprehend
The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint –
No occupation either, but something given
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
Ardour and selflessness, and self-surrender.
For most of us there is only the unattended
Moment, the moment in and out of time,
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts. These are only hints and guesses,
Hints followed by guesses; and the rest
Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.
(Eliot, 1969, p.190)

What I am tracing, here, is a shift in discursive emphasis from interiority and an 'emptying out of self' associated with the more Eastern traditions, towards the much more linear preoccupations of the West which marked some of the defining elements of its salvific narrativ thrust. I shall now turn to a brief mention of the role that St Augustine (of Hippo) played in articulating that shift and, thence, in framing key ecclesiastical doctrines whose discourses still affect us today. I shall argue that Augustine marked another narrativ turn from the more mythic preoccupations of the Eastern Church (and of the wisdom literatures of the more mystical elements of Judaism, early Christianity and Gnosticism), towards the more prophetic and progressive discourses which marked key Western preoccupations for the next almost eighteen hundred years.

St Augustine and the 'Fall'

Augustine's *The Confessions* 'a confiteri, the praise of a soul' (397 - 400 CE/2008, p.9) describes his search for meaning in what appeared a meaningless universe. It charts his early rejection of Christianity, his adherence to the Manichean doctrines of the East, his grief at the death of his closest friend, his relations with his mistress, and throughout, a restless yearning for a deeper peace to quieten his undoubtedly troubled soul. He had read Aristotle and appreciated the latter's articulation of rules governing our materiality, but it was his reading of the Platonists which effected a mediation into Grace, and opened the way to illumination and conversion. His erstwhile futile attempts at intellectual apprehension of the source of all meaning, and thence his estrangement from that source could now be assuaged through acceptance of the ultimate unknowability of the divine, whilst paradoxically accepting that unknowability as proof of divinity's existence. Augustine's articulation of the Trinity rendered it an intrinsic part of our mental apparatus. He internalised its triadic aspects as 'memory (*memoria*), understanding (*intellectus*) and will or love that gave us an insight into the triune life of God' (Armstrong, 2009, p.120).

There is something quite extraordinary about reading Augustine's *Confessions*, albeit in translation. The agonies which accompany his journey towards Christian belief, firstly, in more intellectual, thence in emotional and spiritual terms, have the shocking immediacy and accessibility of our own human struggles. 'The higher transport is ushered in by the deeper pain' (Modern English Version, 2008, p.131). But what also marks Augustine's journey is an equally human predisposition to move away from, to ultimately vilify, some of those very experiences which brought him such 'transport'. His quest was to distinguish between the 'foul and accursed enchantment [and] the delight that is appropriate and lawful' (ibid. p.131). In asking, 'what is the ultimate purpose of ebb and flow, alternate displeasure and reconciliation?' (ibid. p.131), Augustine answered in ways which have marked him as both misogynist and intolerant. His 'entirely novel exegesis' of the beginning of Genesis led to his

doctrine of Original Sin, one of his less positive contributions to Western theology [...] Despite the salvation wrought by Christ, humanity was still weakened by what Augustine called 'concupiscence', the irrational desire to take pleasure in beings instead of God itself [...] The spectre of reason dragged down by the chaos of lawless sensation reflected the tragedy of Rome [...] Jewish exegetes had never seen the sin of Adam in this catastrophic light and the Greek Christians, who were not affected by the barbarian scourge, have never accepted the doctrine of Original Sin. Born in grief and fear, this doctrine has left Western Christians with a difficult legacy

that linked sexuality indissolubly with sin and helped to alienate men and women from their humanity.’
(Armstrong, 2009, p.122; emphasis added)

The rise of modernity and the supremacy of logos over mythos

There are obviously a great number of issues arising from the preceding pages which would warrant a number of theses even to begin to unravel (and, of course, there have been many). What I am chiefly interested in is the ways in which certain foundational narratives in the West have privileged epistemological discourses which favour reason and rationality over other ways of knowing. I shall now turn to the rise of modernity and what I argue as the further relegation of our potential for Sophia to the margins of the mythic and the magical. I shall limit my discussion to two key points: The first concerns the distinction between the immanent and the transcendent, between the natural and the supernatural realms. Charles Taylor (2007, p.16) argues that the rise of modernity in the West brought with it a shift from what he terms the naïve, porous self, who was open to the enchantment, mystery and awe of the supernatural realm, and the modern buffered self who limits meaning to the immanent and the mundane:

The great invention of the West was that of an immanent order in Nature, whose working could be systematically understood and explained on its own terms [...] This notion of the ‘immanent’ involved denying – or at least isolating and problematizing – any form of penetration between the things of Nature, on the one hand, and the ‘supernatural’ on the other, be this understood in terms of the one transcendent God, or of Gods or spirits, or magic forces or whatever.

Taylor is not suggesting that the modern and buffered self does not experience moments of what he terms ‘fullness’, but that these moments with their ‘mystery’ and ‘depth’ can be articulated ‘as entirely anthropological’ (2007, p.356). Neither is he reverting to the ontological fusion between humanity and the gods which was explored above. His thesis is questioning the extent to which the modern mind has found other and sufficient answers to these glimpses of ‘mystery’ and ‘depth’. And he is alert to the cultural consequences that the shift from the porous to the buffered self can bring; in terms of ‘disengagement’ which ‘is frequently carried out in relation to one’s whole surroundings, natural and social’ (op.cit. p.42). Taylor’s distinctions between pre- and post-modern selves are not meant to be taken either simply or literally; he is not advocating an homogenous modern ‘self’ which is impervious to the transcendent.

Rather, his thesis is symbolic articulation of our current cultural predilections and he asks us to consider what the consequences might be...⁴⁶

The second, and related, point concerns the shifting articulations of the discourses surrounding belief and reason. Enlightenment thinking, and the impact of the post-reformation, was aligned with the historic rise of capitalism and the concomitant privileging of rationality over faith. This move from *sapientia* (wisdom) to *scientia*, ‘was undertaken with the ‘modern’ principles of objectivity and criticism essential to a ‘science’ ‘ (Treire, 2006, p.3), whilst the impact of Calvinism was measured by the maintenance of the work ethic, which was central to capitalism’s sustainability, (Armstrong, 2007). It is in these and other ways, I would suggest, that we see the rise of the modern mind as characterised by a discursive shift away from the pursuit of *Sophia*, (and the possible contemplation of the divine), towards an emphasis upon the kinds of practical knowledges noted by Hall (2011) and discussed in chapter one.⁴⁷ And I would go on to argue that it is this shift which has gathered such momentum during the last forty years with profound consequences for the kinds of knowledges we might pursue, and for the wisdoms inherent within them. As Cox notes in his introduction to Sennett’s exploration of *The Fall of Public Man* (2002, p. xx), one of the ‘great debates of modern thought’ is ‘the relation between religion and secularization on the one hand and the rise of capitalism on the other’. As we know, such debates have exercised the minds of, among others, Durkheim, Weber and Marx. I am particularly interested in the ways in which the rise of modernity led to a concomitant marginalisation of particular kinds of epistemological possibilities for which *Sophia* stands as metaphorical carrier.

I have already suggested that the rise of the Christian Church was accompanied by a hardening against diverse voices which might threaten its power and privilege after becoming a state religion. Such battles for the hearts, minds and souls of its adherents did not dwindle during the so-called ‘Dark Ages’, the period between the fall of Rome in the West and the early Renaissance. It is an Occidental framing which characterises this historical period in such terms; there was both light and scholarship in other parts of the World and within the Eastern Christian Church, sited in Constantinople and which

⁴⁶ And Tacey (2009, p. 75) notes, ‘As Ken Wilber wrote, ‘the metaphysics of the religious traditions has been thoroughly trashed by both modernist and postmodernist epistemologies. There has as yet arisen nothing compelling to take their place.’

⁴⁷ Once again, I do not wish to fall foul of a totalising tendency and ignore the myriad and glorious potentialities offered within Western epistemological traditions. My interest, here, is with certain prevailing tendencies and the consequences of some of their articulations.

became the basis for the Orthodox Churches we know today (cf. Bullen, 2006; Dalrymple, 2005; Herrin, 2008; Osborne, 2006/2007). The Empire in the East lasted for almost a millennium until its fall in 1453. In the thousand intervening years between the fall of Rome and the fall of Constantinople to the armies of Islam, the Christian Church in the East was influenced by the works of Islamic scholars who, in turn, welcomed and enjoyed the ideas of Greek philosophers, such as Aristotle, who had been lost to the West. This latter fact was exacerbated by the continuing schisms between the Eastern and Western Churches and the violence of the Crusades, including the one that led to the sacking of Constantinople in 1204. Whilst occasional scholars took back to Rome the glories of Eastern metaphysics and other intellectual pursuits in medicine, astronomy and other arts and sciences, including the work of scholars such as Averroes, such was the increasing intellectual tyranny within the Western Church that the potential for their full flowering fell victim over and over again to the fires and the rack of the inquisition. I have already noted the kinds of destructive ‘othering’ of different world views as illustrated in the frescoes in the Church of Santa Maria Novella, in Florence. Indeed, the tensions between faith and reason as vehicles for understanding our natural world continued throughout the renaissance and well into the 17th century. Those scholars in the West, such as Galileo, who maintained Copernicus’s theory of a heliocentric universe, were punished by a Church which had not learned the lessons of its own Thomas Aquinas who urged the ‘peaceful and productive co-existence of faith and reason’ (Lyons, 2009, p. 201). In other words, faith and reason need not be mutually exclusive as vehicles for understanding God’s world and his cosmos. The natural world might be subject to natural laws, accessible via the use of analytic reason, but that did not preclude the possibility of faith in a belief system of which those natural laws might be a part. Unfortunately, the Church’s general unwillingness to accommodate the findings of science, many of which were based on Arab teachings, led to an inevitable hardening on both sides of an increasing schism between epistemologies appropriate to faith (the transcendental) and those which articulated the immanent world of natural law.

Nevertheless, the fearsome inquisitors never managed to put the jinn of Arab science back in the bottle. The findings of Johannes Kepler on elliptical planetary orbits and Isaac Newton’s later theory of gravitation, published in 1687, effectively completed the work of Copernicus and helped guarantee the success of the scientific revolution.
(Lyons, 2009, p.201)

It was a revolution which also helped give rise to the period known as the Enlightenment which began in the seventeenth century, and which has been heralded as

the Age of Reason. This was preceded by another direct attack on the Catholic Church in the form of the Reformation which effectively made 'man' arbiter of his own relationship with god. By the time of the Enlightenment which, for argument's sake we might regard as coterminous with the rise of the project of modernity, control of the schism between the epistemologies pertaining to faith and to reason was no longer in the hands and the power of the clerics.

That project amounted to an extraordinary intellectual effort on the part of Enlightenment thinkers to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their inner logic [...] The scientific domination of nature promised freedom from scarcity, want, and the arbitrariness of natural calamity. The development of rational forms of social organization and rational modes of thought promised liberation from the irrationalities of myth, religion, superstition, release from the arbitrary use of power as well as the dark side of our own human natures [...] It was, above all, a secular movement that sought the demystification and desecration of knowledge and social organization in order to liberate human beings from their chains.

(Harvey, 1990, pp. 12, 13)

There are a number of elements here which warrant attention, not least the emphasis upon the term 'rationality' which illustrates its growing separation from what we have hitherto termed 'reason'. With the Enlightenment, we see articulation of the denigration of myth to the realms of the irrational. The 'Word', logos, is no longer the Word of God and accessible to the minds and hearts of the believer; now logos reigns supreme as charioteer for science and rationality, and tramples its erstwhile partner, mythos, into the dust. I am aware that the preceding sentence is a little simplistic, to say the least, and that I have resorted to a very large brush in order to make my point. But I hope that I might be forgiven this tilting into melodrama in the interests of economy and of moving my thesis forward. The fact is that however many shadings have characterised the so-called Age of Reason, its consequences, both positive and negative, are still with us today. Whereas we might applaud the rise of greater freedoms which accompanied modernity's belief in 'man's' progressive potential, we must also remain aware of the Enlightenment's dark side. To try and banish irrationality revealed a fundamental misapprehension at the heart of the project as to the nature of 'man' and of what he was capable:

Writing in the shadow of Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia, [Horkheimer and Adorno] argued that the logic that hides behind Enlightenment rationality is a logic of domination and oppression. The lust to dominate nature entailed the domination of human beings, and that could only lead, in the end, to 'a nightmare condition of self-domination' (Bernstein, 1985, 9).

(Harvey, 1990, p. 13)

It is an argument that is still being played out today, but there are other elements which accompanied modernity's arrival on the intellectual stage of the West and which are germane to my thesis. I have already noted an increasing distinction between reason and rationality; to this might be added an increasing privileging of objectivity over subjectivity. The grounds are being laid for the arrival of positivism and the insistence that what counts and can be known is that which can be observed and measured. This marks the fullest expression of what McGilchrist (2009, p.337) calls our left-hemispherical western bias:

There are obvious continuities between the Reformation and the Enlightenment. They share the same marks of left-hemisphere domination: the banishment of wonder; the triumph of the explicit, and, with it, mistrust of metaphor; alienation from the embodied world of the flesh, and a consequent cerebralisation of life and experience.

Such is the triumph of logos over mythos, and how far we have come from a potential synthesis which marked the philosophy of Heraclitus: 'Appreciating this coming together, wherein all opposing principles are reconciled, was the essence of *sophia*' (McGilchrist, 2009, p.269). But what was happening to Sophia in the midst of such narrowing of intellectual and spiritual possibilities? There is a delightful, and soul-saving, irony in the fact that even in the midst of repression of the 'other', and of the tyrannical silencing of voices which do not conform, there is always the potential for those voices to find expression and to bring light:

As the Mother of the Logos, Mary took on attributes of the Judaic biblical figure of Sophia, or Wisdom – described in Proverbs and Ecclesiasticus as God's eternal creation, a celestial feminine being who personified divine wisdom and mediated humanity's knowledge of God. In Roman Catholic theology, Mary was explicitly identified with Sophia [...] Catholicism's partial transformation of God into a sheltering and forgiving maternal-like figure prompted Eric Fromm to comment that "Catholicism signified the disguised return to the religion of the Great Mother who had been defeated by Yahweh".
(Tarnas, 2010, p. 480: n 16)

In chapter five, I shall explore the re-emergence of Sophia across a range of disciplines and urge her enduring importance as both literal expression of, and metaphorical carrier of, the potential for the kind of wisdom that is so crucial for our pedagogic practices. But to conclude this chapter, I would like to revisit that 'moment of being' which I described in chapter two and which speaks of my own experience of 'the presence of God, or the voice of nature, or the force which flows through everything, or the alignment in us of desire and the drive to form' (Taylor, 2007, p.6). I have acknowledged, and I am mindful of, the discursive shaping of our stories; my 'moment

of being' is offered as fictionalised memory. A 'moment' experienced in the past is re-told in the present and thus, perhaps, its very recounting defeats the time within which it was held. 'Where clock time epitomizes objective time, story time epitomizes subjective time, the time of our lives' (Randall and Kenyon, 2004, p.334). But how am I to frame the 'moment' as a means of 'knowing'? Does my contemplation of it bring me closer to Sophia? It is with these questions, and their potential ramifications, that I now turn to section two.

Section Two

Chapter Five

Searching for Sophia: from past to present

The poor mythology of our time seems afraid to go beneath the surface.
(Manguel, 1998/2000 p.17)

The task of Sophia is indeed a soul destroyingly hard one – to resacralize the life that we have denied in so many ways in the West.
(Matthews, 2001/2009, p.159)

One of my favourite images is of what Oakeshott calls a ‘platform of conditional understanding’ (1975:6): a temporary position in place and time where one can take stock of what one knows and feels at that point – but in full awareness that, even in the process of taking stock, one will already be changing one’s position [...] This seems to be in keeping [...] with Jaggar’s argument for alternative epistemological models that ‘demonstrate the need for theory to be self-reflexive [...] and explain how the reconstruction of knowledge is inseparable from the reconstruction of ourselves’ (1992:164).
(Hunt, 2009d, pp. 130,131)

The tower-room at the top of the house was wooden clad, but what was left from the original all round covering hung in shards of dank, rotting tree-flesh; now seeming glad of their divorce from the stone walls behind and for which they had once offered warmth and protection. The house itself was empty save for her presence in this room. The stairs had led to this moment of meeting; each ascending step undertaken with the *dread of premonition but the knowledge that escape was futile. It wasn't* lack of volition, there was simply no other way: the inevitability of this holding to account.

She was hanging, apparently suspended from the few remaining timbers which just might bear human weight, but there was no noose around her neck, no limpness to indicate lack of breath and life. No, she was alive, this rotting room was her domain, no violence had been visited upon her, her aerial suspension rather more clue to her power. Witch, hag, beldam, crone? No, enchantress, sorceress, virago, high priestess. Queen of the night, with face as white as death and dress as red as blood. Her hair, long streams of black; the last I noticed before she sprang and pressed cold fingers at my throat.

Introduction

This is but one of the many nightmares that I have been having since searching for Sophia. They are occurring with such regularity that I sometimes fear a kind of possession, but with an occasional and uncomfortable sense of such accompanying power that I know I am on the right track. More frequently, however, the feeling on waking is one of depression, even despair, and a kind of residual greyness accompanies my waking and working hours. At times, this greyness is the colour of November, of those short days and long dark nights, yet still sometimes suffused by those washes of light which give a little respite to the year's declining days.

There are a number of reasons for my malaise, most obviously my anxieties about the backdrop to this thesis in both personal and professional terms. Some of these formed the underpinning to the chapters in section one. But what of the nightmares? And which terrifying high priestess is demanding obeisance and a time of reckoning, even to the point of apparent annihilation? In one of the heartening synchronicities which have accompanied my project from the outset, I found the answer almost immediately, and it was one which further impressed upon me the powerful extent with which the myths

and symbols we conjure in our waking hours articulate their deeper resonance and connectedness when our conscious guardians are at rest. But first, a brief resume of the quest thus far, and a further turning of the nautilus shell towards a deeper and more intricate meaning.

My search for Sophia began at the level of intellectual (and spiritual) curiosity as to what extent she might serve as metaphorical carrier for a kind, or kinds, of knowing which I fear we are losing in so many educational policies and practices. This question was situated within my broader exploration of particular ‘turns’ within the development of certain Western discourses which have privileged what McGilchrist (2009) summarises as the ‘denotative’ rather than ‘connotative’ apprehensions of our left-hemispherical bias. The whole project has been framed within a methodological approach termed the autoethnographic. This has necessitated foregrounding the nature of the ‘self’ which pens, or types, these lines. This, in turn, has led me to offer what I term a genea-mythic setting to my endeavour based on my firm belief that the nexus of contingencies which comprise our duthas is part foundation of our ways of knowing. Chapter two had already offered a further clue to the epistemological and ontological predilections of this author. The ‘moment of being’ which opened the chapter described an epiphany of such lasting power that nostalgia for its never repeated ‘fullness’ has coloured the emotional palette with which I paint my days.

There are two other elements comprising the two major chords of this composition: one is obviously the mixed terrain of adult/lifelong learning and education which comprises my ethnographic field; the other, my mother’s vascular dementia. Further exploration of the former represents the larger part of this second section: my mother’s unanchored self, the underlying refrain which both resonates with and amplifies the whole. Given the nature and ambition of my search, it is hardly surprising that this journey has been assailed, at times, by doubt and despair. To seek Sophia within the confines of this thesis is to lay myself open to potential charges of superficiality; of ‘spreading myself too thinly’. How I am to do justice to a search which should have involved far greater knowledge of the classics and of theology? My response is to fall back on to the methodological underpinning I have chosen; fully aware of my limitations, I can offer no more than the partial and subjective account I outlined in the opening pages. But such rationalisation does not always silence the voices in my head, the visions in my dreams, ‘Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering’ which can tip my doubt into

depression and leave me floundering, ‘with the intolerable wrestle/With words and meanings.’ It is at times like these that the words of the poet offer the most succour:

That was a way of putting it – not very satisfactory:
A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion [...]
What was to be the value of the long looked forward to,
Long hoped for calm, the autumnal serenity
And the wisdom of age?
[...] There is, it seems to us,
At best, only a limited value
In the knowledge derived from experience.
The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
For the pattern is new in every moment
And every moment is a new and shocking
Valuation of all we have been.
The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.
(Eliot, 1969, p.175)

There is also some comfort to be had in the knowledge that the timing of my search, in my late middle age, is almost a cliché if I am to give any credence to the power of Sophia to operate at some kind of archetypal level. ‘The reward for responding to what the dark angels ask is to be returned to a place where the imperative of personal journey may be recovered’ (Hollis, 2003, p.126). But I must remember that this is not simply a ‘personal journey’, and therefore before moving on, and perhaps by way of loosening the high priestess’s grip, it might be helpful to review some of the challenges and contradictions which have coloured this thesis from the outset, and which have compounded some of the complexities with which I am grappling.

The ‘word’s’ fragility - a modernist dilemma, a postmodernist assumption, and a ‘subjective confession’

Whilst I was at pains to clarify some distinction between ‘modernism’ and ‘modernity’ (the former primarily to a movement within the arts, the latter to an historical ‘turn’), nonetheless much confusion remains as to the epistemological questions and challenges pertaining to the differences between modernism and postmodernism. These are far too complex and diverse to try and encapsulate here, but it is important to stress my own allegiance to a particular epistemological distinction which goes to the heart of my search. One of my anxieties has been the extent to which what I am writing is itself contradictory, and can be criticised as such. What follows is some attempt at greater clarification in relation to the status of the ‘Word’ and its relationship to other themes within the text.

One of the many challenges which modernism sought to address was the sense of fragmentation and chaos brought about by a number of socio-cultural and political factors including: the work of Freud and others regarding the fragile relationship between the unconscious and the conscious and the irrepressible power of the former; related questions concerning the nature of the 'self' and 'subjectivity'; challenges to the class structure during and after the First World War; and the rapid rise in technological invention for both aggressive and peaceful purposes. Such a maelstrom inevitably led to the kinds of anxieties as to the status of language, or the 'word', as a medium for articulating the nature of truth. I have noted the tensions in the work of both T.S. Eliot and Woolf, for whom the 'word' was inadequate purveyor.⁴⁸ But, nonetheless, the challenge for both artists concerned their assurance that there was some kind of underlying reality, or truth, to which language might point. Thus, the 'word' still functioned as conduit to that underlying veracity. It was this materiality of language with which Maclean also struggled. The added poignancy of his determination to write in a vanishing tongue was his fundamental belief that this threatened language had its own, and vital, role to play in articulating its, and our broader, lifeworld. For modernist artists such as these, the struggle was of realising their visions via the medium of the written word because the relationship between the signifier and the signified had not yet been rent asunder, although it had been rendered problematic. It was postmodernism which would wield that final blow. Le Fanu, writing in 1987, offers a helpful summary and reminds us of how relatively recent are these considerations:

In the debates about philosophy and literature that have taken place in the West over the last fifteen years or so there has emerged a tendency to deny the relation between speech and authenticity. Language, it has been remarked, speaks us (rather than the other way round). The self is a fiction, an impossible metaphysical entity. In the general trawl of ideologies (going with a concomitant decline in religious faith) an extreme scepticism has grown up about whether language can ever find, or master, truth.
(Le Fanu, 1987, p.82)

Such scepticism leaves me on the horns of a dilemma as I have tried to show in section one. My epistemological or ontological predilection partially arises from my assumptions regarding the development of some kind of relatively stable sense of self which was nurtured within the ducts explored in chapter three. Chapter two had already laid the foundation for this particular disposition because of my belief in some kind of transcendental possibility as experienced in that epiphanic moment of mystery

⁴⁸ '... Words strain, Crack and sometimes break, under the burden, Under the tension, slip, slide, perish, Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place, Will not stay still.'
(Eliot, 1969, p.175)

and grace. However, I am grateful to the challenges which have accompanied postmodernism's assaults on certain grand narratives including those of science and history. It is thanks to such multivocal offensives that I am pursuing a methodological approach which privileges the relative over the quasi-essentialist.

Perhaps it is sufficient, at this point, for me to acknowledge my somewhat selective choice and use of the various tools at my disposal; if I might borrow from Jung, '[Who] commented that he regarded his own contribution to his field as a "subjective confession"', suggesting that a theory is an expression of the theorist's individual character, ancestry, and disposition' (Lall, 2007, p.121). However, there is another dilemma arising out of the problematic status of the 'word' and it is to this that I shall now turn.

The 'Word' in relation to mythos and Sophia

Chapter four explored the marginalisation of Sophia from certain Western discourses, and suggested that her decline reflected a shift in discursive emphasis from mythos to logos. I drew upon a range of secondary sources to support my belief that the struggles between faith and reason, within the Western Christian Church, both reflected and played a crucial role in ecclesiastical decline and the rise of the kinds of rationality which marked the age of modernity. For the sake of argument, I had suggested some kind of synergy between my personification of Sophia as mythos, and therefore placed her in conflict with logos. However, such synergy is also riven with contradiction.

The problem concerns the diverse ways in which Sophia has been claimed and reclaimed through the ages. For some Gnostics, she was both wisdom and creator; the prime mover as feminine, who was usurped by the rise of patriarchy. Yet Gnosticism was never an homogenous school of thought or discipline and *Sophia's* status within Gnostic traditions has been almost as embattled as it has without. This can be seen in the ways in which she has been aligned with both mythos **and** logos according to the predispositions of her various reclaimers or declaimers. One of the synergies between Sophia and logos found expression in the movement known as Sophiology which sustained her place as part of the Trinity and gave rise to her worship as such in parts of the Russian Orthodox Church. This was a further manifestation of her alignment with Mariology which I noted in the previous chapter. More recently, she has functioned as a

focus for a particular kind of feminist dissent, and one usually related to concerns with the environment and the protection of the planet. (For fuller accounts of these positions, see Birnbaum, 2005; Hoeller, 2002; Matthews, 2001/2009; Pagels, 2003; Pearson, 2007; Powell, 2001; Schaup, 1997.) It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the notion of Sophia has been used both trans-culturally and trans-historically as a kind of symbolic representation of the repression of the feminine. ‘Throughout human history Sophia can be traced like a red thread’ (Schaup, 1997, p.1370). Indeed, such is her ubiquity that Hoeller (2002, pp. 52, 3) reminds us that,

It might be fair to state that Sophia in any and all of her manifestations (ancient Gnostic, as Shulamite, as Shekinah, alchemical, Boehmean, Eastern Orthodox) has little in common with the sexualised and politicized images of “the goddess” as these appear in feminist and New Age sources [...] Not all that glitters is gold; not all that is mythic and female is Sophia!

And it reminds me of the clarity needed in my own appropriation of her in terms of this thesis.

From the outset, she has served as metaphorical carrier of the kind, or kinds of knowing which I fear are becoming less available to us for reasons which will be explored in the rest of this section. ‘Sophia’ does represent ‘wisdom’ in both Greek and early Judaic and Christian writings. In the Middle Ages, she was depicted ‘as queen of the seven liberal arts’ (Powell, 2001, p.57), and she has functioned as that ‘red thread’ throughout the shifting discourses relating the relative fortunes of faith, reason and rationality. Thus, for me, she has tremendous potency as symbolic medium through which I might explore both my professional and certain personal anxieties. As I have pointed out, there is a wealth of material to support my argument about *Sophia’s* cultural and historical marginalisation. One of the questions which this thesis considers concerns the consequences of such marginalisation in cultural terms. I agree with McGilchrist’s sombre analysis of the inherent bias which characterises certain Western preoccupations, and I am happy for that bias to be attributed, however metaphorically, to a left-hemispherical connotation of our world. I am also mindful of the kinds of damages which result when certain energies and ways of seeing are denied expression and repressed. The extent to which we might concur with Hoeller’s (2002, p.53) statement that, ‘Today, as before, Sophia remains the great prototype of our exiled and alienated human condition’, is a moot point. However, I am sufficiently open to the lessons of the unconscious to recognise my night time visitor and I ignore her at my peril.



Fig. 15 'Sophia' from 'The Book of Wonders' David Jors or Jovis, 16th Century – copyright unknown.

This image, taken from Godwin, (1994, p. 202) illustrates some of the symbolical weight that Sophia has carried through the centuries.

Notes towards a methodology – part three: In search of a paradigm

In my introduction, I placed this particular inquiry within what Denzin and Lincoln (2008) have called the ‘eighth moment’ in the history of qualitative research in North America.⁴⁹ In their fourth edition of *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2011), Denzin and Lincoln, and others of their collaborators in this volume, have further debated the relevance of this ‘moment’ as part of the ‘methodologically contested present’ (2011, p. xi) which has confronted qualitative researchers in the States as part of the backlash pertaining to Bush’s support for the No Child Left Behind legislation which demanded evidence-based outcomes and signalled a kind of retreat to more normative methods of inquiry. This latest volume is particularly significant in recognising the impact that such retreat entails, and not just in North America, and in articulating a range of appeals for the sustenance of the kind of ‘multiple findings’ which aim to speak back to power:

The call here is for an ethnography that moves beyond the “sin” and “guilt” of modernity, and that attempts to unravel the complexity of the milieu which is, according to Davis and Marquis (2005) “vacuuming up” social life and social reality [...] Far from being some imaginary endpoint, we are in fact at the edge of a new colonialism, a new era [...] and one that we must begin to understand more fully than we have to this point. The only meaningful method for that understanding is a refashioned, refunctioned, repurposed imaginary for ethnography and ethnographers. And that is yet to be invented. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p.718)

This thesis is presented in part response to that appeal, and in part celebration of the flexibility and creativity that is evidenced in so many of the contributions to this latest edition (as well as in the writings of the key researchers in the field, from many of whom I have already drawn). However, it is not sufficient simply to be able to gain inspiration from those working at the boundaries; it is also important to be aware of the stages of the qualitative research process however much one might then wish to ‘trouble’ those edges (Speedy, 2008). Put simply, ‘The gendered, multiculturally situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology), which are then examined (methodology, analysis) in specific ways.’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p.11). The first section of this thesis has attempted to adhere to this basic approach, however loosely it has been interpreted. But there is another factor which has to be taken into account and that concerns the overarching paradigm within which these stages are being articulated.

⁴⁹ For a useful summary of the history of qualitative inquiry, see Erickson, 2011

Denzin and Lincoln (ibid, p 3) offer ‘four major interpretive paradigms [...] positivist and postpositivist, constructivist-interpretive, critical (Marxist, emancipatory), and feminist-postructural.’ Whilst they then acknowledge the shades of grey in each and the potential for overlap, I find myself more drawn to a fifth paradigm, one that is articulated in the work of Heron and Reason (1997; see also Hunt, 2009d) and which they term the ‘participatory’. For me, their work offers some respite from the hard edges of positivism and post-positivism which bruise and wound those of us who seek alternative to the I/thou split as perpetrated by their articulations. The softer boundaries represented by the critical theorists and constructivists offer some welcome riposte, but do not go far enough, in my opinion, in allowing the expression of the transcendent or cosmological view. This is why I am grateful for the work of Heron and Reason who have offered cogent critique of each of the other paradigms. In words which resonate with my contentions in chapters two, three and four, they argue that,

Our experience is that our meeting with the elemental properties of the living world, or the I-Thou encounter with a living tree or person cannot be confused with our symbolic constructs [...] while propositional and presentational knowledge are grounded on and symbolize experiential knowledge, experiential knowledge cannot be reduced to either of them [...] The sceptic may ask how we can know we meet anything or anyone, if the meeting is always given our own shape. The answer is that when we open ourselves to meeting the given we are arrested by the presence of other; or to put it another way, the Other declares itself to us so that we resonate with its presence in the world.
(1997, pp.4, 6; original emphasis).

There are shades, here, of McGilchrist’s seeking a right-hemispherical apprehension of the world as being in a state of attention towards it. There are shades of (artistic) modernist attempts at capturing some truth about the world through the materiality of language (Maclean, Gunn) and/or despite its fragility as medium (Eliot and Woolf). There are even shades of the kind of mythic apprehension of the world which finds the sacred in the mundane and in relationship with the ‘elemental properties of the living world’ (ibid.) ‘In the relation of meeting, my subjectivity becomes a perspectival window filled with a world which also transcends it. This ontology is thus subjective-objective’ (Heron and Reason, 1997, p.7). And there are further resonances here with the axiological⁵⁰ underpinning to my search, as Lincoln, Lynham and Guba explain (2011, p.116):

The expansion of basic issues to include axiology, then, is one way of achieving greater confluence among the various interpretivist inquiry models. This is the place, for example, where Peter Reason’s (1993) profound concerns with “sacred science” and human functioning find legitimacy; it is a

⁵⁰ ‘the branch of philosophy dealing with ethics, aesthetics and religion’ (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba , 2011, p.116)

place where Richardson's "sacred spaces" become authoritative sites for human inquiry; it is a place – or the place – where the spiritual meets social inquiry, as Reason (1993) and later Lincoln and Denzin (1994) proposed some years earlier.

Heron and Reason posit a framework which combines critical subjectivity and four ways of knowing: experiential; presentational; propositional and practical which can lead to practical action and transformation. They stress that practical knowing 'is in an important sense primary. It presupposes a conceptual grasp of principles and standards of practice, presentational elegance, and experiential grounding in the situation within which the action occurs' (Heron, 1996, p.8). I find this epistemological framing very helpful in offering a way out of the limitations posed by the other paradigms noted above. However, my reservation about their privileging of the practical stems from my unwillingness to adhere to this kind of epistemological hierarchizing. Indeed, it is my contention that we have so much emphasis on the practical, as outcome, that it has distorted the potential for the other kinds of knowing which Heron and Reason espouse.⁵¹ There is another way in which I have to fall short of their appeal for a genuine participatory approach and that is in the way in which I have used, and will use, the data gleaned from others throughout the course of my research. Heron and Reason, quite rightly, argue that the transformative potential in their approach is based on the democratic means by which their methodology is pursued. For them it is of paramount importance that any participants in their research are involved from the outset in both the framing of the research questions and the ways in which the resulting methods are employed. Thus, their work is democratically and dialogically co-constructed with the 'objects' of their inquiry. Whilst I applaud such an approach, it is too late for me, at this stage, to re-frame my search in such democratic terms. The following chapter illustrates the extent to which I feel I might be able to engage in participation with my interviewees, but I cannot claim that such co-construction has been the impetus from the outset. This is not to diminish my gratitude to Heron and Reason for their framework; on the contrary, I find so much to celebrate in their suggestion that,

The participatory worldview, with its emphasis on the person as an embodied experiencing subject among other subjects; its assertion of the living creative cosmos we co-inhabit; and its emphasis on the integration of action with knowing is more satisfying. To return to Ogilvy's terms it responds creatively to the emerging mood of our times, overturns the mechanical metaphor which

⁵¹ 'Practical knowing is knowing how to do something, demonstrated in a skill or competence [...] It fulfils the three prior forms of knowing, brings them to fruition in purposive deeds, and consummates them with its autonomous celebration of excellent accomplishment' (Heron and Reason, 1997, p.8).

underpins positivism, provides models for action inquiry and above all offers humanity a more satisfying myth by which to live.
(Heron and Reason, 1997, p.14)

And, for me, the most particular cause for optimism is in their final line which heralds the potential for a re-balancing between logos and mythos, and perhaps the return of Sophia.⁵²

Autoethnography - clarifying the terrain

As the terminology makes clear, and as I have noted above, the term ‘autoethnography’ comes from the discipline of anthropology and was originally used to highlight the role of the researcher in relation to her field of inquiry as a means of both acknowledging and, thence, addressing the inherent colonialism which drove the discipline.⁵³ This is not to suggest that all anthropologists were guilty of imperialist practices, but the construction of their academic discourse sustained the fundamental Western bias towards its own supremacy in the face of the ‘other’ peoples of the planet. Erickson (2011) places autoethnography as one of the ‘seven major streams of qualitative inquiry’⁵⁴ which have arisen in acknowledgment of such bias and which are striving to address such imbalance. Combined with further assaults on the ‘objective’ legitimacy of the so-called ‘expert’, we have now reached a point where,

Today qualitative research reports are often considered to be partial renderings done from within the standpoints of the life experience of the researcher. The “validity” of these accounts can be compared to that of novels and poetry – a pointing toward “truths” that are not literal; fiction may be employed as a means of illuminating interpretive points in a report.
(Erickson, 2011, p.54)

This is the standpoint which I have adopted from the outset, and it is one which will find fuller expression in chapter seven when I come to explore the potential for ‘writing as inquiry’ by writing with and through my data, rather than writing it up. However, as previously noted, it is important to bear in mind that the space currently available for such experimentation as a means of developing creative inquiry is also under threat. The struggles for legitimacy between artistic interpretations within the field(s) of social science and more traditional evidence-based approaches are constant and on-going, and are particularly highlighted by the discursive shifts towards greater accountability which

⁵² It also coincides with the work of Willis et al, and Hunt (see reference list) and their celebration of mythopoesis and *wyrd* knowledge.

⁵³ ‘This kind of data collection and reporting in overseas settings was called ethnography, combining two Greek words: *graphein*, the verb for “to write”, and *ethnoi*, a plural noun for “the nations – the others”.
(Erickson, 2011, p.45)

⁵⁴ including ‘a continuation of realist ethnographic case study, a continuation of “critical” ethnography, a continuation of collaborative action research, “indigenous” studies done by “insiders” (including practitioner research in education)’ (Erickson, 2011, p.54).

characterise the marketization of educational terrains. I shall explore this shift in greater detail below, but first I outline the particular arena within which I am operating in order to clarify my role within the ethnographic field that concerns me, and from which I offer this ‘partial’ ‘[rendering] done from within the standpoints of the life experience of [this] researcher’ (ibid).

I introduced my field in chapter two, but to recap, I am currently employed by a department of post-compulsory education and training within the education faculty of a post 1992 university. My department offers teacher-training for colleagues working within the lifelong learning sector and these programmes are subject to the inspection regime of the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). My department also offers a BA (Hons) Degree in Lifelong Learning and a Master’s Degree in Professional Learning and Education. This has replaced our previous Master’s in Lifelong Education and Professional Practice for which I was programme director. I joined the university in January 2004. Prior to that move, I had been employed by the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA) for almost twenty years. My duties there included: running the liberal arts programme for the 18 voluntary branches within East Kent, by managing 60 local volunteers and 42 part-time tutors to deliver approximately 63 courses each year; designing, delivering and evaluating appropriate training for multi-agency tutors and WEA volunteers; working in partnership with statutory bodies to generate external funding streams to support community learning (including a Women and Health project which we ran nationally and which was cited as an example of best practice by the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) in 2001⁵⁵); organising local, regional and national conferences to disseminate best practice in widening participation and partnership working; representing the WEA on a European/Transnational Programme to combat social exclusion in rural areas; organising, chairing and/or convening local and regional steering groups involving senior colleagues from higher education, further education, the voluntary sector, local and district councils, social services and health at regional and national levels – in relation to urban and rural regeneration initiatives; developing women’s education in our South Eastern district; representing our region on the national Women’s Education Committee; teaching a variety of courses in literature and women’s studies, and in a variety of settings including prison and Higher Education. In 1992, I was seconded to Goldsmiths College at the University of London to undertake research into ‘Learner Managed Learning in

⁵⁵ James, K. (2001)

an Institution of Higher Education' and my report was published in 1993. In 1992, I collaborated with Linden West, then at the University of Kent, on a pilot study based at their School of Continuing Education (extra-mural department) which concerned 'The Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning in Universities' Admissions Procedures'; our report was published in the same year. In 1995, my book *Learning from Experience. Empowerment or Incorporation?* was published by NIACE and concerned the results of a project I had undertaken into the potential for 'making experience count' across a number of locales including higher, adult and community education. My rather provocatively titled chapter, 'Making Experience Count – Towards What?' was included in Mayo and Thompson's (Eds, 1995) *Adults Learning Critical Intelligence and Social Change*. In 1996, I co-directed and edited a WEA promotional video called *Learning for Life*. In 1994, I was appointed Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Kent. In 2004, I started work in the university department mentioned above. My work has included teaching on the aforementioned programmes, running our previous MA and, currently, devising a series of liberal adult education courses under the title *Community Arts and Education*. This development has come about as a consequence of the decline in extra-mural provision at the other university in the town, and as part of a strategy to develop greater links with the local community.

This, then, is the ethnographic field, or fields, of which I have been a part for almost thirty years. Looking back on the preceding paragraphs, thinking again about the various developments I have either initiated or played a role within, and reflecting on the research and writing I have done as practitioner, I am struck by two clear thoughts and feelings: my regret at the loss or change of so much of the landscape I have described, and the similarity in my written responses over the years, whether undertaken alone or with others. In other words, what strikes me so forcibly at this point is the extent to which I have always placed myself at the margins, and with a fighting disposition of greater or lesser ferocity. At some level, Sophia has always been goading me; and it is time to face her in her tower and work through the time of reckoning she demands. This, in large part, has been the drive behind this thesis. On the other hand, part of that reckoning must also involve my acknowledgment of the distinction between the 'I' who types these words and the 'thou' of my ethnographic field(s). In other words, I must remain mindful of the obligation of the autoethnographer to be able to distinguish between her own narcissistic concerns and the so-called realities of the field under study. The balance in this thesis must be towards an analysis of the state of the

terrain as it is experienced by minds and souls apart from mine. This is not to suggest that I am striving for some kind of objective assessment; that is patently at odds with the whole thrust of my narrative which has argued the impossibility of such a measure from the outset. But it is important to remain mindful of the nature of my own projections lest the whole thesis falls into a kind of solipsistic mire, thus fuelling the prejudices of those who view autoethnography as both spurious and self-indulgent.

From adult education to learning and skills

This thesis was originally sub-titled ‘adult education and the cultural imagination’ before I realised that its implied ambition was too grandiose on the one hand (how large is the cultural imagination?) and far too questionable on the other – what currency does the term ‘adult education’ still hold? As I noted in the Introduction, the field has long been contested, and has been the subject of countless conferences, reviews and assessments including Fieldhouse’s study in 1996. At that point, there was still sufficient cogency in the term to enable Fieldhouse and his associates to offer a review of adult education’s previous two hundred years, and to make claims and recommendations about the, then, present and the future. Fieldhouse (1996, p.399) made a point of iterating what many have said before and since, about the ‘artificial distinction between vocational and non-vocational adult education’, whilst also reminding us about ‘the identification of adult education as ‘public’ (i.e. state-funded) or ‘voluntary’ (non-funded).’ In words which might now seem rather quaint in their assumption of one’s adherence to the social purpose underlying the adult education movement, Fieldhouse reminds us of the challenges which such purpose generated:

Another is the tension between the social concern to put ‘really useful knowledge’ to practical use in social action, and the liberal emphasis on individual, personal development and fulfilment [...] these themes have sometimes been seen as simple dichotomies determining the curricula, pedagogy, organisation and resourcing of adult education. In reality, they might more usefully have been treated as different but not opposite positions along the continuum of adult education (ibid. p. 399).

They might indeed, but such is the speed with which discourses such as these have been marginalised by state policy and intervention that it is now quite rare to find talk of adult education outwith the reminiscences of those of us old enough to have memories of more than one and a half decades in the field. Yet such is the importance of nomenclature that the naming of the MA which we used to run in our department became a matter of rather heated debate between me and Linden West, much to the

amusement of other colleagues for whom the question was rather too antiquated to cause such anxiety. Linden and I spoke about this struggle at the Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults (SCUTREA) annual event in July 2008. In the conference proceedings with the telling title: *Whither Adult Education in the Learning Paradigm?* we explained that, ‘Some of our recent conversations revolved around whether to use the term ‘lifelong learning’ or ‘lifelong education’ in the title of the [proposed] Masters course’. (This is telling in itself: at no point did we consider calling the MA Adult Education and Professional Practice.)

Using the former risks, as many commentators have observed, signifying an overly economic and instrumental agenda – around fitting people into an increasingly fragile, anxiety-ridden world of conspicuous consumption – rather than critically interrogating its assumptions and presumptions (Field, 2000) [...] But [the latter] title, too, is weighted with a particular discursive ballast which also needs interrogating [...] Its use [...] partially reflects an understandable yearning for those older, more progressive and, perhaps, more certain narratives in the face of our current times. Yet there is a need for caution; nostalgic yearning can cloud our memories of that ‘older world’, where it was often difficult to articulate notions of collective and individual empowerment, or critical and transformative learning, or even to agree what these terms might mean. Such ideas could be deeply masculinist, and Cartesian assumptions about the supremacy of mind, and a corresponding neglect of the body and emotionality were pervasive.
(Fraser and West, 2008, pp. 216, 7)

And in an apt preface to the concerns within this thesis, we also concluded that, ‘There could be neglect, too, of the spiritual in heavily materialist readings of history, despite adult education, historically, being rooted in a progressive, non-conformist ethos (Goldman, 1995)’ (ibid. p. 217). In other words, we were mindful of both the tendency to re-imagine some kind of ‘golden age’, or prelapsarian state for adult education, and of the fact that even at times of its fullest expression, its materialist discourses did not encourage the kinds of spaces in which Sophia might flourish. This is very complex terrain. On the one hand, we have a progressive, non-conformist, Christian-Socialist discourse intent on the general cultural, political and social improvement of the working class (cf. Dennis and Halsey, 1988; Goldman, 1995), which might be seen to have reached its apotheosis in the social settlements at the end of World War Two. The cultural betterment included in this kind of articulation echoed the work of Matthew Arnold (1869/1971) who, in *Culture and Anarchy*, posited his famous three-fold classification of society into Barbarians, Philistines and the Populace. Arnold argued that aristocratic power in Victorian England was destined to give way to the rule of the populace, but for the ‘selfishness and commercialism of a complacent middle class’ (Gregor, 1971 p. xviii), which was in danger of fostering the kind of ‘anarchy’ he abhorred; one of fragmentation and ‘“thralldom to the passing moment” ’ (ibid. p. xxiii).

As Gregor's Introduction points out, 'we are in constant need of reminder that our perfection lies "not in having and resting, but in growing and becoming" and it was Arnold's belief that it was the role of "sovereign educators" [...] to work "decisively and certainly for the immediate future" '(ibid. pp. xxiii; xviii). Arnold's belief in egalitarian access to the 'best that has been thought and said' (1869/1971) became one of the corner stones of an adult education movement dedicated to the extension of a liberal curriculum outwith the walls of the university. On the other hand, we have an almost parallel strand arguing the inadequacy of such a cultural emphasis to be able to address systemic social inequality (cf. Barr, 1999; Hoggart, 1957/65; Roberts, 2003; Rose, 2001/2; Williams, 1958/1989). The history of the WEA has been riven with attempts to accommodate both strands, and their attendant adherents, amid accusations that its liberal programme tenders to the cultural needs of the retired middle class to the neglect of its 'real' work with the disadvantaged and dispossessed. My own history with the WEA was one of attempted compromise between the two: whilst promoting liberal education for the voluntary (and largely middle class sector) I was also developing women's education programmes which urged alternative feminist (and activist) readings of much of the liberal tradition. It is interesting to speculate about the extent to which Sophia might have looked favourably on either. On the one hand, my postulation of her as glimpsing aspects of the divine would have resonated with the kinds of cultural essentialism promoted by Arnold. On the other hand, her marginalisation through the ages, as described above, would have resonated within the realms of women's studies and education with which I was engaged.

It is obviously important to note these differing discursive strands which articulated the 'older' worlds of adult education but the main thrust of my thesis lies elsewhere; and that is with those which frame our current pedagogic preoccupations. Linden and I have noted some of the distinctions and I shall now turn to clearer exposition of the present moment. Biesta (2010, p.18) coins a new term to explain this shift in articulation:

The rise of the new language of learning can be seen as the expression of a more general trend to which I now wish to refer – with a deliberately ugly term – as the "learnification" of education. "Learnification" refers to the transformation of the vocabulary used to talk about education into one of "learning" and "learners".

He notes several outcomes pertaining to this shift, not least the emphasis upon the individualisation of the process, (what function does the educator have beyond 'facilitation?') 'This stands in stark contrast to the concept of "education" that always implies a relationship: someone educating someone else' (op.cit. p.18; original

emphasis). This shift, he argues, also leads to the emptying out of the purpose of education if learning is seen as on-going process without goal or framing. Of course, concerns about the individualisation and the emptying out of the processes of learning are nothing new. (Indeed, as I have already shown, such anxieties played a major role in my assessment of two related initiatives: ‘learner managed learning’, and the potential for ‘making experience count’.) What is of more concern is with the narrowing of the potential for alternatives that would seem to characterise the present moment. I shall return to Biesta’s work below but, by way of illustration, an example of this discursive shift might be seen in the use of language employed by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service. LSIS is the latest manifestation of the regulatory body which oversees the lifelong learning sector⁵⁶. LSIS took over from Lifelong Learning UK (2005-2011) which had, in turn, taken over from the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). LSIS also took over the role of the erstwhile Quality Improvement Agency in October 2008 as it did the UK Qualification and Skills team (ex-LLUK) whose remit was to oversee the lifelong learning workforce; ‘The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) was formed to accelerate quality improvement, increase participation and raise standards and achievement in the learning and skills sector in England.’ (www.lsis.org.uk)

With such an extensive frame of reference (see footnote below), it is hardly surprising that the umbrella term, lifelong learning sector, or workforce might be seen as anything more than a bureaucratic tag for administrative purposes. There is certainly little room for appeal to shared discourses born out of historical struggle and democratic commitment. But the notion of a lifelong learning workforce is also now moribund, and has been replaced by the Learning and Skills Sector which,

is a broad and diverse one, to which no overall description does justice. We refer to further education colleges and use the term ‘providers’ to include work-based and adult and community organisations. Overall, the framework will be relevant to: general further education colleges, independent training providers, public (including local authority) and third sector providers, sixth form colleges, specialist designated institutions, higher education institutions offering further education provision, national skills academies and sector skills councils. (www.lsis.org.uk)

This description comes from its strategic framework entitled: ‘New Freedoms: New Focus’ (2011). Its guide to improvement in 2011-12 is ‘built on five interdependent

⁵⁵ The lifelong learning sector comprised: ‘Further Education/Work Based Learning/Community Learning Development including Youth Work, Community Development /Career Guidance/Libraries, Archives, Records Management and Information Services’ (www.lsis.org.uk)

strategic platforms’ (www.lsis.org.uk) which follow below: the emphasis, in italics, is mine, the colours are original.

<i>Accelerating improved teaching, training and learning</i> – inspiring practice, improving effectiveness.
<i>Reinvigorating curriculum design</i> by building further capability and capacity for innovative and effective development of learning programmes.
<i>Enhancing leadership, governance and management</i> for improvement, innovation and change.
Energising improvement through <i>new ways of working, innovation and efficiency</i> .
<i>Supporting the sector to influence the future</i> – using policy analysis, research and strategic intelligence, locally and nationally.

Given the attention I have been paying to the language with which we frame our educative endeavours, the use of language in this context deserves some consideration. The verbs: ‘accelerating; reinvigorating; enhancing; energising’ are more suited to the activities of the local gym than they are to a statement concerning educational improvement services. The use of the word ‘intelligence’ is also something of a hostage to fortune. There is undoubtedly much of value being undertaken by the ESRC funded Teaching and Learning Research Programme (www.tlrp.org/themes/tenprinciples.html) but its emphasis is on ‘evidence-informed principles for teaching and learning or pedagogies’ (ibid) and this poses the same kinds of questions as previously noted in relation to the anxieties articulated by Denzin et al concerning the closing down of research possibilities in the wake of ‘No Child Left Behind’ legislation in the States. A further example of the emptying out of meaning is the promise that these five platforms ‘will be underpinned by; a new way of working and listening to learners, employers and communities...’ (ibid; emphasis added). There are two issues here: the first concerns the assumption that old ways of working and listening were obviously insufficient; the second, that active use will be made of the verb ‘to listen’ in relation to constituencies for whom that action might amount to the kinds of improvement proclaimed in documents such as these. Yet, as Biesta (2010, p. 13) reminds us, we must pay careful attention to the ways in which language use, such as this, is framed within discourses offering greater freedom and choice when neither is accessible to the constituencies under discussion:

The rise of a culture of performativity in education – a culture in which means become ends in themselves so that targets and indicators of quality become mistaken for quality itself – has been one of the main drivers of an approach to measurement in which normative validity is being replaced by technical validity (see, e.g., Ball 2003; Usher 2006).

If this is reminiscent of the argument about metaphor put forward by Abbs in the 1970s, then there is a second order question concerning the extent to which education's health and well-being have been further compromised in more recent times. (And it is a question of some importance in terms of my thesis because an answer which argues significant worsening in the patient's care offers a little more legitimacy to my feelings of personal despair in relation to the broader political picture.) Biesta would seem to be in no doubt that the situation has worsened considerably in the last twenty years which 'have witnessed a remarkable rise of the concept of "learning" and a subsequent decline of the concept of "education" (ibid. pp.16, 17). For Biesta, this is not merely a matter of nomenclature; for him the decline in the discourses framing educational policies and pedagogies has been accompanied by an equal decline in the values with which we used to associate education's purpose and mission...and its relation to our democratic *raison d'être*.

Biesta's argument about the purpose of education comprises three main elements: qualification, socialization and subjectification; with the latter being 'not about the insertion of "newcomers" into existing orders, but about ways of being that hint at independence from such orders' (2010, p.21; original emphasis). Biesta stresses the importance of value at the heart of any educative endeavour and adds his voice to those who fear the circularity and self-referential framing of evidence-based research into the efficacy of educational pedagogy and practice. 'What is needed', he argues (2010, p.36; original emphasis),

is an acknowledgement of the fact that education is a moral practice, rather than a technical or technological one – a distinction that goes back to Aristotle's distinction between *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and *techne* (instrumental knowledge [...]) The most important question for educational professionals is therefore not about the effectiveness of their actions but about the potential educational value of what they do.

Biesta draws upon the pragmatic philosophy of Dewey because he believes that the latter has developed 'one of the most powerful and sophisticated "practical epistemologies" available in Western philosophy' (ibid. p.37). His interest in Dewey's articulations of potential ways of knowing bring the discussion back to the same kinds of questions that have woven their way throughout this thesis. Biesta's use of Dewey's

emphasis upon the *transactional theory of knowing* ‘concerns the relationship between our actions and their consequences’ (ibid. p. 39; original emphasis) and relates back to my concerns with the I/thou encounter which, I am also arguing, is central to the ways in which we should frame our pedagogic and cultural practices. But it is not an I/thou encounter based on the language of the market place; on the contrary, the shift in discourse pertaining to ‘choice’ and ‘freedom’ is doubly worrying within an educational framework which seems less and less able to teach its students how to critique the language and relationships articulating the current neoliberal hegemony. Biesta (pp. 57, 8) quotes O’Neill, by way of explaining the shift from the kinds of professional accountabilities that pertained in the 1970s, even the 1980s, to the technicist framing that we labour under today.

O’Neill describes the predicament as follows:

[...] But underlying this ostensible aim of accountability to the public the real requirements are for accountability to regulators, to departments of government, to funders, to legal standards. The new forms of accountability impose forms of central control [original emphasis].

And Biesta concludes that, ‘accountability is an apolitical and antidemocratic strategy that redefines all significant relationships in economic terms, and hence conceives of them as formal rather than substantial relationships’ (2010, p.59). He finds some comfort in Bauman’s belief that ‘ “the moral conscience” [...] has only been anaesthetized, not amputated” ’ (p.68; original emphasis), and this might be the case. But it is in Biesta’s (ibid. p.66) use of Bauman’s analysis that I find a chilling description of my professional terrain:

In this situation actors become just one link in a long chain, and they see and have the ability to control only the next link [...] In such a situation the moral capacity of the actor, now prevented from interfering with the overall aim and outcome, is deployed in the service of the efficiency of the process. The moral focus shifts, in other words, to the “loyalty to the mates” (Bauman 1993, 126) - a development that “reinforces discipline and willingness to cooperate” (Bauman 1993, 127) but at the same time stifles responsibility.

In language which is again redolent of McGilchrist, Biesta introduces the concept of ‘proximity’ (after Levinas and Bauman) when speaking of the potential to revivify a moral connection between two parties. I am less interested in the ways in which the use of the term is played out vis a vis Bauman’s moral articulations, and more in the ways in which the term might be elided with some of the metaphorical weight that I am suggesting Sophia might carry. ‘Proximity is more like “attention” or “waiting” ’. He continues (2010, pp.65, 72):

Proximity is something that has to be achieved again and again [...] I wish to emphasise that this is not only a personal task. It is also a professional task, that is, if we are willing to see that responsibility is an essential component of

what educational relationships are made of.

Biesta suggests a ‘pedagogy of interruption’ as a means by which the challenges posed by this neoliberal emptying out of meaning, accompanying the ‘learnification’ of education’s potential for meaning-making and maintenance of democracy, might be challenged in turn. Once again, his description has echoes of my own tentative framing of *Sophia*’s potential. Biesta takes it as axiomatic that education should be about human freedom, and thus needs to be seen as the means by which humans seek autonomy rather than being ‘inserted’ into the existing order. This entails ‘the idea of education as the production of a particular kind of subjectivity [...] with the question of how we, as unique individuals, come “into presence” and, more specifically, how we come into presence in a world of plurality and difference’ (ibid. p.80). To return to the discussions that vexed Linden West and myself in relation to the proposed title of our previous MA, and in trying to bring together the ideas of ‘proximity’ as ‘waiting on’, and of the idea of the pedagogy of interruption with its potential for troubling the circularity of our regimes of accountability and central control, perhaps we might begin to see a way of inviting *Sophia* ‘into presence’; ‘The engagement with this question [of freedom] is perhaps the point where we encounter the end of learning and the beginning of education’ (Biesta, 2010, p.130).

I shall now turn to my use of the final third in the term, ‘autoethnography’ – the element which refers to the ‘writing up’ of the data I have accumulated whilst researching this thesis.

Chapter Six

‘Writing as Inquiry’

Thou my friend! art one
More deeply read in thy own thoughts; to thee
Science appears but what in truth she is,
Not as our glory and our absolute boast,
But as a succedenaum, and a prop
To our infirmity. No officious slave
Art thou of that false secondary power
By which we multiply distinctions, then
Deem that our puny boundaries are things
That we perceive, and not that we have made.
(Wordsworth, The Prelude Book 2 lines 210 - 219)

Perhaps there is a kind of wisdom from which the logician is banished?
Perhaps art may even be a necessary correlative and supplement of science?
(Nietzsche, in McGilchrist, 2009, p.288)

Notes towards a methodology – part four

As I have tried to show in preceding pages, this thesis is predicated upon certain key assumptions of mine which seek to offer some alternative to the kinds of assertions that underpin what I regard as limiting and reductive pedagogical pronouncements. I am encouraged by the work of autoethnographers such as Ronald Pelias, whose intention in *A Methodology of the Heart – Evoking Academic and Daily Life*, is stated in the following terms:

As I go about my business of just living and of doing my job in the academy, I never want to hurt or be hurt, but too often I've watched claims of truth try to triumph over compassion, try to crush alternative possibilities, and try to silence minority voices. Seeing the pain this causes, I seek another discourse, one that still has an edge, that could say what needs to be said but would do no harm. I want a scholarship that fosters connections, opens spaces for dialogue, heals.
(Pelias, 2004, p.2)

I have argued that the chasms which so often exist between disciplines, and the lenses employed to view and value the world, are both culturally and historically constructed. Therefore, they do not warrant the privileging of certain truth claims at the expense of others. I take it as axiomatic that representing life and learning must entail the pursuit and inclusion of multi and interdisciplinary perspectives if we are to do justice to the complexities of our relationships to ourselves, each other and our lifeworlds. I am, therefore, arguing against the kind of reductionism which, I suggest, characterises many truth claims that are espoused in opposition to the compassion required in our work if we want a scholarship that genuinely 'opens spaces for dialogue' and 'heals' (Pelias *ibid.*). Once again, I draw upon the work of Peter Abbs who noted that, after a lifetime of urging the role of rationality as means of understanding our world, Socrates dreamt, in his final dream, that he was commanded to make music. Abbs (1994, p.40) argues that,

We need a return to music and poetry (to stay with the arts specified in Socrates' last dream) because such a return would reconnect us to the life of our feelings and unconscious, but also because the arts are vehicles of compelling cognition necessary for life's understanding.

In keeping with the tenor of Abbs' later appeal, rather than this particular requirement to make music, I start with the premise that, 'Although many are now turning to science and technology for their interpretation of human life, it yet remains the specific burden of authentic art to illuminate the elusive nature of our ephemeral lives' (Abbs, 2003, p.28). I also take it as axiomatic that the notion of 'authentic art' carries with it the

impress of a moral imperative. Thus, I am urging realignment in the ways in which we conceptualise much of our pedagogic practice in order to proffer vigorous rebuttal to those policies and processes which, I argue, limit the potential for seeking Sophia.

As I have been suggesting since the beginning of the thesis, I am sure that my search for Sophia is for a shaping narrative that will provide a kind of bass note to the orchestrations of my personal and professional lives. As an adult educator, it is perhaps not surprising that I should seek a personification of wisdom in order to make sense of some of the discursive framings which shape knowledge dissemination. But equally important is the metaphorical power that Sophia carries; she is a fiction, yet she has offered solace, comfort and meaning as I have tried to heed her call. As we have seen in chapter four, many claim that she is its personification in the wisdom literature of the Judaeo/Christian tradition. My search is for her relevance in autoethnographic terms. But, as I have also argued, it is a search further prompted by a growing anxiety that the value we accord the importance of certain kinds of knowing reflects a cultural mind-set in flight from wisdom.

Sophia has also functioned throughout the text as the metaphorical carrier of my particular methodological use of ‘writing as inquiry’; and in this I can fully concur with Cole, Ronan and Taussig’s point (1996, p.19) that, ‘The relationship a person has to Sophia is virtually the same as their own relationship to the process of understanding.’ This is the basis of the reflexivity at the heart of this project. As the thesis unfolds, the very act of writing helps to bring Sophia out of the shadows, but with the full cognisance that the text’s (and *Sophia’s* !) shape and form are dependent upon further turnings of the nautilus shell which are, themselves, determined by the dispositions of the author in relation to the new learning that she is acquiring. The premises outlined above do not arise ab nihilo from this writer’s mind and pen. Each is predicated upon other choices of texture, shape and content which together comprise the thrust and momentum driving the narrative on its particular trajectory. Some of those ‘choices’ may be clearly and consciously articulated; others remain as elusive, and unconscious, as those which colour the larger narratives comprising this author’s lifeworld and her experiences of it:

A next story suggests metaphors of ‘contingencies, tacit choices, and drift’, where the flow of a life is captured as ceaseless series of microscopic fateful moments, little turning points, and tacit choices taken that are hardly articulated and only dimly noticed that push a life along a certain but always changing pathway’. (Plummer, 2001, p.194)

Yet in aligning the framing of a thesis with the narrational framing of a lifeworld, I am also utilising a particular metaphorical resonance which, in its turn, is predicated upon a further discursive nexus concerning the shape and development of story. The next stage of exegesis must therefore address the nature of that story and the further set of ‘choices’ which have informed its telling; and I concur with Porter Abbott (2002, p.42) when he suggests that,

We seem to connect our thinking about life, and particularly about our own lives, to a number of masterplots that we may or may not be fully aware of. To the extent that our values and identity are linked to a masterplot, that masterplot can have strong rhetorical impact. We tend to give credibility to narratives that are structured by it.

My adherence to this particular discourse places me within the latter of the two categories outlined by Bruner, as quoted by McAdams (1993, p.29):⁵⁷

The first he calls the “paradigmatic mode” of thought. In the paradigmatic mode, we seek to comprehend our experience in terms of tightly reasoned analysis, logical proof, and empirical observation. In the second, “narrative mode” of thought, we are concerned with human wants, needs and goals. This is the mode of stories, wherein we deal with “the vicissitudes of human intention” organized in time.

There is a further element here that needs attention and that concerns the question of ‘time’. Central to the notion of any kind of plot development is acceptance of the construction of time as moving along some kind of linear trajectory; of time ‘passing’ in the conventional sense with which we tend to frame our days and lives. But there are other senses in which time challenges that depiction, and those include the moments of epiphany such as those that have been described in chapter two. Whether we are discussing Woolf’s ‘moments of being’ (Schulkind, 1976), or C.S Lewis’s theological interpretations of those moments when he was ‘surprised by joy’ (Lewis, 1955/2002), most of us can relate to the intensity with which particular memories, sights, sounds and smells can seem to transport us to another level of being in which ‘time stands still’. The relevance of our apprehensions of the shifting nature of time to the development of my methodology concerns the particular importance that I attach to the different ways in which time might be experienced. Once again, I am not striving for any kind of objective appraisal of the relationship between time, memory and subjectivity; on the contrary, I seek a methodology which, in turn, ‘speaks me’, and I strive to articulate that particular reflexivity by acknowledging the kinds of elements that comprise its expression. And there are contradictions; my acceptance of ‘master-plots’ and plot lines

⁵⁷ See also Willis and Morrison (2009, p. 3) for their adoption of Bruner in articulating their thesis of mythopoesis.

suggests acceptance of the notion of a developmental and linear progression of a more or less coherent and unified subjectivity moving through life. This is problematic if one is seeking a degree of liberation from particular foundational or master narratives that have also assumed a unified subject and, therefore, one less able to challenge particular hegemonic structures and definitions pertaining to class, gender, ethnicity and so on. And yet, as I have argued in the first section, whilst welcoming the postmodern and post-structuralist turn which uncovers the degree to which we are 'storied', I am mistrustful of a tendency to de-humanise the subject, preferring to believe that 'a humanistic ambition can still survive and prosper, in focusing on how lives, individually and collectively, are and have been enriched, and made more varied and fruitful, by the actions of people themselves' (Plummer, 2001, in Merrill and West, 2009, p.167).

And in pursuit of that 'ambition', I believe it is important to access one's own prevailing metaphorical structures in order to better elicit and understand the structures of others. For this act of bringing to awareness offers opportunity for clearer analysis of the dialogic relationships and struggles between inner and outer lifeworlds, and of the relative weights and balances of the metaphorical elements which shape and inform them. Brief analysis of some of the language framing this text highlights a propensity for a master plot comprising traditional elements of the 'quest'. This is hardly surprising given the attention paid to the discursive construction of 'salvation history' which shaped much of our Western construction of narrative as I argued in chapter four. Neither is it surprising that my quest is further particularised by repeated reference to the 'search for Sophia'; indeed, that 'search' is the major narrative driver of the entire thesis.

McAdams (1993, p.47) finds the roots of our 'narrative tone' in the 'relationship between the personal myths we fashion in adulthood and the first two years of our lives'. He draws upon literary tropes to formulate his analysis of our mythmaking; 'comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony' (p.50), and explicates the kinds of 'narrative mixtures' that can arise (ibid.). In my case, the tone of this thesis would suggest a mix between the tragic and the ironic, in which the 'hero finds himself or herself separated in some fundamental way from the natural order of things' and 'the narrative tone is pessimistic, and negative emotions such as sadness and confusion predominate' (pp. 51, 52). Certainly, the tone of this narrative is coloured by a profound sense of loss at many levels, and it might be tempting to view this as symptomatic of those early moves and

confusions that characterised my first few years, and of which I have spoken in the *entr'acte*. However, McAdams urges a less deterministic view, and one with 'no simple correspondence between narrative tone and life history. Personal myths involve an imaginative reconstruction of the past in light of an envisioned future. They are subjective creations – illusions, in a sense, whether they be positive or negative' (pp.52, 53). And herein lies the potential for a liberatory practice, through the research process, as it strives to illuminate the nature of those 'illusions' and of their 'subjective creation':

One of the virtues an individual derives from studying his or her myth is in making conscious a personal predilection for viewing the world, which may previously have seemed part of the nature of the world and not of the self (ibid p.53).

And this closes the theoretical circle to Richardson's (1997, p.185) genre-bending work within the social sciences and of her reminder that,

Discourses about the ineffable occur in sacred spaces; but so can collegiality, teaching, researching, and writing. Now, I find myself wanting to turn ordinary sites into sacred sites. I'm wanting to create alternative metaphors for ethnographic practices. We become the metaphors we use. We construct worlds in our metaphoric image.

It is but a short step from here to adopting autoethnography as the main methodological vehicle for my exploration:

I rarely come across people who set out to do autoethnography but I do rather meet many people who resort to it as a means of getting across intangible and complex feelings and experiences that can't be told in conventional ways, or because the literature they are reading is not telling their story [...] In order to take the leap into creating an autoethnography one has first to recognise that there is no distinction between doing research and living a life.'
(Muncey, 2010, pp.2,3)

'Writing as Inquiry'

In my Introduction, I noted that my methodological underpinning was autoethnography, with a particular emphasis upon 'writing as inquiry'. It lies outwith the limits of this project to attempt a full and exhaustive review of the development of the latter in relation to the larger fields of 'narrative inquiry' and/or 'autoethnography'. Indeed, it could be argued that the latter term is so comprehensive that to particularise 'writing as inquiry' is neither necessary nor useful, and that my emphasis upon the '*graphy*' element should be sufficient. Whilst this might well be the case, I would like to draw upon the work of certain colleagues who have helped me to stay committed to my pursuit of more literary 'truths' than are traditionally found within the limits of social scientific research, whichever framing they have chosen to couch their analyses. Some of these writers have already been introduced to these pages, but I am particularly

grateful to Church, 2002; Chase, 2011; Clough, 2002/10; 2003; 2009; 2012; Hoult, 2009, 2011, 2012; Richardson, 2003; Scarlett, 2004, 2006, 2011; Sparkes, 2002 a and b, 2007; and Speedy, 2005 a and b and 2008, who have helped me to move towards my final chapter and the use I have made of my interview ‘data’. I shall begin with the aid of Jane Speedy in her preface to *Narrative Inquiry and Psychotherapy* (2008, p. xvi), who states her hope ‘that by experimenting with and moving between literary, scholarly, investigative, imaginary and personal styles of inquiry [she] will gently scrape away at the discourses of research.’

My rationale for this choice returns me to the distinction between veracity and verisimilitude which I noted in the introduction. There, I was talking about certain artists’ preoccupation with the limits of the word or with language to adequately capture and transmit the world’s ‘realities’ and our relationships to them. It was a struggle which went to the heart of Modernism’s preoccupation with the ‘borders between sensing and naming’ (Bradbury, 1973, p.124). It is a struggle which has found further articulation at the boundaries between social sciences and the arts, and it is one which, of necessity, finds itself at odds with certain more traditional academic framings. Church (2002, pp.239, 240) explains her own practice in terms which are reminiscent of C. Wright Mills:

Against the grain of traditional academic practice, I amplified the private, personal, and emotional dimensions of my project. In doing so, I was forced to confront the ways in which academia is split: public from private, subjective from objective, personal from social. I wrote my findings in ways that I hoped would blur the lines between these dualities, to show how the subjective and personal are simultaneously objective and public [...] Ultimately, we need to become connected to the sociality of our own subjectivities.

The phrase, ‘sociality of our own subjectivities’ does not have the ring of literature, but it could very well serve as baseline to most literary and artistic endeavours. What else is George Eliot trying to do in her classic studies if not explore that fundamental relationship? Indeed, this is precisely the point which serves as the basis for Buzard’s (2005) book, *Disorienting Fiction. The Autoethnographic Work Of Nineteenth-Century British Novels*.

Richardson (1997, p. 15) is another writer who has offered clear, cogent and moving testimony to her struggles within the academy towards a different kind of research: one which punctures the carapace of the old shibboleths whilst, simultaneously, letting new light shine through, ‘The search for the unambiguous was “the triumph of the quest for

certainty over the quest for wisdom” (Rorty 1979, 61)’. Her deconstruction of academic theorising is helpful in further elucidating my own struggles with the kinds of logocentricities that have marked the shaping of particular epistemological practices (p.39):

Only since the nineteenth century have kinds of writing been located in two separate domains, “literary writing” and “science writing”. Literary writing has been aligned with the evocative, emotional, non-rational, subjective, metaphoric, aesthetics and ethics; science writing has been undertaken with the belief that its words were nonevocative, rational, objective, unambiguous, accurate, and correct. This is the Faustian bargain that has birthed modern, core sociology and its homunculus, “midwestern empiricism” (Agger 1989a).

By showing the metaphorical underpinning to ‘core sociology’, Richardson is able to illustrate its value-laden base and to remind us, as does Abbs, of the ways in which the metaphors we use reflect our selves and our discursive constructions. Her metaphorical vehicle is the crystal, and she uses it to play with differing modes of signification, thereby highlighting the transgressive potential of her work as well as critiquing the binary oppositions noted in the previous quotation. Of course, her methodology is predicated on postmodernist and post-structuralist assumptions about epistemological relativity and fluidity: assumptions based, in turn, upon the ‘loss of grand theory’ (1997, pp 13,14):

In philosophy, the principles of uncertainty and contextuality undermine the possibility of universal systems of thought (Rorty, 1979). In physics and mathematics, the focus is on the inelegant, the disorderly, indeed, even chaos. [...] When scholarly conventions are themselves contested, politics and poetics become inseparable and neither science nor art stands above the historical and linguistic processes (Clifford, 1986, 2).

I have already indicated my own problems with wanting to have certain aspects of my postmodern cake, without swallowing the entire confection, but Richardson is one of many writers in the social sciences who have laid bare the normalising assumptions and normative practices of so much academic presentation. She is also one of an increasing number who explore such transgressive potential by liberating disciplinary boundaries, by adopting methodological practices using bricolage and montage, and by fictionalising their ‘data’. I have deliberately apostrophised the term, for I, too, take issue with the literal meaning of the word and its denotatory function within the social sciences.

I have turned the content of four of my interviews into a story. Richardson took another route (1997 p.140):

I transcribed the interview into thirty-six pages of prose text and shaped it into a poem. What possessed me to do so? [...] In the routine work of the sociological interviewer, the interview is tape-recorded, transcribed as prose, and then cut, pasted, edited, trimmed, smoothed and snipped, just as if it were

a literary text, which it is, albeit usually without explicit acknowledgement or recognition of such by its sociological constructor [...] we conceal the lived, interactional context in which a text was co-produced, as well as the handprint of sociologist who produced the final written text.

Richardson acknowledges that there has been sufficient movement within the social sciences to allow for a greater degree of recognition of the co-created text, but she makes the further point that her alternative arrangement, her poem, might not deliver as expected (p. 141), ‘The poem may seem to omit “data” that sociologists want to know. But that is Louisa May’s narrative, not the sociologists’. And she asks the more basic and telling question, ‘More generally, have the concepts of sociology been so reified that even interpretivists cannot believe they “know” about a person’s life without refracting it through a sociologically prescribed lens?’ Indeed.

Other writers have also excelled at offering alternative readings for their ‘data’. What follows is merely a selection; meant neither as exhaustive nor comprehensive analysis: Ellis’s (2004), *The Ethnographic I is A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*. Her *Revision* (2009) offers autoethnographic reflections on life and work. Sparkes’, (2002), *Telling Tales in Sport and Physical Activity* is another *Qualitative Journey*. Stewart’s (2008) *Cultural Poesis* explores *The Generativity of Emergent Things*, and Pelias (2011) offers further help with *Writing Into Position: Strategies for Composition and Evaluation*. Elizabeth Hoult (2012, p.4) perhaps summarises my feelings about the potential offered by ‘writing as inquiry’ in her work which, in turn, draws upon the ground-breaking oeuvre of Helen Cixous:

I therefore developed a methodology that sought to inhabit the space between theory and creativity. The methodology [...] required me to engage in a holistic process of writing, engaging the cognitive, emotional, and visceral aspects of my learning and increasingly requiring me to let go of conventional structures and to have faith that the process of writing itself could reveal the answers I sought.

The interview ‘data’ – the nature of the ‘given’ and the hermeneutic circle

I shall now turn to my use of interviews conducted during the second half of this journey. I had originally intended to adhere to more traditional methods of utilising the material generated at interview. I had planned to work with the six colleagues, introduced on page 26 above (and presented again, as reminder, under *dramatis personae* on page 172 below) by inviting them to take part in my search for Sophia by engaging in a minimum of two sessions each. The intervening time between each would allow for transcription, for sending the transcript back to the interviewee to check for

accuracy and to allow exclusion of any element which was deemed ‘inappropriate’. This could include features which might cause embarrassment or disquiet of a kind which would impact upon the ethical limits required by my institution, and upon my own need to respect and care for their trust in me. As it turned out, factors beyond our control militated against two visits to all but ‘Hannah’, and so I made sure that each saw and checked their transcription, as detailed above. I then spoke with them, on more than one occasion, to check that they agreed to my use of their words, and to assure them that whatever I made of their narratives would be shared before presentation. In this, I was also echoing the ethical advice given by Chase (2011, p.424):

Lieblich (in Clandinnin and Murphy, 2007) suggests that because narrative researchers do not know in advance how they will use the narratives they collect, they should return to narrators to inform them – and ask again for permission to use their stories – when they do know how they plan to present, publish, or perform the work. [Original emphasis]

I had decided that it would not be possible to undertake my own transcriptions, so I employed three different transcribers, all of whom work within my institution, and all of them adept at transcription according to the rules of confidentiality and the rigours of working within the recognised boundaries of traditional social science research. However, my assumption that their experience would produce similar working practices was rather thrown when the transcriptions came back. One had adhered to the convention of translating the verbatim account into a syntactically coherent version, as one would expect, with punctuated sentences and differing numbers of dots to denote the longer or the shorter pause. Another had decided that it was not her responsibility to proffer a lexical template and so the returned manuscript resembled a kind of stream of consciousness which presented its own challenges as we shall see. The third adopted a kind of ‘half-way house’ between the two, having attempted a verbatim translation, but having found herself struggling to do justice to the emotional power of what she was hearing.

All of the interviewees were known to me, and all but Tricia shared my ethnographic field of adult/lifelong education. ‘Jane’, ‘Hannah’ and Tricia were, and are, close friends; ‘Sean’ works in the same department, ‘Susanne’ had been a student of mine, and I had known Peter over a number of years as a highly esteemed colleague. My choice of interviewees was ‘opportunistic’; I knew that each had the experience and the maturity to engage with my search for Sophia in ways which could only augment my

own questing. I was not striving for answers, assessments or any kind of pretence at ‘truth-telling’ beyond the truths of the human heart and soul.

The interviews were deliberately ‘unstructured’; in order to allow for a fuller and freer exploration of the issues as they arose. This choice was also consistent with the methodological underpinning, and with the fact that, perhaps with the exception of ‘Susanne’, the interviews did not replicate the kind of power imbalance that has bedevilled much ‘traditional’ work of this kind. (This is not to say that the ebb and flow of our various relationships did not impact upon the process. I have tried to incorporate some of these subtleties in the text.) Each interview lasted for between an hour and ninety minutes. Before starting, I explained the purpose of my research and began the conversation by asking, ‘What does wisdom mean to you, and how would you see it in relation to adult teaching and learning?’ Throughout all the interviews, and at their conclusion, I asked the interviewees to comment on their experience and to reflect upon the process as a whole. Each was also sent the final version of their ‘fictionalised’ story and asked for further response including the affective. This is in line with Muncey’s (2010, pp.92/93) view that,

questions are raised about the reactions of the reviewer. They can share an intuitive response, check for resonance with the piece, and make comments about the aesthetics of the piece; but on many occasions authors have added the reviewer’s response into the finished article; Sparkes (1996); Mykhalovskiy (1996); Holt (2003); and Wall (2006) to name just a few. These reviews are recognised for the contribution they make to the finished piece of work, not so much acting as gatekeeper to the journal but engaging in dialogue and social reflexivity.

It is also in the spirit of collaborative inquiry that I would have utilised as part of a broader ‘participative approach’, as I explained in chapter four, had I shaped my thesis in this way from the outset.

Between the two interviews with ‘Hannah’, I began work on some of the thematic elements that seemed to be emerging. My approach, at this stage, drew upon my earlier studies in literary analysis, hence the initial concentration on evolving themes rather than a more overt psycho/social perspective which came to the fore during our second discussion. I shared these themes with ‘Hannah’, prior to the second interview, and they, too, formed part of our discussions at that stage. In the intervening months, we spoke on the phone about the process and some of that discussion is also included in the final text.

Before returning the transcripts to their ‘owners’, I worked on them, against the recordings, to check again for accuracy, and to add as much verisimilitude as I could in the translation from one medium to another. It was this process that finally brought home to me the constructed nature of what I was doing. I was building a different artefact from the one, or ones, caught on the digital recorder. I was, in effect, creating an outcome which could never be said to reflect the original in its entirety. It was at this point that the freedom to ‘play’ afforded by my choice of methodology came to the rescue. I would risk what other autoethnographers had done before me and turn my ‘data’ into story. Clough (2002/2010, pp.8, 9; original emphasis) explains some of the challenges inherent in this decision:

So, in setting out to write a story, the primary work is in the interaction of ideas; in the act of thinking, tuning in, decision making and focusing on the primary intent of the work [...] So, I am telling my versions of stories which I have created as a result of my own interactions and intuitions, remembering Richardson’s warning that [...] ‘desires to speak “for” others are suspect’ (1994:523).

Whilst not claiming to be offering a ‘case study’, as such, the words of Merrill and West (2009, p.167) point to the kind of ‘luminosity’ I was striving for, ‘One good case study can, in its luminosity, reveal the self-reflection, decision and action, and/or the ambivalence, pain, loss, messiness and satisfaction in life that has resonance and meaning for us all.’

In a sense, Merrill and West’s words get to the heart of the matter, but they need a little more unpacking in terms of the tenor and tone of my thesis. Throughout, I have tried to problematise a number of issues, not least the fragile nature of ‘the word’ and its metamorphosis into particular kinds of concretising discourses, including those articulating certain religious and scientific narratives. My adoption of Sophia, as carrier of a particular kind of wisdom, has been couched in a language which has distinguished her ‘role’ from that attending other definitions of knowledge, including *techne*, *phronesis* and *episteme*. My use of her has privileged a potential for the transcendent over the immanent for autobiographical reasons which I hope I have made clear. I have also noted the problem in positing such a dichotomy, particularly in relation to the challenges it presents in pedagogic terms. How, precisely, might we invite Sophia into our classrooms if she remains such an elusive, (and illusory?) figure? The answer must lie somewhere along the lines that Jarvis suggested and that I noted in the Introduction, ‘Wisdom, then, assumes at least two different forms – one explores the mystery of being, and the other provides a foundation for becoming. The former is

philosophical/theological (Sophia) and the latter is ethical/cultural preservation (phronesis)' (2011, pp.90, 91). I have tried to retain a distinction between writings about wisdom, in pedagogic terms, and those about spirituality, although I acknowledge that the distinction in relation to Sophia is somewhat complicated. But as I near the end of my exploration, and in turning to the material in the interviews, I am particularly struck by the potential that the idea of 'becoming' offers us. It is a potentiality consistent with the references I have been making to phenomenology throughout my text, and it is directly relevant to the format in which I shall couch my interview 'data' for it goes to the heart of the process of meaning-making.

Lest I be misunderstood, I am not prepared to abandon the transcendental nature of Sophia that I have utilised in my text, and that resonates with the 'moment of being' that I wrote about in chapter two. However, I am obviously mindful of the fact that the credence that the reader gives my 'moment' is entirely dependent upon that reader's own lifeworld and the ways in which she both frames and is framed by her construction, and co-construction, within that sphere of experience. This brings us back to the problem of language. 'Any priority claimed for words is on the strength of their aesthetic foundation as actual responses to the physical world. Their inability to 'fix' reality is the condition of their being in the fluid field of embodied consciousness' (Clough, 2002/10, p.91). Clough develops his discussion of language in relation to Heidegger's concept of the 'hermeneutic circle'. 'There is always first an interpreter, for "only in the context of the existing interpreter can the being of the work matter or make sense" (Murray 1978: 107)' (Clough, 2002/10, p.95). I have found Clough's analysis particularly useful in helping me begin to articulate my own misgivings about the claims to objectivity which have characterised the traditional social sciences as well as underpinning the shift from 'sapientia to *scientia*' noted in chapter four. Clough (2002/10, p. 95) continues:

The social bonds which interpreter and text share in their common language are described by the life-relation of the interpreter. The pre-understanding of the interpreter describes how the reader's foreknowledge is brought to anticipation of the text. This meets the essence of that which is interpreted and is 'the particular kind of reality which is experienced in the act of interpretation', constitutive of the text. But, literary interpretation not only questions the work; the work also questions the one who understands. The circularity of the interpretive process lies in the movement of questioning and being questioned. (Murray 1978: 107-8) So, finally, the truth of what is interpreted is a dialogue with self. [Original emphasis]

There is a subtlety here which it is important to note. I do not think that Clough is arguing that there is no ‘truth’ beyond that which is ‘interpreted in dialogue with self’. That would render the whole research process a solipsistic endeavour: utterly regressive and entirely pointless. The key terms are the ‘pre-understanding of the interpreter’ and the ‘reader’s foreknowledge’ which is ‘brought to anticipation of the text’ (ibid.); it is this relationship which is at the heart of interpretation, and thence of meaning-making. And it is this understanding which has helped me realise the doubts I have always held about the process of analysing interviews, eliciting themes and then offering these as, in some measure, a kind of ‘summing up’ or distillation of the truth of an encounter. But there is a second point here and it is equally important, as Clough concludes (p.96), ‘Narrative is not, then, exclusively a property of fiction, but because consciousness shares this structure with it, fiction may have a similarly privileged access to the real’ (added emphasis).⁵⁸

There is a further point which links to the potential for becoming which I mentioned above. The hermeneutic circle, as outlined here, must not be seen as in some measure limiting the potential for meaning to a ‘simple’ exchange between researcher and reader as each completes a cycle of meaning with the other. On the contrary, the meaning-making generated can be so much more than the sum of the two participant parts, but this is, in turn, dependent upon the openness of both to the potentiality before them. The same is true for the relationship between the writer and the words that she places on the page. ‘Writing as inquiry’ replicates the hermeneutic process by being both institutive and constitutive of the reflexive cycle which pertains between the two. This is a familiar condition to many literary writers who say of their creations, “I had no idea she was going to say or do that, she just did!”⁵⁹

Neither is this open-endedness in relation to the potential for meaning-making to be confused with a kind of ‘free for all’ as Clough also reminds us when exploring the ‘reality’ of the novel (2002/10, p. 99):

The text becomes a witness of that dynamic for it ‘lives’ for the reader between the finite statements it presents lexically, and the infinite experience of the reader, which verifies them. But if texts are ever open to new integrations, it is mistaken to suppose that they are merely ‘like a picnic, to which the author brings the words and the reader the meaning’ (Frye 1957).

⁵⁸ For an amusing and insightful interrogation of the contribution that fiction might bring, see Wyatt’s (2007) ‘Conference story’, where the author plays with an imaginary encounter with Peter Clough in a pub.

⁵⁹ I am grateful to Tricia Wastvedt for her many insights into the creative writing process.

On the contrary, the range of available meanings has to resonate within boundaries which we might, for argument's sake, place within the realms of 'common-sense'. The writing is framed, but there is space for new and fresh meanings to be made, in this reflexive relationship between writer and reader, as their 'coming together' generates the potential for both being and becoming in hitherto unexplained or unexplored ways.⁶⁰ Labouvie-Vief equates this potential for hermeneutical thinking to be a marker of maturity, (perhaps, even, a marker for wisdom?), as she suggests that,

One consequence of the onset of hermeneutical thinking is that it breaks the isolation of the traditional, logos-identified thinker and relates him or her back to a sense of place, history and community. The self emerges out of a sense of static universalism and moves into a view of reality that embraces diversity, change and transformation (1994, p.193).

It is also a view of reality that we might equate with an educational imperative which acknowledges the potential for becoming, for being about 'more than words can say' (see chapter one), and thence for opening the kinds of spaces where a greater range of resonances and understandings are both engendered and encouraged. And it is perhaps in these opening spaces that we might find a way of bridging the distinction between being and becoming that Jarvis states is the difference between *sophia* and *phronesis* (2011). Perhaps the sense of becoming that I am aspiring to in our educative endeavours is one which is reminiscent of the sense of 'waiting on', 'attentiveness' and 'proximity' that I have discussed in preceding pages. I am certainly seeking the kinds of pedagogic spaces where the 'metanoic and the unpredictable' (see Introduction) are invited into play, and thereby resonate with Biesta's hope that, 'The engagement with this question [of freedom] is perhaps the point where we encounter the end of learning and the beginning of education' (Biesta, 2010, p.130). It is a hope interestingly reiterated by Labouvie-Vief in her argument for a greater complementarity between rationality and imagination, and an end to the dichotomous split between *mythos* and *logos*. She poses a similar question to my own:

Why should some but not all adults move on to transcending narrower convention-based systems of thinking? [...] Whether an individual displays this form of thinking will depend on whether there is a supportive culture that fosters it [...] many educational and religious institutions themselves may have fostered conventional and closed forms of thinking. Indeed [...] the notion of conventional values amounted to a cultural and philosophical ideal.

⁶⁰ Whilst teaching English literature to adults, I was often in the position of restricting the more 'outré' interpretations of novels offered by students experimenting with the 'logical' outcome of the 'death of the author'. I don't think it could ever be argued, for example, that the ghost of Hamlet's father was an alien from outer space, or that Macbeth's murder of Duncan was simply a bad dream...

Such closed cultural ideals may well set limits on what most adults are capable of achieving. (1994, p.198).

I am not sure that I can agree with her optimistic conclusion although I fully concur with her hope that,

We are in the midst of evolving a new concept of reason and human nature, one that bridges the old tension between the ‘immanent’ and the “transcendent” [...] Only by developing new images can such concepts as divinity and what they exemplify be changed (ibid. p.225).

And she argues that the Sophia of the Gnostic Gospels united the ‘paradoxical opposites’ that have figured throughout this thesis, ‘considered’ as she was, ‘a feminine form of intelligence or spirit, knowledgeable not only of such masculine forms of learning as the law, but also of the workings of nature, the heavens and living creatures from beasts to plants’ (ibid. p.224). But it is also in the following stanza⁶¹ that we might see the link between Labouvie-Vief’s celebration of Sophia as akin to my own; and it also returns us to the open-ended potentiality that I am arguing needs to be the reading of the story which follows:

I am the silence that is incomprehensible
and the idea whose remembrance is frequent.
I am the voice whose sound is manifold
and the word whose appearance is multiple.

The ‘truth’ about fiction

As with any interviewing process, the thousands of words generated cannot all find inclusion in the finished text. I had to undertake some kind of selection process. I have already alluded to my earlier method of adapting a form of literary analysis and seeking the main themes and how they were being articulated. But I knew that something crucial was being missed; some degree of subtlety, even silence, to which the hard words on the page could never do full justice. I realised that it would be foolish if I allowed myself to be ‘hijacked’ by the anxiety that somehow the themes in the interviews should reflect the key themes of the thesis in some kind of neat ‘summing up’. This would go against the grain of my methodology in a number of ways: it would assume some kind of tidy closure which would be at odds with my emphasis throughout on *Sophia*’s potentiality for the unknown, the unknowable and the unpredictable. It would also suggest that my choice of thematic resonance would coincide with another reader’s apprehension of the same material. Perhaps it might, but then again...Whilst selection had to take place it was, in the end, a matter of poetic licence, of intuition, of seeing how this fragment of conversation might augment or counterpoint that one. It was and is, in the end, a story.

⁶¹ Taken from Baring and Cashford, (1991) *The myth of the goddess*. New York: Penguin Group

‘And where [it might] work, there is surely some surplus of meaning over the cold lexical qualities which language usually demonstrates in the research report’ (Clough, 2002, p.83). In order to further highlight the constructed nature of so much traditional ‘writing up’ within the social sciences, I have deliberately retained some of the pauses and repetitions spoken by the interviewee, as I have the different styles of transcription. This allows for some deconstruction of the text by the participants as it unfolds which, in turn, reinforces its reflexive nature. I have also kept some of the pause marks, or dots, employed by the transcribers where this has aided the emotional weight of the scene and its sense. In the interests of greater fluency, I have glossed over the links between different sections.

I shall offer only brief introduction by way of scene setting and guidance for the reader. Then the story is offered on its own merits, in much the same way as Clough (2002/10) positions his own ‘stories’ in *Narratives and Fictions in Educational Research*. Drawing on a poem of Wallace Stevens, Clough notes that:

His methodology is thus embodied in the text itself, and this is what I have tried to do [...] to blur distinctions not only between form and content, but also between researcher and researched, between data and imagination; to insist, that is, that language itself, by itself, does the work of inquiry, without recourse to the meta-languages of methodology (pp.2, 3).⁶²

What follows is the fictional account of four characters on their way to a fictional supper party which ‘Hannah’⁶³ is hosting prior to a fictional conference the following day on ‘wisdom and adult teaching and learning’.⁶⁴ The towns and villages are fictional although their descriptions sometimes borrow from one or two places in the South of England. **Everything in italics and in Times New Roman is fictionalised although other characters in the drama might be borrowing from my words during the interviews.** Whilst Jane does have a son who is a photographer, and who works in London, the encounter described is purely fictional. Susanne’s colleague does not exist except in the mind of this author; the same can be said for the friend whom Hannah encounters in the church. I have interpolated an important insight into Jane’s ‘backstory’ which has been used with her permission, as has her place of birth and

⁶² See, also, Badley’s review of Clough (2003) and Clough’s ‘rejoinder’ (2003).

⁶³ The names are also fictionalised. All further references will not be apostrophised.

⁶⁴ Unfortunately, as I have already explained, I was unable to use the interview with Peter Jarvis. The interview with Tricia Wastvedt centred on the creative process, rather than teaching and learning, and so I decided not to include her words in the story although her insights into the creative process have been incorporated throughout in both conscious and, I suspect, unconscious ways.

current home. Jane wanted the political emphasis within her story to be located appropriately. However, there is not, as far as I am aware, a portrayal of Nick Clegg on a railway embankment.

This story is not entirely fictionalised in the sense that **all the words which are not italicised, and in arial font, are taken directly from the interviews**. In keeping with the tenor of the whole thesis, I wanted a bridge between two different ways of seeing and knowing. By basing the story on the ‘real’ words of the interviewees I had a platform from which to offer both synthesis and opportunity for further readings and meanings to be made. This choice places me towards the ‘creative non-fiction’ end of Sparkes’ continuum (with ‘creative fiction’ at the other; Wyatt, 2007, p. 319) where ‘the content is dramatized [...] in order to draw readers closer into the emotional worlds of the research subjects’ (ibid.). Whilst I am not attempting a poetic transformation, Richardson’s (2003, p.197) advice is also helpful here:

The research self is not separable from the lived self. Who we are and what we can be, what we can study, and how we can write about what we can study are tied to how a knowledge system disciplines its members and claims authority over knowledge. Needed are concrete practices through which we can construct ourselves as ethical subjects engaged in ethical research, even if that means challenging the authority of a discipline’s cherished modes of representation. Poetic representation is one such practice.

So is the practice which follows. ‘It illustrates and suggests but it does not explain or evaluate’ (Speedy, 2005, (b) p. 64). It is also offered in the spirit in which Elizabeth Hoult included a ‘naked’ piece of writing in her PhD submission in 2009. I have adopted a similar process in that, ‘I am reluctant to close down the text by providing a close reading of it along thematic lines’ (ibid.). I shall incorporate my reflections upon what follows in my conclusion. However, ‘the decision to let this chapter work as a reading, unencumbered by secondary analysis is entirely deliberate’ (Hoult, 2009, p.222).

Chapter Seven

Searching for Sophia: Seeking wisdom in adult teaching and learning spaces

I take someone else's words (someone I respect and trust and who trusts me), slowly read her text, try to understand her intention behind her choice of words, try to place myself in her place so that I feel inside her mind and heart, search for her meaning before I impose new words or meaning of my own, imagine what might be so important to her to say that I must take care not to lose her meaning. Only then do I allow new words to flow from my fingers – the words are mine, yet hers as well.
(Goldberger, quoted in Merrill and West, 2009, p.128)

So the question is, how do you grasp what's going on? That's the key question operating at several levels. It's the question the assessor asks of the new research that is breaking boundaries; it's the question that the government funder asks of the programmes that it's funding; it's the question the learner asks when they are trying to check whether they've learned something; it's the question asked by the teacher, "How do you grasp what's going on?" It's the question that underpins our justification of education, "How do you grasp what's going on, how do you get proofs in a culture that's based in empiricism?"
(Hannah part of interview with WF - 11th Feb 2011)

Through metaphor, the past has the capacity to imagine us, and we it. Through metaphorical concentration, doctors can imagine what it is to be their patients. Those who have no pain can imagine those who suffer. Those at the center [sic] can imagine what it is to be outside. The strong can imagine the weak. Illuminated lives can imagine the dark. Poets in their twilight can imagine the borders of stellar fire. We strangers can imagine the familiar hearts of strangers.
(Ozick, 1991, p. 283)

Dramatis Personae

- ‘Sean’ works with me in the same university department but comes from many years’ service in the police force. His job in the department now includes teaching on the DTTLs programme.
- ‘Jane’ is now retired but worked in adult education throughout her professional life and in a number of roles at middle and senior management levels. Her experience with the Open University, in running an adult education centre in the north of England, and in working in regional and national roles within the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA), has proved invaluable in helping me locate my discussions within their broader historical and political contexts.
- ‘Hannah’s’ help has also been incalculable. In her role as Director of extra-mural studies at a university in the South East of England, Hannah’s story covers the early days of her work in adult education through to the final chapter of her department’s narrative. Her testimony is precisely that, a ‘bearing witness’ to the end of an era and to some of the emotional cost that such an ending wrought in its protagonists.
- ‘Susanne’ currently works for what used to be the largest adult education service in England. Her specialism lies in various aspects of information technology and she used to train within the National Health Service. She had just completed her Masters in Lifelong Education and Professional Practice as one of my students when her interview took place.

The march that morning had drawn the usual crowd and Jane had chatted to a few and nodded to many more of the familiar faces amongst her fellow protesters; a familiarity bred over almost forty years of marching and campaigning. What was it that journalist *had said?* *I love coming to Sheffield, you're the most politically astute audience in the country*. *'Maybe', mused Jane as she boarded the train for St Pancras, 'but where's it getting us?'* The train pulled past the inner wall of the embankment, but someone had still managed to climb down by the track to make their feelings known. A few deft strokes with a brush had rendered a full-size Nick Clegg, clearly recognisable despite the addition of horns and a tail. The caption read: *'You bastard, you've supped with the devil and we'll make you pay, the students of Sheffield will have their say'*. Jane smiled despite herself as the rhythm of the train matched the beat of the slogan and the carriages were borne away from the town and out towards the suburbs. Just think, When I started working in the OU, this is in Sheffield in the early 1980s, we had just had two to three years of being completely bashed to pieces by Thatcherism. Sheffield loses its steel industry, it loses its mining industry; people forget this about Sheffield but Sheffield employed as many people in mining as it did in steel because it's surrounded by pits in South Yorkshire and North East Derbyshire and so Sheffield gets a double whammy...

A glance from a fellow passenger warns Jane that she might have muttered this aloud. "Oh dear, into my sixties and talking to myself, at least *I'm not 'wearing purple', nor am I 'gobbling up samples in shops and pressing alarm bells'*⁶⁵...*Well, not yet anyway!*" She turns to her newspaper and opens it as the train passes Dore and moves into open country. Just as quickly her smile fades. It might have been a headline in the Education Supplement; it might just as easily have been that tug of memory, that glimpse from the train window, that indissoluble thread of pain linking her comfortable house in Dore to her childhood home on the other side of the City. Hoggart and Williams⁶⁶ might have offered some comfort in their accounts of their journeys, via grammar school, from their working class backgrounds to university, but there was one crucial difference, one indisputable fact for which they had no validation:

She remembers her first attempt to go out wearing some make up. She was seventeen, and she stood in front of her father in the kitchen with a wisp of pink lipstick and a smudge of green eye shadow. He had grabbed her by her

⁶⁵ 'Warning: When I am an old woman I shall wear purple' – A poem by Jenny Joseph – labyrinth-3.tripod.com/page59.html – accessed Dec 9th 2012

⁶⁶ See bibliography

hair, dragged her to the sink, and reaching down found her mother's scrubbing brush. Holding her head in a vice under the cold water tap he had taken the brush to her face, ripping her cheeks, her eyes, her mouth.⁶⁷

She closes her eyes against the memory and forces her mind into her reservoir of the general. This is a hard won manoeuvre; but a life spent teaching adults has provided much practice at shifting into performance-mode, even when alone, and then feeling the gradual easing of *that corrosive hurt*. “*The personal as political? Hah!*” She practises now...*deep breaths... mind clearing...visualising a group of students...what were they talking about?* Oh yes, I'm not saying anything new here. But, it seems to me that there has always been a tension at the heart of Western culture in the sense that since the Industrial Revolution certainly, as far as I'm aware, there has been an ever closer connection between the demands of the economy, and for that read the demands of capitalism and the capitalist class, and the way in which people are educated; and the tension has been between the old way of thinking about education which is about 'learning for its own sake', learning for awareness and greater meaning-making, leading hopefully to wisdom etc. and learning in an entirely utilitarian sense so that learning becomes very strongly linked with being able to read the instructions on a piece of machinery in a factory, and being able to read your Bible, of course, because that keeps you on the straight and narrow when you're not in the factory, but that's the limit of education for the mass of working people. “*Not bad*”, she allows herself, “*and good practice for tonight.*” She returns to her imaginary classroom: So, where does politics and economics come in? Well I guess that's where I'm kind of locating this in terms of how this started to develop as a real tension, and I guess as you track it through the twentieth century you see that that really, in a sense, has always held true as the general kind of consensus around education, that you can give a minority of people a really full rounded education. Education for the self, education for the person. Education in its purist sense. Education which leads to wisdom on the one hand and on the other hand you have education for entirely utilitarian purposes and I think that's always held true, I think that's always been the done deal, right through English, British society, English I should say perhaps not so much Scottish... “*Hmmm, not quite sure how they're doing these days, but it seems that adult education is in a much healthier position north of the border...but that doesn't mean...no, no, we have to be clear...it's so easy to be*

⁶⁷ Scarlett, C (2011)

simplistic”... There never was a golden age for education per se, not for the masses anyway, but I think there was certainly rather more leeway allowed before people in power felt that the boat was in danger of getting rocked too badly, let’s put it like that. I think that what happened with the post war consensus was very interesting. What Butler did, in fact, was recognise that it was only fair to provide some kind of escape route for the working class bright kids and that that sort of input of blood, as it were, into society was useful and valuable and I think there was a recognition that an awful lot of talent got wasted by condemning all working class kids to leaving school at 14, so that door got opened slightly and some of us sneaked through. And at that same time we had this huge expansion of Higher Education, and we’ve got people like John Newsome, ‘Half our Future’, who says things like ‘we’re actually losing half our future because we’re not giving proper educational opportunities to working class kids who are really bright enough to benefit’, and he, of course, is making the economic argument is he not? He’s actually making the case in the terms he knows it’ll get taken up by - which is economically. There was a huge expansion of Higher Education in the late 1960s of which I was a direct beneficiary. So, I think there was a sort of flowering, I think there was a sense of hope and it’s to do with the ‘sixties and the political protests and the progressiveness and the general levelling up; the raising of living standards for ordinary people who suddenly could afford a fridge and a week’s holiday in Benidorm, you know it went with all of that, that things were getting better and that in this Brave New World with all this economic growth going on there was going to be a place for a lot more people, ordinary working class people, to actually get their little place in the sun via education, and that those jobs were going to be needed and the economy was going to generate them and we were going to be able to be in a position of expanding the educational base for a lot more people, because the economy would soak them up...

A sudden rush of air and the deepening of *the train’s growl* brings Jane back into the present with the realisation that they are entering the tunnels on the outskirts of London. “We shall be shortly arriving at St Pancras, and passengers are reminded that...” Jane picks up her paper and thinks back over her ‘mini-lecture’. Of course it didn’t really happen like that, as we know, it was a flash in the pan, and those of us who got caught up in that little moment in history, made the same mistake

that everybody caught up in a transitional moment in history makes, which they actually think is permanent - and of course it's not and it wasn't. But I think there was a kind of brief flowering around that time...and as long as that belief held, then it was going to be okay politically to allow educational opportunities to prevail. And also there was a flowering of adult education and those kind of opportunities available to people who had missed the boat the first time round. And of course, the beacon that encapsulates all of this is the OU...good old Jenny Lee...and her link to Aneurin Bevin her husband and *his* link back to the autodidacticism of the working classes pre-war...You know, we're talking about something very complex here, really, we're talking about different strands in the political class as well as the economic scenario interpreted variously by different pundits that comes together. But in the middle of that sort of maelstrom, Jenny Lee has sufficient clout and political persona and nous to push through this wonderful institution which I do think the OU was...

Tom is *waiting for her at the barrier*. "Hello, love, *oh you're looking tired.*" "Hello Mum, well, *it's full on now we've got the studio. I can't wait to show you.*" The journey to Hackney took less time than expected and Tom had laid out some sandwiches next to *a large bowl of fruit. Steve's desk was on the other side of the large room that* functioned as base and as warehouse for the cameras, lighting equipment and laptops that accompanied Tom on his various assignments as fashion photographer both in the UK and internationally. Jane reached for the celebratory glass of wine that Tom was *handing to her*. "*To the future*", "*To your future*", she responded, with that familiar jolt to her heart; that admixture of pride as its top note but with an underlying pull of anxiety. Tom *had won 'Kodak Student Photographer of the Year' award in his final* term at university. But that had been almost fifteen years ago, and the commitment and the struggle to build a reputation from which to earn a living wage had cost Tom the kind of relationships and security that most of his friends were by now enjoying. He was *driven, she knew that, but it wasn't simply by ambition*. There was a purity in his vision *that she both loved and feared*. "*The world is so beautiful, Mum, it's just a question of seeing it.*" Feeling this, perceiving this, how could he have gone on, year after year, *airbrushing the 'flaws' from the faces and bodies of the models* who posed in exotic locations and strove for that blankness of expression that negated personality and reduced their function to signifier, merely, of the glamorous and successful. He read her *so well*; "*Come on, Mum, don't give me that look, I know what you're thinking.*" Both

irritated and pleased at her own transparency, Jane followed her son over to the largest of the computers *in the corner of the room*. “Now, this is something that will really get *your goat!*” *He pointed at the photograph*. “That bag *she’s carrying costs £30,000....don’t say anything, let me see if I can anticipate your response.*” And he stood before his mother in a clownish attempt to mimic stance, voice and expression:

“There is kind of like the real education for the right people and then there’s the rest for the hoi poloi and it’s like we’ve forgotten about the first lot now, and I think that that’s because the whole economic agenda has become so vicious, has become so global, has gone viral in a global sense, that it’s pushed the old notions of education completely out the window. So, all that we’re locked into now is we have got to be able to have the right skills in our economy to be able to generate the right level of profitability for the class that wants all the goodies.” Of course he had her to a tee, and she laughed and he laughed and then she said that she had to get the train to Hywyh, and he walked with her to the Tube.

Back at St Pancras, Jane realised that she had left her newspaper at Tom’s *studio*. “Okay, no excuse, no *distraction, this’ll give me time to jot a few notes down for the meeting*”. With half an hour to go before the train, she bought a coffee at the Sourced Market delicatessen and sat at one of the wooden tables. She liked this shop and usually left with a Black Bomber cheese or *a bottle of organic wine*. “*I like its authenticity*”, she thought, as she looked back at the displays of free range meats and line-caught fish. “*Oh, for heaven’s sake, don’t be so daft. It’s no more ‘authentic’ than Boots over the way, or FatFace round the corner. Get a grip!*” But her sigh was also part lament that somehow *she was always ‘on alert’*. “Give yourself a break, woman; I am more seduced by this place than by Starbucks, it does feel more me than CostaCoffee, just relax and enjoy it, just be in the *moment*.” Irritated with herself, and with the constant voice in her head that seemed to run a perpetual loop of analysis over every waking moment, *she walked to the train*. “*But this is the trouble*”, as she found her seat facing forwards towards the engine, “this is exactly the problem. Who am I, who are we beyond the constant call into so-called being that is actually no more than our response *to the clamouring appellations of capitalism’s clarion chorus? What is the difference, when you come to it, between my wanting a special kind of cheese, and my wanting a £30,000 handbag?*” She smiled at the absurdity of her own question, but then remembered *the focus of tonight’s meeting*. “So, where does this leave us if we are talking about wisdom? Who am I beyond the circle of seduction and acquisition,

between the spirals of desire and consumption? Well, I'm me", she asserted, but with such energy attaching to this self-validation that the words spilled out and fell on to the man sitting opposite. "Glad to hear it," as he looked up from his book, "nothing like some good old self-assurance in these *troubling postmodern times*." He smiled and then returned to his copy of 'When I am playing with my cat, how do I know that she is not playing with me?'⁶⁸, an exploration of Montaigne which Jane had noted in last Saturday's *Guardian* review. She smiled shyly in return. "Of all the trains, in all the world, why couldn't I have sat opposite one of the million commuters plugged into their I-Pods? But then", her embarrassment receding a little, "isn't there something just a little wonderful, a little glorious even, in this acknowledgment from a total stranger that there has to be more to it than.. than...well, there just has to be..."

Jane settled back into her seat and looked out of the window as the city of London gave way to the jumble of canal, market, retail outlet and terraced street before succumbing to the suburbs and the greater splashes of greenery and straight avenues. As the Hi-speed train devoured the miles, and Jane's focus lost its purchase on the flashing countryside, she found herself back in her early days at the Open University. The vast majority of people that I taught [then] were unemployed steel workers and miners, and in a way it felt like I was back with the old autodidact tradition. There was no compromising of standards with the OU but once you built people's confidence up and once they'd actually got the idea of it and they'd some general study skills they motored...They didn't motor, they flew and that was what was so lovely about working with those students, it was just so rewarding...And then, little by little, as I started to move into the 1990s, there was a real change. The miners and the steel workers generally dried up, and the people who then started to come through, people realising they'd somehow got to scramble to get some qualifications that when they'd started that job actually weren't required...So I began to see a lot more women sitting in front of me in those tutorials [and] there was a completely different sort of notion amongst those students of what education was for, from the old idea of education for itself [and] those people imbued with a real sense of learning for its own sake...and that's where the pleasure and the reward and the excitement came from.

⁶⁸ Frampton, 2011

Jane reached into the bag at her feet. This pull to the past was all very well but she had to spend some time thinking about the evening ahead. But then it was all part of the *same thing, wasn't it?* And anyway, the picture, as always, was mixed. What about those miners and steel workers who also wanted, to claw themselves a little place somewhere, back into society, via a job...It was a mish-mash. Oh yes, but there was still something qualitatively different about those early days. By the time I'd finished in the mid-90s, I was working with people in the OU whose attitude towards their studies I found increasingly difficult to take. They were perfectly nice people, but they were simply coming into it from a very different place. But *it wasn't just that, was it?* She remembered having quite a few serious doubts about the quality of education that had been delivered. That started to really show in terms of how people could put an essay together, how they could read books. But what was different, particularly different, was their attitude, it was so much more instrumental and there was a real narrowing of vision. Oh, that woman! Suddenly she was there in front of her, large as life, the personification of all that was falling apart! What had she been? 20s, 30s? Jane had been handing back her essay,

- But you haven't told us how to do it.
- No, I haven't.
- Well, I think you should, it's your job.
- Actually, it's your job to decide how to write an essay and write it and it's my job to give an evaluation of that.

The depressing thing had been Jane's awareness that the woman was not alone in her thinking. A significant proportion of that group, by that stage in the game, actually thought like she did. It was so utilitarian, it was so instrumental...It stopped me in my tracks as an educator. She remembered the clarity with which she had thought, "I'm not an instructor, that's what you're asking me to do. I'm not in the business of training monkeys. I'm in the business of trying to help you develop a critical intelligence, and that's your job, it's my job to help you develop it, but it's your job to do it, to learn it"...The miners, the steelworkers understood that but she didn't....They came out of hard, heavy industry, she came out of the service sector. White collar banking.

Oh, for heaven's sake. What do I sound like! Give me a platform and I'm away!! But, there is truth to my polemic, and my polarisations. In a sense it kind of encapsulates, really, the whole shift that was taking place at that point, and that

has continued apace ever since, as to the connections between education on the one hand, the demands of the economy on the other and the cultural milieu in which people have been steeped over the last couple of decades...The WEA was one of the few remaining spaces left where it was possible to not only deliver an educational experience to people along [these] lines, but it was also a place where you could talk about this and people understood your language...These days, you talk to somebody under 45 probably, and they don't understand the language, it's like you're talking Sanskrit or Ancient Hebrew...It's terribly distressing...

Jane opened her notebook and turned to the jottings she had made on wisdom. It really was time that she turned her attention to the conference theme. But the groundswell of reminiscence pulled her back to her leaving the WEA in 2004 ... for the same reasons that I left the OU...I've kind of got resigned to it now because I'm out of it altogether these days. I don't have to...go through the pain...but...it is painful, it's painful, it's distressing and it's profoundly sad...and dangerous to be living in a society where that kind of discourse has all but disappeared. She rummaged in *her bag for her copy of MacIntyre's 'After Virtue'*. It had been a salutary read, and it would be useful to jot down a few notes. If I can remember this rightly, he ends up in a sense saying, "the Barbarians aren't at the gate, they've actually captured the castle...they're there, they're in situ", and we are going into a period of our history where we can't do anything very much about that. They're too strong, they're too barbaric, they are too uncivilised, the people who constitute the political and economic elites, they are Barbarians in the sense that they are unknowing...We're going into a new dark age in a sense...

Jane paused in her jottings and leant back in her seat. The smooth Kent countryside now flowed past the window and she thought for the umpteenth time just how different was this landscape from the grit and granite of the north. But she loved both this soft southern rolling green and the hills and moors of her home. And Wilma had reminded her so many times of the plight of the miners in *Kent in '84. We have to have hope.....*There are some positives about dark ages; and for those of us who think the way [she and I] do about education and about learning and about wisdom and about educating for citizenship, for democracy and a fairer world, we have to accept that the Barbarians are most certainly in power at the

moment...But there is still the odd space where those of us hold fast to...to the wisdom that we have [which] has been hard fought and hard won...*MacIntyre's* metaphor was there before her. There have to be little pockets of light, little candles that we keep aflame in the darkness...we can keep those flames going until the balance shifts and it becomes possible to regroup and to start to build some kind of counter platform, counter opposition, counter challenge.

Her spirits somewhat renewed, and in fellow-feeling with *MacIntyre*, Jane turned back to her notes. She felt reasonably prepared for however this evening might turn out. She had been happy to respond when Wilma had asked her to be a part of her study on wisdom and adult teaching and learning. They had known each other for twenty years *and had worked very closely together on the national Women's Education Committee in the WEA*. Jane had just completed her own doctorate using narrative inquiry as her methodology and she knew the struggles and the challenges that the process engendered. "But wisdom, hmmm, is this her candle I wonder?" She delved into her bag and pulled out the transcript of her interview with Wilma on folded A4 sheets. There were a lot of them. It had been an intense conversation. Jane skimmed her responses: I would say that for me wisdom is comprised of two fundamental components, although it's much more than this, this is being prescriptive even before I start, but it's about certainly knowledge, it's 'knowledge based' which means understanding and which in turn means meaning-making, erm, and it's also informed by experience. I think that's what I think wisdom is. I think, you know, the simple sum is 'knowledge plus experience equals wisdom' which is putting it far too over simply. Erm. I guess if I look at my own, my own self and also my working life hmm I've come across people who I think are wise and that has generally been people who are older rather than younger, although not always the case, so I guess there's something there about longevity isn't there? That wisdom is something which accrues over years, over decades, that it's something you expect to develop alongside a developing knowingness about the world and one's place in it of course. So I guess that's something there about wisdom which immediately brings up you know the...the.. cliché ...the kind of...you know the kind of general image we hold, the iconic image we hold, of the wise old woman or the wise old man so.. and age immediately comes into it. ...It isn't a necessary adjunct to growing older by any means, don't get me wrong, but for people that I would regard or do regard as wise I'm saying

something here, I think, about the fact that it's an accretion, a gradual accretion of knowledge, of learning, of meaning making of a a a developing knowingness situated in the world, alongside articulating it inside, inside an experience it's both; it both informs our growing experience as we go through life, but also our experience helps us to develop our wisdom so it's a kind of feedback I suppose, there's a loop there, I suppose I'm saying, you know that as we go through life and we develop more understanding, more knowledge, we make you know, more meaning-making in a more skilful way that leads.. that leads us to hopefully live our lives in ever more wiser ways and that of course in its turn feeds back into a greater understanding of of the world around us and a greater, a better articulated, more insightful, more wisdom imbued knowingness, does that make any sense ?

“That’s the trouble with literal transcription”. She was vaguely annoyed by the ‘erms’ and the repetitions and she spluttered when she came to the redundant comparator. “Ever more wiser? I ask you!” This had annoyed her at her first reading, and at the second. Now at the third, when it still hadn’t gone away, she rather hoped that Wilma would not include it in the final draft. “Oh well, I guess everyone else she’s spoken to sounds just as inarticulate.” Still rather piqued, Jane continued reading. She needed to concentrate; there was actually some rather good stuff here if she allowed herself to see it. Wilma had continued the conversation: - It makes wonderful sense actually and it encapsulates many many of the definitions of wisdom which I’ve been reading about thus far. I suppose in a sense erm you’re linking it to experiential learning, you’re linking it to a process of accretion (yes) and as you say that’s a cliché of the wise old woman, the wise old man and so on and so forth. What relationship does the growth of wisdom or the potential for gaining wisdom have to teaching and learning practices? Should it have, I mean you’ve worked in Adult Education for what, your entire adult life? Do you did you perceive part of your role in educating adults to be contributing to some kind of developmental wisdom process?

Mollified, indeed a little pleased, by Wilma’s own slips and mumbles, Jane reads on, and as she does so, she remembers, once again the energy their conversation had generated: the intensity with which both had held on to the vocalisations of the other; the threads of comprehension that were woven and rewoven into stronger ropes of

communion as each of them committed to the process and stitched their net of meaning-making. “What shoals of wisdom did we land that day?” She turns to her response to Wilma’s question: Well one would hope that is always the end goal, but there is absolutely no quantifiable way of knowing that as an educator, and to assume that you can is an act of pure hubris and vanity, it seems to me, and also to completely misunderstand the whole process of meaning making, and the development of wisdom, because in a sense wisdom is highly individualistic, is it not, although one can share one’s wisdom and one hopes one does so. It leads to a rather better world, you know, but generally wisdom is something which is located within the individual, in a sense, it’s part of oneself and hopefully you share it and it influences other people if they’re up for it, if they’re up to being influenced by it. I suppose that’s the thing about wisdom that it’s singular isn’t it, it’s highly singular, it is actually appropriate to our self and our self alone. My wisdom is not your wisdom, and it might be helpful to share that wisdom and we might make some meaning-making together based on our pool of wisdom which might then produce some better meaning-making in the world. But essentially, I think, the development of wisdom is located within our self; and so what I would say is that the teaching process, the teaching and learning process is all about trying to facilitate the development of meaning-making, and the development of knowledge, in such a way that it helps that individual to develop their own wisdom as they go through life and, fingers crossed, they actually manage to share that wisdom with other people. So, we can build on that collectively together. “Collectively, huh! Hadn’t the march that morning against public sector cuts been prompted by precisely *the decline in the collective?*” And as the train pulled out of Hybury station, and she caught sight of the Cathedral spire, the light from her candle seemed a very poor thing. What had she said in the *interview?* She’d said it all: The kinds of educational discourses that currently prevail in our culture are actively disabling in relation to the development of wisdom. And the more emphasis there is on instrumentality in the pursuit of educational goals, the tighter the nexus, the tighter the link between the demands of capitalism and modes of learning, the less space there is, and the less political allowance made for the development of a critical intelligence...There’s a closing down of all kinds of spaces going on, and that means for me that the chances of people being able to develop a wisdom in respect of putting their experience as they go through their lives in some kind of meaning-making context becomes less and

less possible...I'm thinking about things like the internet, about mobile phones, about the ubiquity of crap TV, and how so many people live life on that level where there is every opportunity to shield ourselves, to hide ourselves from the bald truth that our lives are empty and characterised by shallowness and ignorance, or at least non-wisdom. *Oh dear, yes she had said it...*

This makes me sound exactly like the old biddies that we all hated when we were 20...but I'm saying it's a different order now, like all older people say, [but] all of that busyness and all of that kind of *seeming* knowingness about engaging with our world, and discovering about people through some kind of connection and exchange, takes the place of, substitutes, the real meaning-making that goes on through what I would call real education, real learning.

The shoost of the train as it braked to a stop at Hywych station pulled Jane back to the immediacy of her surroundings and she followed the other alighted passengers on to the concourse. The short walk into the centre of town offered two possibilities. For those in a hurry, and focused on their destination, there was the pavement alongside the busy main road; dusty and noisy but less likely to distract the pedestrian bound for home after their cramped commute from London. Unconsciously negotiating the dips in the concrete, marking entrances to garage, shops and houses, the erstwhile passengers moved away from Jane and relied on their automatic footsteps to walk them home whilst they mentally re-played the meetings of the day and re-wrote the scripts for those on the morrow. Or at least that was Jane's *fantasy*. *With the residual frustration that her reading of her interview had evoked, she was happy to ascribe a herd mentality to all those from whom she now parted company as she chose the alternative route and walked towards the river. Always a good timekeeper, she had allowed for rail transport hold-ups and now had an extra half hour to spend before arriving at Hannah's. Drawn to a bench by the one of the willows, she sat down, pushed the final pages into some order on her lap, and continued reading: The way in which we can develop our critical intelligence is quite a hard path, it's not something that happens overnight, it's something that you have to put time and effort into: You have to read a lot, and you have to think a lot, and you have to write a lot, and you have to engage with people on that level and you do a lot of talking...Like the autodidacts [at] the turn of the century; they'd join their philosophical societies, or their historical societies, and after they'd sluiced themselves off at the coal-face, they'd tramp off and they'd have a two hour discussion about whatever*

hard won knowledge...I'm not saying that's the only model, but there's a huge amount of empty chatter going on these days. Under these circumstances, it seems to me increasingly uncertain in terms of the development of wisdom happening in our culture...There's a kind of de-civilising process going on here, and where does wisdom fit into that? Well, it doesn't. Wisdom gets squeezed out. Those places, those spaces where we have been able to develop some wisdom in relation to our knowledge base, our meaning-making, our ability to learn, our ability to think critically and to apply that, and resonate that with our life experience, those spaces seem to be contracting more and more, so we end up with a profoundly uncultured, uncivilised society in the real sense of the world which is characterised not by wisdom but by barbarity.

"Oh, God, I didn't really leave it like this, did I?" But there was one final page, I have given a very bleak overview...but I don't think all is lost...I don't want you to think that...I do think that there are those candles in the dark, they will be shielded, they will be protected and they will join together and they will provide some light, some illumination. Maybe I have to think that, but I do... And she pulled her mobile from the inside pocket of her bag and phoned home.

.....

A little over two hours earlier, and resting on the same bench, Hannah's anxieties about the evening ahead had found reflection in the roiling and confusion with which the river bore its burden of small town detritus towards the sea. She'd offered to host tonight's pre-conference supper party some time ago, and at a peak of self-confidence after another successful gig with the band. But that was then, and the familiar ebb and flow of her emotional resilience, and the turmoil engendered, was now mockingly mirrored in the muddy churning at her feet. Jane was the only other retiree, and it was the thought of the others, still embroiled in those familiar battles, whom she feared. Not as themselves, that wasn't it at all, it was what they would bring with them; that bitter-sweet fusion of commitment and belief overlaid with the pallor of tiredness and resignation, an all too familiar aspect of those from whom perhaps too many compromises had been wrung. She had her own digital recording of the interviews she'd done with Wilma, and she now adjusted the ear piece so that it lay a little more discretely under her hair. Her words flowed back to her, along the tiny wire, words spoken in response to being shown Wilma's analysis of their first interview...Perhaps it's because it reminds me that when I left the university I didn't leave with a

sense of achievement, I left with a huge sense of failure and I don't think I'm alone in that actually. I think that one of my predecessors, though she may not publicly admit it, I think that that was kind of where she was. I know because she said to me at the time when she left that one of the reasons she was going was because she felt she spent, increasingly, her time on fire-fighting; that is justifying funding from the powers that be, the government, and also, which I think in a way is more wearing, fighting our corner in relation to the rest of the university. So she was frequently in discussion with the centre, vice-chancellor and pro-vice-chancellors about the School and its role, its legitimacy, its value. And that was taking up so much more of her time that it was taking away from developing our provision, and enhancing what we were doing, and she felt kind of ground down by that. And I know that that is definitely how I felt because by the time I took on the directorship, the school had been disbanded. We were then the Unit for Part-Time Study. We were, you could argue, we were getting into a stronger position with departments because I was being assisted by the Dean of Humanities to 'get into bed', as it were, with the Departments and they vice versa. So you might say that our position could have been stronger but I felt that I was up against entrenched attitudes, ignorance, arrogance and it was utterly disheartening ...I felt that I was trying to do about three people's jobs at least ...And when I got to the point where I could just not carry on I left with, you know, a huge sense of failure and that I was actually useless; you know, I had not been able to take us forward or protect the provision... So, I suppose that then having left at a relatively young age, I was then faced with a sense of being useless as I was out in the world not doing anything useful anymore. So I think that's what I have picked up on in that paragraph, yeah, questions about my usefulness since leaving full time employment.

A sudden darkening overhead, as the sun disappeared behind a large grey cloud, brought Hannah back to the immediacy of her present and to the tasks that still remained before her guests arrived. Although she would normally never walk through town *'plugged in'* as her step children would say, she wanted to go over their conversations again, she wanted to be prepared for what might come up. Calling to Harry, who had enjoyed her lapse of attention to rootle in the undergrowth, Hannah, readjusted her ear piece once more, picked up her bag and began the walk back into

town. Just as suddenly, the sun reappeared and brushed the path in front of her with a wash of spring colour. She smiled, "Oh yes indeed," as Eliot's words came back to her:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain⁶⁹

"Well, my 'dull roots' have certainly been stirred!" The walking helped, and she called again to Harry as the path moved towards the little bridge that marked the edge of town. Those two interviews with Wilma had surprised her with their intensity, and she had been thrown by the realisation that their troubling tremors were still just below the surface. ... because I was just so exhausted doing the job that there was no room left for engagement with the things that mattered to me... just wasn't ... There was a kind of resentment, I remember, about not being able to pursue the things I really wanted to pursue because I was so utterly exhausted with work that it left no room for anything else. In order to hit the targets I was working all hours and so, you know, the creative me got just disappeared, just disappeared for about five years. I just didn't do anything outside work, it was just survival. So that now I actually feel that... I'm beginning to get closer to where I was before that high pressure kicked in for five years... so much of your waking life is spent in that institutional environment you absorb so much of it and you begin uttering, erm you reflect, no I can't get this right; you almost unconsciously adopt a lot of the institutions' expectations, impressions in terms of achieving and performance.

- And if you feel that you're not matching up the consequence is...?
- Pretty dark mmm

Hannah turned the corner away from the bridge and took the lane towards St John's. Just at that moment, the church bells pealed four times and Hannah looked up, as she always did at the rolling sound, towards the tower and the distinctive cupola that had been built by Flemish refugees in the seventeenth century. Was it her thoughts on education that prompted the memory that Thomas Paine had married here in 1759? What radical potential was left, hmmm? You know if you're excited about learning that's where the vibrancy comes from, if you see the results in students of learning something new, the effect on them of that, how it changes lives. ...And

⁶⁹ Eliot, T.S (1969, p 61)

I'm now thinking of the work that we did with the disadvantaged and so on, the 'New Opportunities for Women' programmes. They were vibrant enterprises, really, and yet there always was a kind of tension between those of us who wanted to do that developmental work, and wanted to give it priority, and those who were more entrenched. And I'm thinking of what I would call, I suppose, traditional academics who wanted to follow a model of teacher at the front, students before them; receptive empty vessels just to be filled up...And not a huge amount of mutual exchange and challenge for whom the idea of student centred learning was quite threatening and radical ...and yet that was what I felt committed to.

She turned into the stone porch and sat down on the old wooden bench to wait for Stephen. It was his turn to be key-holder for the weekend, and Hannah had arranged the *handover for just after four o'clock. She didn't usually linger in the porch*; perhaps that was why her attention was now suddenly caught by the worn, chiselled words in the flagstones at her feet. *It was almost as if the phrase, 'the peace that passeth all understanding', had been sculpted just for her, just for this moment, and just in time to* remind her of the journey that she had taken away from the despair that had characterised those last months before taking early retirement. Her words beat chilling reminder: And then when work started to get very pressured again in my late 40s then I went back into that depressed state, I recognised it, I thought "I've been here before, I know the territory" and that was very scary and of course when I left work I was in that very dark place for months at a time and fearful at whether I'd come out of it: what was there going to be after work? But now I have made that journey, come through that territory, I know it's there but it doesn't dominate my days anymore. But you know I seriously thought it would at one stage - I know it doesn't have to - just remove all that pressure, get out of that environment and er I'm in the land I want to be in - though I might take journeys back into the darkness, I don't think I have to stay there.

Yes, that was why she was anxious about the evening ahead. It wasn't that old fear that she wouldn't be able to cope with the impossible tasks that each working day had demanded of her, it was the burden of empathy wrought by the knowledge that all her guests, apart from Jane, were still facing the challenges that had darkened the end of Hannah's professional career, because the discourse was an arid one...The

things that excited me about being in university adult education was the richness of opportunity for people to learn and change their lives, or deepen and enrich their lives, through the education provision we were making. And then, of course, later on when the funding cuts came, rapidly followed by the justification clauses, i.e. you had to accredit or die, that brought with it a preoccupation with fulfilling the requirements, ticking the boxes, constructing systems that delivered and you felt you were constantly having to just put energy into justifying the provision; energy that I felt could have been more usefully spent dreaming up good courses or training people to teach better, or ... providing better learning resources and environments. And increasingly there just wasn't time to do those things, or to focus on those things, because it was all taken up with accountability and measurement systems and, also, I think that people were losing heart. There was a kind of demoralisation process that was going on as the institution as a whole fought for its survival.

Hannah wasn't sure what troubled her most; the fact that so much had been lost, or the concern that those working in the adult education sector, who had never known a time before accreditation, would never be able to recall that place of opportunity that had meant so much to her at the start of her career. Once again, her words came back at her: We all knew somehow that important learning was taking place. I mean, to be very anecdotal, it's something about that look of amazement or that look of illumination and enlightenment that you see on a student's face as they grasp the concept or, indeed, as you yourself, as I have experienced, being a student in a class myself in adult education; you suddenly 'get it' and you have that, that moment of "ah yes" yea, it's er, I don't know what to call it, it's a bit like the, erm, the Eureka moment. But how to prove that, the only way I could prove it to a tutor would be to say, "Oh yes, so, so what you mean is this", and then to describe what it is that I think they mean and then if that concurs with their understanding, for them to say "yes" then you know you've got it. But to demonstrate that on a piece of paper is very hard, I think, and learning outcomes make an attempt at it, but I think what we're beginning to talk about this almost immeasurable, indefinable something that happens, in the classroom, or maybe when you're reading a book and you get that Eureka moment when you think, "Ah yes, I now know something I did not know before. I now understand something I did not understand before, and as a result of that

I'm a different or richer or deeper person", whatever language you want to use. And for me that was a driving *raison d'être* for being in the career that I was in because I felt that I was part of that very wide, broad process. You know I was a tiny little cog in that vast machine of helping people to reach some sort of enlightenment...And then much later on we had the whole introduction of accreditation, and that came in in the 1990s, and suddenly one was thinking all the time about accountability...*Hannah felt for Harry's collar and looked around her and smiled: I suppose, it's like asking a Church of England vicar what is it you've achieved in your parish this year? Can you write down your outcomes? What is it you've set out to achieve in your parish for next year? I mean, how would they do that? Perhaps they do. I don't know. It would be fascinating to see how a vicar of a parish would define his or her aims and how they would achieve them and how they know when they've achieved them. What's the job description for a Church of England vicar? To bring God to the people? Where do you start? It's just crazy once you start to reduce that kind of role to definable, understandable, accountable bits... But I guess that most vicars would know when one of their parishioners has had a sort of revelatory experience or a deepening of their faith or a weakening of their faith. They could probably recognise it if they are any good at their job and if they care and if they work from a position of conviction; but how you would spell it out to somebody else who needs to see it too, I don't know...*

Once again, and unsurprisingly, the words in her ear echoed her train of thought: But in this increasingly accountable world of learning outcomes and accreditation I had to somehow try and be part of helping to find a way that we could protect that provision that enabled those kinds of experiences to take place, whilst at the same time coming up with the goods that would make the government, who were the funders of this sort of provision, satisfied that we were using public money to good effect. So the learning outcomes were the kind of proof of that, they were the currency. So the whole issue of accreditation when it came in in the early 1990s was extremely problematic and caused rifts between those who felt that we should go along with it, because that was the way to get the funding, and those who felt we should take a stand and not go along with it at all. And people like me who worked behind the scenes knew that that was just going to be like slitting your throat because if you didn't go down that path the funding

simply would be cut and there wouldn't be any provision at all. So that was very difficult.

Hannah removed the ear piece just as the porch door opened and Stephen bent down to greet Harry. "Hello, old *chap*, *how are you doing?*" Hannah had always liked Stephen. There were some in the town who expressed their doubts about his reliability as key-holder. Now in his eighties, and a widower of less than a year, perhaps Stephen should think of 'retiring' and 'taking it easy'. Hannah heard the comments, knew those who uttered them; but she also knew the value of commitment and of having a reason to get up in the morning. Stephen straightened and proffered his hand, a gesture which always warmed her as reflective of his *courtesy and gentility*. "How are you, my dear, and what are you up to this evening?" "I'm fine, Stephen, thank you. I've got a few people coming for supper. They're going on to a conference tomorrow in Hybury, on wisdom and adult education." "Wisdom, indeed! Well, now, that's a word we rarely hear these days in connection with education. I'm delighted to hear there's a conference about it." Hannah suddenly realised that she, too, was delighted; and that her gathering this evening had its own part to play in picking up some strands, and weaving something together. However fragile the net, however tenuous this potential mesh of meaning-making, Hannah was proud to be involved. Newly buoyant, she smiled at Stephen. "Yes, it is good isn't it, hopeful I mean, somehow." "Absolutely," he paused. "You know, my dear, the older I get, the more grateful I become every time I recognise the struggles of others to try and make sense of things." Inexplicably, and at the height of her sudden jubilation, Hannah felt the tears coming. Seeing her so moved, Stephen tried to focus her with a question. His tone was matter of fact: "Well you have an evening of it coming up. What does wisdom mean to you, in terms of adult education?"

Grateful for this prompting, Hannah was not prepared to offer anything other than a serious and sincere response. She owed him that, Um wisdom for me is about, well, I'll take EM Forster on this occasion (she laughed)... where his phrase 'only connect', in other words, join up the dots. Wisdom, for me, is about joining up the dots, making those connections which lead to enlightenment. So it's about linking, hmm, your different understandings, different parts of knowledge to have a wider and broader understanding. I suppose I'm talking about the liberal education, aren't I, you know, the person with the liberal education who's managed to link the different disciplines, to have an understanding that goes

across the subject disciplines, which is why I enjoyed the university's broad programme of learning. It was basic, it was called liberal studies and it was from philosophy through literature, history, art history and so on. And I'm sure if we'd the facilities we would have offered science as well because I include those um... But we didn't, although we made a few brave attempts at it, but resources being what they are you just can't do it. So, for me, wisdom is about making the connections which means you look at the world and see how interlinked everything is. Hmm, I'm sounding a bit vague here aren't I? ...And if you see those connections and how interlinked everything is, ultimately I suppose, and this is where we get a bit philosophical, it makes it harder to invade another person's space or territory because you acquire, through that understanding of how the dots join up and how everything is interconnected, you acquire a respect for other cultures, other people, other living creatures on the planet. And for me, ultimately, it's about that. Education is a means to enabling that wisdom to come along.

Stephen has sat down beside her. "So, wisdom is about connectivity?" Yes, and connectivity is about understanding and mutual respect, and mutual respect and understanding are about harmony, and harmony is about living in a world that's a better place than it is now. (Her tone is hesitant, exploratory.)

So it's a pretty, you know, grand kind of aim. But you know, you have to have an ideal... that underpins your thinking ultimately, that's, that's it. *Stephen has reached for her hand again. "And is that where the spiritual comes in?"* - Yes it does for me, of course it does ... It does for me although it doesn't have to, you know you could adhere to that philosophy of not um... it doesn't have to have a spiritual dimension. I'm, I'm sure that an agnostic could lay claim to what I've just articulated, but for me it happens to have a spiritual dimension too. That's probably where the passion comes from, in me; it's the spiritual conviction really... The world is a very special place so there's a part of me that wants to protect it and improve it and... I'm finding it difficult to articulate this, actually, without it sounding crass or grandiose or ideal, idealised... I mean, if we get very personal then I suppose my spiritual belief is that you know one starts...from a position of, of love for other people, which sounds, I'm aware as I say it, it sounds absurd, but um the way I live that in my daily life is that, for example, if I come across somebody who seems to be from a different planet in

terms of their frames of reference or who, with whom, I feel a discord and I think I have got nothing in common with this person, how on earth can I communicate with them? Then I stand back, and I look for the goodness in that person, and I look for the point at which I can connect with them. That's my starting place and it could be something very trivial, very small but I do believe there is a starting place, somewhere, with most people. And I would also say that in the classroom actually, you know with a learner, you look for the point that you can connect with them, and that's...But you know that's informed by my spiritual belief, my religious belief ... that this is a place we're privileged to be on and we should cherish it, and every human being is cherishable.

Hannah looks at Stephen, seeking the assurance that she has not said too much or tried his patience, but he is looking at the worn letters on *the flagstones at their feet*. "I sometimes ask myself if we strive a little too hard to try and pin things down. Do you think, perhaps, that one of the definitions of learning might have something to do with the wisdom of unknowing?" "Oh yes", Hannah responds with enthusiasm, Well the wisdom of unknowing for me is a very meaningful phrase because it um, sometimes feels like you are at your most wise when you know least, or put it another way, you are at your most wise when you know most profoundly what it is that you don't know, you know, it's that point where you think I've grasped this but, but I really don't know, and I wish I did, all that there is still to know. You feel like you're, there is so much more of the journey to go, and compared with the person who presents as knowing it all, well, "I've done that", you know, "I've done history, I've got my degree", you know "I've done it" as if to have a Masters or PhD in history, for argument's sake, is to know history, and anybody who I think is a serious learner knows that is just absolutely not the case, that's just the beginning of the journey. The journey goes on and is never achieved. You can't ever know all you want to know.

Stephen looked away from Hannah towards the inner door *of the church*. "I'm interested that you said *that you didn't* know how to articulate this '*without sounding crass or grandiose or ideal*' and I was wondering why we would find it difficult. What do you think has happened to make you think that, to talk like this, suggests that we are being crass or ideal?"

I think an increased secularisation, and with that an increased cynicism and the rejection of what would probably be called sentimentality in the media. So that an expression of deep feeling in a public place is ridiculed or, or denigrated as being sentimental, so that even when you attempt as a public figure to speak sincerely, the media spin on it will be to ridicule it, to say that you had a 'hidden agenda'. So it's very difficult for...even a concept like sincerity to be given much value in our culture now... I think... it's very difficult.

Hannah paused. The question of sincerity reminded her of those old discussions about some kind of prelapsarian state within the field of adult education, when everything held a golden glow, and when the dedicated efforts of committed individuals were part of a larger picture of progress and enlightenment. She sighed and turned back to Stephen. I think there is in the human psyche a tendency to idealise and to pretend that there was this Golden Age; though we can never actually define it accurately, and we can never accurately place it and locate it. But we need to have this sort of belief that it's possible, it was there, once, almost like a goal to aim for if only we could be like that again. So, I'm not knocking the existence of the concept of the Golden Age, but I do think that Adult Education has always been a problem fraught. It's always been a second class citizen in educational provision, there've always been other more important audiences to reach basically, so adult learning comes way down the list. So it's problem fraught anyway, and I think actually most areas of human endeavour are problem fraught because as humans we are problematic creatures, we are never going to inhabit a Golden Age; we are not golden, we are flawed... But we need to aspire to not be flawed....I think there probably was a sense, after the Second World War, we're in the early days of extra mural studies where tutors who were delivering education and particularly in subjects like international relations, current affairs, history, politics, felt they were really engaged in important work and the student response was extremely positive. I mean working men, and I do mean men in this instance, were coming out in droves to those classes and then later on more women came forward. But it was, you know, it was definitely a feeling that this was part of making a better world. Education was the means to that, and it was highly valued and respected. And I think the cynicism seemed to surface during my time in university education...The days where education was valued for its own sake are now gone and it is just about 'bums

on seats', and filling the classrooms, and ticking the boxes and...All credit to the people who had taught for the Oxford delegacy; I do think they had a point actually, they had to watch what they regarded as sacrosanct, 'education for its own sake', 'learning for its own sake', being somehow turned into a means to an end, it all became very specific, goal focused and I suppose that could make you pretty cynical, really, which it did... I don't know why I still feel so passionately about it. Other than because it has a personal significance for me. Without education I wouldn't be where I am today. I mean that's literally true, literally true, because it was education that enabled me to move into different social circles, different levels of employment than would have otherwise been open to me, as I do not come from a privileged social class or privileged background in any way... So education opened doors ...to other ways of, of being.

Hannah was shocked at her own frankness. She had never spoken with Stephen like this before, and for a dread-drenched moment she felt the fraudulent nature of her current position in *Hywyh society*. *Surely, now, if he hadn't already done so, he would see right through her and he would find her wanting.* But she should have known better, of course, she should have known better. He had taken her full circle. He wanted to talk about wisdom: *"You've acknowledged for you it has a, a spiritual dimension, you've talked about it being a means of fostering respect, you've talked about it in terms of um respecting not just each other, different cultures, different frames of reference, as you said, but also respecting the planet. So you are suggesting, it seems to me, that it has a moral purpose, it's a moral imperative. Would you agree with that or is that a little too strong?"* It might be a little too strong. Hannah laughs, partly with relief. [It] sounds very grand. Well wisdom, you know someone who we regard as wise or a sage, I think we look up to and I think we see it as a laudable thing to be. So, in that sense I guess it clearly has a moral association, doesn't it? Wisdom is desirable, wisdom is innately good; so does it have a moral imperative? ... I suppose it does for me because along with wisdom comes a kind of humility. That's a moral quality, isn't it, I suppose to be humble, which I think is morally desirable because humility teaches you or enables you to listen and be aware of other things around you as opposed to the arrogant but deaf person. You know, if you are sure that you know everything then you're, my view, arrogant and er not very likely to listen. And if you are not likely to listen you're probably

not going to be able to change. So wisdom is, for me, being open and humble... and knowing that there is still so much you don't know ...and being willing to pursue it... I don't think I can articulate it any better than that really...

Her voice tails off and, once again, Hannah is left with the feeling that she might have risked too much. But surely, here, of all places, and with such a man as Stephen? Once again, his intuition is remarkable. He holds her with his eyes, "Thank you, *Hannah.*" They remain seated. It might have been for a few seconds, or perhaps several minutes, *but the bells of St John's ring out the half hour and both rise together and turn towards the door.* "He's such a patient fellow", says Stephen as he *pats Harry's head.* "We have so much to learn from our *four-legged friends.*" As they part at the church gate, *Hannah responds to her impulse and, reaching for Stephen's hand, she covers it with both of her own.* "Thank you, Stephen. I am so glad that we spoke *today.*" "God bless you, Hannah, and enjoy *this evening.* *You deserve it.* 'Bye Harry!" And Stephen leaves Hannah at the gate and walks back towards the centre of town.

Hannah takes the few steps from the church gate to her front door. The house dates from the sixteenth century, but it was overlaid with a Georgian frontage which now *converses assuredly with the side of St John's which stands directly opposite.* "Layer upon layer" smiles Hannah to herself as *she turns the key in the lock,* "We are not always *as we appear*". *Unlike many of Hywyh's residents, the couple who live in this house were neither born into money nor the privileges that the casual passer-by might assume as the objective correlative of ownership and habitation. On the contrary, this proud residence embraces example of a particular kind of social mobility, and one that was characterised by educational opportunity.*

Hannah moves through the house to the kitchen, drops her bag on the table and puts the kettle on. Then carrying a cup of camomile tea, she crosses the garden towards the barn conversion where she plans to *host the evening's gathering.* *The small stained glass hangings by the window shift and catch the late afternoon sun, which is refracted in shades of blue across chairs, desks, bookcases, files, papers and paintings.* Hannah sits in a corner, with Harry at her feet, *sips her tea and turns to Wilma's notes of her initial analysis of their first interview which she had sent to Hannah prior to their second meeting:*

From the outset, the richness of the encounter is manifest⁷⁰. Hannah's deprecatory remarks about the relative 'usefulness' of her life since leaving full-time employment are counter-pointed by the sophistication with which she situates the relationship between 'place' and 'identity': "[this barn is] a place where I can most be me." The conversation continues with a brief description of the colours in the room which offer vibrant reply to the muffled blues brought in by the sun and, once again, Hannah makes conscious links between the physicality of her environment and the stages of her own psychological development: Well, actually there is a bit of a history to that because it's, it's a part of me that I brought with me from my cottage. Now my cottage, when I decorated that main living area was um, I wanted a strong colour which is the red and I wanted on the reverse of the red, I'm talking about the curtains here, the fabrics, I wanted a yellow and white stripe because that reminded me of sand and sunlight and the red for me represented energy and strength and passion um and its interesting because I went in to those colours having been very pink and pastel and it was like an assertion er of me at that point in my life which was probably in my... thirty, early thirties, yeah because I moved in when I was 30 so it was um me on my consciously chosen path towards self knowledge.

There is a picture of her by a fellow adult educator, and her description of this provides the link to the next wave of our discussion. Hannah relates the story of her professional life from secretary and 'temp' to director of programmes in the extra-mural department at a local university. Her sojourn lasted twenty years, but it is the shifts in patterns of policy and provision that concern her here, and that form the framework within which to explore the changing nature of that provision in relation to further questions concerning the purpose and pursuit of knowledge.

Hannah puts her cup down and turns over the first sheet of A4 paper. Wilma had sent her initial thematic analysis as a spur for deeper discussion:

Themes:

- *self-deprecation - when I'm pretending that I do useful things in it, and I was in awe of this guy and I was even more in awe of him...and it was a privilege to*

⁷⁰ The change in font to Calibri signifies the use of my notes (WF)

work um with him actually....I started off as you can see, at that very lowly um level of secretarial work, lowly paid, low status and um ended up at the end of my career as as running the department that I had once joined at that low level um⁷¹

- *anxiety about levels of 'meaning' after leaving work*
- *importance of art and creative expression*
- *actively seeking self-knowledge-links to the immediate environment*
- *energy and strength and passion- and it was like an assertion er of me at that point in my life which was probably in my... thirty, early thirties, yeah because I moved in when I was 30 so it was um me on my consciously chosen path towards self knowledge.*
- *the academy as site of articulate and intelligent people; and the attraction this affords: what an incredibly rich world this was... fascinating courses... I was kind of hooked really ... the principal of the adult education centre who was an amazingly charismatic, extremely er competent intellectual ...who was also a poet.*
- *Relationship between teaching and learning: see vibrancy is interesting 'cause I think, I think the work in itself, because of its um, the nature of it is, has a kind of vibrancy, you know if you're excited about learning that's where the vibrancy comes from*
- *Knowledge as transformative: if you see the results in students of learning something new, the effect on them of that, how it changes lives. Now I know not so much first hand but through the tutors who worked for me at delivering programmes that changed people's lives quite dramatically and I'm now thinking of the work that we did with the disadvantaged um and so on, the new opportunities for women programmes um and such.*
- *Tensions between models of delivery: I know I was picking up all these ideas um um about teaching and learning and coming back to this sort of stuffy literature tutor (laughs) who really didn't want to, to change his teaching ways at all and had one model of how it should be done which seemed to me stultifying ...They were vibrant er enterprises really and yet there always was a kind of tension between those of us who wanted to do that developmental work and wanted to give it priority and those who were more entrenched...a model of teacher at the*

⁷¹ The colours reflect the original colour coding of themes in WF's notes

front, er students er, er you know before them, receptive empty vessels just to be filled up...not a huge amount of... mutual exchange and challenge for whom the idea of student centred learning was quite threatening and radical er and yet that was what I felt committed to so there was some tension... 'cause it took the control away from them um and who, would say it was a threat to academic standards, that was their defence... slogan if you like, er and those of us who were constantly trying to attack that or, or subvert it by saying but look you know, if you get students erm much more involved in... their own process of learning you'll have much more success... Er, it was a difficult line to um to get these academics to accept and I, I have to say some of the older Oxbridge ones, the ones that came to us from the Oxford delegacy found it, they were the ones who found it most difficult to shift their position.

The notes continued:

- *Cynicism*: “bums on seats”
- *Compromise*: Effects of accreditation...learning outcomes...
- *The ‘unaccountable’ elements of ‘knowing’*
- *Spirituality and Christianity*
- *Wisdom as connectivity...*

It had worked well, the notes accorded with Hannah’s own independent jottings which she had made on receiving the transcript of that first interview, and their second encounter had produced the deeper rhythm and resonance that Wilma was hoping for. But looking over these notes again, Hanna now felt a little irritated by this attempt at colour coding. Recalling her meeting with Stephen just that little while ago, Hannah focussed on the last three bullet points. “What colour would they have been, I wonder? What palette is subtle enough to evoke the silence that followed our encounter at the church?”

There was a further issue which she had brought to Wilma’s attention, and that concerned their relationship and the levels of complexity that attended it. She returned to her reflections about this element of the process: I raised those other layers with you because, as you said, you were pulling out the themes and I was beginning to feel [that] the way you pull out those themes is going to derive in part from

the kind of interaction between us. And I suppose I'm drawing on my knowledge there of the, I think I said this to you at the time, the therapeutic alliance that's set up between therapist and client in a psycho dynamic situation, [a] psychoanalytic situation. And in that you have all sort of issues like transference and I thought, well, we can't ignore those things; better to be up front about them as far as we can when carrying out any sort of analysis or evaluation of what you are finding. So, when you asked me about those layers I came up with these that you have noted down because I felt they have a part to play in how I feel able to talk about things that's going to be influenced by the fact that we are old friends. Why are we old friends? Because we started out as colleagues. So there's that dynamic; one of colleagues that grew into friends. There's also the dynamic of the interviewer and the interviewee. I mean, as an interviewee you feel a bit 'put on the spot' and there's a bit of anxiety around that, and you know that it's being recorded so you're a little more careful, perhaps, about how frank you might be. Then there's 'worker' and 'non-worker'. I mean I feel a bit, er, not being a worker gives me a little bit of insecurity ...because you're doing research every day and I feel that that makes you much more articulate and eloquent than someone like myself who's now lapsed, you know I described it as 'lapsed brain, rusty non-researcher type person' and certainly I'm a long, long way away from academic circles and academic jargon and language. I don't use jargon in a negative sense, I just think that there is a very useful familiar vocabulary, that you probably use with colleagues, that is a shorthand for the concepts that you are dealing with, and I just don't have access to that anymore because I'm not in that loop. So, I feel that it makes my attempts to describe and provide answers to your questions very unwieldy and awkward although you're very flattering at my attempts ...probably more flattering than I deserve. So, anyway I thought these layers ought to be brought out into the open.

Hannah now reached for the large sheaf of papers which comprised the transcripts of both interviews and turned to the second. She re-read her response to being given Wilma's *initial thematic analysis*; she noted, again, the lack of punctuation and thought, *again, of the challenge to the writer to convey the 'truth' of a conversation without rendering the speaker a fool or reducing the meaning to a poor imitation of 'stream of consciousness'*. *Wilma had used three transcribers, and each had exercised their role*

according to their own custom and practice. Wilma had yet to decide whether to 'dress' the 'naked' transcripts with the garments of punctuation and syntax, or to let the flow run unimpeded as here.

what else have I written down oh yes I've written down passion and spirituality and about wisdom being open and humble wisdom for me being tied up with well-being and I suppose passions spirituality are also about well-being obviously this is all me speaking very personally in my own prospective um yeah and the importance ultimately education as being about the space for meaning making and I think this is in common with and if you take that space where do you go to make meaning you're left you're left with very personal therefore possibly isolated spaces which I think is very sad

"It needs dressing", she decided, and took another sip of tea.

.....

Sean was enjoying the drive to Hywyh from his home in the village of Bearsden. It would take him just over the hour if he took the motorway, but he had left enough time to take the country route so that he could relax behind the wheel and listen to the cd of his interview with Wilma. He slowed down at the crossroads, still registering that frisson of pleasure as the leather-topped gear stick relayed his control to the impatient thrumming of his royal blue two-seater. *"Whoa, there," he smiled, "plenty of time to have your head on the way home, but for now, take it easy, it's thinking time."*

He swung the car up the hill, past Bearsden's boundary and into the adjacent village of Burnham. The church stood at the further edge of the parish, beyond the many new houses that had been built to accommodate increasing numbers of commuters over the years. It was rarely used now and Sean remembered his walk there with Helen at the weekend, as he manoeuvred the car past the lych-gate and up the narrow lane away from the church and towards the Downs. [It] has been here for six, seven, eight hundred years and we're going to throw all this away because people aren't interested anymore. Helen had murmured her assent as she negotiated the crumbling path between the ancient, and almost indecipherable, gravestones. Sean had stopped at a group of them in the northwest corner of the churchyard. Worn and falling towards each other like the remaining teeth in an old man's mouth, the stones told the story of four generations of the same Wealden family, the newest one recording the death, in

childbirth, of 'their most beloved daughter...' in 1869. I just sometimes wonder where in society we've lost these things. The issues we have with young girls, you know, falling pregnant, young people getting into trouble with the police, drug abuse and everything else. Is it because we've lost those standards, those old fashioned standards under the guise of, say, materialism, free speech, everybody knows their rights, but not their responsibilities?...Wisdom must be wrapped up in that somewhere...

Remembering this exchange with his wife, Sean's attention turned to the task in hand and to the cd which lay on the seat beside him. Their interview had taken place so long ago that he had forgotten most of what had been said. But he had been willing enough to join the party that evening, and he had invited several of his students to the conference on the following day. Although he would know no one in Hywyh, apart from Wilma, Sean was looking forward to the *get-together; after thirty years' service* with the police, he was all-too familiar with the management mantra...'value for money', 'efficiency of economies', 'more for the same, the same for less' etc., etc., etc. And he felt that he had much to offer a discussion about the changes in education, when he knew from a policing perspective that we were beginning to lose focus from what we were here to do...we'd very much got into instrumentalist sort of policies and works, targets and performance, which skewed a lot of the real purposes of policing.

There was such an irony in the fact that lessons had been learnt in the service which he wished could be translated to the education sector. Slipping the cd deftly into the slot on the dashboard, Sean smiled as his reflections echoed back to him in his own words: It's actually not too bad within the police force I have to say, um, but when I go back to B...College, the aims and objectives, the intended learning outcomes, the lesson planning etc. etc., is so defined, they've actually lost the plot of what they're trying to do. "Exactly", and some of the energy of frustration that accompanies much of what he tries to achieve these days is transmitted simultaneously down his left arm and right leg as both gear level and accelerator propel the car rather too quickly over the brow of *the hill*. "*Calm down, calm down, if you'd wanted to play 'boy racer' you should have taken the motorway.*" Sean's words on the cd wove their way into his self-admonition: People that I think are wise have got very good people skills, they've got very good social skills and they've got very good

networking skills; so they are business model type people, if you like, and they can run a business. You know, they see the need for targets and performance and things like that, but they know when to take their foot off the gas and to allow things to carry on.

Smiling at the aptness of his metaphor, Sean slowed the car at a warning sign indicating the presence of children in the vicinity. A quick glance at his watch confirmed the reason for the sudden flurry of four wheel activity as parents manoeuvred their cars through the narrow rural streets to collect their offspring at the school gates. *It wasn't the sudden traffic jam that now irritated him, it was the fact that even here, away from the madness of the town, mothers didn't feel that it was safe enough to let their kids walk home alone. Sean knew the statistics, knew the realities first hand, but the perception remained that nowhere was safe; and that the individual cocoons of the several 'Chelsea tractors' now blocking his way represented the only sane response to the threats infecting everyone's thinking.*

*But it wasn't the mothers who were causing his annoyance; on the contrary, he thought, as he slowed to a stop to allow a white BMW 320 coupé ease its way back into the traffic, with its young cargo safely on board, it was the mentality that had led to this state. The puff of anger now shifted, with his gear change, to that lower but more persistent note of sadness, or was it nostalgia, for a time, a simpler time, when kids could walk home, play conkers, climb trees and maybe even nick sweets from the local shop without the world falling apart. Was that what he'd meant; was that the feeling that had drawn him to Wilma's presentation on wisdom all those months ago?⁷² "I said something like that, didn't I?" And Sean pressed, stopped and pressed the fast forward button whilst he waited for another mother to pull her car into the general flow. He stopped, and then *replayed at Wilma's question:**

- What do you think it was in your case; what drew you to this particular workshop?

- I think it was the word 'wisdom' actually because it's an old fashioned word and... er, I'm not a religious person but there are I think, in the word 'wisdom', there are some religious connotations, particularly when you look at the history of education Plato, Socrates; and it was all wrapped up in that sort of arena and this University with the Cathedral and Church of England church schools. You

⁷² See the prologue.

... speak to parents and they say “my child goes to so and so, it’s a Church school” there’s a certain cache about that... probably better education than um, if you just go to an ordinary school, where people try and work hard to get their children to go to a religious school, I think, so that was all tied up with it. Plus where I see, within general society in this country today, in the new ‘God is materialism and shopping’, and yet, for 2,000 years, we as a country have um, paid homage to religion, God and Christianity and if that spirit world is still out there why, for 2,000 years, do those people get it wrong? And are there spirits still out there today but we just don’t connect because we don’t have the same lines of communication? I don’t know, it sounds a bit bizarre, doesn’t it; to have this sort of conversation, but it is that type of thinking that drew me to your presentation about wisdom.

Most of the cars were now turning away from the school and moving in the opposite *direction to Sean’s. He was soon out of the village and heading towards the A28. Still* preferring the country roads, and wishing to avoid the congestion of Hybury at this time of day, Sean skirted the town to the south and eventually joined the A257 to Hywyh. The two voices coming from the dashboard wove into the low thrum of the engine but the ensuing tapestry of ideas and sensations arose as much from the memories and feelings prompted by the conversation. As Sean left the outskirts of Hybury, in his rear-view mirror he noticed, as always, *the spire of the Cathedral*. “What vision and foresight, a council with the sense to forbid any high-rise building within the city walls, so that the spire could be seen from any approach to the city.” His thoughts merged with the cd as he recalled the high-rise blocks springing from the desert: ...*We went to Abu Dhabi for three years where I worked as a consultant to the Ministry of Interiors, Sheik Sherif, where I introduced an intelligence regime, Police Intelligence Regime, and professionalised their CID. He remembered the socialising, the specialist trips and jaunts for the Westerners, the sheer opulence of it all. Helen had loved it, and would have stayed there forever, but at the end of the three years I’d had enough ... very difficult circumstances to work in because of the Arabic culture, not that they’re not lovely people but um, particularly the Gulf States, their work ethic is not particularly strong and when you speak to them they’ll say, “Well for 2,000 years we’ve had sand, dates, camels and now all of a sudden we’ve got this new found wealth with the oil, and we’re going to enjoy it”, and they do so. It is very difficult and very frustrating if you want to*

professionalise something and you haven't got the main bulk of the work force assisting you in the process so I came back, um, and within a couple of weeks I was offered a job with the University. He saw the sign to the garage coming up on *his right and indicated*. "*Petrol and power, eh?*" But you really had to hand it to them: You go there now and it's Manhattan plus... In our history, the British folk, you know there's been milestones over the last 400 – 500 years to have got us to where we are today; *they've* done that in 40 years and the founder of the nation Sheik Zyeed, who died whilst we were out there, who was not an academic, he wasn't an educated man, but interestingly he was a very wise man, and he realised that he had to invest in his young people through education... but that would take time.

"Yes, but what does that mean?" Sean put his credit card back into his wallet and *walked back to the car*. "*It's all very well to talk about schooling, but mine was a bit of a mixed bag to say the least.*" He pressed the ignition button and both engine and cd came back to life. How many times had he and Helen reminisced about their school days: ... Certainly when I was at school you didn't really question; and I went to a boys' school where my wife went to a mixed school, and the conversations we've had over the years, her schooling, er, and the way she was treated was far more caring and compassionate. I mean you just went, you sat in rows, you just did what you were told what to do, and you never questioned...But I did think the teachers were wise, but I didn't feel they gave me the all-round experience of life that maybe kids today get because the schools are far more aware. But I didn't question their abilities, and I probably did think they were wise people, and they were wise people, and there were one or two brilliant teachers who I still thank today because they connected with me.

"Yes, but are teachers born or made?" Sean pumped the accelerator to take advantage of a gap in the traffic and turned back on to the main road. He had been working for the university for a few years now, and was responsible for managing the delivery of DTTLS ⁷³ *at B...College, as well as still tutoring the police groups. He enjoyed the work, he really respected the programme director, but at the end of the day...the DTTLS programme is a very structured programme, and to satisfy the needs of all our students across all the colleges, and the police groups and public service*

⁷³ Diploma to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector

groups, we have to be able to have a measurable outcome. And of course this makes it very easy, if we say we're doing modules 1,2,3,4,5,6; and these are the aims and objectives, the intended learning outcomes etc., etc., etc., it's very measurable and we can actually put our hands on our hearts and we can say they are qualified according to this. But does that actually make them a good teacher? I don't know, I don't know, where is the flair, where is the imagination, where is the rapport building, where [are] all those 101 things that makes teaching so interesting and lively? And sometimes I think it knocks the stuffing out of people; they join the teaching profession to teach and to engage with people and to, for a lot of them, give something back and make the life better for the student. But then when you actually start talking to them about lesson plans, aims and objectives, and the differences and evaluation, Tyler, Kirkpatrick etc., they're thinking I didn't actually join up to do all this; you then have to convince them you have to go through that because that's the professional standard. "But then, what about those for whom it will never make sense *anyway?*"

Sean drove straight ahead at the roundabout, passing the vast pharmaceutical factory *on his left*. "Now, there's a challenge alright, for the policy wonks – what a waste." A wave of sympathy for the three thousand plus breadwinners, who had just been given notice of the closure of the site, shifted his attention away from the voices in the car. Then as he turned into the back road to Hywyh, his words chimed again with the slight shiver of helplessness that had followed his sense of fellow-feeling: ...Like a lot of things in life um, you know the theory is important but so is the practice, and that's where I see the coming together. So we give them everything we have on DTTLs, and then they get their diploma etc., and then they engage in the real experience which will hopefully then make them very wise teachers. But of course not everybody can do it. I don't think everybody can do it. I think some people are very gifted, er, and are naturally wise. I think there are some people that it's very deep inside and can be brought out. And others, if you gave them a million pounds, they'll never be able to do it because they just haven't developed in that way.

"So, what *is the point of it all, then?*" He moved forward as the red light switched to green, turning left round the toll gate and then keeping in low gear as he moved slowly

uphill looking for a parking place. The shop was now just in front of him on the left, one of Helen's favourites, and he had left enough time to have a browse. Even after all these years, Sean still enjoyed the delighted surprise on her face when he came back from a trip, however brief, with a token of his love. He turned into the car park of the Bell Hotel, "Perfect, a quick look in the shop and then a pint in the bar before going to Hannah's." He switched off the engine, but something lingered, some unanswered question, and he turned the cd back on. His voice came back to him: ...You can make a real impact, use your natural flair and ability and your experience and wisdom to know when to step in and when to step out. Of course, you have to provide what your organisation requires...but how you get there that's your job... What I think I do give them is confidence: confidence to question; confidence to question management; confidence to question the systems; confidence to question, you know, government policies and education policies and things like that. Not that there's too much that they can do about it, they have joined up, they are on contracts etc., etc. However, in the areas where they can influence, and they can tinker around the edges, they've got the confidence to do so. Buoyed up by the assertion in his tone, Sean turned off the player, climbed out of the car, flicked the automatic lock hanging to the leather fob and stepped into the shop.

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At exactly that moment, the strap finally snapped on Susanne's leather shoulder bag, which fell to the floor and disgorged its entire contents across the breadth of the hallway. "Oh, thank you, Simon", as he bent to help gather the array of lesson plans, schemes of work and minutes from the day's meetings. He caught the slight tremor in the second syllable of his name and chanced a quick glance at his colleague as he rescued a stray file which threatened to escape, with its contents, into the neighbouring classroom. "I'm ok," she responded to his look with an abruptness that she didn't mean, but Simon persevered. "Come on", and he grabbed at the last sheets of A4, rose, and guided her into the empty room. "Really, I'm fine." "Sure, so let's take a breather, and you can tell me how your meeting went." She knew the one he meant; she had talked it through with him a thousand times before calling the tutor in to her office. "Bloody awful, she feels totally betrayed after all these years." "How was it left?" "I don't know, I really don't know, but I cannot, will not, just let it go." Simon took a step back; this was the mood that worried him the most. He really liked Susanne, he had been her line manager for three years and he respected her teaching abilities, her commitment and her ability to see the bigger picture. But she didn't know when to stop,

when to say, “Ok, done my best, let it go, *not my problem anymore...*” She didn’t seem to understand the need for compromise and, if anything, she’d been worse since she’d done that damned Masters. “Yeah, great staff development. We pay them to go over there and do it, and they come back asking impossible questions and upsetting apple carts – *as if the carts weren’t wobbly enough to start with.*” Calming his irritation, Simon reminded himself that there might have been a time when he, too, would have loved the chance to spend Wednesday evenings discussing the potential for fostering critical intelligence in adult learners, and finding ways to encourage community activists to ‘speak back to power’. But this was the real world, and Susanne could go far within this adult education service if only she learned *how to ‘toe the line’*.

Susanne, meanwhile, was mollified and a little comforted by Simon’s obvious interest and concern. She had felt terrible at having to tell the tutor that she wouldn’t be employed in the autumn term, and why not? Because she had not met the OFSTED criteria for ‘satisfactory’ at her recent observation, despite the obvious learning that was taking place, and the thrill and enjoyment of her students. Susanne knew that the students had learned, indeed they had learned a great deal; if her own experience were anything to go by – after all, she had been there, she was the observer, and it was she who had given the ‘unsatisfactory grade’. “It’s just so insane, she’s a fantastic tutor, she ticks all my boxes, but not the 104, or whatever, that OFSTED wants.” She paused, “I’m going to tell her to appeal.” “What! Against yourself?” “Yes, if need be.” They looked at each other, then both smiled at the ridiculousness of what she had just said. Her tension eased a little as she pulled a chair from one of the desks and folded into it. “But I have to do something, Simon, *it’s just not right.*” She took a deep breath, “You know, I can vaguely recall that once upon a time being involved in teaching adults was what I lived and breathed. But I had lost that feeling prior to undertaking the MA...There was a sense that perhaps the MA would re-ignite what I had felt in the past about the importance of Adult Education.” He pulled out a chair next to her and sat down. She looked across at him. I was under no illusion, and I don’t think my thoughts have changed, that obtaining an MA would make [any] difference to the job I’m doing here at Wealden Adult Ed. Simon started to lift his hand in protest, but Susanne continued speaking. Her tone might have been hesitant, but her voice was measured and held the conviction that he both admired and feared. I didn’t think that erm, I would erm, that in doing the MA I would see any opportunity to really inform the way this organisation is going. Nor did I see

it as a means to, to advance my career here at *Wealden* Adult Ed. I see it as possibly a means to maybe do something outside of *Wealden* Adult Ed which saddens me... but I can't at this point. And of course it's very early on, I've only just recently received the result, so maybe I am being a bit pessimistic about that, and there are lots of changes, but I don't see that the way *Wealden* Adult Ed is going, the changes that it has to make, will necessarily include me.

Her outbreath marked the distance between them, but she continued speaking to her line-manager, almost as if she were speaking with herself, And that, I think, has to do with the way I perceive the organisation, probably, oh just being very caught up in the way it manages people. I, I'm not sure I see a place for me ...at this point. She looked across at him, because I can't quite see how this huge organisation can slow down and hear things some of us have to say and include us in the dialogue that has to take place if they, if they want to involve us. So, I suppose, I suppose what I'm saying is I don't feel any more valued with an MA than I was before, without it. "*That damned MA*", thought Simon, "it was never meant to change anything, it was just..." He maintained her gaze, "Which is something of an irony, given that the reason you started the MA was in order to safeguard your role, it was an instrumental *choice to safeguard your role.*" He couldn't help himself, "Does that mean that for you *the MA has been a waste of time?*" The vehemence of her reply surprised him. No, absolutely not. When I started I think I thought 'oh yes I can.' All along, all along I thought all I have to do is pass this because then I'll have an MA, and I can put that on my cv. And when inevitably I get called for an interview, as they restructure the organisation, I will be able to sit there with my MA on my cv and think well at least I've done something to try and demonstrate my worth... But, quite despite myself, I have found that the MA, the whole process, has reawakened my interest in, and my realisation that there is something in this Adult Education arena that I want to be a part of, and I want to be involved in...It's made me realise that I, I suppose what it's doing is it's helping me understand what has happened and what is happening, and why I feel so uncomfortable about some elements of the work I'm doing. And it's helping me to see why that's happening and...not just what's happening, but understand why it's happening and I can do something about that. I'm not 100% sure I can do anything within *Wealden* Adult Ed but I think I can certainly go elsewhere and, and I can continue to work in this area and make a difference.

The silence between them spoke of their mutual realisation of what had been said. The organisation was going through another re-structuring, the fifth since Simon had started working there, and here she was practically asking her line manager for *redundancy*. “*Look, I’d better go, I’ve got to be at Hywyh by 6.30 and I’ve still got to get home and sort John out.*” But he knew he mustn’t leave it here. He could suggest an official meeting where he would ask her to lay her cards on the table, a suggestion that would leave them both in a state of anxious resentment, or he could listen to what she *really wanted to say*. “Look, five minutes, ok?” He rose from his seat and went to the corridor. Their floor seemed empty, and he came back in, shut the door and shifted his chair a little away *from the glancing light from the window so that she wouldn’t have to crease her eyes when looking at him*. “*I’m listening.*” It, it’s... difficult. What, what I find hard is the pace at which we are having to work... When I came to you and we had that very first meeting and I briefly touched on the fact that before I joined [this organisation] I worked for the NHS. Simon nodded encouragement. - And I had joined the NHS to help them roll out a series of programmes around IT- improving the skills of NHS community health workers in IT so they could start to use the new IT programmes that were being developed. It became, for me, a very frustrating roll out of programmes in that they bore no...(she opened both palms and put them on the table in front of her). They, they weren’t related to what I would call developing knowledge and learning and understanding of IT. What they were, really, was product demonstration. It was very much a case of: - ‘Here’s the new system; these are the functions that you need to be able to use, if you press this button this happens, if you click on that icon that will happen, these are the icons you need to use’.- It was very much demonstrating a product. I came to *Wealden Adult Ed* thinking things will be different now. I will get back to having the time and the space to allow people to delve into areas of learning and not just become, not just be about acquiring a low level or a slightly better skill to be able to do something. It will be more about learning why something is the way it is. (Now it was her turn to hold his gaze.) That hasn’t happened for me at all. What I perceive my role to be here is very much just an administrator; and all the knowledge I had about how people learn, the value of learning, none of that has been utilised whatsoever. I’m just administering a series of courses and I am managing tutors and making sure they conform to that delivery. What the MA has opened my eyes to is understanding how that’s happened, and why it’s happened, and why organisations like the NHS are just

demonstrating products, why they're not learning organisations at all, although they profess to being a learning organisation, or did in my time. And I, at last, have an understanding of why that's happened and what might be going on. (She had absolutely nothing to lose, and even managed a smile). Whether I can, whether I can affect any change I'm not sure at this stage because I don't feel that the decision makers will want to hear some of my views, because I don't think it will, I don't think they believe it will help them. And there isn't, it's hard to find, the time or to have the opportunities to talk about what we might be able to do differently, or that we could do better. So, what I sense is I am being asked, even more now, to just put together programmes and courses that become products really, that get pushed out and are really just so like the product demonstrations that I was involved with in the NHS. So, for example, I think of the IT courses that I look after here, and what concerns me is I am being asked more and more to put together courses that can be packaged up into ten hour, fifteen hour, twenty hours, of, in effect, a product that can be delivered by anybody with an interest or experience in IT, in terms of delivering IT courses. But what concerns me is... those are products that will develop somebody's skill or understanding of a piece of software but it's not learning.

“But what is it then? Surely, ‘developing somebody’s skill or understanding’ is precisely about learning?”

What I mean is...I get asked now to put together a course to deliver Word or Excel and that course will give somebody a small raft of skills to utilise a small element of Microsoft Word. All I'm doing is enabling somebody to use a small portion of Word so that they can go out and type up letters, or type up reports, or put together a presentation. So it seems a very superficial skill that I am part of enabling, and I would like it to be so much more than that because I feel that being able to use a piece of software involves, should involve, a much bigger area of understanding: in terms of why we're using computers now; what computers are doing; how they can help us; where they've come from; what else is out there; understanding why we're using Microsoft in organisations and not some of the other pieces of software that are out there. She paused for breath and slowed the pace of her delivery so that her words had a metronomic quality that beat out her meaning between them. Having the time to investigate different uses and the impact that IT has...I'm just concerned that everything is being levelled, everything I do is being levelled in terms of the course offerings, and it's not real

learning because there's no time for that. And I just see, I just see that everything I do is heading into this very constrained 'we just need a product, Susanne, that anyone can deliver that we can pull off the shelf and put out there.

"But this is a business! Hundreds of full-timers and part-timers work here. *If we don't do it, then someone else will, Wealden FE for example, and they certainly won't do it the way you want.*"

"I know that, *I know it.*" *This was exactly what she'd feared. She didn't need reminding of the way the circle worked: "If we don't, they will; if they do it, we lose our jobs."* But it was the circle that was the problem, not its mechanics, but the whole damned construction. I don't believe education works well necessarily as a, I don't believe learning works well as a business, because I don't think you can box it up clearly enough for business purposes. Inevitably, learning means that it's hard to keep things constrained, and to have things travelling in the direction you need them to travel in, or to control, if you want a business...You can have a very successful business model delivering what appears to be learning, I learnt my trade working for an IT organisation that operated a franchised model of delivering IT courses, where there were a series of products that came with a course manual, and an outline, and a timescale, and tutors who were taught and trained to deliver that product absolutely within those constraints. There was an accounts team that went out and pulled the students in, sat them in front of the computers; we delivered those products and it was very successful. But although it gave me an element of my IT tutoring skills, in terms of how to manage a classroom, I knew very early on, this is not the best, this is not learning, this, again, is teaching people a skill or a product, but it's not real learning. And when I got away from that into a different organisation, where we had a lot more time to go "Ok, this is a computer, this is a piece of software, this is what you need to know to get started. But now what can you do with it? Now I've shown you how to get going, see what you can discover". ..We had a lot more time, and people were able to be a lot more creative with what they then did with the bits of information, knowledge, learning I was giving them. And that started to feel like, more like, what I understood learning to be, and what I want it to be for people. Susanne risked one last appeal ...My worry is that with *Wealden Adult Ed* we could possibly have an opportunity to get to, to change and deliver learning. But what I see us doing is heading into the business model where we

will have small packages of learning i.e. courses that become products that we send out there. Almost that anybody could deliver. The die was *cast, she couldn't* stop now. You almost need presenters rather than teachers, because it becomes a demonstration of a product that people acquire and then can have a certificate and say “yes I've done that”, but it's not learning.

He could bear neither the appeal nor the defiance in her eyes. He looked away from her and at the window. The late afternoon sun was just catching part of the roundel on the *dusty, stained glass window that reminded the room's inhabitants of the building's* earlier purpose *as a Victorian grammar school*. “We have some really beautiful *buildings*.” Susanne, surprised but grateful for this sudden respite, also turned to face the window and together they watched the sun spill some of its crimson on to the *wooden floor at their feet*. “Have you ever noticed the windows on the stairs at *The Wells?*” Simon was referring to the art nouveau architectural jewel in the *organisation's crown*. “The figures represent art, science, industry **and** commerce.” Susanne rose to the *challenge in his verbal emphasis*. “But it was built as a technical institute. We might have inherited the building, but we have a different historical trajectory, or we have had.” Simon laughed, now, in *spite of himself*. “Ok, ok, so learning for you is a mixture of time, space, creativity, and awareness of the broader *picture?*” Something had shifted and she *didn't want to squander the moment*, Yes. It's about that, “okay I know what this is, I know what I'm supposed to be doing with it”, but learning is also “I know why, why this is as it is and why it's like this and why I'm doing it this way here, but actually there are other ways I could be doing it now I understand this”. So, learning for me opens up choice. And what concerns me is that some of the so- called learning I've been involved in seems to constrict choice ...I don't see those [other] opportunities being given to our learners here. An education isn't something you can easily get hold of and just package up and make a profit from.

“Look, I'm not denying that you have a point, here, and we can come back to the reality of this place paying lots of us our mortgages, but you have to accept that there were far too many courses behaving like clubs, with cliquey mentalities and absolutely no progression. If we are meant to be promoting learning, what was the point of programmes like those? Surely, it is perfectly justifiable to expect students to stay at the appropriate level, for the appropriate length of time, then move up to the next. That's what progression is all about.”

Obviously in my role I'm accountable... in terms of achievement and retention on courses, as are our tutors. Our tutors are being made to be more accountable and to answer questions from managers as to why student numbers have changed, why students have left courses. Why haven't students achieved the qualification at the end of the course, [and] why if these achievement targets were met last year they need to be exceeded this year? Well, for me, that's not what happens, that's not how learning works. Sometimes people, sometimes students drop out of courses, but that doesn't mean that learning isn't taking place, doesn't mean that the learning they've acquired is less valuable than if they had stayed on to the end of the course, doesn't mean that they won't come back to this course later on... You know, this is a lifelong messy process that you can't easily tie up into in business objectives and targets. So it distresses me when I see tutors and managers, people like myself, managers being held up as not achieving when it's just a very difficult thing to show achievement against the targets that we're being given and I don't know what the answers, I don't know what the answers are. Suddenly, as if the air was being dragged from the room, Susanne felt the energy leach out of her, All I know is it makes me very uncomfortable, it makes me feel like I'm not doing a good job here... and I can't quite think how to, I don't think there's, I don't think... I suppose I'm saying... there isn't an answer... I can't give Wealden Adult Ed, and the managers who are trying to restructure the organisation, I can't give them an answer...and maybe can never give them the answer that they need because, I probably feel, the sort of learning I want to be involved in isn't something you can box up.

She felt slightly ashamed of her repetition, it sounded weak and she needed the strength of her convictions to keep going. But she was so tired, and then, "*oh no, please no*"; she felt the clutch at her throat, and she turned away with a cough to hide the small sob that was threatening to break down the last of her defences. Could she risk telling him? I feel like, I feel like a jelly fish...I feel very vulnerable, no sort of defences to deal with what is, what I perceive is, being thrown at me. And I feel, well I feel my mental health is completely shot to pieces by all of this in terms of the work I'm being asked to do and whether I'm doing it well or not well.

He spoke very quietly, "It sounds like a very painful place to be." It was a statement not a question, but she responded to the sincerity in his tone. It is for me, it is. It is

because I feel, I do feel I'm not doing a good job, despite the fact I now have an MA in Education and Professional Practice, I have a sense that they, that what it's done is, it's made me, it's made me critical. And where I feel and have always felt that being critical is a good thing, I don't think that the senior managers who have to make some decisions about the shape of the organisation, I think they will see any input I have as being negative.

The slight, but involuntary movement of Simon's *head was almost* unnoticeable, but she reacted to it with a shift in tone which he was pleased to read as resignation. If it were *also tinged with defeat, he wasn't going to worry about it too much*. I suppose I need to perhaps be, I need to be more politic about how I go about things, and that maybe there is a way to quietly affect change...He nodded his encouragement. But in trying to quietly affect some change, I can't erm... The accountability, the responsibilities that I am being given are so erm ...I get so caught up in them, and they're so important to the business that actually I'm being overwhelmed by them. And I either have to throw all my energies into meeting those targets, those performance indicators, criteria that they want of me... She turned her face towards him again, trying to measure the level of his remaining patience, **Because** they take all my energies there's no other time, otherwise I'm just going to fail. The pause was too long for both of them before she finally turned away again. It's almost, it's almost...I can't do, I can't do anything here. That is, I suppose, really what I'm feeling...

Once again, Simon knew that they had reached a crisis point. He glanced at his watch; he should really call it a day and go home. But then he would be as guilty of perpetuating that *dreaded 'circle' of hers as the* senior managers whose demands she could neither ignore nor accommodate. He would try a different tack: "*Ok, let's agree that lifelong learning is a messy business.*" She looked back at him again, with that peculiar feeling one has when putting a toe in the water of an unfamiliar lake or river and having no idea how deep it might be.

"Yes".

"So, how do you see the role of Adult Education, if it were not limited by the kinds of accountability frameworks that we have. In other words, given that lifelong learning is *such a messy thing, do we need to have Adult Education Services? We've got the internet, you know, you've got the radio, you've got access to the BBC; why would you*

need to have an organisation *dedicated to Adult Education?*” Although not sure where this was leading, Susanne welcomed the retreat from the main battle-zone, and followed Simon to this adjoining field station.

I just feel what I’m about to say is so naïve, but...we need a place; we need a place where we can come to talk to others, to engage with others, to be made aware of all these opportunities for learning that are out there, that we may not find on our own, by ourselves. We need a place that we can come to where we are not necessarily being given one particular way of learning, or skill... that we can experiment, and try things out, and test things out. And I thought that, perhaps, that was what Adult Education would allow... I’ve used the BBC, I use the Internet but without something like the MA course, and similar things for everyone, you don’t get that support in how to critically understand. Again, it’s coming back to why things are the way they are. For example, I’ve had some wonderful teachers when I think back to my knowledge of IT. They weren’t necessarily tutors delivering a course on how to use Word, it was more this having the time to talk about where things have come from... finding that some of the things we get told are not necessarily the truth of it all. And I had the feeling that in an Adult Education class you would not be constrained by objectives and outcomes that were written onto a piece of paper and ticked off at the end of the day when you left the classroom. That it was very much a place where you could go off on tangents, and that’s what it was about. So, going back to your question, I think there is a place for the BBC, there is a place for the internet. But we need places, as well, where you can pull all that together and look at it, and see it for what it is, and understand that there are also lots of other things out there, all the time coming along, that you should tap into, and can tap into and utilise. I think, in some respects, it’s about being able to be adult about these things, and question and talk about and argue and challenge; and that’s what we can’t do here at the moment in this organisation.

Then suddenly, Simon *realised why he respected her so much. It wasn’t simply* that she was good at her job; it was that she still cared so passionately about it. The simplicity *of this illumination almost made him laugh out loud. As it was, he couldn’t stop the* smile reaching his eyes. Of course she was her own worst enemy, but what else could she be? Oh, he would have to rescue her, if not for herself, then at least for the organisation. She misunderstood the smile; her tone changed, she plunged fully clothed

into the lake. Yes...I think one of my problems is that doing the MA has made me realise how little I know of how the world works, and it's really quite distressing that I still have so much to learn. I naively thought that it would be in everybody's interest if we were all more learned than we are, but I realise that's not the case. That's not what everybody wants or requires of us, and I'm still learning this, and still finding my way through all of this... I have a very superficial grasp of the historical underpinnings of Adult Education but my knowledge is improving in terms of, you know, why we have Adult Education, where it's come from, its history and I realise very clearly how education is hugely political and so is very problematic as a result...I don't think we're doing enough of the 'why' anymore. Why is it like this? Why is the world the way it is? Why do people act the way they do? Why do organisations operate the way they do? And I don't believe that any government is going to be really helpful when it comes to learning, because governments are political. And I think there's a dangerous tension there between learning and government and politics. I find myself looking at what [the WEA are] doing at the moment. Is that an organisation that's doing better than we are in terms of being a real learning organisation? But I suspect that they're probably struggling, too, because I bet they have links with government and funding. And what I'm intrigued by, as a result of the MA, is is there anything out there that can divorce itself completely from government and politics but have a place in our society where people can go? ...But I'm thinking that perhaps we might have to create those ourselves.

Once again, she paused *and looked at him*. "Oh, Simon, *I'm just trying to be honest here.*" "I know, I know." Now for the third time, Simon felt himself at a cross-roads, and he searched for a platitude to buy some time. But Susanne was changing tack, and for a second or two he thought he had misheard her. "*Wisdom? I'm sorry, you've lost me.*" "I was saying that I was going to the conference on '*Wisdom and Adult Learning*' tomorrow, you know the one, and *perhaps I'll find an answer then.*" Relieved that she had taken them both into calmer waters, Simon *risked a lighter tone*, "Well, if you do find any wisdom there, bring it back here in bucket loads, *I'm sure we could all benefit.*" *She smiled at him kindly*, "You're not going then?" He responded in similar vein, "*Haven't got time, Susanne, too busy oiling the wheels of this machine called Wealden Ad Ed.*" The crisis had been averted for now, and both of them stood up and moved to the door.

The walk together along the corridor, and then down the three flights of steps to the reception area, gave them both sufficient time to adopt the postures suitable for a manager and her senior colleague. “What are you doing tonight?” Simon asked companionably as they moved towards the register to sign out. “Well, once I’ve got John sorted, I’m off to Hybury for a pre-conference supper with some of the other organisers.” “I didn’t realise you were taking such an active role in this wisdom thing. Is this part of our collaborative arrangements with the University?” She hedged her bets, “Sort of, it kind of follows on from some old MA work I was doing with Wilma.” “Oh, right, give her my best won’t you, hope it goes well.” He found his name and scribbled the time in the ‘out’ column next to it. “You know, I’ve never given wisdom much thought. I suppose I’ve assumed it either comes with age or it doesn’t, you know, the old man with the beard and the staff wandering about the desert.” What about the old woman?” “What with the beard? Anyway, weren’t they called witches?” He picks up his briefcase and follows Susanne out to the car park. “Not that I’m saying women can’t be wise.” “No, of course not, you’re just repeating one or two of the old stereotypes just to keep me on my toes.”

They are at ease now, and he walks the length of the car park with her, somehow reluctant to let her go. “Ok, so what’s it mean to you then?” “Oh, gosh, I don’t know,” She adopts a tutor-like pose and pretends to declaim to the few remaining vehicles next to hers. It’s not something I can, or anyone can, get quickly or be given. And it relates to understanding life and the situations you come up against and dealing with them...There are points in my life where I stumble...and just acquiring knowledge doesn’t necessarily make life any easier...I suppose wisdom is...so huge because it’s about being able to deal with all the situations that get thrown at you. But at times, it’s very difficult to keep a handle on it all, and to have all the skills you need, and to have all the knowledge and the learning that you need. So, I can do small bits, but at times big things come along and make life very problematic. Her pose is abandoned, and she carries on talking in a much quieter voice as if telling herself something for the very first time. And I realise that where I thought I was dealing with things ‘wisely’, I’m not...and... I suppose I’m getting a sense life has become very complicated, and I’m struggling to understand. Or I’m thinking, “are we making it complicated... What’s happening to make life so complicated?” Because I am struggling with so many things that I perhaps didn’t expect I’d be struggling with at this point. And I have a sense of you know,

being... that once, years ago I might have felt I was perhaps better able to deal with, with, life and situations than I am at the moment. Without thinking, Simon took a step backward, to give her a little more space, to reclaim a little more balance. It helped. Well, that's just some of the, you know, the pitfalls that we fall into, and we have to claw our ways out of those, and then we'll get to a point where perhaps we can feel, and she paused, erm, calmer, better able to deal with things down the line. Simon waited, and she gave a small laugh and then looked at him *again*. "You know, I have this vision...I can't get it out of my head, this picture of, you know, wise elders sitting around being able to say, "Ah, Susanne, but you know this is, this is what you need to think about here, this is what you need to do." And, I feel that I can't, I'm not there, I'm not at that point. I can't give that support to anybody around me, and it's not, maybe actually that's what it is; maybe it comes and goes, and there's this flow, and wisdom is something you can have at certain points in your life, but it will come and go...but... I'm not sure that you ever get there. She is now almost fully recovered, You know, once upon a time, I was a lot more self-assured about how to deal with things than I am now and that makes me realise that we have to be more humble about learning; that you can't just give people an education and then walk away thinking, "Well, it'll be alright now", because very often it isn't. And I'm going to come back to this thing about businesses and organisations and needing to meet targets... No matter what you give people, no matter what they learn for themselves, things will happen, situations will come along that suddenly makes everything not alright and you have to start again. And although that might be perceived as it's not happened, or it's all gone wrong, or learning hasn't taken place, it's not that. It's just that's the way life is. And we have to just, we have to pick up, and be, and accept the fact that you can't, there's no, there's no end product; I suppose is what I'm trying to say.

"Is that your definition of wisdom; that we have to accept that life will throw things at us for which we will not necessarily be prepared, we have to start again, we have to be humble and the older you get, *one gets, the less one knows?*"

Yes, possibly yes, because I think of all the things that you might consider I've learnt, the education I've had, but here I am finding myself in a position where I don't really know who I want to be, who I am, I'm not sure that anyone engaging with me knows exactly who they're dealing with from one day to the next, so what does that say about the supposed learning and education that I've had?

Simon tries for a sardonic smile in response to hers.

All I think is, every so often there are little sparks that I can draw upon from my past, and from my past experience, that go to maybe add a little bit more to my skills and ability to deal with things, although they're not necessarily going to at times, I can see they're not...And I suppose, again, I'm frustrated by the fact that I get a sense that people are thinking that education, and the learning that we deliver, will make us these 'rational' people who can do the right thing, at the right time, but that's not necessarily what can happen. At this time of the evening, *she's willing to concede, but only so far*, "Of course, we need to improve the skills of individuals, we need to ensure we have people who can work, who can be of value to our knowledge economy. And, you can give people certain skills and knowledge and ability; but things can come along that can cause them to have to react differently, or deal with situations differently, and from an outside view that will make them appear less useful, less valuable, but it's just them trying to deal with the situations that are coming along in life. And it doesn't mean they're no less worthy to us. Oh, this is getting very messy now, but in terms of what I'm trying to say... I just know it's just not as easy as people are making out...I think we're short changing people, we're short changing the learners that we come across by just thinking if we give them the skills to be able to enter figures into a spread sheet... It's not going to be enough for them to be able to cope with, or deal with life, and we need to need to understand that, and... I worry that we will consider that the learning that we acquire isn't valuable because they're not picking up the specific skills, or not staying rational individuals, useful individuals.

"What about the community courses that you are putting together, don't they fit the bill a little better?"

"How, Simon, how can they? - I've been asked to pull together courses that fall into ICT, Art and Craft, Fitness, that amount to ten to twenty 'guided learning hours' delivered by tutors with generic learning outcomes, course outlines that will be given to, that will be offered out into the community. So, we're doing things like paper crafts and drawing and painting. I just wonder what that really means, is that really learning? *I'm sorry; we're back in my loop again.*" *"It's ok, really it is, I might even say it's been a bit of an education."* *"Please don't mock me, I deserve better than that."* *He is genuinely outraged,* "I am absolutely doing no such thing!" *"Ok, I'm sorry, it's just that I feel I've not said the things I wanted to say*

because I don't know how to say them still. All I can say is it doesn't feel like I'm involved in real learning and the acquisition of wisdom at the moment. I can see us heading down this road again of providing products that are considered useful, relevant ...and...I can just see it not being helpful... in terms of being able to deal with the situations that occur throughout life. She needed safe ground again, and it really was time to go. I think that the one thing I take huge comfort from is that the MA has introduced me, and I know I've said this to you before but, to people like Giroux, McLaren, Jarvis. I mean I was blown away listening to...the chap who came to [Hybury]. "Brookfield?" Stephen Brookfield, and hearing him tell us some of his story, thinking there are people out there, like me, or going through very difficult times. So, I do take comfort from that. But I have never felt so unsure, but also so desperate to make some sort of change. But I don't know what or how to do this at the moment. And she ended with a final appeal, "I have some ideas, but whether they'll come to anything, whether I can hold myself together to make that happen, I don't know. He held the car door for her, *"It's not over, you know."* She smiled as she got in and put the key in the ignition. "No, I know that, and I do take great comfort from that. It's not over..."

Conclusion

I think it is time for educators to re-claim autoethnography: it seems to me not only to be a really useful form of research with which to challenge what counts as ‘evidence’ in and of ‘good’ research – but also a really useful approach to professional education and lifelong learning in its own right. (Hunt, 2009 b, p.261)

The future of our planet depends little on the information we provide to our students. It depends rather more on the knowledge we allow students to develop through their experience. But it depends much more on the wisdom we encourage our students to develop through their knowledge. (Phil Race, 2011, <http://phil-race.co.uk/words-and-thoughts/>)⁷⁴

Paradoxically, losing our identity as a field may also be a way to find it anew’ (Tisdell, 2011, p.10).

⁷⁴ Thanks to colleague Katie Cox for this quotation – email exchange 15 / 3/2012)

Introduction

In keeping with the tone and tenor of this thesis, which has been undertaken rather as an inquiry than an argument, I do not feel that these concluding pages can offer neat summary of my search for Sophia and of her potential for successful incorporation into certain teaching and learning spaces. That search goes on beyond the limits of this exploration but, as I come to the final spiral of this particular nautilus shell, I am reminded of Hunt's (2009d, p.130) summary of the reflective writing process:

[O]ne of its key functions is to enable practitioners to grapple with their own meaning making so that they can say: 'This is where I am now; this is how I got here, and these are some of the reasons why I think/feel/act as I do.'

I believe that this thesis has offered illustration of each of these points, and what follows will provide summary of its main themes and ideas.

As noted in my Introduction, I stated that 'it [was] my 'proposition', and thence my line of enquiry, that current articulations of, and emphases upon, skills and competence-based outcomes [were] constricting our teaching and learning spaces.' I also argued that 'many of our educational processes [were] so limited by outcome-based imperatives that we [were] in danger of limiting education's potential for the kinds of multi-dimensional learning that was described as 'more real' in the prologue'. I also suggested 'that certain educational discourses [were] being reduced to mainly emphasize forms of knowledge that [led] to economic competitiveness and not to wisdom'. But from the outset, and in keeping with my emphasis upon my search for Sophia, and my methodological approach, I also made it clear that the thesis would develop this theme in the interests of promoting deeper discussion. It [was] not my intention to offer proofs of my argument'. Therefore, what follows will seek to include and amalgamate elements of the following:

- a review of key elements of my thesis in terms of my quest, and the underlying dispositions which have shaped and informed them, including the admixture of loss/nostalgia which has beat its rhythm throughout (in particular as explored in the Introduction, chapters two, and three and the *entr'acte*);
- some further thoughts about the relationship between mythos and logos, and the potential for seeing some kind of rebalancing between the two (especially in relation to chapters four and five);
- a personal reflection on the unfolding of chapter seven and the roles of the 'characters' within it, and further thoughts about the decline of adult education as a 'movement';

- certain questions as to the potential for inviting Sophia into our classrooms, and finally;
- an appraisal of my choice of methodology, and of the extent to which I might be said to have caught glimpses of Sophia as this thesis has unfolded.

I am still pursuing an autoethnographic approach and, with that in mind, I shall now turn to the underlying nature of my quest and the particular predisposition which has shaped and informed it from the beginning.

The ‘Fall’ – a personal reflection

Figure 16 (Masaccio, (approx 1423) en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Expulsion_from_the_Garden_of_Eden)

As I noted in the Introduction, this thesis found one of its key questions during a conversation with a colleague about one of the West’s foundational narratives, the injunction against ‘knowing’ in the Garden of Eden. Perhaps it is only fitting that I should return to this narrative, and to its outcome, as I move into my conclusion. I shall begin with the aid of another artistic masterpiece; that executed by Masaccio in approximately 1423. To stand before his depiction of Adam and Eve’s expulsion from Eden in the Brancacci Chapel in the Church of Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence is to be faced with such intensity of despair that it is impossible not to be reminded of one’s own deepest sorrows. Such is the brilliance of this young artist’s achievement (he

was only twenty-two), I was stunned by the unutterability of this expression of loss and exile, this consummate portrayal of, perhaps, what we all fear the most; abandonment and banishment from our centre of being and belonging. There is such humanity in this painting that, for me, it transcends the more punitive exposition of our 'sin' which we inherited from Augustine. These two souls exude such dignity in their despair that I find I accord them emblematic status. They both represent and carry the weight of our pain and thus, for me, they resonate across the centuries with other portrayals of loss and exile for which I also weep. It is not the sense of 'sin' which carries the emotional and spiritual charge, it is the sense of exclusion from one's source; a reminder, for me, of Archibald Geike's reminiscence of a clearance on Skye. Although he witnessed the destruction of the community of Suishnish in 1854, it was not until fifty years later that his autobiographical *Scottish Reminiscences* (1906) bore eloquent witness to the agony of his fellow islanders:

a strange wailing sound reached my ears at intervals on the south side of the valley [...] There were old men and women, too feeble to walk, who were placed in carts [...] younger members of the community [...] were carrying their bundles of clothes and household effects, while the children [...] walked alongside. When they set forth once more, a cry of grief went up to heaven, the long plaintive wail, like a funeral coronach was resumed, and after the last of the emigrants had disappeared behind the hill, the sound seemed to re-echo through the whole wide valley of Strath in one prolonged note of desolation.

(In Richards, 2002/ 2005, p.2)

I suggested on page 98 above that 'the agony of the human condition is its predication upon the contingent'. My understanding of the 'Fall' does not share Augustine's emphasis upon the sins of the flesh; rather I see its symbolic power as testament to the agony of exile. Perhaps this is the nature of sin: the extent to which evil might be measured is the degree to which violence is visited upon a people or a psyche to tear them asunder from their sense of belonging. Geike bore witness to the literal removal of a community from its home, its roots, its duthcas. But a similar violence can be perpetrated at the symbolic and psychic levels when the limiting tyrannies of certain discursive practices are privileged over alternate and more meaningful ones.

I suppose that it is this sense of violence that has also prompted me in my search for Sophia. Whereas the base note to the thesis has definitely been the sense of loss that pervades the whole narrative, the losses that I feel in relation to the terrain(s) of adult education, the kinds of pedagogic practices that shape our classroom delivery and the socio/political/economic drivers that form and enforce them are, I am suggesting,

framed within an ideological nexus that perpetrates a kind of violence upon our potential for being, becoming and responding in more ‘heartfelt’ ways (Pelias, 2011). Without wishing to rehearse the polarities that I have noted in relation to articulations of mythos and logos, and without falling into a kind of crude psychological ‘splitting’ between the two, I would nonetheless argue that our shift into the disenchanting realms of secular modernity (see chapter four above) has left us prey to a different kind of fundamentalism, and one that privileges the kinds of hard edged rationalism and levels of competence that bedevil so much of our teaching and learning practices. And it is these practices which lead to the kinds of undemocratic framing of our endeavours that Biesta and others describe and I have noted particularly in chapter five: a series of practices which lead to the ‘the subtle tyranny of instrumental pragmatism’ abhorred by Abbs (2003 pp.3, 4) and noted in my Introduction. It is a form of violence which, I argued there, has such ‘profoundly deleterious consequences for our educative practices, for ourselves and for our broader communities.’

It is also important to reflect on the ways in which my sense of loss has drenched the whole narrative. There are a number of elements included in its personal composition; my mother’s frailty and increasingly unanchored self a key counterpoint to the framings of my own identity, and my quest for some kind of adjoining thread linking my seventeen year old’s lifeworld with that of my fifty-eight year old’s. The accompanying soul-work that has been an inevitable consequence of writing this thesis has, of necessity, brought to the fore deeper awareness of the ‘road[s] not taken’⁷⁵; and the circumstances surrounding certain choices, or more regrettably, those times when I ‘chose’ not to choose, preferring to blame fate rather than the lapse of personal agency and responsibility.

The other losses that pervade this thesis include those attending the decline of the crofters’ world that comprised chapter three; Sorley Maclean’s poetry, and Geike’s lament recorded above. But as I noted in that chapter, Maclean counselled against any kind of easy sentimentality attaching to the kinds of discourses framing the ‘Celtic Twilight’. Sorley offered a muscularity in his prose which matched his early adherence to the kinds of progressive narratives offered by his versions of Scottish nationalism and communism. With his support waning for the latter, Maclean developed an equally

⁷⁵ ‘The Road Not Taken’ by Robert Frost – www.sparknotes.com/poetry/frost/section7.rhtml

tough and uncompromising aesthetic to both frame his art and to offer some kind of redemptive quality for those willing to partake of his vision.

The failure, for Sorley, of the progressive narrative pertaining to communism echoes the decline of another theme within the thesis and that is the disappearance of adult education as a 'movement' which has been noted in earlier chapters. I shall return to this particular sense of loss below, but it is important for me to acknowledge that I have striven throughout this work to remain alert to the tensions, and possible projections, between the personal and the professional. It is also important to stress that I have tried to avoid accusations of uttering a kind of monophonic blast against the present whilst seeking retreat into a prelapsarian Golden Age of adult education. It is a potential predilection noted by both Hannah and Jane; but it is a tendency that must be avoided if we are to find creative and hopeful glimpses in the present.

Mythos and Logos: Towards a reconciliation and 'horizontal transcendence'

The other theme of loss concerns the 'moment of being' explored in chapter two. Whilst my glimpse of the 'divine'; or unitary field behind the 'cotton wool' of daily existence (Woolf in Fraser, 1976), might be framed in many and diverse ways, the fact of that experience has set a particular ontological and epistemological tone to my years, and searches, since that time. This is not to suggest that my appeal for a kind of transcendental positioning, for which Sophia has stood as metaphorical carrier, need be viewed as a return to a kind of religio/spiritual essentialism which would somehow re-right the balance. Despite my experience of the 'moment', I am not seeking an alternative polarity to the one that I posit is framed within the reductive interpretation of logos that I have articulated in these pages. In chapter two, I made it quite clear that I could not expect the reader to concur with my sense of an all-embracing unity behind the 'cotton wool'. And whereas my initial appropriation and pursuit of Sophia chimed with that suggested by Aristotle as 'the highest form of life because of its concern with the eternal and unchanging' (Thiele, 2006, p.40), I am not suggesting that we return to the kind of linear and vertical framing and 'paired dichotomies' which arose 'from this easy synergy of Greek and Christian thought' (Kalton, in Young-Eisendrath and Miller, 2000, p.190). On the contrary, the Sophia that I seek has echoes of a different kind of transcendence and one which does not replicate the polarity of this vertical frame of reference. I am searching for a Sophia in our educative practices who might offer the

kind of ‘horizontal transcendence’ and potential for ‘becoming’ (Kalton, *ibid.*p.195) which challenges the supremacy of a particular kind of human rationality at the heart of key discursive framings in the West. This would be an articulation of Sophia, and the pursuit of the kinds of wisdom, which are far more suited to the range of spiritual, ethical, intellectual and, ultimately, ecological problems that beset us today. It would also be a framing of Sophia in pursuit of a sense of belonging, exile from which has also marked the pages in this thesis. ‘Belonging is an achievement as well as a statement of fact, and the path to that end involves a re-examination of our basic assumptions (Kalton, *ibid.*, p.195)’. Precisely, and such re-examination, along the lines of some kind of ‘horizontal transcendence’ might lead to a resolution, or synthesis, between Jarvis’s (2011) distinctions between wisdom as ‘being’ and ‘becoming’, as quoted on page 11 above, ‘The former is philosophical/theological (Sophia) and the latter is ethical/cultural preservation (phronesis)’. I am suggesting a definition of Sophia which can embrace the two, and I am also appealing for a re-framing of our educational endeavours which allows for far greater integration between mythos and logos, and one for which Sophia might stand. It is the kind of integration, and definition of Sophia, that Labouvie-Vief encapsulates in her discussion of hermeneutical thinking, and one which could be summarised in the following: ‘Thus our current concerns with wisdom may bring to fruition an ancient hope – that of constructing a theory of human potentialities oriented by a normative view of transcendent ideals yet firmly grounded in the organic texture of life’ (Labouvie-Vief, 1990/2003, p.79). But the question remains, how to try and inculcate such revisionings within our adult teaching and learning spaces? I shall come back to Sophia as the learning process in succeeding pages, but before that, and in the spirit of maintaining dialogic connection, I shall now turn to some reflections on the fictionalised framing of my interview material which comprised chapter seven.

Further reflections on chapter seven and the potential for ‘curriculum wisdom’

It is interesting to note, by way of introduction, that three readers of this section wrote or spoke to me in the following terms: “The dinner party work sounds exciting and original. Obviously I haven’t seen it...”; “Oh, it stopped!” “What happens when they get together for the supper party?” Well, one of the points of that chapter is that they don’t! To be fair to the first reader quoted here, she hadn’t seen the fuller version of chapter six which contextualises what follows much more clearly than that earlier draft. But what strikes me with all of their responses is that each was seeking continuation;

leading, one assumes, to some kind of closure and resolution. One wanted the characters to meet at Hannah's in order to 'complete the Gestalt set up in the reader at the outset'.⁷⁶ I shall begin this reflection on chapter seven by explaining why the characters' journeys were never completed.

I had originally intended to place the entire story at the dinner table in Hywich. The fictional place name came to me first as a suitable homophonic location for the manifestation of Sophia which haunted my dreams. I was drawn to the idea of a supper party as a short-hand mechanism for getting my diverse characters together and then allowing them to speak for themselves whilst augmenting and counterpointing the views of the others. But whilst working through the transcripts, I became painfully aware that I was simply not gifted enough to construct a drama of sufficient energy and power through the use of interweaving dialogue alone. I cannot write plays, however short they might be! This left me with the problem of retaining the freedom offered by a fictional framing of their material but without their having to be together. Then the idea came to me of each setting out on their particular journey even if, in the case of Hannah's, it only involved a walk across town. This allowed me to 'cheat' and incorporate various devices which would link them to their transcripts; be they written notes, a digital recorder or a cd in a car. The idea of journeying also echoed one of the narrative drivers for this thesis which has revisited the notion of the quest; although I have to say this metaphorical resonance only came to me after the expediency of separating their various inputs. Each story was written in the order in which they now appear. As I noted in chapter six, I went through an initial process of analysing the themes that were arising from the texts. But I soon wearied of what felt like an inadequate response to the emotional dynamic which I felt was being generated. I have incorporated this frustration in Hannah's section where she notes the failure of my thematic notes to reflect the subtlety of her encounter with Stephen. I shall now comment on each character in turn and thence relate their sections to the tone and tenor of the whole.

I began with Jane. I had great fun in the early stages of her journey because this was the first time in the whole five and a half years⁷⁷ of writing this thesis that I could just 'let go' and see where the material would take me. I have not paid due respect to the guidance and support offered to me throughout by Tricia Wastvedt. The wisdom with

⁷⁶ In conversation with another reader, Melanie Lewin. October, 2012

⁷⁷ I had originally written 'five and a half decades' rather than years : a Freudian slip which somehow says it all!

which she trusts to the workings of the unconscious during the creative process is incredibly humbling, and I have learnt so much about just ‘letting things be’. But with Jane, I ‘let things be’ just a little too much and she complained that I had made her “too grumpy”⁷⁸ in an earlier draft. Of course, this was my grumpiness coming to the fore, but I learned to be more mindful of the respect I owed my characters even although I was fictionalising them. This brings me to an interesting dilemma in terms of our roles and responsibilities when we use interview material in such fictionalised ways. Tricia pointed out to me that if I were writing fiction, and had my interviewees’ permission to do so, then I should not be showing them their characters’ stories and asking for feedback. ‘Whose material is this?’ she asked me; and given the choice I made, which was to share as much as possible, it is a question which I have not yet answered satisfactorily. And the end result has been rather more ‘contained’ than it might have been had I not had my ‘real’ characters at my side the whole time.

But given that they are ‘real’, and given the choices that I made, another issue would be their reception of their stories. Jane felt that I had captured the political framing with which she wanted to couch our discussion “fairly” and “accurately”. “This is the way I conceptualise our current educational mess.” Hannah wept when she read her account. She later said that her reaction reminded her of Wordsworth’s terms when speaking of the power of poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” which “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity”⁷⁹. It was only by having the time to read and reflect on our words that Hannah realised just how much pain she still felt about the circumstances of her leaving her role in the academy. Sean’s response, as might be expected, was very pragmatic; I had been “accurate” in my use of his data, he had enjoyed his story, and would “support me in anything I wanted to say”...

Susanne was the most difficult from whom to get a response. It seemed a disproportionate amount of time between my sending her the transcript and receiving her feedback. Then we both spoke, and she emailed. Her delay had been due to her fear that I would destabilise the rather fragile rapprochement that she had managed to negotiate between her idealism and her organisation. This is what she emailed to me. I have her permission to include it here:

⁷⁸ My characters’ responses have either come in conversation or email.

⁷⁹ I checked and found the reference on line: www.literary-articles.blogspot.co.uk/2010/02/what-does-wordsworth-mean

Dear Wilma

Just to confirm, I do not need you to make any amendments/strikeouts to the transcript, other than those you feel necessary. For a number of reasons, not least the completion of the MA, the transcript encapsulates a very real moment of my life – a point of change, I suspect, which is full of conflict and anxiety; although as I mentioned, I've currently manoeuvred myself into less turbulent waters for the time being. For me, the interview with you captures a 'passing place' in life that we don't always have the opportunity to acknowledge, so 'Thank you' for giving me that time. I shall leave it all in your safe hands...

Her verbal response to the fictional encounter with Simon was that it was "absolutely fine"; although in an interesting coda another of my readers, who used to work in the NHS, cried when she read this account.

I also made it clear in chapter six that, in keeping with my methodological approach, I would not be offering an analysis of chapter seven but a reflection at most. I do not intend to change that view except to offer some kind of link between the stories in that chapter and the underlying threads to this thesis. If we have now come to a kind of integrated view of Sophia which allows for a range of different epistemological strands, then I would suggest that these characters might somehow articulate the 'seven modes of inquiry' offered by Henderson and Kesson. In their fear for the current state of democracy, and in their book title, they urge '*Curriculum Wisdom*' as essential in formulating '*Educational Decisions in Democratic Societies*' (2004). It is worth looking at their formulation in a little more detail because of the resonances with what has been included in my thesis. They have identified 'seven inquiry domains that have archetypal dimensions' in order to 'meet this curriculum wisdom challenge' (p. 47) and there are clear overlaps with areas that I have noted above and, in particular, in chapters one and five when discussing Hall and Heron and Reason: 'These seven modes of inquiry are *technē* (craft reflection); *poesis* (soulful attunement to the creative process); *praxis* (critical inquiry); *dialogos* (multiperspectival inquiry); *phronesis* (practical, deliberative wisdom); *polis* (public moral inquiry); and *theoria* [or *Sophia*] (contemplative wisdom).' Their following sentence offers delightful synchronicity with my own use of Sophia throughout this thesis: 'An archetype can be both a guide on a journey and a stage within the journey' (ibid. p.47). Indeed. Henderson and Kesson then explain what they mean by each of these archetypes and offer examples of how they

might be incorporated into the classroom. Whilst acknowledging that ‘Theoria [Sophia] may be the most difficult mode of inquiry to sustain in this fast-paced world of data, outcomes, accountability, and the bottom line’; they nonetheless urge all educational practitioners to find ways of answering the question, (ibid.p.63), ‘How will our curriculum nurture those qualities?’ It is a question that might find some answer in the burgeoning field related to ‘mythopoesis’ to which I have already referred, and to which I shall return below.

But firstly, I would like to suggest that my explorations with my interviewees into the nature of wisdom and her place in the pedagogic process led to illustration of each of these modes: Jane combines both praxis and phronesis by way of urging the need to safeguard her vision of an educated citizenry via public moral inquiry or polis. Whilst perfectly ‘at home’ with the need for critical inquiry, Hannah’s mode of reflection locates her far more within those modes named here as poesis and theoria. I would suggest that Sean is more interested in resolving the tensions between *technē* and phronesis as they affect his classroom practice. Finally, Susanne seems to encapsulate an interesting meld of praxis, phronesis with perhaps an element of theoria at the margins. Together, these voices offer the kind of multiperspectival inquiry, denoted here as dialogos; and an overall kind of synthesis which ‘meet’ Henderson and Kesson’s ‘curriculum wisdom challenge’ (2004, p. 47). It is a challenge which also brings back to mind the state of adult education as both field and movement; and the prelapsarian tendencies warned against by both Jane and Hannah. Henderson and Kesson fear for the future of democracy, just as early pioneers within the movement urged a curriculum for the ‘workers’ that would offer both challenge and the potential to speak back to power. As Jane and Hannah reveal, the history of adult education has been riven with tensions between those offering a so-called reformist agenda and those with more radical demands for deep and lasting structural change. The question lingers: what potential is there, today, to offer the kinds of ‘curriculum wisdom’ which might still encompass the kinds of radicalism espoused by aspects of the WEA, for example, in relation to their pioneering work in women’s education...

Of course, there is much to be hoped for in the moves for a genuine politics of transformational learning, and I could cite the work of radical educators such as those found within the pages of O’Sullivan, Morrell and O’Connor whose ‘Essays on Theory and Praxis’ in their edited volume ‘Expanding the Boundaries of Transformative

Learning' (2001) take the discussion far beyond that articulated by Mezirow. Others such as Stephen Brookfield, who so inspired Susanne when he visited our campus, have spent an adult lifetime in pursuit of 'Radicalizing [sic] Learning' (2011), and they offer inspiring and provocative ways and means in which we might re-frame our educational endeavours. It goes without saying that there is a long history of such calls to educational radicalism. The works of Freire, Giroux, bell hooks, McLaren and Apple represent a fraction of those who have urged alternatives to reductionist pedagogical discourses. But this thesis has not been about the potential for transformational learning, as such; it has sought Sophia as metaphorical carrier for a different kind of potential, but one that also requires a revisioning of our practices. This leads the discussion back to one of the key issues about wisdom noted in my Introduction: the extent to which 'she' might be taught.

Much has been written about the potential for teaching wisdom⁸⁰, including Jarvis's (2011) suggestion that it cannot be. But there are ways in which we might invite Sophia into our classrooms if we are able to retain that notion of 'her' as integrated in the terms suggested above. Rather unsurprisingly, given the attention paid to language throughout this thesis, Tara Hyland-Russell and I argued in our chapter entitled 'Searching for Sophia: Adult Educators and Adult Learners' (2011, p. 33), that we needed to 'pay heed to the metaphors and discourses we use in our teaching, research and scholarship [...] rather than relying on reductive metaphors relating to the marketplace.' We urged, 'in contrast, an attitude of attentiveness and encouragement towards the potential for unknowing as both antidote and opportunity for change.' In similar vein, and acknowledging her paradoxical nature, we concluded that 'we are more likely to encounter the wisdom of Sophia if we are willing to abandon rational certitude and embrace a stance of curiosity and openness.' This is all very well, and I would not wish to gainsay such an appeal, but I feel that the urgency needed to offer robust and profound rebuttal to so many of our pedagogic policies and practices requires rather more than attention to our language use and discursive articulations. This is not to suggest that the areas of radical and transformational learning do not overlap with explorations of wisdom as pedagogic practice as texts such as those by Henderson and Kesson so clearly illustrate. But there is another dimension which has been at the margins of this thesis which now demands greater attention.

⁸⁰For example of some of these complexities, see e.g. Bassett; Okpalaoka and Dillard; and Jarvis, in Tisdell and Swartz (Eds. 2011)

Spirituality, Mythopoesis and Learning

In Willis and Morrison's 'Introduction' to their edited collection of essays on Spirituality, Mythopoesis and Learning (2009), they note the basic link between mythopoesis⁸¹ and theories of narrativity and 'ways of generating imaginal rather than explanatory knowing' (2009, p.2). The approach obviously resonates with the framing of my own search for Sophia as autoethnographic practice as well as 'speaking back' to the kinds of disenchantment which, I have argued after Taylor, accompanied the rise of modernity. With clear links to the spiritual, and in words which echo my own in preceding pages, 'The mythopoetic dimension [...] is one of invitation, attraction and enchantment rather than the conviction of propositional truth' (Willis, 2009, p.27). However, Willis is not proposing that we should polarise the two. On the contrary, he draws upon Heron's 'modalities of knowing and learning', and upon certain phenomenologists to posit a kind of 'mythos-logos complementarity' which is consciously embodied whilst retaining its spiritual dimension (ibid. p.22). In terms of classroom practice, Willis and others have elsewhere (2005) suggested a range of activities by which we might 're-enchant' our pedagogic practices in ways which may be summarised as fostering 'imaginal knowing' at the heart of our endeavours. It is a process which could lead to a kind of 'unitary transformation' which 'departs from the predictability of the organic analogy and from the concerns with power relations [...] It is concerned with a way in which an adult educator's sense of [...] herself can be modified and deepened' (Willis, 2005, p. 81). This is an approach which draws on Jung's theories of mature integration and individuation, in turn resonating with MacDermot's (1978/2001) link between Sophia and Jung (noted in chapter four above), and finding echo in Labouvie-Vief's (1994, p. 193) encouragement of 'hermeneutical thinking' which,

breaks the isolation of the logos-identified thinker and relates him or her back to a sense of place, history, and community. The self emerges out of a sense of static universalism and moves into a reality that embraces diversity, change, and transformation.

In other words, my search for Sophia has helped me find common cause with a range of theorists and educationalists who seek similar respite from the kinds of reductive policies and practices that I have explored in these pages. One might be tempted to argue that urging ways to 're-enchant' our classrooms is all very well in theory, but

⁸¹ The term has been variously italicised, apostrophised or left as written here. For the sake of consistency, this latter choice will be my own.

much more difficult to attain in practice. But then I never suggested that my quest would lead to practical and easily assimilable outcomes. On the contrary my search, and the underlying dispositions which have prompted it, is offered by way of continuing a dialogue with others who share my concern. For it is also offered in the firm belief that is through dialogue, in relationship, and by engaging in a hermeneutics of the self, that we learn best and come closest to Sophia. This search has also prompted my firm belief in the importance of striving to retain some semblance of the liberal tradition which found expression in the adult education movement lamented in these pages.

Community Arts and Education (CAE)

It was purely by chance that an erstwhile Pro-Vice Chancellor at my institution, and knowing my background, asked me to try and develop a form of educational provision which could replicate the range of liberal studies that had been offered by the other university in the town before the closure of the final manifestation of its extra-mural department. The WEA in the area had also reduced its programme in the light of socio-economic and political pressures and the local education authority's offer was also in decline. By drawing upon old friends and contacts at each of these organisations, and by using Higher Education Initiative Funds (HEIF), I was able to buy myself out of teaching, employ an administrator for 25 hours per week and develop some marketing tools. In the fifteen months since September 2011, when our courses were launched, we have generated over 800 bookings on our programme of liberal studies under our CAE umbrella. The courses are not accredited, they include the 'usual suspects': archaeology; creative writing; literature; philosophy; photography; social psychology; as well as venturing into the more esoteric with programmes looking at the 'I Ching'; 'The Music of the Spheres'; and 'Exploring Practical Symbolism' which examined 'Alternative ways of Knowing': a programme where Sophia would have been much at home.

The popularity of these more esoteric offerings has also encouraged our continued efforts to launch a new MA, under the auspices of CAE, which could, potentially, attract international interest. Drs Angela Voss, Geoffrey Cornelius and Marguerite Rigoglioso have been working with me to develop an 'MA in Myth, Cosmology and The Sacred', although this battle is now two and a half years in the fighting. At each stage of its development, our proposed MA has met with institutional barriers that range from the incomprehensible to the simply risible. In eerie echo of the themes of this

thesis, at one panel meeting to decide its fate, it was feared that the MA might be seen to legitimise ‘alternative ways of knowing’ thereby bringing into disrepute the ‘ways of knowing’ currently being offered. As I write these words, the fate of the whole CAE project is in the balance. Unless I can generate further support from HEIF, the university will have no choice but to close the programme; the faculty simply cannot sustain my ‘buy-out’ from teaching. On the one hand, this probable outcome fills me with the kinds of despair that has, at times, accompanied my quest for Sophia, but it is only by having searched for her that I have found the energy and creativity to launch and support CAE, and to fight for the MA; and I am reminded of Tisdell’s words, noted in chapter one, when she talks of the need for wisdom in the face of a declining field of adult education: ‘The more that one knows, one realizes the limits of one’s knowledge; within scarcity there is abundance; to lose oneself is to find oneself. Paradoxically, losing our identity as a field may also be a way to find it anew’ (2011, p.10).

Autoethnography as both method and methodology

I shall now turn to my choice of autoethnography as both underpinning and framing to my search, and offer some concluding reflections on the efficacy of my choice. I believe that I have utilised autoethnography as both method and methodology, and that by interrogating each part of the term individually I have illustrated its appropriateness to the elements of my search.

In my Introduction, I noted that I was not trying to ‘prove’ the ‘truth’ of some key propositions, but that the ‘truth might reside within the “Judgement of the Senses or some other way of Declaration” ’ (OED, 1979, p.3288, quoted above on page 5). And my ‘contention [was] that wisdom is broader in scope than cognitive knowing and includes aspects of the sacred, divine, intuitive, and experiential’. In offering certain key ‘moments’ of my own and by contextualising my lifeworld within that of my forefathers and foremothers, I have argued ‘that these interweaving links to the ‘hand’ that ‘pens’ these lines have helped form the particular subjectivity undertaking this current search for Sophia’. I went on to suggest that, ‘Such encapsulation requires acts of cultural, and psycho-social imagination [...] and it is such an act of imagination that I am striving for in this thesis, an act and undertaking for which the term ‘genea-mythic’ stands’ (pp.92 above). In other words, I have striven from the outset to couch this thesis within a spiral of becoming which fully acknowledges the truth of Eliot’s words (1969, p.186,7): ‘ –

not forgetting/Something that is probably quite ineffable:/The backward look behind the assurance/Of recorded history.’ And as I noted on page 48 above, ‘it is this move from the ‘outer’ to the ‘inner’, from the ‘other’ to the ‘self’, from the ‘objective’ to the ‘subjective’ that has characterised the growth of autoethnography [...] as both methodology and method over the last four decades.’ This is not to underestimate the struggles that have accompanied every stage of this journey, and which have found expression in the nightmare opening section two. Sophia has been a demanding, challenging, terrifying task-mistress; but ultimately, as I believe I have shown, she has been a liberating one.

Muncey (2010, p. 148) had helped frame my search in my Introduction; it is timely at this juncture that I revisit her summary:

In short, an autoethnography consists of:

- identification of a meaningful experience that you are prepared to share
- an engagement in an iterative relationship between your research and your personal experiences
- a selection of creative means to transform the experience
- showing, not telling
- an expectation of criticism and the ammunition needed to counter it
- recognition of the role of synchronicities in steering the development of your work
- immense satisfaction from the personal growth that ensues.

There have been a number of meaningful experiences, but I would choose the ‘moment of being’ described in chapter two as both epistemological challenge and impetus for the nature in which my underlying search has been conducted. The whole thesis has unfolded as an iterative relationship between my research and my experiences. The creative means by which I have sought to transform my experiences, and my research, has been woven throughout but found expression particularly in chapter seven. I have deliberately tried to ‘show’ rather than ‘tell’ in order to sustain my efforts at ‘writing as inquiry’. I have anticipated much of the criticism levelled at this approach and included my responses in the text. I have also included examples of synchronicities. Finally, I am left with the question about the ‘personal growth that has ensued’.

As noted above, I do believe that my search for Sophia has ultimately proven a liberating one. This thesis has striven to push at the boundaries of the autoethnographic approach, by using it as both method and methodology, and by incorporating ‘writing as inquiry’ by way of remaining as true to my vision as possible of the spiralling of the nautilus. This has necessitated particular compromises wrought by the demands of the

academy; but I still maintain that my search for Sophia has offered illustration of Jarvis's caveat (2011, p. 91) for the possible teaching of wisdom in the sense that, 'biographical research projects may also prove a resource for wisdom studies,' and this thesis is part-presented in that light. I would also argue that this whole inquiry can make a significant contribution to studies in the relationship between wisdom and adult teaching and learning which, as I have shown, is a relatively under-theorised field.

But what of my use of Sophia as metaphor? Cole, Ronan and Taussig (1996, p. 23) stated that, 'She is, in fact, the learning process itself. She calls us to a life of seeking understanding of the world in which we live.' The way that this thesis has unfolded has offered some truth to that claim, at least metaphorically, but I would also hope that its articulation throughout these pages has produced the kind of aesthetic of which Ede (1984, p.18) talks, and which I quoted in the *Entr'acte*:

I have felt strongly the need for me to give again these things which have so much been given to me, and to give in such a way, that by their placing, and by a pervading atmosphere, one thing will enhance another, making perhaps a coherent whole...

Figure 11. c.Ede, 1984, p.47

Finally, I would like to close with my reflections upon the conference on wisdom held by ESREA in Milan in 2009. Although I had only been working on the thesis for two years at that point, I was asked to offer a public response to the conference. I shall end with the words I offered then for they stand me in good stead now. The title of my piece was, 'Am I any wiser?' And I concluded it as follows. The words in italics referred to papers given by colleagues at the conference:

Just one more vignette before I finish, if I may. The cathedral [in Milan] is currently fronted by an exhibition of Futurist Art, and the other day, the precincts held a rally of vintage and very expensive automobiles. The juxtaposition echoed the surreality of the Magritte exhibition which was also on show, and reminded me that wisdom likes contradiction and demands a loosening of our threads of expectation. This juxtaposition between the

religiosity of the cathedral and the worship of the motor car served as ironic commentary about the importance of opening to the real and of celebrating that we are human becomings, not human beings; we are not fixed in some irresolvable state of stasis and can, if we are vigilant, distinguish between *savoir vivre* and *ars de vivre*, between knowing how to live and the art of living, and thereby coming to lucidity and a deeper authenticity. Am I any wiser? I hope so.

Epilogue

It was a fine Saturday morning in May, albeit a little cold for the time of the year. I had been asked to be one of three speakers at our department's study day for students on the BA in Lifelong Learning. The subject was research within the social sciences and we had been chosen to represent three very different approaches. One colleague talked of the studies he had undertaken using Action Research and the other, who came from a medical background, spoke of the usefulness of quantitative methods in helping improve our health and well-being over the last two centuries. Knowing the title of my talk – Educational Research as Autoethnographic Inquiry – which would follow his, he took great delight in emphasising the importance of employing objective measurements to understand our world and develop means by which we might improve it. To be fair, he was at equal pains to point out that one must choose one's methodological approach to suit the subject under investigation, and I rose to take his place before the students as he generously acknowledged that there were times and places where an emphasis upon a more subjective form of inquiry might have something to offer.

Two days earlier, at my viva voce for this thesis, I had been asked how I would teach autoethnography. I had answered that I couldn't; reaching for a favourite tutor-training adage I replied by saying that the best I could hope for would be to share rather than teach, to 'show' rather than 'tell'. For if autoethnography is to have any purchase as a legitimate form of research it must be couched within a frame of reference which acknowledges the importance of the searcher at its heart, and of the particular subjectivity which shapes that seeker's lifeworld. I explained to the examiners that the best one could hope for would be a three-fold approach: context-setting, of course, examples of scholarly legitimations but, at the centre, some kind of bridge between one's own and another's subjectivity. I shared part of Susanne's story in chapter 7, and in the power of the resonances evoked, I hoped to reveal, at least to some extent, that 'if inquirers stand in relation to their objects in the light of what Hofstadter (1965) has called 'truth of spirit', then our response to their work [...] is a moment of verification, [...] or un-hiddenness' (Clough, 2002/10, p. 94).

Clough's words could also refer to my quest for Sophia throughout this thesis. In a number of ways, during the last six years, I have tried to 'stand in relation' to her with

as much ‘truth of spirit’ that I could muster. There have been a number of other ‘outcomes’ to this search beyond the conclusion to my thesis. I have mentioned some of the conference papers that I have presented, and published, and there have been two book chapters. One is the co-written piece with Tara Hyland Russell (2011), the other is the forthcoming chapter entitled, ‘‘Moments of Being’ and the Search for Meaning: Epistemological and Methodological challenges for the Autoethnographic Researcher’, within a book on Narratives of Continuity and Change, which has just found a publisher. It is my hope that this particular search for Sophia might also find a publisher. There have also been workshops, two of which began and concluded this thesis, as well as a number of other seminar presentations at research theme-group meetings and other fora.

But if Sophia lives on in my professional practice, then she is to be found just as much in our burgeoning Community Arts and Education (CAE) programme, and in our new MA. At this time of writing, we are just going to press with our brochure for next academic year, and CAE has been included in a forthcoming ‘glossy’ publication to showcase examples of ‘best practice’ within our university’s Knowledge Exchange project. The courses within our CAE offer for next year include the ‘usual suspects’: art appreciation, philosophy, natural history and music. But, rather coincidentally perhaps, or example of further synchronicity, the programmes offered to me by both current and prospective tutors included aspects of the Grail Quest; to the extent that we are now planning an international summer school for 2014 to explore the Grail in art, literature, myth and music as well as running a series of related short courses throughout the year.

And I felt Sophia with me in the successful validation of our MA in Myth, Cosmology and The Sacred at the panel held a week after my viva. After struggling for so long to persuade our institution of the MA’s legitimacy and academic credibility, we were commended at the panel for extending the Faculty of Education’s offer with such flexibility and creativity. Our challenge, now, is to make sure that we recruit enough to run, although we are encouraged by the response we have had thus far. I shall be teaching on the MA; I shall be ‘showing’ the potential for autoethnography as both method and methodology, and I shall also be inviting Sophia into our classroom in our explorations of wisdom’s many faces through the ages.

Sophia has proved a hard task mistress since I began this journey six years ago. She has brought me to the heights of jubilation and the depths of despair; she has visited in my nightmares and held me to account. I have not, again, been subjected to such terror as that opening section two, but this might be because, as I conclude this stage of my quest, I can truly claim to have paid heed to her invocation with which I ended my prologue:

You who are waiting for me, take me to yourselves.
And do not banish me from your sight.
And do not make your voice hate me, nor your hearing.
Do not be ignorant of me anywhere or anytime. Be on your guard!
(Simon, 2004, p. 222)

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Appendix 1: Confidentiality Statement

Adult Education and the Cultural Imagination/ In Search of Sophia; Seeking wisdom in
adult teaching and learning spaces

PhD Research Consent Form

1. I agree to the material in the recording and transcript being used for study purposes as part of on-going doctoral research into ‘Adult Education and the Cultural Imagination/In Search of Sophia: seeking wisdom in adult teaching and learning spaces’ currently being undertaken by Wilma Fraser in accordance with the ethical guidelines governing doctoral research at Canterbury Christ Church University. I understand access to this material is restricted to the supervisory team and the transcribers unless specific additional agreement is obtained.
2. I have read and understand the Notes of Guidance attached to this form.
3. I request/do not request (delete as appropriate) that my anonymity is preserved in the use of the material via the use of pseudonyms etc.
4. Any other comments:

Signed:

Name (please print):

Address and telephone number:

Date:

Appendix 2: Notes of Guidance and Consent Form

1. This particular research is being carried out as part of a doctoral project currently entitled ‘Adult Education and the Cultural Imagination’ at Canterbury

Christ Church University. The methodology includes using autobiographical writing and biographical interviews. This methodology involves conducting interviews with a view to understanding related issues through your eyes and stories.

2. Given the potentially sensitive nature of the material you have a right not to answer any questions asked as well as to withdraw from the study at any stage.
3. You have the right to withdraw retrospectively any consent given and to require that your data, including recordings, be destroyed. Obviously, it is important that we know your position as soon as possible after reading transcripts (see below). Refusal or withdrawal of consent would normally be within two weeks of receiving a copy of your transcript.
4. Confidentiality is a key issue. we will provide you with a consent form which will allow you to preserve anonymity if you so wish. As a general rule, the material is to be used by members of the supervisory team, including the transcribers, and the examiners of the thesis. Any other access to the material, eg for publication purposes, will be with your permission only.
5. You will be given a recording of your interviews. We will produce a transcript of the interview which will be sent to you. This can be edited as you wish and might be used as the basis for a follow-up interview. Copies of the material, including final edited versions of the transcripts, and the recordings, will be kept in a secure place.
6. These guidelines are written in accordance with the ethical procedures governing research of this kind at Canterbury Christ Church University.
7. Thank you for all your help and contribution.

