venus as a spinster

word		count	22,319
endnotes	&	definitions	2,790
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ABSTRACT

VENUS AS A SPINSTER is an assortment of vignettes positioned to question the erasure of women from Wales' weaving history at The National Wool Museum. By using translation as both a methodology and a barrier for understanding, this essay highlights the inevitable absences found throughout the production and presentation of knowledge.

Situated in the disused Welsh wool mill where I was raised and currently reside, I try to access an alternative weaving history with women at the fore, by talking to local residents, my mother and the ghost in my bedroom. I rake through the museum's 'backroom', the village graveyard and the story books. I revisit memories, share dreamscapes, and ask a knowledgeable neighbour in a language I no longer grasp fluently, about the undocumented women I convince myself to have existed. I miss the important details. I try again.

Informed by seminal feminist texts on craft and labour, I examine the ways women, thread and care have been kindred for millenia across mythology, society and depiction, to create a text that suggests a radical reworking of archival and historical practice, by prioritising oral and social histories.

VENUS AS A SPINSTER is a love letter to my Mum, a complaint to The National Wool Museum and a homecoming to language. It's an infatuation with a ghost, and it's a Welsh blanket embodied – with multiple threads of thought interlocking, growing, building, unravelling and knotting together again.

IT MATTERS WHAT STORIES WE TELL TO TELL
OTHER STORIES WITH; IT MATTERS WHAT KNOTS
KNOT KNOTS, WHAT THOUGHTS THINK THOUGHTS,
WHAT DESCRIPTIONS DESCRIBE DESCRIPTIONS,
WHAT TIES TIE TIES. IT MATTERS WHAT STORIES
MAKE WORLDS, WHAT WORLDS MAKE STORIES.

—— D. Harroway, *Staying with the Trouble*

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Sunrise on a computer screen
pixelated thread
I like the way a spindle looks
and the way I type history, fast.

It's a new time
or rather,
one no calendar could have seen coming
where the start feels easy
and the end is just a sentence.

My fingertips draw distilled memories of
trapped cries and cakes.
Dance, I curse, dance –
bring them to me. [1]

I head out before the day makes itself known – as in it's a little bit dark still, and I don't bother getting dressed. All I do is bring her with me, her woven threads and knots, and I wrap myself up in her with my legs sticking out, feet loose and wobbling in my shoes.

There are really old douglas fir trees behind the building I live in, and a knot of birds that gather on their branches in the early morning.

We'll find these trees in the background of some photographs I see next spring, when I'll go to my folders and begin the spring clean. I may cut them away from the frame at the click of a button. Watch them fall, older than me and you combined.
I wipe away the debris of collected jpegs,
deleting the information that I see no way of joining neatly.
I discard names like they don't matter.
They vanish from my search history.

Figureheads and folkloric tales meet the scissors of my own subjectivity. They're not relevant enough. Not compactable enough.

This *enough* comes looming before spring. I have had *enough* of waking up to black outside.
I have done *enough* research.

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You downloaded a MatingCall.mp4 from the internet.
You play it from a hidden speaker in the wooden bird box above our front door.
You want to bring the local birds to our part of the valley, from up near the chapel at the top of the hill. I see them when I go out on my walk to catch the throbbing murmurations in the sky – these big outbreaths that buckle the air.

I like it when they fly over, a broom of dark noise,
while I read names on gravestones and practice my pronunciation. While I sit, wrapped in wool beside them and ask about their affidavits. Were they, like me, wrapped in or rapt by wool? [2]

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I race you with the litter picker in my hand.
It's made of plastic and promises virtue. I see a compost bag ahead and it's fluorescent and ready to suffocate any little animal, so I prod at it with my plastic arm before I put it into another plastic bag.

The birds ripple about the douglas fir trees.

I see glittering pieces of foil and pick them up. I collect at my own whim – leaving behind more than I take away. It makes sense to me – this precarious reasoning.

Up in the sky, I look again at the murmuration.
It's so easy to believe in time when it arrives like that,
all humming and frightening and knotted up.

On my way home, I scan for little silver flickers of foil
for little silver flickers of that shiny thing called hope
and I pass our neighbours house – this white bungalow with a silver car outside. I meet the eyes of a man in the dark, sitting beside a metal bed. There's a hospital blue sheet across it, and in the shadows I see ten toes poking from the end.

To his side hangs a very big, framed photograph of Derw Mill, the place we walk to now and call home.

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clywais fod y teulu wedi llosgi pob un o'r blancedi

clywais fod y teulu wedi tynu'r llawr pren i fyny

clywais fod y teulu wedi dod yma i gynnal partïon hela ar gyfer eu ffrindiau o'r ddinas

I heard they burned all of the leftover blankets

I heard they pulled up the wood flooring

I heard they came here to host hunting parties for their city friends

/

I reach The National Wool Museum. The building glitters. The recesses in the walls are pristine. No moss lurks between the gaps in the stone. The driveway is smooth. Having been open to the public for fifty years and built a century ago to house local weavers, the place appears to have been swept clean for my arrival. Not a door left unvarnished. Not a fence left faded.

Sharing land with the river that batters my own garden a village over - THE TEIFI VALLEY WAS ONCE THE CENTRE OF A THRIVING WOOL INDUSTRY .
I copy this sentence into my notepad, and notice how lonely it is against its Welsh source, detailed in description and length at the museum entrance.

Inside, I try on intelligence. Curiosity. Conviction. It is no surprise that Wales has a museum dedicated to the history of weaving wool, because it is a story that may be told with patriotism, grit and drama. A story that has action, a hero and power.

I read the small print. Feel the historian in every room. Hiding behind phrasing and floorplan, he pushes pride to the fore in patriotic green letters –

THESE BLANKETS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN MORE THAN JUST DECORATION. NOT ONLY DID WOOL SURPASS COAL IN THE 19TH CENTURY WELSH ECONOMY, BUT IT WAS USED BY OUR GREAT PEOPLE TO WEAVE THE STORY OF OUR GREAT COUNTRY.

Where are you where are you where are you – I say, resisting his information, sidestepping it, looking for anything other than grease and iron. I'm Miss Marple, hunting for holes. Nancy Drew after her boobs came in. I'm Maud West, seeing the gaps in every room I enter. And every photo. And every chunk of text. I look at the machines that whirred in Derw Mill years before I was raised there, polished and shining as though they could never have caused any harm. As though their story is a meek and gentle one. I refuse to believe that women were peripheral, only onlookers at the side of the fields, applauding with children by their side and in their arms. I refuse to believe that the only woman in this museum is standing at the till pouring coffee for visitors. I read every paper leaflet, and every sticker – but I can't escape the flow of the historians arrows, even when I try to go against the current because the hallways lead me in a direction I can't choose, from start to finish, from this to that. The historian, the curator

– he wants me to learn in his chosen order. He wants me to hear this story in words he chose himself.

The clean floors. The brushed steps. The polished signs – they are hiding all sorts of violence. I have entered a mortuary.[3]

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Younger, with woolly tights and milk teeth, I ask where all the girls are, and a man in a suit appears from the dust – *come with me girl, I'll show you* – but I run in front, lace between the big lumps of iron, the cogs and grease. Past the spindles. Past the spools. I look for Aurora and her spindle.[4] I look for Charlotte's thread.[5] I pass the machines with the spikes and the drawings of men with dirty shirts. I sigh. Every now and then, I look back to see the suited man, surrounded by other men in the photos and the sentences and the museum uniforms, weaving wool and watching me as I move.

I reach the end.

It's darker here.

A big exit sign glows at the far corner.

You found it– he says to me – *there you are!* and he points at a plaque, right by the door. Smaller and cleaner than any other plaque in the whole museum. A crumb. An afterthought –

ONCE THE BLANKETS WERE MADE, WOMEN FORMED CIRCLES TO KNIT WITH EXTRA WOOL AND SOCIALISE.

You're wrong – I say, and again, to myself I say– *he must be wrong.*

I step back and imagine his archive. Imagine clues in his background. The discarded paper. Imagine the women in the shadows and the skirting of the fields. The drafts of information in the archive. I imagine the dirt left behind at the dig sites, at the mills, and the life eradicated by the protocol of his intellectual discipline.[6]

I say to him —

By using mythology, iconography, conversation and memory as evidencey – by using Derw Mill and this museum as a site for embodied research, I will substantiate that the conception and story of weaving should be modified from your male fiction of welsh, and global, history. I am going to unravel your weaving of information to show who has been hidden for too long.

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Rolled up, the pieces of fleece arrive at Derw tied in twisted string. Someone on a pulley system passes the stuff through the window from a hanging rope. Their arms heave on the ground outside, watching this heavy cloud rise to the second floor, coming through the window with a struggling scrape. There's this smell of resin around, and dust, and wax. In order to get the fleece here to begin the blanket making process, spun threads of varying densities and thicknesses are needed to hoist and to tie. This means that another craft predates the shearing one– a lesser revered one, with a different kind of action, and a different kind of hero. In other words – this is a false beginning the museum prefers to tell. It is neatly packaged and consumed.

Once these ropes and strings are cut, the fleece is rolled out and sorted– all of it torn and dotted across the floor by breed and body part. The quality bits from the shoulders and sides are put to one corner, and the tougher bits that brush against grass and mud, are put to the other. There's a waste pile in the corner.

Before scouring, this raw fleece is full with grease, dirt, sand and suint.[7] Like receipts, lint, bottle caps, crisp crumbs, pen lids and floss threads at the bottom of my handbag, the weight of grease, dirt, sand and suint racks up seventy percent of the

fleece's total weight. It's really important that this is all washed away or 'scoured,' because if these contaminants aren't ridded, the fleece won't ever be clean.

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In no time, it will be shiny and soft, you say when a century later, you're washing my friend's hair over the bath, then using that sharp metal comb to drag out every nit there is, every piece of dirt from her head after school. You invited her over without asking me about it, and now she's sitting on the side of our bath. *This is the room they used to wash and brush the sheep hair in, isn't it Mum?* I ask, but you're busy tending to her, the skin at the back of her thighs all soapy so she keeps slipping under the pressure of your comb. From the plughole, slippy myself, I can see her feet clenching onto the ridge in the ceramic, barely touching the bottom, trying to stay still. Pieces of fluff from our school socks dot about the tub full of milky water, floating like cereal. You're performing a sort of care I don't understand yet.

'She's not your daughter. I am.' I keep this thought to myself.

We'll get them all out for you, don't worry, you say from the back of her neck, as half her yellow hair lies combed and slick against her while the other half bursts as gorse does, in all directions. I watch her trying to unknot your words to make sense, and remember when she told me that she dreams in Welsh words I didn't know yet and don't know anymore.

Do you remember this? You invited her over because her dad had died the week before, between the big city in England she'd never been to, and the foot of the motorway, where she went shopping with her Mum on weekends - but not that weekend. Her Mum wasn't doing well. Couldn't care for all her children on her own. He was out on a delivery run when two of those really big lorries, racing in the night, crushed him from either side. So loud.

In the bathroom, you stroke her head with thick paste that smells like oats and resin. Her eyes close for a second, feeling your hands, believing that maybe you can brush out all of the hurt somehow, and I'm sitting by the tap, watching.

With its spiral grooved, long metal teeth gripping onto each strand, you tap the comb against the ceramic of the sink hard, and the sound bashes down the hall, clangs my ears, makes

me wince. But it doesn't make my friend wince at all. It's almost like no noise can scare her any more. Like everything is a bad dream now. She's not even wincing at the sound of her tangles ripping like I do, as you brush the top of her head to the bottom.

Then, you wipe up all of the wriggling black nits onto a piece of toilet paper in one slow and intent motion, along the silicone tile filler, pushing the conditioner along with it, and twist your wrist around to scoop the lump of cream up inside the sheet. A couple of the lice get stuck on grit and sand in the cracks. You pick them up on the back of your nail, and press them between your two thumbs until they pop. You wipe the blood from your nails, and the slippery comb with that same piece of toilet paper, heavy now, and flush it down the toilet. Then, you quickly give a towel to me and my friend– we don't have heating in the house yet – before you dress us and feed us with vegetables from the garden. You get the Derw blanket – the green and white and heavy one– and you swaddle us in it together, next to each other, with no room for anything in the middle.

Bwystfilod yw peiriannau, my friend says to me, after saying nothing all day.

Machines are monsters,

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Six years ago, before coming back to Wales, I learned about the industrial revolution, feminisms, and craft. I completed neoliberalism. I passed capitalism with 68%. I revised Marx and asked him that question about silent falling trees. Then I woke up with a feeling so specific we have a word for it here in Wales – ‘hiraeth’ – and it was right at the front of my head like a bad cold.

‘Hi–’ like at the start of ‘hill’.

‘Rae–’ like ‘rye bread’, but with an ‘r’ that rolls from the top of the mouth to the bottom teeth, instead of the ‘r’ in ‘rye’ that

comes from the teeth and the bottom lip, and '– th' like the 'th' in the 'ith row' of a matrix, or the 'th' in 'thing.'

HIRAETH: a longing for Wales.

I tried to dull the feeling by singing the Welsh alphabet, but got stuck at 'E' and forgot the route to 'Y', so wrote a recipe for Pice ar y Maen instead – the things you cook on the griddle and call 'Welsh Cakes.' I ate them all in a windowsill I was unfamiliar with, my feet pressed against a hot radiator, and tried to remember the names of my primary school friends, and their mothers' names, and their grandmothers' names, and their house names, and their jobs, and their opinions, and their dreams, and the way they answered their doors when I knocked to ask them questions about their time at Derw. If only I could translate my own memory. I knew more then than I do now.

I include the recipe overleaf –

PICE AR Y MAEN to make when I can't speak Welsh so I eat it instead:

225g blawd	*flour*
85g siwgr	*sugar*
½ tsp sbeis mixed	*mixed spice*
½ tsp pwdr pobi	*baking powder*
100g menyn	*butter*
50g cwrens	*currants*
1 egg	
bach o milk	*a little bit of*

MIX DRY INGREDIENTS, RUB IN BUTTER BETWEEN YOUR FINGERS, STRETCHING IT OUT INTO TINY KERNELS, STRETCHING MORE AND MORE INTO THINNER PIECES UNTIL THEY EVENTUALLY DISAPPEAR. STIR IN CURRANTS, ADD EGG, ROLL INTO A FLAT SHEET THE THICKNESS OF PINKY FINGER, STAMP OUT DISKS, HEAT FLAT PAN ON HOB, ADD BUTTER (NOT TOO MUCH), COOK DISKS FOR THREE MINUTES EACH SIDE UNTIL BROWNISH. REST ON TEATOWEL. SPRINKLE WITH SUGAR.

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I peel the apples at the sink in the kitchen – the sink that fit my whole slippery body inside at bath time when I was a baby you washed every other day. It's deep enough for my arm to be submerged by starchy pasta water, tickling the bit between my armpit and elbows – but the sink's empty, and right now it's later than my bedtime back then. I peel the fruit in one single sliver, thinning at points and widening at others with

varying amounts of flesh attached. It ribbons at my fingers as the oven wraps my face with light. I cut close to the peel, careful not to nick into it, and think about the room I'm in, imagining whole strips of fleece being folded with meticulous focus, after being shorn in the fields that same morning, and the pile of string in a mess in the corner.

In the summertime, and also in the spring, the blades for shearing were big, unlike the one in my hand, and maybe mottled orange with rust and use. The shear– a hair grip looking thing, pasta tong-like in the way it was held, was secured with two welded pins on each side. They tapered in width, for a cleaner trim, and were sharpened for the occasion.

While the whole wide world is fast asleep
you lie awake and think about the boy
and never ever think of counting sheep

I am Annie Reed from SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE, listening to Carly Simon sing 'In The Wee Morning Hours' on the radio, padding the floor in a nighty and a red wool jumper. I pick another dull green apple – granny smiths are the best for crumble – from its bag, assessing its curvature and form.

In the same way, women and children would pick viewing spots at the hem of the field for the best view of the shearing, to see sheep smooth down in size, wiggle and give in to submission. This craft of cutting fleece, performed by local men with their forearms exposed and their brows furrowed was theatrical, gripping and revered. It was a public affair, framed as an excellent spectator sport. The man who could cut away fleece in one neat piece would be honoured for their valuable skill by all onlookers – it was a craft done in public, for all to marvel – and it made an excellent story too. A story that not only had action, but a beast and a hero as well.[8]

Farmers opened and closed their blades, where snips were ‘blows’ and hands were held flush at the belly of the animals. The blows were neat, long, clean. The inside of the back legs came away in one blow. The outside of their legs took three blows. Three blows too, for the tail and more blows up the neck. [9]

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I cry with one burst of breath out, as Sam Baldwin dedicates the Carly Simon rendition of the song to his dead wife on my television. Absence is the main character here, as we watch the film and eat at the same time, in the kitchen. All our eyes fixed on the action (love) and the hero (Tom Hanks). [10]

When it was just us three at home for weeks on end, you used to buy curried instant noodles for dinner with car pennies, and we would stand in the Derw blankets as we ate over the sink. We'd clink the plastic cups and cheer the names of the people whose absence we felt in that moment. The woven wool would soak up the sauce.

Now, away from this memory, I stand near some waterlogged spaghetti as my twisted ribbons of whole apple peel drop into the ceramic basin. I sort the fruit properly in the tin, neatly arranging the slices beside one another, ready to be put through the oven with sugar and butter.

I think about the cut up sheep fleece folded in one piece and tied up neatly, ready to take on its new form in this mill I'm standing.

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In the village over, I am standing at the reception of The National Wool Museum. I am asking about women and their roles in the industry our country has attached such pride, and the clerk tells me, in Welsh, that I need to talk to Ken. *Ma' fe'n wybod popeth sydd angen i chi wybod.* He fiddles with his name tag. *Mae wraig e'n sal, t'weld. ma' fe'n edrych a'r ol hi.*

He knows everything you need to know.
His wife is ill though, mind. He's caring for her.

Then, I'm sitting on a sofa in a living room of a farmer who lives in the village I live in. He dips between two languages like oars in a river. I don't catch his name. Over a mug of tea, he tells me that I need to talk to Ken. Tells me he lives in the bungalow near my house. I remember the eyes in the living room, and the framed photo of Derw on the wall.

Gweithiodd yn Derw am amser hir iawn, he says.

He worked at Derw for a very long time,

The photograph makes sense now.

Dylech'i mynd drosodd gyda chacen. Ma'i wraig fe ddal bwyta pethau melys. mae'n sâl iawn, gofiwch.

You should go over with a cake.
His wife can still manage sweet things.
She's very ill though, mind.

Then, I'm running in the village, going along the five oak trees near the farm. A man I've not met but seen many times, speaks to me through the rain as his dog tugs behind. The water spits down, diagonally. I stop to untangle my wet hair from the knot in my earphones and ask what he said. He tells me that I need to talk to Ken.

Ma' fe'n byw ar bwys Derw. Mae'n gwybod popeth sydd i'w gwybod amdanno'r felyn, he says, then turns on the tarmac and walks down the hill.

He lives not too far from Derw, at the fork in the road.
He knows everything there is to know about what you're after,

His dog stays with me, brown shining eyes looking right at my hands, as the elastic leash around his neck begins to extend. We stand still for a while, listening to the trees and the puddles fill as the stranger's raincoat melts into the hedgerows further down the way. Then, the little dog drags itself behind them. *Mae wraig e'n sal, t'weld* – he calls to me, pale face my way, *felly dylech traed yn ystod fyna.*

His wife is ill though, mind – so best tread gently there.

Once he's left my vision, I move slowly with the five oak trees. From where I am I can see the fork in the valley and beside it, the house I know now to be Ken's.

I walk on, pass his window, see only quickly what's behind the glass and the net. I don't stop, my body keeping forwards, but I see that the lights are off. I catch the glitter of a TV like the glitter of a water fountain from the far end of the room. I see the same two feet at the foot of a bed. I keep on.

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Care, caring, carer. Burdened words, contested words –yet so common in everyday life, as though care was evident, beyond particular expertise or knowledge.
But what is care?
Is it an affectation?
A moral obligation?
Work?
A burden?
A joy?
Something we can learn or practice?
Something we just do?

Care means all of these things and different things to different people, in different situations. Care stays ambivalent while still being identifiable, researched, and understood concretely and empirically.[11]

Care is all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web. [12]

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You ask me what the spinning of a thread means as I fold thin slices of apple into my mouth, snapping them in half between my new teeth stumps. The wobbling has stopped. I am old enough to read and write now. I look up from the telly and twist your words to translate them on my tongue. *Life, time, growth, power, death, destiny,* I say as each word thins out. The meaning stretches like thread as it's wrapped around a spindle, fine as hair into a new language.

I was ten when I started thinking in Welsh, and when speaking English to you at home felt like a sort of constant transformation. A sort of magic. Like I had started to mechanise. It was magic, too, when you told me that Princess

Aurora wasn't one person, but thousands of drawings instead. That Princess Aurora was made with thousands of lines made by a team of illustrators at Disney, played faster than a blink into one continuous line of motion to make up the 75 minutes of THE SLEEPING BEAUTY. I connected with the princess' rapid, undetectable change between states.

Aurora is the earliest connection I made between a woman and a spinning thread – though it's an association woven into the very fabric of folklore, film and fantastic narratives. Even medieval Christian visions of Eve were tightly attached to spinning, despite it being unattested in Genesis.[13] Look for any painting titled 'The Spinner' and you will find endless depictions of women at work for thousands of years. For the most part these women, unlike the royal Aurora and God's Eve– are unnamed and uncredited for their work.

On the eighth of November, today, I find William-Adolphe Bouguereau's 'The Spinner' from 1873, and fall hard for the way her pale finger poises a narrow, weighty spindle from a single thread so fine it could disappear if even my breath met her. The way her fluffy carded roving twists loosely around her distaff – this wooden stick as long as an arm with a

tapered end like a knitting pin. The way her distaff somehow feeds her spindle to set off a change– from loose and filamentous fleece to stretched line of glimmering thread. It hangs beside her thick skirt.

Who is she?

I think of you pulling sentences from my six year old mouth in our living room, and of me translating words from you, sitting on the wooden floorboards scarred by the weaving power loom where lamps, carpets and our telly now sit.

Am I committing the same violence in your namelessness? Should I name you, Mum?

The weaving of textiles and of Welsh blankets, specifically, could have only been done once string as long and as strong as needed had been spun. In the same way, I could have only spoken in two tongues once you brought yourself here to raise bilingual daughters. I am your distaff side, and you are mine.[14]

With this, we start not with the in and out of the man-invented, mechanised loom, nor with the blows of a shearing spectacle, but with the round and round of a spindle, held by the makers of such beginnings – women. In twisting

short filaments onto a spindle from a cloud of sheep fleece on a distaff, we were able to layer, make patterns, plait and move forward with textile development. In other words, without woman's spinning, depicted on canvases and vases and woodcuts, the weaving of textiles could not have happened.

I leaf through other examples. 'An Italian Woman Spinning, 1847.' 'The Spinner, 1864.' 'Balkan Women Spinning, 1670,' drawing threads from disarray, all the way back through the mud and the dust. I see women spinning in transit to make the time consuming work pass by while completing their other daily responsibilities, enslaved by the textile industry and the need for warmth, tools, clothing, shelter.[15] They spin under the sun, on footpaths and seafronts – and despite man's depiction of their lazed eyes in paint, they are hard at difficult work.

Archaeologists and historians claim that they don't know how early to date this great discovery of spinning. But, after it happened, crowds of women opened the door to new ways of saving labour and improving the odds of survival, just as the harnessing of steam did for the Industrial Revolution. Soft, flexible thread of this sort was the necessary prerequisite to making woven cloth, but was also an essential invention that enabled us to simply tie things up. To catch, to hold, to carry – to do this is to be human.

Fully, freely, gladly. [16]

From the making of thread, the making of humanity is entangled. And from these notions come snares and fishlines, tethers and leashes, carrying nets, handles, and packages, not to mention a way of binding objects together to make more complex tools. [17]

It is a human thing to do to put something you want, because it's useful, edible, or beautiful into a bag, or a basket, or a net, and then take it home with you, home being another, larger kind of bag, a container for people, and then later on you take it out or store it up for winter or put it in the medicine bundle or the shrine or the museum, the holy place, the area that contains what is sacred, and then next day you probably do much the same again. [18]

Can you imagine how long this would have taken to make before technology? you ask me and I nod at the telly. Then I look at the bag holding apples at my feet.
Then I look at a single thread that bursts from its frayed hem. Tiny.

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clywais fod nhw'n ymdrin cyffuriau

clywais fod nhw'n
cipio plant a cadw'r
plentyn yn yr ystafell gardio

clywais fod y teulu wedi
paentio pob un o'r
waliau melyn

I heard they're drug dealers

I heard they kidnap children and keep them in the carding room

I heard they painted all of the walls yellow

/

I moved back to Wales on the thirteenth day of March. What I did before was of no importance. I walked to the village shop in wellies and a skirt that hit my mid thighs. I passed the bus stop I used to stand at five mornings a week.

The man with the pub was still standing in the doorway, watching the road.

My knowledge of this village was anecdotal, puddle deep and learned in a language I had only a loose grip on.

My name was Hattie Morrison. I was folding and refolding at the tongue, finding consonants and soft mutations.[19] The road was feminine. The trees were feminine. The river was feminine. I read each house sign like I was on holiday in flip flops, with sweat under my arms and Google Translate in my hand. There were no chemtrails in the sky.

Is this really what I've been missing? I asked, and the pub man looked at me with condescension, then asked *be dwedest?*

I vaguely understood and told him what I meant really, which was *hiraeth* and he lifted his fist to his heart in salutation.
What did you say?

We stood there a while. Then he sang the national anthem.

Mae hen wlad fy nhadau yn annwyl i mi –
The old land of my fathers is dear to me–

It made the crows dart from the oaks.
I looked inside his jacket by his armpit, and saw a little white label that flitted with every exhale.

– o bydded i'r hen iaith barhau.
– oh may the old language continue

100% WOOL. MADE IN WALES.

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I heard they moved to the mill a year before I was born. Over baked beans on doorstep-thick toast with butter, jarred pickle, tomato and coffee, they dog-eared the page with CHANGE YOUR LIFE – an order in big grey letters – MOVE TO DERW MILL IN RURAL WALES and looked at it every morning as she made breakfast. That week, another woman had been attacked in Peckham Rye Park & Common. A neighbouring threat at almost arms length.

Her fists tired from clenching around keys on the walk home, she imagined a new kind of green. A surrounding green. Ungated. Wide enough to fit on her stretched canvases.

Later, in what would become a kitchen, big beams and windows, they stood and looked at bottle glass swept to corners and powdered zip lock bags licked clean with shaky

tongues and empty crisp packets and stains. A clip-board holder spoke of parties and decay. Of smashed windows, sleeping and sedated bodies, and police. Of ruin and loss and shame. Of property value.

And you know what, the price was good, so they signed the forms

packed their things

burned others

and left London for that sort of green they'd seen only briefly on their visit for the viewing. The sort of green that wraps a body up safely in the way a blanket does – the way the green blanket they found three days after moving here does, folded in a coffer with *Derw* embroidered on the label at the bottom seam. She slept underneath it in the cold, before the draughts were sourced and stopped, while he tied loose ends back in the city. She knew the blanket had been made between the walls she was lying and that she wanted to learn how. Learn why. Meet the people behind the threads. She dreamt of unravelling jumpers as a child and knitting them together again with her Mum's mum.

She woke up and walked through the village to whispers she couldn't decipher – and there was a joy in that at the time. A kind of break from noise. A peace within the unknowing of

what was really being said about her. She smiled. Held open doors. Went back to Derw – the place she called home but couldn't feel at home in yet. She tried learning their language from books, but paused in the hope of a practical knowledge. A lived knowledge gained through stumblings between sentences, errands and trees.

Then, they started building, knocking down, cleaning, and she told him what was happening to her body – that I, the size of an apple seed, was growing into sentience. He planted a cherry tree in the lawn and daffodil bulbs in the woodland. Marked the moment within the surrounding green. At the busy post office, she sent letters to say how much she'd grown, and women smiled at her stomach. Cooed vowelly words in the queue.
She smiled back in quiet, nodding, unsure, and waited for my translation. A translation that was slow at first, then coherent, fluent. I became ear and mouth.
Bridge.
Conduit.

Valleyed in such a way that the river could fall from the mountainside at great height onto a hefty water wheel to power the machines. I heard the first slabs of stone were laid

here because of that very same green the pair wanted to swim in, drink deep, sleep on, grow life in after their first visit. I heard that Derw was built with opportunity and power in mind. To employ villagers and give them a chance to make things they'd be proud of.

He took my hand down the woodland, daffodils leaning under my tread, to show me the dug out leet full of leaves, where water once ran towards a spinning set of paddles but now rises and overflows for a chance to glimpse our mundanity.
To watch us ascend stairs
be late for school
burn toast
argue
shower
watch television
tidy sinks
flip eggs
wash hair
breathe slow
mend
learn.

He spoke of life and spinning.

The over and over of it.

Then, of the relentlessness of water over water over water, as we drove to the museum and stood to watch the water wheel from the story. Oiled and turning in the sun like it had no idea how to stop. We tripped over an information sign neither of us could read, and answered questions with more questions. A loop of thread.

/

Tonight, I dream I'm barefoot. I dream I'm treading gently on the tarmac from my house to Ken's. I tread gently over the gravel on his driveway, and quietly through the doorframe with my wet toes against the dry, soft carpet. I meet him in the hallway. He kindly leads me through to the living room. A hand comes out from the blue of the bed sheet, cold and worn, to meet mine. It passes me a history so heavy I wake up from the weight.

/

You look like her.

Venus of Lespugue. [20]

And although you'd never wear something like this because you'd rather hide your calves, I picture you, carved from tusk ivory, and can't help but swell like a bruise. You're a marvel, and I think of you at the kitchen table cutting taffeta to sew across my body as my prom night impended. *I want to look like a woman. Grown up. Can you make the neckline deeper, please?*

You are creator.

Mother.

In a similar way, Venus' figure is accentuated by clothing. The skirt hanging below her hips and fraying at the bottom is the earliest known depiction of spun thread dated to between 24,000 and 26,000 years ago. She is pendulous, exaggerated and almost entirely nude, with mere tassels rippling against her thighs. In no way are the threads keeping her warm, nor are they covering her up. Instead, they signify her

childbearing ability, marital readiness or age to potential suitors she is yet to meet. She looks like a woman. She looks grown up.

She must have worn a linen shift underneath the skirt to hide her nakedness. It must have disintegrated without trace.

When scholars in Ølby found a young woman from the Bronze Age laid to rest in a string mini skirt similar to Venus of Lespugue, they were horrified. Not only was this woman indecent in her exposure, but her outfit with its fraying ends, contributed to a line of findings that whispered, stifled in the archive –

Maybe… the crucial methods of combining thread… that were used for pattern… and textile…and tool…and weapon creation… were developed by women…after all? [21]

/

We're in the kitchen again. The slate floor is warming in the sun. I'm standing on the big oak table with the round legs and the crumbs in all the grooves, and you're standing underneath me, with little pins held between your lips. Feigning confidence, you're cutting a roll of the fabric like the stuff we see on every cafe table in town when we sit out of the rain to eat soup. You're using those crocodile teeth scissors I'm not allowed to use on paper, and you cut the roll up slowly, then tell me to *turn, turn, turn, turn* so I look at the field, yellow with flowers, and I look at the stove top, white with flour, then I look at the field again and watch the lambs boing about, then at the cakes you've burnt on the griddle. *Are they meant to look like this?* you ask me, and then, with your tape measure, you mark exactly where the lace will go, and the elastic, and the hem, and the shawl.

The day after, I'm the only one in my year with national dress made by an English parent, and black welsh cakes in my lunchbox.

/

clywais fod y rhieni yn gymreigion

clywais fod y saeson
wedi troi'r felyn i westy

clywais fod y
teulu yn artistiaid con

clywais fod y
saes yn rhedeg
puteindy fno

I heard the parents are addicts

I heard the English turned Derw into a hotel

I heard they're con artists

I heard the English run a brothel there

/

Lately, we have been thinking about pasta. We look at photos of sticky counters and watch videos of rolling spaghetti. We talk about the shape of it. The way it melds together into a ball after a while of partially grouping in rubbery, damp pieces. You weigh out the flour and pile it up in a mound on the kitchen table. Some of it goes into the cracks and some of it goes on your linen shirt, presses into the fabric and marries with the fibres.

I'm learning the numbers at school, and so you show me with your fingers how many eggs to get from the carton. *Un, two,*

tri, four, pump, six. I put an egg into each of my pockets and carry four more of them over in my hands, as you dip your elbow into the mound and wiggle it about. Widen the hole. Dilate it. At this point, I am approaching the middle, halfway between two languages – yours and theirs. I'm not sure whether either of them will ever feel truly mine. I am flour and egg, melding together, sticky and inconsistent.

One, three, five.

I crack one into the divet. The craft of pasta making in Italy – of making long threads of dough, washed and woven with delicious red sauce – by the weathered hands of women, country over, is one celebrated and accepted for national pride.

I think to myself, in that same kitchen: 'how did they keep their craft their own? What made weaving thread different?'

You go into my pocket for another, partially dirtying my jacket. I don't mind because I know you'll wash them tonight. I'm not expected to take care of myself yet. Each yolk bobs as the other lands on top of it, slips to the side and makes space, and then we stab at them with forks, forcing the flour into the slimy bits, watching pieces join. There is a surprising violence

in making something so soft. No piece can be left dry, no egg left whole, and as edges appear and clag, we keep at it until we have a ball of dough to spin into spaghetti.

I guess, although it's a reach, we are carding ingredients, readying them into one thing fit for rolling. Long strands of spaghetti like long strands of thread woven to make care for a plate or a body. To make a body warm from the inside or a body warm on the outside.

We leave the dough to rest in the airing cupboard where a carding machine may have whirred to intermix washed or willowed fibres into one sliver before spinning.

/

I have been having the same two dreams each month for almost a year now.

In the first dream, my stomach is full of the kind of thick thread that was used to tie fleece together and hoist it up a flight of stairs before being processed into a blanket here at Derw Mill. The kind of thread that made the rope I used to climb at school – twisted into strength and function. The kind that was so rough and dense that when it rubbed against my thighs it would burn them a fiery red. In the dream I'm able to go about the things on my list, but I am very aware of the threads pressed against my throat, and can see the fraying end poking at the back of my mouth when I look at myself in reflective things, baring teeth – shop fronts, cars, living room windows.

On a walk, in the dream, I am moving naked through a green woodland not dissimilar from the one in our garden. A fair-headed man with a fig leaf for modesty, heads for me from behind a tree. With force, he pulls lengths of the thread out of my mouth, laying it in a rising spiral at my feet. He then takes some polished scissors, cuts the thread and walks with it to a merchant. He makes enough money to buy himself

golden trousers, a pressed white shirt, a tie, and a jacket spun with fine silver thread. I wake up crying.

In the second dream, I am juggling the earth and the sun. The hot star burns my hands to blisters, and the blue planet slips from my fingers. My arms begin to move faster against my will, and though the water cools my burns, the heat grows more and more painful.

I call out for a pause. For a break. For a chance to improve my method. For mercy, but no pause comes
only a pair of gloves lands at my feet, to be worn as protection for my palms.

I try to pick the gloves up from the floor, but I can't. I have to keep the sun and earth from falling. I can't stop, even though I know that the gloves will make me better at this task I, for some reason, have to do. Will make it easier, faster.
I wake up crying.

/

I remember translating for you when I was about nine or ten. I was holding a loaf of bread in a string bag in one of my hands, and you were standing beside me by the corner shop door, holding my other hand. You had just picked me up from school and we needed to go home because you'd left soup on the hob to boil. One of my friends' grandma's was speaking to you in Welsh with intent about a birthday party coming up, and you were nodding, hardening your grip around my hand. I realised in that moment, with my hand in yours, that it was

down to me to grasp a shadow of what this woman was saying. To choose the important information and relay it to you in the car on the journey home. I didn't remember times, locations or dates but I did remember

chocolate cake
dinosaurs and fossils
eight years old
arm bands

Whenever I try to question historiography and the problems within it, I remember this infantile, magpie-like collection of dazzling words. My experience translating for you as a child reminds me of the inevitable subjectivity that frames any pile of collected research. Translation and historiography, in this way, may be likened to one another – they both make inexorable holes.

/

On the sofa, foot tucked under the lip of the cushion, eating crisps and crying about heartbreak after another boyfriend, my friends send x's to me and links to songs, and e-cards. Wrapped in the Derw blanket that itches like a lie but weighs me down like soil around a well potted plant, I am undoing. The edges of me fray. On my laptop, a man kisses the cheek of the patron saint of art weaving; Anni Albers. She looks to the sky like he just came from up there. An angel. A storm.

Don't look so happy, I say, *you're going to be attached to him in every single fucking way from now on. You'll be irreversibly tied to him in the archive. in all the stories.*

Reliance is a sort of death.
Get some space.
Go abroad or something.

I look at her dark hair. Her dark eyes. I look at the place where he meets her. The locking of cheek to lip. I think about her weavings, and weaving in general. I wonder how her name managed to hold tight onto her work like grandmother's holding onto their craft in Italy. The under, over, under, over of it. How important the threads are for both the vertical warp and the horizontal, lacing weft to the overall thing, and how without either, there's nothing of real consequence. I think about the round, hard shuttle entering it. I think about reliance again. About reliance as some sort of intense symbiosis, or rather, an intense suckling.

There is always a sort of undoing alongside any sort of creation. When a blanket is made, a spool of wool is unravelling, thinning out as the thing itself grows.

I guess this is when I realise that care is politics. That association is politics. That intersection is politics, because whenever the weft meets the warp, a tiny knot is made. A tiny mess.

/

Care is not a notion to embrace innocently. Thought and work on care still has to confront the tricky grounds of essentializing women's experiences and the persistent idea that care refers, or should refer, to a somehow wholesome or unpolluted pleasant ethical realm. [22] [23]

/

Barefoot, I am in my kitchenette, pressed into the corner where the oven meets the cupboard. I crack an egg into a bowl of flour, spices, and sugar. I fold everything together slowly. Like wet sand, like a stubborn dog, they move slowly. Dark like the beams in the ceiling.

'Am I doing this right? Is it meant to be this hard to stir? Is it meant to feel like I'm stirring cement?' I keep on. I remember you burning the Welsh Cakes that night with the pinking shears. I feel closer to you.

Behind me, on the floor in the other corner of the kitchenette, on the black and white laminate floor, I have, collecting in a scattering like dust, some dried fruit, cracked strands of spaghetti, loose onion skins, matted knots of my own hair. It appears I am coming undone. My room is narrowing, shrinking, thinning.

This is a slow decline.

A steady descent.

I am losing who I am in the floor crumbs. Asking questions of heritage and lost women has rendered my fat all the way down to bone. I haven't washed my hair in days. Haven't taken care of myself but am taking the utmost as I rub the pan with butter, soft and slow. I am careful to catch every lump of flour, making sure it all disappears. I do this because it has to be proper. If it's anything other than proper, I will be the woman from the English family who lives in the mill who can't even make Pice Ar Y Maen. *Dwi'n gallu flasu'r saesneg mewn y ffordd mae'r ffrwyth 'di plygu i mewn. Dyna drueni.*

You can taste the English in the way the fruit's been folded in.
Such a shame.

I spin the dial on the hob too fast and it shorts the electricity as it always does, so I walk to the fuse box and flick the red switch up again. I like being reminded of how connected everything is here. All the wires laced together like threads. The oven and the lights and the toaster and the TV.

The oven comes alive with a hum. I have too much dough, so I cook the cakes over two pans, as I eat toast with margarine

and fizzy jam – left open for too long – on the dirty carpet by the stacks of printed paper and newspaper clippings I've harvested.

I try the burnt cake first. It's the best thing I've ever made and far too sweet.

Ma'i ddal bwyta pethau melys.

She can still manage sweet things.

I wait for the smooth ones to cool. I then wrap them up in plastic like a swaddled baby, under, over, under, over, round the back, over again. I use too much in fear of them staling. Then, I leave them on the table for later when I will walk to Ken's house as the sky gets dark, with them poking like a hand staying warm, from my pocket.

/

The jobs regularly assigned to women must be carefully chosen to be compatible with care-giving. Such activities often have the following characteristics:
they do not require rapt concentration;
are relatively dull and repetitive;
they are easily interruptible and easily resumed once interrupted;
they do not place a child in potential danger;
and they do not require the worker to range far from home. [24]

In this way, motherhood relegates woman to a sedentary existence. She stays at home while the man hunts, shears, throws spears, kills fish and fights, then he comes home to a

place where, according to The National Wool Museum, and the archive, and the canon – nothing of note happens. He interrupts her work and tells tales of grandiose theatre and violence– but because primitive people rarely grow more than a modest garden and its cultivation is a domestic task, the maintenance work is given to her, too. She weaves blankets, feeds the cattle, shapes pottery, and manages barter. Business is in her hands. She does not stop.

As the soul of the clan through children, harvests and tools, she is relied upon for her work and virtue. Man respects her while also fearing her, and reflects this contradiction in his worship. To him, a woman weaves life, weaves human destiny, and cuts the weeds of plants, the threads of life.

Death is a woman, and she mourns the dead because death is her work. [25]

/

I'm in the back room of The National Wool Museum. The man at the desk tells me, *we don't have an archive* then takes me to a locked room and hands me a key. He calls it 'the backroom.' I stand beside the single office chair as he opens the upright filing cabinet. He moves a card divider to the left and lifts a buyer's manual for the Spinning Jenny that draws thread in the room over. A spider crawls from the inside seam of the paper and over all of the ink HE's and HIS's. The man beside me judders in fear. *They're everywhere* he says. [26]

/

Suppose I were to begin by telling the dimensions of her. Two hundred and thirty two centimetres by two hundred and fifteen centimetres. Suppose I were then to describe her at such a pace you, by accident, start playing a guessing game with me. The way we played 'I Spy'. I sway you dizzy, mislead you into wrong turns with clues. *You'd expect her to be quite light, but she's heavy.* You guess a paddling pool. *She protects us from the weather.* A four-person tent. *She's a relic. A reminder. A ruin.* You guess a painting, a rug, the floor plan of a small tudor hut.

Suppose I were then to give up with the clues, and wrap her around you instead, around and around and around you so tightly that there would be no need for you to guess anymore, because you would feel her threads surround you, with your feet and your eyes peeking out from each of her ends. Suppose I were to then leave you rolled up like this for an

afternoon, or even just an hour, with her threads woven here all those years ago, pressing onto your skin. She would become a part of you, if only briefly. Your sweat would seep into her threads. Become suint. And her threads would press into your skin. This is what I mean, Mum, when I say our Derw blanket is a part of me. How couldn't it be?

/

We stand outside Ken's house. Me before the wall, him behind it. His house is white, pebble dashed and rough. It reminds me of being pushed against the wall in primary school until a little bit of the skin on my knuckle rubbed away and hot tears wiggled down my face, and I had to show you when you picked me up at the end of the day. His garden is clean. The door is varnished. There's a little pond in the back. There are a few small leaves at my feet, but not enough for the season (it's November), which I take to mean that Ken cares for the garden too. Keeps it from browning too much. Keeps it well, on top of everything else.

Because I am nervous, I see myself in the way these leaves shuffle against the stone wall. I stumble across words I haven't said since I was at school. *Helo, enw i yw Hattie.*

Hello my name is Hattie.

My name gives me away. So full of hard consonants and without an accent. I pass him the cakes.

Rwy'n byw yn Derw.

I live in Derw Mill.

We try to speak about Derw. He tells me he used to work here.

Shift nos shift gwisg hir.

Shift night shift long dress.

About locking up the doors. *The end. Tywyllwch.*

Darkness.

about the floor creak. *Y peiriant.*

The machine.

The devil machine. She had sharp teeth. Peryglus.

Dangerous.

wool carding spokes. Inside wife. Bys.

Finger.

I tell him about the carpets and the radiators. He remembers the draft. *It crawls across floor.* About the staircase. *Women gweithio*.

- working.

With. Not. Tying. Tired inside. The words run quickly through me, over me. He says it like I know it all anyway. Throwing the words. *All over. Very sad. Losing parts. Losing hunaniaeth.*

- identity.

I am dropping more words than I can catch. I can't discern it. I can only understand pieces of his sentences – the '*she,' 'her,' 'hers,'* but I can't locate them within their surrounding context. I just attach the *'she'* and *'worked'* to one another with hope as my only adhesive. They're just glimmers in a

dark room – and because I can't catch the sense in his sentences, I feel my eyes drifting to the other half of the building behind him where the lights are turned on. I keep looking at the window where I think his wife is. *My wife. Doesn't anymore. Lying down. The rest.* His wife with a name no one uses. I am thinking – *who is she?* – as he turns with the cakes in one hand to go back inside – *I can't be away from her long.*

On the way home, in the bath, in bed I think, 'who is she? What is she doing in there?' and later, broader, wider, 'where is she? Where are all the women? They must have worked here, somewhere? They must be in here somewhere?' *Come out* – I say to the beams and the walls. *Tuck me in,* I say*, under this blanket that I know you made even though I can't find anything about you anywhere. even though no one says your name. Even though everyone acts like you didn't exist. Even though the museum walls say nothing about you.* The quiet is full. *Tuck me in and tell me how you wove yourself into this mess. I know you're in here somewhere.*

/

Concern and care have acquainted meanings – both come from the Latin ‘cura’ - cure. But they also express different qualities. ‘I am concerned’ denotes worry and thoughtfulness about an issue as well as, though not necessarily, the fact of belonging to the collective of those concerned. ‘To whom it may concern.’ ‘Concerning you.’ ‘Concerning the women of the mill.’ ‘Concerning them.’
‘I care’ though, has a strong sense of attachment and commitment to something.

The quality of ‘care’ is to be more easily turned into a verb: ‘to care.’ One can make oneself concerned, but to care

contains a notion of doing that ‘concern’ lacks. Care brings to mind particular labours associated with feminised work and its ethical complexities. Because of these charged meanings, if ‘matters of concern’ can function as a generic notion for the politics of things (because everything can be potentially thought as a matter of concern), ‘matters of care’ might not. This is not to say that feminist thought should claim a particular ownership around the notion of care but that care is not a neutral notion.

Feminist interest in care has brought to the forefront the specificity of care as a devalued doing, often taken for granted if not rendered invisible.[27]

/

I look for ancient myths that orbit the life of a thread with the making of life, the course of destiny and the darkness of death. A pile of paper stacks beside me like an ugly layered cake.[28] I quickly find tales mounted onto the simple analogy of spinning life, weaving it along its course and cutting it at whim – and because women were the ones repeatedly spinning thread at home, or in transit, or while a snotty child tugged at their legs, it is women who are worshipped. It is women who become the face of thread and of power. They are respected and feared, because they hold the knowledge and the distaff. In Ancient Greece, the three Moirai sit, spindle hanging hipward to plot and snip life into pieces. They are named carefully, with the weight and worry of the world around them. Klotho, 'The Spinner', for the life she will create, Lachesis, 'The Allotment,' for the trials she will plot,

and Atropos, ‘The Unturnable,’ for the fatal end she will decide. In preDynastic Egypt, Neith weaves destiny like the crust of a pie with her callous fingers and her uninterested glare. She is frightening and beautiful and, because it is just a story, powerful too. Urd, Verdandi and Skuld huddle in the cold of Scandinavia, cutting life like a delicate and dead strand of hair. These women become fantastically, iconographically and mythologically tied to the thread, and to the course of life itself. They reap the ultimate (narrative) power.

/

Those nights after sharing jumbled words and gestures with Ken, I felt like I do when things seem to open onto new vistas of excitement. I felt as though Ken's wife was here, floating dense beside me, set someplace between my left ear and my shoulder, compressed like thought.

I thought about her all the time.[29]

Never one for posters in my bedroom, infatuations, to me, felt trite or moot. Empty of reason. But I couldn't stop myself from daydreaming in the early morning hours about her, enamoured by stories I was soon to hear. I made up narratives in my head. Entire interactions with stumbles and whispers. We were to become friends. Me at her bedside in the living room as Ken pottered about the kitchen sorting tea and sorting the bins. I would bring cake to her, whatever she likes, and we would talk about the conversations she had at the looms with women whose names she could remember with ease. We'd talk about their ambitions as individuals, not just as daughters or mothers. We's talk about pop stars, and neoliberalism and

pixels. About spring. For a few short weeks I was the image of a teenager. I couldn't care about anything else – scribbling her name in the sides of my notebooks. Full of hope.

/

Anni and I are on the sofa, flying now, making a cat's cradle so that our hands can touch. We see goddesses in the walls. Our hands melt. We become goddesses. We are women with names.
Though it shouldn't be, it feels like a defiance.

I want to be a knot in her hair
thick and coarse and wired
with our eyes wide on one another because it's a party.

I have never seen anything like her
Headscarf and hands so intent
and the indentation in the sofa from where her legs squash makes me shiver.

She tells me drunk that *thousands of years of establishing and expanding the usefulness of woven materials have made us see in them first something to be worn, walked on, sat upon, to be cut up, sewn together again, in short, largely something no longer in itself fulfilled* [30]

I turn, confused by her conviction, and look at a new thing crawling clumsily, right to me like I mean something to him, with his thumb in his mouth, or a beer bottle, or a burning

joint – *is he a newborn or a drunk*? – and because I am twenty three without a man beside my name, he gurgles at me, doe-eyed and says *save me from my unravelling. Teach me how to be. Look after me.*

I think of care and function
and of Anni
and imagine knotting every thread that comes from this thing that needs me, all these tiny hairs left unstopped, as though they could pull apart his entire body if I tugged at them,
and I believe that maybe I'm the one to halt his flood,
bung the hole
because my care can stop time.
My care is sweaty
My care works hard
and it gives.
My care is generational.
Inherited. Divine.
Because my care is expected.
Demanded.

I reel towards him
Anni shaking her head at my brash naivety
as a shuttle wrapped in wool would

and I go in and out, enlace this thing
care for him like laundry
wrap him up in all of me
so delicate
so that I only care for myself once everything else is done – which means I never care for myself again –
and the ghosts watch, tut in the walls, their skirts muddy,
and they tell me off for being just a girlfriend, just a mother, just a woman in my own house who is *walked on, sat upon, cut up, sewn together again.* For becoming a person who is *largely something no longer in herself fulfilled.*

/

Is unravelling a moving thing? Is a weave a doing thing. A moving thing? An expanding thing? Is a blanket always moving? Always changing?

When Karis Medina, the Associate Curator of The Albers Foundation talks about weaving, she brings up a photo of a loosened textile. [31]

Beneath it, text –

ANNI ALBERS'S UNRAVELLED ANDEAN TEXTILE FRAGMENT, CHANCAY CULTURE.'

She says that Anni *aimed to let threads be articulate again.* That she pulled delicate relics apart to learn how they were put together.

To care for something
for someone
is to exert energy
to wane.

Can care-giving be generative? Creative?

If we consider the characteristics associated with the labour of women – 'easily interruptible, does not place a child in danger' – they revolve around reliance, not around ability (other than the ability to breastfeed), within a community

where specialisation is desirable. Females are, historically, quite able to hunt and often do; males are quite able to cook and sew, and often do, among cultures of the world across the thread of time.

The question is whether society can afford to rely on all of the women as a group for all of the hunting or all of the sewing. The answer to 'hunting' (and smithing, and deep-sea fishing) is no. The answer to 'spinning' or 'weaving' or 'sewing' is yes.[32]

I scan the Derw blanket with my nervous eyes. I smell the wool's resin, waxy. The thing is old and very expensive now, worth hundreds and hundreds of pounds because of what it represents – luxury, heritage, pride. It is bought by wealthy hotel owners and English tourists, and it looks just like the pattern on the inside of an eyelid. Crosses and boxes of colour.

My shoulders loosen. The moon bleeds into the sky. *Back at the height of the traditional welsh blanket production line* — the receptionist at The National Wool Museum gives me a tour — *it was common for most welsh households to have one*

of these blankets. they were not considered luxury or decorative. I try to remember what it felt like to understand Welsh without focus. *They were special in a very different kind of way.*

I fall asleep.

I steal a lump of uncombed fleece from the gift shop and drive home with it between my legs.

I am going 110 down the bypass, overtaking a farmer. He looks like Ken. I am singing along to Princess Nokia. *Bitch I'm wavy. Bitch I'm wavy. Bitch I'm wavy* — and the white road partitions weave into a long scarf. I wipe my face like Nokia did in that skincare video, in that hotel room, moisturising her cheeks like she was polishing an expensive car– *I'm very conscious of my body and how I take care of it.* Then the road markings shake and loosen like a wet dog drying itself, and the whole road underneath me melts away.

My ex says he's not scared of death – only of ghosts. He cleans the back of my house where the waterwheel was with a

wire broom, and sages my staircase to show them he means well.

He means well. He means well. He means well.

Identifying motivation is tough. Trust is such a thin methodology.

/

I'm soft like a soap bar, clean and warm. I see those same toes from Ken's house, peeking from the end of my bed, beside my own. I turn to see her face, as she introduces herself, and her name rolls from her mouth as a ball of wool would. I wake up before I learn it. She's left unnamed, like the rest of them.

Naked, with the radiators on as I slept, I'm laced up tight with sweat. I forgot about my body last night, forgot to take care of it. My mouth tastes like dry crackers. The Derw blanket is folded in the doorway.

/

clywais ey fod nhw 'di llosgi'r flancedi whaethom yna cyn
symudo nhw i fewn

clywais fod y deulu'n
weddus os ydych yn siarad â nhw

clywais eu fod nhw
wedi darpar'r gwaith
cerrig gwreiddiol

clywais fod y saes yn ffonio'r
heddlu os ydych chi'n
mynd i edrych o gwmpas

I heard they burned all the blankets we made there as soon as they moved in

I heard that they're decent people if you talk to them

I heard that they pebble dashed the original stonework

I heard that they phone the police if you go and ask for a look around

/

The analogy of a thread and a person's life-span goes beyond length and fragility to the very act of creation and birth. Women create thread; they somehow pull it out of nowhere from a distaff and spindle, just as they produce babies out of nowhere. This same image is inside of our own term 'life span,' because 'span' comes from the verb 'spin,' which originally meant 'draw out, stretch long' – as one does with a thread.[33]

/

She was dilated. As though her whole body had been looking at the sun. Skin so hot it hummed, her blood ran eager. She was deep inside of pain but too early to push, so the attendant women did their spinning while they waited to be useful. Then life, all slippery and crying, came along, attached to that original thread– the umbilical cord. Maybe this is from where life and women and thread are joined. [34]

The life of a word – even the need for a word, tells us so much of what we're looking for.

One doesn't have a term for something one doesn't know yet, so if an ancient term for something exists, what the word signified must have been a known entity. A Palaeolithic hunter could not have had words for rifles and phantom jets but would have had terms for knives and nets once the objects were invented. One of the beauties of language is that it allows us to devise words for whatever we want to talk about.[35]

Did I ever tell you that the words 'country' and 'wool' are almost identical here? Gwlad. Gwlan. Life. Spin. Line. They all shattered from some need for meaning and littered across time to us here, today, softened with wear like a pebble.

/

Mae'n drueni beth ddigwyddodd i'n Derw –

Such a shame what happened to our mill –

says the woman whose husband just died and whose name I don't know, because when I ask her for it she won't share it with me. We are in the rain at the fork in the road by the building that was the greengrocers but now has a Marina &

the Diamonds poster on the wall and a lilac curtain in the window, and I don't respond to her because I've already forgotten the word she used for shame, though I feel it at the back of my throat in the way I always do when people from the village say this to me on each of my daily walks, with the 'our' pulling at my skin, making it feel uncomfortable on my body, because the word isn't wrong, Derw Mill is more theirs than it is mine, a thought that is sticky and liquid, and so I nod and look up at the Marina & the Diamonds poster, and remember that unlike mine, Marina Diamandis' mother is Welsh, and because of this she is still a sort of Welsh icon for teenage girls, and that my home is more hers than it is mine as far as heritage is concerned, as far as tracing roots through soil is concerned, and I am reminded in the mist that really, I am the shame this old lady is speaking of, and that my family is too, with their roots buried in different soil found over bridges and borders, and as I walk back home, turning the key to open their mill in my pocket, I think about fault lying on the feet of a family for a transition that is more global than it is personal, while also feeling guilt and agreement and a splittage between the words 'ours' and 'mine' and 'yours', and they feel like one very big question, and I sing a 2010 Marina & The Diamonds song to myself as the puddles pulse.

There's a fork in the road
I'll do as I'm told
and I don't know
don't know
don't know
don't know
who
who
who
I want to be.

/

Long before the Industrial Age, the art and naming of being a spinster denoted women who spun wool. As was inaccurately believed through slippery historiography, spinning was commonly believed to be done only by unmarried women, so the word came to denote an unmarried woman in legal documents from the 1600s to the early 1900s, and by 1719 the word was being used generically to mean ‘woman still unmarried and beyond the usual age for it.’ Either you spun thread, or you were married.

By the 1800s, the term had evolved to include women who chose not to marry. During that century middle-class spinsters, as well as their married peers, took ideals of love and marriage very seriously, and spinsterhood was indeed often a consequence of their adherence to those ideals. They remained unmarried not because of individual shortcomings but because they didn't find ‘the one.’

Spinsterhood was often a choice, not from a lack of choice.

One 19th-century editorial in a fashion publication encouraged women to remain choosy in selecting a mate —

even at the price of never marrying. The editorial, titled ‘Honourable Often to Be an Old Maid’ retorted –

MARRY FOR A HOME! MARRY TO ESCAPE THE RIDICULE OF BEING CALLED AN OLD MAID? HOW DARE YOU, THEN, PERVERT THE MOST SACRED INSTITUTION OF THE ALMIGHTY, AND BECOME THE WIFE OF A MAN FOR WHOM YOU CAN FEEL NO EMOTIONS OF LOVE, OR RESPECT EVEN? [36]

To be a spinster is to be busy. To be a spinster is to be a worker. To be a spinster is to be a feminist. To be a spinster is to be romantic. To be a spinster is to be independent. To be a spinster is to be a fighter. To be a spinster is to be left alone. To be a spinster is to protest.

/

I am sat on a damp wall outside the JobCentre, eating an iced bun from a woman in an apron with no name tag at a small bakery with smeared counters. It tastes like cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, and something else, and there's very little icing left on it because most of it is sticking to the bag it came in. I eat the bun first, then suck on the packet and think about what my supervisor just said to me in my Universal Credit meeting. *Taking care of someone can really take it out of a person.* She told me that I was a ball of energy when we met six months ago, and since missing all of my meetings, I'm not anymore.

‘But I’m not taking care of anyone. I’m just looking for someone,’ I think to myself in the car on the way home.

On the drive home I sing with the radio – *I give a little bit. give a little bit of your love to me. give a little bit. I'll give a little bit of my love to you. There's so much that we need to share. I'll give a little bit. I'll give a little bit of my life for you. So give a little bit. Give a little bit of your time to me. see the man with the lonely eyes. Oh, take his hand, you'll be surprised.*[37]

I glide by the hedgerows slowly to watch farmers I know only by sight, lean on the gates of their grassland. It’s autumn, and tupping season, which means that ewes and rams are being put together to multiply. The farmers match them with practised consideration, thinking hard about how to get the best lambs come spring. Their care seems transactional. They do it for their own gain. For the other farmers to see how much they know. How much they care.

If they hear a sound, they leap into action.
If they sense a shift, they pile in to help.

Behind his garden wall, Ken behaves similarly– with a kind of precise instinct. He knows that he can give no more than ten minutes to any conversation, and knows exactly when it's time to head for the living room again.

/

In The National Wool Museum, they exhibit window shutters from Derw, with words pencilled or carved into them by mill workers. These handwritten marks of marriage indicate the existence of women through their attachment to men.

TOM DAVIES CAI MARRIED ON SATURDAY APRIL 1ST, 1939 AT CARMARTHEN REGISTRY OFFICE.

Another unnamed wife.

/

I sit in the windowsill, my back to the shutterless wall, and watch a leaf struggle its way out of a gutter in the driveway, laughing at its pathetic attempt to escape. After two hours of being home and padding across the kitchenette with flour on my hands, I am waiting for the dough I have been kneading to rest. It is deflated. Wind falls in from a crack where the wall meets the glass and I apologise to my dough for the chill while stuffing paper in the hole where the draft seeps through. Noticing a new steady in the air, the dough breathes out in relief and gives in to my hopes for it; to be delicious.
In lust, it swells plump and gorgeous.

/

I asked my supervisor at the Job Centre – *what is it, exactly, that's taken out of a person?* as I got up, put on my coat.

I don't know really – the thing that makes you, you. that thing fades away with time.

/

I ice the buns, letting a spoon drip warm white goo onto them, covering them in a blanket of sugar, forward and backward, forward and backward in strips that eventually meet one another. I am machine precise, making a pattern that mirrors care – the giving and taking of it. Forward, back, forward, back.

I am dousing so carefully I can't hear or feel a thing.

'Ice buns always make me think of you,' I think. Going at whip speed, I am covering everything up '– of my English side. The white icing and the red cherry.'

The icing hides the burnt raisins.

The mistakes.

White and Red.

Then, I place a glacé cherry on top.

Red like England.

Red like Wales.

/

ALSO BY THE WAY –
KEN'S WIFE WORKED AT DERW TOO, THAT’S WHERE SHE AND KEN MET! THAT'S ALL I KNOW ABOUT IT SO FAR BUT I’LL ASK AGAIN LATER TO SEE WHAT EXACTLY SHE DID.

/

Beginnings are usually more interesting than elaborations and endings.[38] Once the process from sheep skin to spool is complete, all that's left to do is weave the thing – a new web of effort and precision. In this place then lies another starting point. Like vegetables sitting on a countertop ready to be souped after a season of growing, harvesting, washing and peeling, this thread sits willowed, carded, spun around spools. From here, it's all in the order and repetitive rhythm of on, in, out, in, out, in, out and so forth until off.

Unlike weaving, knitting takes a set of precise but simple movements possible for rotund infant fingers– in, round, through and off – and is a craft I learned young. Grandma taught me how to knit when I was six. I would ask her to cast on for me every time I wanted to knit, and held the wool taut for her, making sure the threads didn't tangle, watching her tie onto a scratched wooden needle, forming an ordered line of loops tailored to my answers – *what are you making?* A

blanket. *How wide do you want it to be?* This wide. *There you go. Start on the right.*

When we weren't at Grandma's, I'd ask you to start things off instead. When Grandma died, and I moved out of Derw, I had no one to prepare the needles for me. I didn't know how to begin.

Now, it's a couple days shy of my twenty-fourth birthday and you're teaching me how to start, and I'm learning the knots like they're words from a language I think in but can't speak yet, and they come from me like gestures. I feel my way through the bumps. I lay out the threads flat, make sure they don't knot together.

This is an inheritance of language and craft. A craft taught by mothers and grandmothers. It all comes down to the knot and loop, anyway.
This formation of textiles and information. Sheets of endless ties.

To weave, begin at the warp frame to make sure the threads lie in the right length and in the right order. Once the threads are ordered, they divide them with a raddle and space at the

desired width for weaving.[39] These threads form the ‘warp’ – stretching vertically down the loom, side by side tightly.

Imagine a head, with sharply cut hairs hanging all in one length at a pair of shoulders. The hairs are fine and straight. They grow in rows from follicles.

To weave, one needs this warp (though singular in the way it reads on a page, there can be thousands of threads to a warp – just as the hair on your head is countless) and a weft – a single thread, or multiple depending on the desired density of the blanket. It is the weft that moves in and out, over and under the warp.

Imagine the shuttle is a shining metal hair clip, smooth, weaving over half of the hair, under the strands beside the ears and back out again, so that its metal tip glimmers in the bathroom light.

This hair clip goes from one end to the other with a spool of thread - the weft - inside, dispensing thread from left to right, looping back again. Over the weft on the way there, under the weft on the way back. Then, to make a pattern, this shuttle bobs up and down at different points.

Back at The National Wool Museum, I stand outside of the private production room, taking in the sound, sitting on the gravel. If I glaze my eyes over for a second, the machines sound like a steam train, or a string of horses pulling a bell covered cart. The shuttle darts from side to side as a lever edges up and down. Too much is going on to decipher from the noise.

There are few archeological findings with instructional descriptions to teach the process of weaving and spinning – it is an embodied inheritance, hard to trace through time. Women were relied on by their community and family for their many skills, yet they were not supplied or respected with the resources to document these skills in writing. Their knowledge, then, was an embodied form of knowledge. The language of the loom, and the language of the spindle – like Grandma's, yours and my own knowledge of knitting was taught with hands, not with tongues or the inkwells.

Historiography failed them, but their craft persists.

/

At university I was in a relationship with someone I thought I could save with my care. We incorporated like an emulsion of oil and vinegar – partially coming together, violently fighting to combine, splitting then joining again. I morphed, copied him like a shadow, and gave my time to him for a reason I, now, can't put to words. The care is untranslatable. The sentiment is lost. All I can recall is the way I moved down any road beside him, pretending that there was no such thing as loss, for the sake of something invisible, or inherited, or expected, or ingrained.

We split again, as oil and vinegar do, and I unravelled. What was I to do? I cried for a year. I slumped. My flatmates cooked me potato waffles in our student apartment, wrapped me in the Derw blanket and told me that I'd find other things to care for. The promise comforted me.

Traditional Derw blankets come in two patterns – a simple grid pattern in three or four line tones, or a complicated hatched pattern, with honeycomb-like grids and squared. The squares look a little like the potato waffles I ate too many of that year – geometric square formations with round holes where I would poke my fingers into and eat around in the dark. Whenever I look at her, our green Derw blanket, I am reminded of how tiring care is. How important it is. How frightening it is. How replenishing it is. How bad for me it is. How good for me it is. How impossible it is. How easy.

/

She takes care of soup at the stove with a spoon for you. She is a waiter, careful not to spill your drink on her way to your table. She is covered in flour, wearing rubber shoes, caring for dough so that it can grow healthily. She is in your conservatory. The sun shines onto her lower back. She is wearing low rise trousers and the label in her multipack underwear flops over the belt loop like a thirsty tongue. There are bugs headbutting the windows and she is placing ice cubes in a ring around the base of your white orchid, caring for its thirst since you left on your holiday. She in the bath, spooning gloopy conditioner into her palm, listening to 'This Woman's Work' by Kate Bush, pushing a coriander stem from her back teeth as the shower head rests between your wrinkling little feet she grew inside of her only recently, combing the cream through your thin hair, looking out of the window at a crow in a field as it makes a nest between two telephone masts, readying a bed. She is in a nursing home, holding your hands as you tread towards the chair in the corner of the room and talk about your motorcycle accident. Your day at work. Your business deal. She is watching the news, upset by the state of the world and by people she has never met, and her upset lasts

as long as her attention allows. Then the microwave pings. She heads to the hallway, blows on a tray of macaroni cheese, and she's careful not to burn her fingers, careful not to burn her tongue, careful not to get the remote control sticky as she changes the channel to another episode of that series she's already watched. She cares on her website. She cares on her bedroom and profile wall. She cares on her denim jacket with the plastic badges and patches. She cares for you as you sleep on the sofa, curled up in a ball. She gets a blanket, wraps you in the way your Mum used to, says she's sorry, says she cares. Later, she washes your dishes, tidies your bedroom. She cares invisibly. She cares in the shadows. She cares unthanked. She cares loudly on the pavement. She cares in red ink, capital letters at the protest. She cares without credit. She cares at the donation point. She cares anonymously. She cares at the vigil. She cares for her mothers. For her sisters. She cares for her grandmothers. She cares in the aisle. She cares at the information booth, at the display booth, at the gift shop. She cares in the archive and the museum. She cares in the margins. She cares in the mud. She cares in the dust. She cares in any way she can. She cares because how couldn't she? She cares because she has to. She cares because she's told to. She cares because she was raised to. She's learned to. She cares because she has no other choice. She cares like it's a thorn in her hand. She cares like it's a pair of wings on her back. She cares like

she breathes. She cares because it seeths from her. She cares because it's the least she can do – and the most. She cares on the billboard, on the telly, in the cinema and the advert. She is Nightingale, Theresa, Mary, Saint. She cares with a painted smile on her face. Without question.

/

It's January 1st. I am listening to the recording of restored and maintained machines clicking in and out of action at The National Wool Museum. The spinning jennies, the weaving looms, the carding machines. I crept into the private car park and left my phone under one of the windowsills to record it's noise for half an hour, so that I could be as close to the steel as possible whenever I felt like it.

Every now and then it quietens to silence, a man coughs from dirty lungs, and responds to a question –

Wrth gwrs ma' hi'n adref, he says.
Yes of course she's at home,

Then the machine takes over

like it always does.

/

The first wheel completes its first circle, turning toward the future in its dirty tracks. It pushes us forward slowly – a new paragraph with a title underlined to show its chosen importance. The historians sweat excitedly, for mechanisation is nearing its steamy head. At the fire, quiet in the dark of their homes, the women keep on spinning. They spin with flax, cotton and here in Wales, with wool – sheared with an audience and tied up with string for them to make warmth from their hands – for they're set to see a harsh winter. They spin through generations of weathered fingers, slowly at the hip, not unlike the others. It is a common practice never documented but inherited, instead. An alternative mode of history. A lived mode.

The wheel reaches their homes and soon enough, they are wrapping their spools at great speed. They now make thread faster than they can make bread. It's a revelation of rotation and wonder.

The Moirai, the Norns and Neith are soon remembered as decorative wall hangings and bedtime stories only.

Beauty.

Myth.

The end.

Then, in their thousands, they're invited out of their homes and into their gardens to stand in the archives of museums and under the gaze of their adventure books, beside their spinning wheels and ivy. The cameras take their photographs but never take their names.

It's as though this was the beginning for them.

/

It smells like leaves and puddles in here because of that big metal tub full of silty river water, boiled in the kettle. It's sitting in the middle of the kitchen floor on the slate slabs, and the steam looks like a film, rising up. You smile, get the soap, get me happy, excite me with the novelty. *Isn't this fun?* you say, so I believe you.

'This' being the meat of winter without hot or running water.

You're brushing my skin with a sponge that has little threads of pubic hair trapped inside of it, and your hands are rough as always, and I feel safe and folded in half like a letter because I'm a bit too big for the tub, but I laugh. I can't wait to tell my friends at school about this tomorrow. They're going to be so jealous.

Why don't the taps work, Mum?

The ghosts are thirsty

but I have my doubts, so later I pad down the hall, dodging the loose floorboards, to hear you say, convinced, that it's the neighbours who turned it all off. *What did the girls say the spray paint outside says? I don't think it's a coincidence* and I whisper *cer o ma, saes* under my breath, and then, in the car the next morning, I translate it for you again, on the way to school, so that you know it says

Go home, English!

/

People who sound like us punished the language out of them. Shamed their grandparents by placing a placard on a loop of rope around their necks when they were heard speaking Welsh at school. [40] People who sound like us called them 'IMMORAL LIARS, STUNTED, BIGOTED, DARK, UGLY, PUGNACIOUS LITTLE TROLLS' in The Sunday Times in 1997.[41] People who sound like us buy their homes, gut them into modern shells and rent them at prices they can't afford. People like us call them 'TAFFYS,' sing derogatory songs at sports matches, outside of pubs, outside of schools.[42] People who sound like us ask 'WHAT IS THE POINT OF WELSH? ALL IT DOES IS PROVIDE A SILLY MAYPOLE AROUND WHICH A BUNCH OF HOTHEADS CAN GET ALL NATIONALISTIC.' [43] People who sound like us flooded them out of their homes in the 60's to support English industry.[44] People who sound like us presided over the most dramatic transformation of the Welsh economy since The Industrial Revolution, ridding thousands of their livelihoods.[45] People who sound like us benefited from their labour and resources, while believing that the Welsh language was a 'BARRIER TO MORAL PROGRESS AND COMMERCIAL PROSPERITY.' [46] People who sound like us, in the Spectator in 2010, called them 'MISERABLE, SEAWEED MUNCHING, SHEEP-BOTHERING PINCH-FACED HILL-TRIBES.' [47] People who sound like us, in a public

address, said that they would ‘RATHER GO TO HELL THAN TO WALES.’ [48] People who sound like us wrote that the Welsh are ‘UNCLEAN PEOPLE WHO PRESERVED THEIR RACIAL INTEGRITY BECAUSE NO ENGLISH PERSON WOULD WANT TO ENGAGE WITH THEM.’ [49] People who sound like us wrote that ‘ALL THE DISASTERS OF ENGLISH HISTORY ARE TO THE INFLUENCE OF WALES.’ [50] People who sound like us omitted their names after photographing them.[51] People who sound like us claimed that ‘THE WELSH HAVE NEVER MADE ANY SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO ANY BRANCH OF KNOWLEDGE, CULTURE OR ENTERTAINMENT. THEY HAVE NO ARCHITECTURE, NO GASTRONOMIC TRADITION, NO LITERATURE WORTHY OF THE NAME’ in The Evening Standard.[52] People who sound like us patronised them, vilified them, erased them. People who sound like us turn their hometowns into summer luxuries they can’t afford to live in anymore. People who sound like us mispronounce their names. People who sound like us wrote them out of their own history in a language they were forced to learn.

Go home, English! is a retaliation.

/

Their deity stands in marble, thinking of war, orgasms, civilization and birthday cake. Her drapery, white and wrapped about her navel, is unfastened in such a way that it slips down her body, over her hips, towards the floor. The wind might easily undress her, blow her modesty away with a warm billow. Do her arms leave her before she can fix the slippage, or were they always busy doing other things?

Aphrodite is found on the island of Melos and later taken away from her people to a plinth in the Louvre. Almost completely intact – she is described as goddess of beauty, sex, love and procreation. They name her Venus de Milo and gaze at her torso, her pristine form, her poised expression– she is a sight to marvel. A vision in stone.

But, after close analysis, they realise that her shoulders are twisted with intent. They notice her musculature – she couldn't have kept her drapery from falling, even before she lost her marble arms. Why? Because her arms were engaged already, held out, busy at work– the left arm high and a little behind her, counterbalancing her weight by curving her body. The other arm, out in front of her at about chest level. Her gaze rests where her hand would be. [53]

This is a pose held by countless women in ancient Greek society – distaff loaded with fibre high in the left hand while the thread and spindle are hung in front from the more dexterous right, where her thread could be watched for neatness and precision. She, the Greek's Aphrodite, the Roman's Venus, the Louvres' Venus de Milo – goddess of procreation, life, sexual love, war– was spinning.

But they leave her arms in transit, or in the archive, or in the bashing wind and weathering of time, and they put her on the plinth, and they focus on her beauty, and she becomes the subject of loveliness. Of gawking and of marvel. She becomes the image of sex, of procreation and bounty, and as beautiful things often are, she is slowly disregarded and misremembered. Her moving arms are forgotten. Her spun thread vanishes. She is Venus – the world's great mother. The carer. The lover. The work she spun is of no importance nor consequence to us. It is as though it never happened.

/

We stand outside Ken's house. Me before the wall, him behind it. His house looks like it's covered in icing, hiding the gravel and dust underneath.

I hand him the tupperware of iced buns, look at him in his eyes, notice they're blue like mine, and say in the best Welsh I can muster – *Galla'i ddod i mewn?* *Can I come in?*
and he looks at the curtain like it will give him the answer, give him the all clear, and I look at it too, and it doesn't move. He opens the tupperware with four clean clipping sounds, takes one of the three buns in his hand and bites it in front of me. He chews. Then I take one too, and I lift it, say cheers to the air, to the window, and I take a bite.

It's delicious. I think about all of the things hidden behind layers of paint, paper, sugar. Ken says nothing. I think about layers of stories and museum walls. The leaves brush my feet. I think about wrapping people up in wool to care for them, hide them, love them.

'I want to know who you are,' I think to myself in the silence between me and Ken. We have realised that language fails us. That silence is better. 'I want to know all about her. I want to know whether her friends worked at Derw. I look to the window. I want to know whether her name was ever written in

one of the windowsills. Whether it's still there, under white paint or dust. I want to talk to her about where she is in all of the stories. I want to ask if her mother, her sister, her friend worked there too. I like sweet things. Where is she ?'

Ken turns to leave with his hand holding the tupperware, his other hand wiping his trouser leg. I pick the glacé cherry off the top of my bun, swallow it whole, brace, breathe in, call out–

Alla'i gyfarfod dy wraig yn fuan?
Can I meet her soon?

—— as my eyes look to the window with her bed in the shadows. Her toes still poking from the foot of the bed,

and he turns back, nods once –

Wythnos nesaf
Next week.
– and fades into the hall.

/

Not long now – I say to Ken's wife as we lie under the Derw blanket that night.

She laughs.

/

I didn't intend for this to be about care.

In the airing cupboard I was hanging bed sheets over things, thinking about machines and about how I see them as mechanised men in my lazy subconscious. Their hard steel, grease and violence. Then, I think about the way machines are 'manned' – how that word means that something is operated, transported or performed. How 'man' is a synonym for action.

The archive seeps into language like mercury. A dirty pollutant.

Our language informs our thinking. Our understanding of labour is linguistically warped. Have we let language, the most useful tool we have, be manned too?

I iron the pillow case and think about the gaps in history and whether they will all close up eventually, rendering reality or truth inaccessible? I wonder whether history can ever be separate from language, and whether it can change its course through its telling? Whether from the moment of being written, the violence of misrepresentation can be undone.

There are gaps between truth and language, and between reality and documentation. Historiography is a process inherently tied to loss.

I think to myself – ‘what does the face of language look like?’ My answer blurs.

In Welsh, ‘gofal’ means ‘care’, but it also means ‘trouble’.

/

An ontology grounded in relationality and interdependence needs to remember that *cuts* create heterogeneity, and that when we cut out information to put it somewhere else, there is a space left surrounding it. A context lost. If we attach an intense focus on an object or person, we create patterns of identity that reorder relations through leaving out others.

In other words, where there is relation, there has to be care, but our care also performs disconnection.
We cannot possibly care for everything.

Thinking with care compels us to think from the perspective of how cuts made in or from information can foster relationships rather than how cuts can disconnect worlds. We can draw attention to the ways that new patterns take from a web of relationalities, and how those webs made the new patterns possible. [54]

/

I ask to go to the toilet politely, the way you taught me, but they shake their heads like I'm wrong and put their hand by their ears. I ask again, and they shake heads, with their eyebrows raised like a question. *Cymraeg*

Welsh

they say, but I don't have it in my mouth yet, I've only been around it for a couple of days, so it slips over my tongue. Then I'm jumping up and down. My legs can't knot tight enough. Everyone's looking. I'm asking over and over, and all I want is for you to come and get me, take these wet trousers off my legs and take me home. I want to speak in the words you speak. In the words I know. But they won't let me, so they call you on the phone to say I've had an accident, and that I'm cold and wet all the way down to my knees, smelling like nightmares, and that you need to sort me out. I sit in the office with the high tables thinking that this wasn't an

accident at all. If they can speak to you, why won't they speak to me? Translating the answer would take years. Would take a village.

This isn't acceptable, you say to yourself as I peel away from the car seat and into Derw.

You'll learn fast enough you tell me through a tiny gap in the blanket. A blanket that's more Welsh than I will ever be.

I listen to your voice, count the dots in the rows of green wool in front of my swollen eyes. *Un. One. Dau. Two. Tri. Three. Pedwar. Four. Pump. Five.*

One. Two. Three. Four. Five.

Then it's my birthday and I remember what you said that night, and how worried you looked. I count the five candles in the cake, blow them out and wish for a brand new tongue.

/

Every night you hear me through my bedroom door speaking at great length with Ken's wife, as though she's in here with me, baggy T-shirt on, crumbs in the bed, together. We're joined together in a sort of sisterhood of interests. She tells me every detail of working life here at Derw, about her nostalgia for a working body, the work of weaving threads– and I listen hungrily. Swallow it down greedily. I can't quite believe my luck. She is my Chinvat Bridge.[55] My path to the underworld – to the other women who disappeared without trace before I had the chance to talk to them. She is a living, breathing archive.

/

Geloma, they say as they lean wood against a wall, mould clay into lumps and hang those lumps, dried, from the thread they've spun so that it is held down from a persistent breeze and ready to be woven. Like a cracking egg, the hard shell of that Old English 'geloma' splits open and 'loom' appears from the middle, stretched out from that sandwiched '–lom–'. It means 'tool' or 'utensil' when translated, and becomes, beside the axe or spear, one of the key tools of ancient times to propels us forward.

These looms stand within the walls of the home – protected from the weather and the flock and the eyes of the men outside . They're illuminated by the sun from view holes in the day, and lit at night by the fire. At any time, threads can be woven, lengthened, tied together and finished in this space of woman and safety and so, just like the spinning of thread and the creation of life, weaving gets knotted into creation stories and myths and legends. In Inca mythology, the Peruvians worship Mama Ocllo, the wife of their first sovereign Manco Capac, for her ornate and masterful weaving ability. The Assyrians honour Queen Semiramis by surrounding her with the weaving roots and flowers of her own doing. The Egyptians credit goddess Isis – pictured, almost always, with a shuttle in her hand. The Indians celebrate young girl

Hambrumai for teaching the world to weave after God gifted her with the skill. [56]

So she who weaves, weaves us into civilization– through day and night and time, from the walled shadows of the home.

But there is a kind of privacy tied to home. To domesticity.
A certain kind of invisibility.[57]

/

You are in the past, in a dark home, in a dream maybe. Before you are four women. An old wife is cooking dough on a small brazier surrounded by acrid smoke. Two slightly younger women are rocking children in their arms. One of them is breastfeeding. Seated before a loom is another young woman. She is knotting gold and silver strands of wool, weaving them with intent and precision. You leave the gloomy place – this realm of immanence, womb, and tomb –through a long, uphill corridor that leads toward the sunlight, and you meet a man. He is dressed in bright white. He is sparklingly clean and smiling. He has spent the day joking about world affairs with

other men, and is going back to this retreat of his own for only a few hours. He tells you this place is the heart of this vast universe to which he belongs and from which he is not separated.

For the withered woman in the acrid smoke, for the mothering women, for the young weaver doomed to the same degeneration – there is no other reality but the murky shadows from which they will emerge, only at night, silent and unseen.[58]

/

Three women are busy in a wood floored room, talking about lunch and what they want to be when they grow up. Their names are Klotho, Lachesis and Atropos. They are playing with the way power feels. Feels new. Feels good.

Klotho spins a single thread that lasts as long as life. Lachesis decides on the thread's destiny (who will it meet? Where will it live?) and Atropos cuts it, letting it drop at whim.

How do you measure a life?

How do you know when to let go?

They are together, talking about illness.

Talking about care.

Talking about wholeness.

They sing quotes from Attlee, Beavoir, Barber, Boyer, Bellacasa and Le Guin like they’re lyrics by Joni Mitchel.

They tell stories of Hambrumai. Neath. Of Venus of Lespugue's Skirt and Venus de Milo's arms.

The threads should be longer, says Klotho to Lachesis.

Atropos says *that's not the point.*

From where we're standing, in the walls and the floors, we think the thread looks long enough, and then we think about it again as it's pulled out,
thinned
and cut,
and realise that it looks really, really short.

/

I want you to visualise this strand of thread between your thumb and index finger on your right hand. It trails far behind you, around the corner, beneath every step you've taken through The National Wool Museum, to the first person in the street who told you about Ken's wife. You think that the thread began as an idea, or a question, or a few words on a page. You see Ken's wife as the closest you will come to history. The closest you will come to answers. The only woman in the world.

On the other side of your hand, the strand of thread hangs across your fingers in front of you. You pull it towards you, take steps, swap hands, so that your left hand now holds the thread, between your thumb and index finger. You follow the thread wherever it takes you, to the museums, the internet, the houses of neighbours who speak in a language you hold onto like a fence in the wind. The thread makes promises to give perspective. To open out your knowledge. It curves around, further. It is your trail. Your methodology. As you keep on, you become indented by the thread as it feeds through your hands– two little grooves divett into your index fingers and thumbs. It's making its mark on you.

Then, it's a cold day, and you take a walk through your village with the wind whipping your ankles. You notice a looseness in the thread. A lack of tension. The strand lols over your fingers. You look ahead, tracing it up the road, across the junction, over the driveway. You see its end, frayed on Ken's slate doorstep. The curtains are wide open. Air flows through the rooms.

She died three weeks ago– Ken tells you in the language he doesn't live in so that there is no misunderstanding. You grip harder onto the thread, look at his tired hands on the steering wheel. You look at his face.

Atropos appears behind the short wall of Ken's garden in the distance. She lifts her scissors to me in greeting. The blades gleam.

Can you meet at my building? I have history for you. Let me turn around up this here lane. You follow the thread up the road, across the junction, over the driveway. You stand beside the cut end on the doorstep.

Ken drives into the garage, gets out of the car, walks across the gravel. He opens the door and for the first time, you see

inside. Cow parsley on the wallpaper glitters with the shadow cast by your nervous body. A blue glass dish sits empty. An ornate clock swings, and you see its reflection in the shiny wood flooring. Ken goes into the left side of the house. Then he crosses the hall and goes into the right side. In the corner of your eye you spot the curtains billowing in the wind. The room looks bigger. The bed is gone. Ken comes out, towards you in the doorframe. He flicks through a big plastic wallet of CD-Roms. You don't say anything to each other.

Up, all around you, are the brown grass walls of the Teifi valley, and despite being in the pit of it together, you feel fields and bushes and walls and trees away from Ken, because all you want to say is that you're sorry, but all you can do is ask –

beth oedd ei enw?
what was her name?

and he tells you, from a mouth shaped like a thank you

Annette.

You think of her wiggling toes under the net shapes on your Derw blanket, hands on the threads as you sung together,

spoke about dreams, spoke about memories and what it means to be a woman in the world– and you breathe in a tear before it leaves your eye. Ken slides a finger under one of the silver discs, and stretches his hand around it taut. He passes it to you.

Across the middle, in black marker ink are the words:

FFOTOS DERW
DERW PHOTOS

You can come here to ask questions when you like. I come to show you Derw next week.

Can you see it? Can you feel how that feels?

/

clywais fod y teulu yn gosod rhedegwyr o dan y llawr

clywais fod y saeson yn rhentu'r felyn allan i dramor

clywais fod nhw 'di walparo'r prawf Derw

clywais nad allant siarad gair o gymraeg

I heard they installed underfloor heating

I heard they rent the whole thing out to foreigners

I heard they wallpapered the oak beams

I heard they can't speak a word of welsh

/

We run down the longest thread there is, after the wheel turns for the first time to take us onwards where more letters are written and the sound of gunpowder explodes from a loaded gun and mutations of language and medicine are made and the sick are saved and bodies are buried and science evolves and methods are met with applauses and a telescope meets the shy moon and a light bulb flickers with power. Looms powered by steam spun wool and wove blankets in mills across Wales faster than Hambrumai could comprehend. Isis was speechless. Aphrodite shivered, and still I ask from the articles and books — *where are you?*

Pulled away as a dog on a short leash from a wet lamppost, our attention is averted from the home with a jolting tug by headlines and history books, newspapers and billboards telling us that WORK HAS MOVED OUT OF THE HOME AND INTO THE FACTORY, as steam rises about us. We hold still. *Where are you where are you where are you*? we ask. Our questions evoke deities with distaffs, spindles and shuttles. Rising from the steam, they look us sharp in the eye.

We're here we hear, from the houses, behind the walls. A wild, resisting baby is The Industrial Revolution, pulling against the nipple of his mother with teeth still stubbornly latched.

She looks at us.

/

An ex buys and learns to use a new word-processing program a year before I begin to use it. I'm in the thick of writing this book using the old system and can't afford to take any time out to learn the new one, or to convert everything. I am already too deep into production to improve my methods.

It appears that women were so busy trying to keep everyone warm, fed, clean and alive that they didn't have excess time or materials to experiment with new ways of doing things better. Of inventing their way into the story.[59] They were too deep into production and so are left behind depiction.

There's a shift in representation.

A slip and a lie.

A false metamorphosis.

The face of thread changes from woman and hand
to man and machine.

/

Hello
I am here
in your mythology
and in your clothes and in your iconography, and in
the walls of the archive or
the walls of your great grandfather's living room.
I work with the hands that care for all there is to up keep
and, as you do, you come back
from the bustle of invention and
heavy machinery and men
to my place
hidden by doors
to clean yourself in the domestic
(that space so private and hidden)
to sit still
go slowly
eat hungry
rest tired
and as you unravel beside me
(your wife, your sister, your daughter – your silent worker watching).

I know that these things you do here are not remarkable because I have watched them forever. Why do you hide them? Why do you hide me? [60]
Why is your rest a secret, baby?
Why am I a secret, baby?
Because I know too much, baby?
Because I spun you from myself, baby?

Baby, do you remember when you used to worship me?

Like the thread from my stomach, you reap what has been a part of me, and then shine with my threads around you.

The inventor.
The pioneer.
The man –
you render my history unreal.
You render my life fantastic. [61]
You make me liquid, running, impossible to catch
as a drawing, a myth, a legend, a goddess, a sculpture – and my liquidity renders me impossible. I am only rumour. An assumption.

What else is there to know? Mine is the same fate as all of us at the loom and at the spindle: no one remembers my name, or

recorded what I said, or observed that I refused to say anything at all. Mine is an untimely story told by a failed witness. It will be centuries before I am allowed to try my tongue.[62]

/

There are a lot of restless nights over Annette, under the weight of a t-shirt with an itching label, a polyester throw and the Derw blanket, where I move between dreams abruptly, crudely, pushing through each, eager to see the dead turn into the living, eager to ask them every question in the world.

My words mean nothing to the empty room.
They are mispronounced, misplaced. So clumsy.

Then, like a key, I say

Annette

and a hairline crack appears in the wall.

Behind it are the faces of women looking at machines, looking at me. They are smiling. They are concentrating. They are working.

Had I only the right questions, I could get to them.

/

After dinner I perform my own translation of a passage in a book I was given by a historian from The National Wool Museum. From English translation to my own translation, I circle the vague gaps, rub out the words and look for the shadows underneath them like chalk on a blackboard or the iron filings in a child's writing tablet. [63]

THE NEW TEXTILE MACHINES OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION CAUSED WAGES FOR HOME HAND-SPINNING TO FALL AND MANY RURAL PEOPLE WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY SPUN FOUND THEMSELVES UNEMPLOYED [64]

becomes

MAINTENANCE OF THE HOME AS A PRIVATE, SEPARATE SPACE HAS BEEN GUARDED FOR MILLENIA, AND WAS DESIRED AMONG MEN OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION. THIS LED TO THE UNEMPLOYMENT OF COUNTLESS RURAL WOMEN WHO HAD VALUABLE SPINNING AND TEXTILE KNOWLEDGE.

It is at this point when I start to think that the plaque by the door in The National Wool Museum– the one smaller and cleaner than any other on the site– had some truth I needed to swallow. I went back to look at it. Tried to find more plaques, but other than this one, there were none –

ONCE THE BLANKETS WERE MADE, WOMEN FORMED CIRCLES TO KNIT WITH EXTRA WOOL AND SOCIALISE

/

You turned on my heating and said *you have to keep looking. They're relying on you* and I didn't know who you were

referring to but believed you because I wanted to. It felt true enough.

Do you have any sleeping pills?
I had been sleeping badly. Too many dreams.
I'm not going to give you those, you said.

My dream that night took me to a memory. I was in an exes bedroom after a seminar on women's labour. Hopelessly untidy. Four in the afternoon. Him fully dressed on the floor. *Wake up.* Duvet hurled to the side like a snake skin. A frightening transformation. *What have you done*? One wool sock half on. Drawings from a hallucination at his side. Red felt tip pen bleeding on the carpet. Clammy face. Dried dribble. He tells his Mum on the phone on the street that he has not been sleeping as we walk to buy instant noodles, colouring books, king skins. She thinks it is because of the stress but it is the acid, actually. *I want to connect to my inner child.* There is a blister foil pill tray on the bedside where little white moons sat only yesterday. Sent from his Mum in the mail. Now empty. *Wake up. Wake up. Wake up.* I say in a sharp whisper. He eventually groans and laughs. *I saw her,* he says. *Who?* I say. *Mother Nature*. I roll my eyes.

/

I come to the kitchen in the morning. You're stirring treacle into oats and see me. *Have you heard of 'Mother's Friend?'* [65]

/

Maybe the fixed hours of woollen mill work was enticing, compared to the relentlessness of women's domestic service. Maybe the factory wages gave women a glimmer of potential financial independence. Maybe, as their traditional role frayed, women slowly infiltrated mills to work on small jennies or tend to the carding process, while averted eyes marvelled at the phallic thrust of mechanisation and development.[66] Maybe, after the gruellingly long shifts at the machines, these women desperately needed a good night's sleep so kept their children quiet at night with opiates: laudanum and treacle – Mother's Friend. Maybe care isn't all women should be remembered for. Maybe some are good workers. Maybe some are both. Maybe some children were too drugged to eat in the day and became malnourished. Maybe some died from starvation. Maybe, after Welsh domestic service, the Welsh textile industry had the second

highest percentage of female workers, with 49% of employees being female, at the height of The Industrial Revolution. [67]

Where are you where are you where are you?

/

A fish bone, long with a point like a blackberry thorn, lodged itself into my left tonsil when I was sixteen. Before that, I moved knots of food down my throat thinking nothing of thorns, taste or disaster, but I chew fish twenty or thirty times over now.

I think this as we walk to Derw. Ken in front, me listening. He moves faster than I have let myself expect. He looks to the flooded wetland and speaks about the valley – the way it slants on one side more so than it does on the other, inviting bogs and moss. We pass the house on the junction and he tells me about dead poets. About a writer, loved country-wide for his folklore, who was raised by his unnamed mother in this house between the two of ours. Ken recites a line to me, says it slowly, and I catch only the simplest of his words. I don't know when the quote ends and he comes back, mother tongue flicking fast now, indiscernible to my fading fluency, but the sentences feed me, colourful and new. I think of fish bones, of digging them out with my tongue after the jolt of choking for the first time. Of feeling every spot of flesh and every bit of flavour, and right now, as we walk to Derw, this big, stone, living, dying archive, I feel that I am turning this village over in my head for the first time too, noticing grooves and grit and landscapes like the hiding sharp and sinuous bits in a fillet of fish.

As we near Derw, I can't bring myself to say Annette's name. To tell Ken that I haven't looked at the CD-Rom yet. That I've spun the disk around my finger, wished for documentation, dreamt of Annette and her friends – immortalised in pixel – but failed to look at some semblance of truth. To tell him that, to me, the CD-Rom has more power than the entire museum.

I start to feel the weight of all the gaps that widen and are widening still, from my own doing. The gaps in my language, the gaps in my candour, the gaps in my knowledge, the gaps in my research. I want to tell Ken that I've been sleeping with the thought of Annette, working hard to no record. Wrapped her around me like a thread on a spool. I want to tell him why she matters. Why the poet's mother matters. Why my mother matters. Why the museum arrows matter. Why that one plaque at the end of the tour matters. Why the stories matter– but for all I know, it's all he spoke to me about that first time by the wall in the wind– I just didn't have the tools, the inherited or embodied knowledge to understand.

He heads down our lane, and I follow. Everything looks different with him in front. Like the machines are still rolling and like time has rolled backwards.

Maybe I don't really live here at all

the work never stopped

I'm not quite part of this

I'm not sure who I want to be, so I unravel again, and become the trees, upside down, deleted, ripped. Reality is not reality. It cracks open. The sky is not sky but milk. I float through walls. I become ghost. Ken becomes the worker with the mill keys and the knowledge. It all turns inside out. Every word makes itself known to me like Welsh words did when I was a child, learning who I was at school, learning literacy, translating while transforming. I am a blooming daffodil. The cherry blossom sinks into the ground, reversing my slow forgetting until I am fluent again and gobbling up his every word, so greedy for his story. He asks for *two sugars, not one* in his tea on his lunch break, *right there by the beam*. His hands leathered. Uses words like *night shift* and *draught*.

This is not a place for breakfast but for our resting between morning and noon, after her knotting and my threading.

This is not a place for sleeping. He sees my – our – his– her– blanket – *made by who?*– and touches it like a person he's not seen in years.

This is not a place for watching tv. This is a carding room where she pulls wool apart.

This is a safety area – we built it to muffle the noise of all the metal.

This is a bathroom.
This is a dyeing room.
This is not a laundry room.
This is where she loaded the spools.
If you lose track, ask her what you need to do. She's the boss.
She's over there.

This is not a story.
This is history making itself material. This is the archive enacted.

You look like you need a rest.
Go home.

I don't know where to go once Ken leaves me here.

All that's been left out here, is all that I missed from his mouth. It disintegrates like the threads on that woman's skirt in Ølby.

/

I wake in the willowing room, eat a fried egg in the scouring room, take a cup of tea to the dyeing room.

I am completely out of place.

/

There are at least two ways historiographical writing can make a place for the living: one is attending to and recruiting the past for the sake of the living, figuring out who we are in relation to who we have been. To invite them to the table as friends, ask them questions, hear their side;
and the second involves interrogating the production of our knowledge about the past as it stands today. [68]

At The National Wool Museum of Wales, there is no mention of women beyond an afterthought at the exit door. Not as the foremothers of spinning. Not as workers of looms. Not as mothers, or spinsters, or goddesses. In the backroom, on the information boards and in the gift shop there are no photographs or paintings of them. No files or census figures. No documentation of existence – and of course, this loss of stories sharpens the hunger for them. So it is always tempting to fill in the gaps ourselves and provide closure where there is none.[69] To imagine the communication that might have passed between two women that no one observed or reported, lip reading one another's tired faces over the drum of the machines.

This blatant lack of documentation only affirms what we already know to be true: the archive, or backroom, or drafts bin, or filing cabinet, is inseparable from the play of power.

We emerge from these encounters along the thread with a sense of incompleteness, and with the recognition that some part of ourself is missing as a consequence of these engagements. We find to our surprise that we are not able to rescue our foremothers or escape their entangled relations of silence and misrepresentation. That we are not able to ask for their names or their truths, but instead come to accept that they have made their country proud, and our own existence possible.

With this in mind, we bear what cannot be borne: the image of Venus as beauty alone, and not as a spinster, working.[70]

/

Where am I even meant to turn now?

Last night I dreamt that I was walking through a darkening forest with a distaff and spindle in each of my hands. I was tired, treading over uprooted trees and side-stepping dug holes. The worms had been rudely exposed to the moon. The mulched leaves were milky with light. My eyes were heavy, and growing heavier still, as drops of water from the sky poured down my face and chest. *You have to keep looking.* I pushed on. I couldn't even remember the reason I had ventured out in the first place and was nearing submission. Everything felt far bigger than I was, and my grip had started to loosen on my distaff and spindle. The rain was washing away every footprint I took in the slippy mud. It was futile.

I stopped for a rest.

With my ankles meeting the cold puddling ground, I started to sink into the earth. My spindle neared the floor. It too would lie buried beside my body to be found and then lost somewhere else.
I breathed deep. The white trees, the white moon rubbed out my body like chalk. I was joining the shadows.

I looked up to see everything for one last time and was met with an arm unfurling before my face. A bright hand opened, ready for mine. I kissed it.

Venus had come for me.

/

The disk whirls.

It’s spring again and the sunlight through the window casts a halo on the screen.

FFOTOS DERW

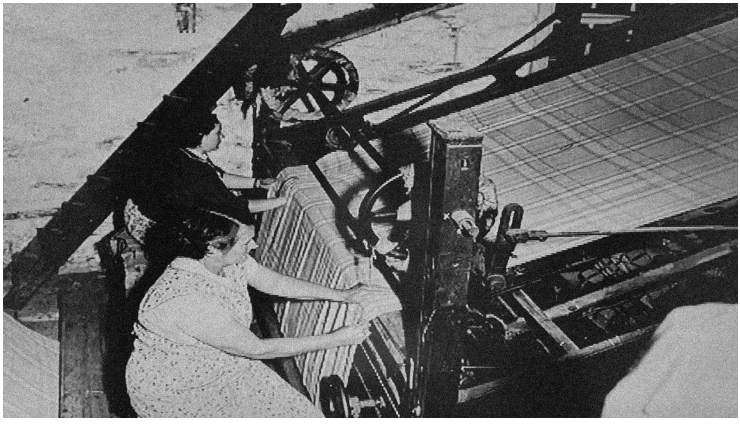
DERW PHOTOS

A murmuration of pixels, electric blue, asks me to PLEASE WAIT. Then, in an instant shift of shapes, the pixels translate an image to me. All sorts of greys shiver across the screen.

Then –

Then –

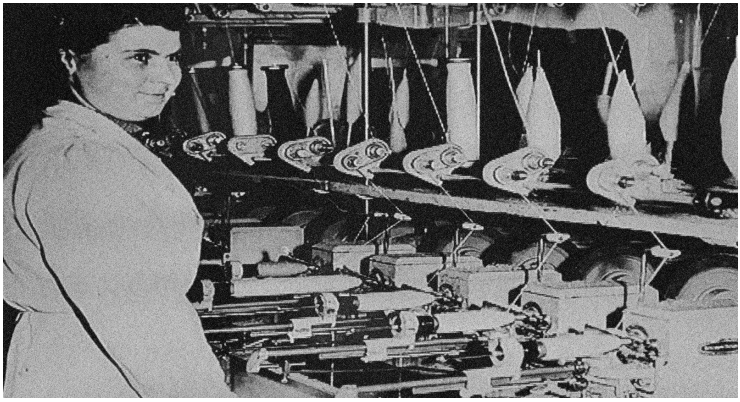
Then –



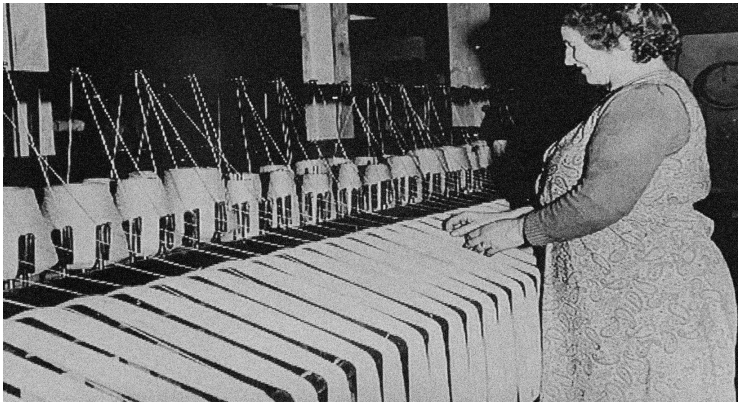
Then –

Then –

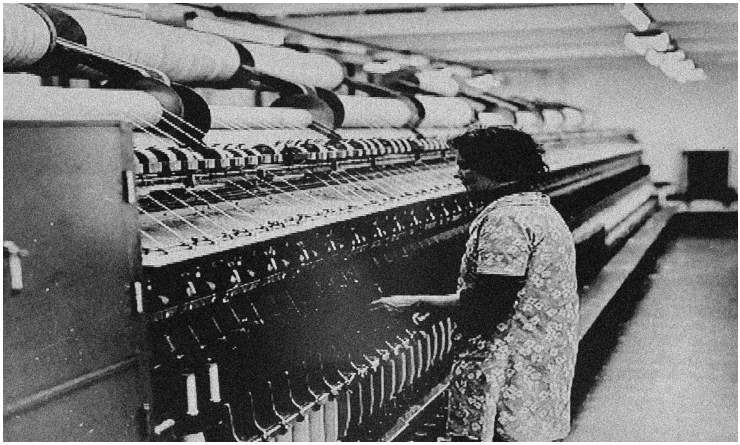
Then –



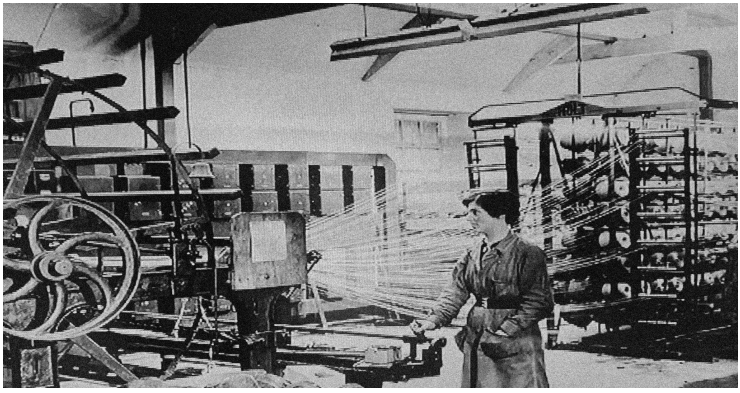
Then –



Then –



Then –



Then –

a black screen, with white writing spread across it –

DERW CLOSED ON MAY 27TH, 1983

Then –

71

Ken walks towards me. Walks towards the camera. His back faces a power loom suspended high up from a crane. It is being taken away from Derw.

It hangs in the sky like an angel.

Then –

A slumped loom sits on the back of a lorry. I see it through the windscreen of a car.

Someone with curling strands of hair falling across their slight shoulders is sitting in the seat in front of me. I can't see their face – only the back of their head as they watch the machine move away.

/

I put the CD-Rom back where it was kept for months, between two pages of poetry.

These words beside the silver disk pierce me like a sharp needle —

I WANT TO BE ALONE
WITH YOU IN THE NEXT ROOM

/

WRITTEN THROUGH

Anne Boyer, *Garments Against Women*

Anni Albers, *On Weaving*

Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick*

Elizabeth Barber, *Women's Work: The First 2,000 Years*

María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*

Octavia Butler, *Kindreds*

Saidiya Hartman, *Venus in Two Acts*

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

Ursula Le Guin, *Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*

REFERENCES & DEFINITIONS

1. *My best friend lives two thousand miles away/ and every day/ my fingertips bleed distilled intimacy/ trapped Pavlovas/ dance, I curse, dance / bring her to me/ the bandwidth of her smell*
——Bowker, Geoffrey C., and Susan Leigh Star. 1999. *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences.* MIT Press.

2. In 1666 Britain, Parliament passed an Act to try and maintain the demand for domestically produced wool. Its aims were *'for lessening the importation of linen from beyond seas, and the encouragement of the woollen manufacturer of the kingdom*'. The Act required that when a corpse was buried it should only be dressed in a shroud or garment of wool. An affidavit had to be provided attesting that the burial complied with the Act, sworn by two credible persons
——Richard Burn. 1814. *The Justice of the Peace & Parish Officer*.

3. *To read the archive is to enter a mortuary*
—— Saidiya Hartman. 2007. *Lose Your Mother.* Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. p.17

4. Princess Aurora is the Disney character from the animated musical fantasy film *Sleeping Beauty*. She is cursed to die by pricking her finger on a spinning wheel.
—— Erdman Penner adaptation of Charles Perrault's original story. 1959. *Sleeping Beauty.* Walt Disney Productions.

5. Charlotte is the name of a feminised spider who weaves an elaborate plan to save a pig from death in the children's book *Charlotte's Web.*

—— E.B.White. 1952. *Charlotte's Web.* Harper & Brothers.

6. *The romance of resistance that I failed to narrate and the event of love that I refused to describe raise important questions regarding what it means to think historically about matters still contested in the present and about life eradicated by the protocols of intellectual disciplines.*

——Saidiya Hartman. 2008. *Venus in Two Acts.* Duke University Press.: Small Axe (Volume 12, Number 2). p.10

7. **Suint** –*noun* /swɪnt/

Definition: a natural greasy substance in sheep's wool.

Oxford English Dictionary. 2010. OUP Oxford; 3rd edition.

8. Ursula Le Guin. 2019. *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction.* Ignota Books.

9. *The fleece from the inside of the back legs came away in one blow. The outside of the legs took three blows to shear*

——Tourist Information Board secured opposite The Black Horse Pub, B4335, Pentre Cwrt, Llandysul, SA44 5AX

10. Nora Ephron, David S. Ward, Jeff Arch. 1993. *Sleepless in Seattle.* TriStar Pictures.

11. *Care means all these things and different things to different people, in different situations. So while ways of caring can be identified, researched, and understood concretely and empirically, care remains ambivalent in significance and ontology.*

——María Puig de la Bellacasa. 2017. *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds.* University of Minnesota Press; 3rd edition. p.1

12. *Care is all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.*

——Joan Tronto. 1987. *Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care.* Journal of Women in Culture and Society 12, No. 4.

13. There are many cases of Eve depicted as a spinster. For example, in a 13th century Hunterian Psalter illumination, Eve is depicted holding both a distaff and spindle. Additionally, there is a common rhyme used in John Balls – the English priest of The Peasants' Revolt- 1381 speech, starting '*When Adam delved and Eve span…'*

——Stephen F. Eisenman. 2015. *Communism in Furs: A Dream of Prehistory in William Morris's "John Ball"*. The Art Bulletin, Vol. 87. p. 92

14. **Distaff**: *noun–*

Definition: a staff for holding wool in spinning

adjective –

Definition: the female branch or side of a family. *Used as an adjective to refer to the mothers line of descent within a family, grown from the root use within the technique of spinning, by millenia of women.* For example, in the blurb of the terrible Seth Rogen starring film *NEIGHBORS 2: SORORITY RISING*, *The Boston Globe* of 2016 wrote – *having survived frat boy uproar in the 2014 original, they now have to deal with the distaff side.*

——Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. Accessed Nov. 2021.

15. *Girls spun as they watched the sheep…spun as they trudged or rode muleback from one village to another on errands.*
——Elizabeth Wayland Barber. 1996. *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years - Women, Cloth, and Society in Early Times.* W.W. Norton & Company. p.31

16. *…if to* [make a thing to carry other things] *is human, if that's what it takes, then I am a human being after all. Fully, freely, gladly, for the first time.*
—— Ibid 8.

17. Ibid 8

18. *…to put something you want, because it's useful, edible, or beautiful, into a bag, or a basket, or a bit of rolled bark or leaf, or a net woven of your own hair, or what have you, and then take it home with you, home being another, larger kind of pouch or bag, a container for people, and then later on you take it out and eat it or share it or store it up for winter in a solider container or put it in the medicine bundle or the shrine or the museum, the holy place, the area that contains what is sacred, and then next day you probably do much the same again*
——Ibid 8

19. *I left on the ninth day of September that year. My name was Anne Boyer. I was unfolding under the pale of vermin. I was afraid of dying.*
——Anne Boyer. 2015. *Garments Against Women.* Penguin Books. p.65

20. *Venus de Lespugue* is a venus statuette of a nude female figure of the Gravettian, dated to between 26,000 and 24,000 years

ago. She is thought to wear the earliest depiction of spun thread as a skirt. Currently held in the Musée de l'Homme, Paris.

21. Peter Glob. 1974. *The Mound People; Danish Bronze-Age Man Preserved.* Cornell University Press.

22. Sarah Hoagland. 1991. *Some Thoughts about Caring* in *Feminist Ethics: New Essays.* University of Kansas Press.

23. Ibid 11

24. Judith K. Brown. 1970. *A Note on the Division of Labor by Sex.* American Anthropologist, Vol. 72, No.5.

25. *The cult of germination has always been associated with the cult of the dead. Mother Earth engulfs the bones of its children within it. Women—the Parcae and Moirai—weave human destiny; but they also cut the threads. In most folk representations, Death is woman, and women mourn the dead because death is their work* ——Simone de Beauvoir. 1953 English Edition. *The Second Sex.* Blanche Knopf. p.200

26. **Spider** –*noun* /ˈspʌɪdə/
Etymology: *from earlier - spiþre, spiþur, spiþer (mid-14c.), from Old English spiðra — literally "spinner," – "to draw, stretch, spin". Arachne, from the Ancient Greek word for 'spider' is the protagonist who, in Greek Mythology, challenges Athena to a* weaving contest. —— Robert Graves. 2017. *The Greek Myths: The Complete and Definitive Edition.* Penguin Books.

27. Ibid 11

28. Caleb Klaces. 2019. *Fatherhood*. Prototype Press. p.132

29. "*Last night I felt," she wrote to David's ghost, "like I do at times when things seem to open onto new vistas of excitement – that you were here: floating dense beside me, set someplace between my*

left ear and my shoulder, compressed like thought." She thought about David all the time.

——Chris Kraus. 1997. *I Love Dick.* Semiotext. p.14

30. *Thousands of years of establishing and expanding the usefulness of woven materials have made us see in them first something to be worn, walked on, sat upon, to be cut up, sewn together again, in short, largely something no longer in itself fulfilled*.

——Anni Albers. 1965. *On Weaving.* Wesleyan University Press.

31. Karis Medina. 2020. *Textile TV - Annie Albers's Warp Families.* New York Textile Month, YouTube. Accessed September 2021.

32. Ibid 15. p.34

33. Ibid 15. p.242

34. *The notion of female deities creating a life by spinning a thread may have begun from the association of childbirth with attendant women who did their spinning while waiting to act as midwives in the birthing room. The parallel between bringing forth new thread and new humans—both done by women—strengthened the image.*

—— Ibid 15. p. 240

35. Ibid 15. p.50

36. Zsuzsa Berend. 2000. *The Best of None - Spinsterhood in Nineteenth Century New England.* Journal of Social History, Vol. 22, Issue 4. P. 935-957

37. Rick Davies & Roger Hodgson. 1977. *Give a Little Bit*. Supertramp. A&M Records.

38. *Beginnings are usually more interesting than elaborations and endings. Beginning means exploration, selection, development, a potent vitality not yet limited, nor circumscribed by the tried and tradition. For those of us concerned in our work with the adventure of search, going back to beginnings is seeing ourselves mirrored in others' work, not in the result but in the process.*

——Ibid 30. p.52.

39. **Raddle** - *noun* -

Definition: *An instrument consisting of a wooden bar, with a row of upright pegs set in it, used by domestic weavers to keep the warp of a proper width, and prevent tangling when it is wound upon the beam of the loom.*

——Fine Dictionary. Accessed January 2022.

40. *Called 'The Welsh Not', this token is used by teachers at schools in Wales to discourage children from speaking Welsh by marking those who are heard speaking the language.*

——Richard Warner. 1798. *A Second Walk Through Wales.* G.G and J.Robinson, Pater-Noster-Row.

41. *Writer Reported over 'ugly little trolls' Welsh Jibe.*

——1998. *BBC Online* in response to *The Sunday Times*. Accessed December 2021.

42. A common derogatory rhyme, with the name 'Taffy' deriving from the River Taff in Wales – *Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief; Taffy came to my house and stole a leg of beef; I went to Taffy's house and Taffy was in bed; I upped with the jerry pot and hit him on the head.*

—— Peter Opie & Iona Opie. 1997. *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*. Oxford University Press.

43. Jeremy Clarkson: *I think we are fast approaching the time when the United Nations should start to think seriously about abolishing other languages. What's the point of Welsh for example? All it does is provide a silly maypole around which a bunch of hotheads can get all nationalistic.*

—— Wales Online. 2011. Accessed September 2021.

44. *Tryweryn: The Drowning of a Village.*

——Wyn Thomas. 2015. *BBC Online.* Accessed August 2021.

45. Huw Beynon & Ray Hudston. 2021. *The Shadow of the Mine.* Verso Books.

46. *The Welsh language is a vast drawback to Wales, and a manifold barrier to the moral progress and commercial prosperity of the people. It is not easy to overestimate its evil effects.*

——1847. *The Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales,* commonly referred to in Wales as *Brad y Llyfrau Gleision - 'Treason of the Blue Books*'. Published by The British Government.

47. Rod Liddle. 2010. *Sosban Bach yn Berwi ana* Tan.* The Spectator. * *Misspelt by Liddle. Correction: Berwi* ***ar y*** *Tan*

48. *The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom H. H. Asquith said in 1905 "I would sooner go to hell than to Wales."*

——Kenneth. O. Morgan. 1987. *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880-1980.* Oxford University Press.

49. *From the earliest times the Welsh have been looked upon as an unclean people. It is thus that they have preserved their racial integrity. Their sons and daughters rarely mate with human-kind except their own blood relations..... I often think that we can trace almost all the disasters of English history to the influence of Wales.*

——Evelyn Waugh. 1928. *Decline and Fall.* Chapman and Hall

50. Ibid 49

51. Francis Bedford. 1857. *Portrait of a Lady in Welsh Dress* & *Welsh Spinners and Spinning Wheels* & *Welsh Women Spinning.* Collection of Photographs of Assorted titles.

52. *Welsh say 'Racist' Booker Judge Must Go*

——Marianna Macdonald. 1996. Evening Standard. Accessed December 2021.

53. Elmer G. Suhr. 1958. *Venus de Milo, the Spinner – The Link Between a Famous Art Mystery and Ancient Fertility Symbols*. The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 18, Issue 4.

54. *I want to suggest that thinking with care compels us to think from the perspective of how cuts foster relationships rather than how they disconnect worlds. This allows lookin at "cuts" from the perspective of how they are re-creating, or being created by, "partial connections." That this, we can draw attention to how "new" patterns inherit from a web of relationalities that contributed to make them possible.*

——Ibid 11. p.78

55. *The Chinvat Bridge or 'bridge of judgement' is the sifting bridge in Zoroastrianism which separates the world of the living from the world of the dead.*

——Lucinda Dirven. 2009. *My Lord with his Dogs. Continuity and Change in the Cult of Nergal in Parthian Mesopotamia.* Beirut Texte und Studien.

56. Eric Broudy. 2021. *The Book of Looms - A History of the Handloom from Ancient Times to the Present.* Brandeis University Press.

57. Edwina Attlee. 2021. *Strayed Homes: Cultural Histories of the Domestic in Public.* Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.

58. Ibid 25. p.118

59. My husband bought and learned to use a new word-processing program two years before I began to use it, for exactly these reasons. I was in the middle of writing a book using the old system and couldn't afford to take the time out both to learn the new one and to convert everything. I was already too deep into "production.".

——Ibid 8. p 36

60. Edit Collective. 2022. *Book review: Strayed Homes – Cultural Histories of the Domestic in Public by Edwina Attlee* The Architects Journal. Accessed January 2022.

61. Ibid 6

62. M. NourbeSe Philip. 2015. *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks.* Wesleyan University Press.

63. *In 'A Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad' (1925) Sigmund Freud speculated that the operation of memory itself can be understood as a process of inscription. He compared the functions of psychic recording and memory to a child's erasable writing tablet. Both form a collection of inscribed traces that is at once the mark of writing and an archival practice, and both also stave off forgetfulness and the passage of time, temporality itself.*

——Charles Merewether, Sigmund Freud, Christian Boltanski, Michel Foucault & Andy Warhol. 2006. *The Archive.* Whitechapel Documents of Contemporary Art.

64. Joyce Burnette. 2008. *Women Workers in the British Industrial Revolution*. EH.Net Encyclopaedia, edited by Robert Whaples. Accessed August 2021.

65. *Godfrey's Cordial, colloquially known as 'Mother's Friend', was a patent medicine, containing laudanum (a tincture of opium) in a treacle syrup, used as a sedative to quieten infants and children in Victorian Britain. Used mostly by mothers working in industry, it ensured that they could work the maximum hours of their employment, without being disturbed by their infants, and thus increased the family income*.

——Elizabeth Lomax. 1973. *The Uses and Abuses of Opiates in Nineteenth-Century England"*. Bulletin of the History of Medicine. p.167–176.

66. **Spinning Jenny** - *noun–*

Definition: *a machine for spinning with more than one spindle at a time, patented by Hargreaves in 1770*

—— Francis Espinasse. 1823. *Lancashire Worthies.* Simpkin, Marshall & Co.

67. *British Parliamentary Census Report for The Central Board of Commissioners, collecting data from 65 Wool Factories in Great Britain.* Dr. Mitchell. 1834.

—— Ibid 64

68. Michel de Certeau. 1991. *The Writing of History.* Columbia University Press.

69. *The loss of stories sharpens the hunger for them. So it is tempting to fill in the gaps and to provide closure where there is none. To create a space for mourning where it is prohibited. To fabricate a witness to a death not much noticed.*

——Ibid 6. p.8

70. *Octavia Butler's Kindred offers a model for a practice. When Dana, the protagonist of Butler's speculative fiction, travels from the twentieth century to the 1820s to encounter her enslaved foremother, Dana finds to her surprise that she is not able to rescue her kin or escape the entangled relations of violence and domination, but instead comes to accept that they have made her own existence possible. With this in mind, we must bear what cannot be borne: the image of Venus in chains*.

——Ibid 6, p.14 in reference to Octavia Butler. 1979. *Kindreds.* Doubleday.

71. Ken. *FFOTOS DERW.* CD-Rom. *Pentrecwrt, Llandysul.* Photographer unconfirmed. Viewed February 2022.

72. *So much for the fighting*
and the sex
I want to be alone
with you in the next room.

—— Kathleen Ossip. 2021. *Marriage.* The Paris Review. Issue 328.

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