Creativitas: Critical Explorations in Literary Studies
An International Journal of English and Cultural Studies

ISSN: 3048-8575 (Online)

Volume 3, Issue 1 (2026)

Manuscript Title: Embodying Druidic *Seanchaí*: Reconnecting Humanity with Nature

Author: Riley Harper

Designation & Institutional Affiliation: Ph.D. Student, Florida Institute of Technology

Email: riley.harper034@gmail.com

ORCiD: 0009-0007-9086-9592

DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24272209

Abstract

We are entering a period of ecological brevity, with anthropogenic global warming changing every aspect of life. While the digital age is consuming us, we forget our origins as caretakers of our planet. Earth provided us with the gift of life, and throughout time and innovation, we have lost that mutual symbiotic responsibility to care for that which bore us. *Our Green Heart: The Soul and Science of Forests* by Diana Beresford-Kroeger connects botanical biochemistry with Irish Druidic culture. She was the last child in Ireland to be taught her ancestral birthright by *seanchaí* storytellers. As an adult, she pursued a higher education in biochemistry, learning the intricacies of the chemical bonds behind processes like transpiration that have the potential to mitigate climate change. In her novel, Beresford-Kroeger not only recalls the stories she was told as a child, but

directly links them to botanical processes she describes in detail. Any jargon she includes is immediately defined, with clear examples provided to complete the picture. This book leaves readers educated and renewed with a sense of duty to fulfil; bridging poetry and protection, spirituality and sustainability. Peace can only be realized when we reconnect and revitalize our relationship with nature, and this is what Beresford-Kroeger hopes to convey. Our tools of telling stories have evolved with human progress, but the essence of Druidic culture remains.

Keywords: *Plant Humanities; Ecological Sustainability; Botanical Biochemistry; Irish Druidic Culture; Environmental Storytelling*.

Conflict of Interest: The author/s declared no conflicts of interest.

Article History: Received: 17 March 2026. Accepted: 17 September 2026. Published: 30 November 2026.

Copyright: © 2026 by the author/s.

License: *The Sapientia Initiative*. Distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Publisher: https://thesapientiainitiative.org/

Remembering Our Roots: Nature, Tradition, and the Possibility of Renewal

Turning the first page of this book felt like smelling freshly cut grass. The hint of a fresh start, coupled with the inevitability that this new trim will eventually return to the state we try to jettison. Full of imagery describing Ireland's countryside, Diana Beresford-Kroeger's novel *Our Green Heart: The Soul and Science of Forests* (2024) immerses its readers in an academic setting that symbolizes cyclical new beginnings.

She begins by educating her readers about the history of Druidic culture, how learning about tradition for the first time memorializes how we as a species must look back to guide us forward. Beresford-Kroeger reflects on her upbringing and learning from the travelling prophet of nature: "the storyteller, the custodian of ancient lore" (23). These *seanchaí* share their sapience of the earth, their methods evolving from Gaelic bards carrying customs through time. Although overshadowed by colonialism, these oral historians moved throughout the seasons, sharing reimagined traditions of the environment. Roman colonization threatened the continued communion of their native wisdom, painting an eerily relevant picture of how education at its very

core is being attacked today. But at the time, their resilience and bravery sharing cultural footprints only fuelled their resolution, spreading "inherited knowledge with ancient origins" (Beiner 382) concisely. *Seanchaí* had a bed made up for them in every farmhouse, respected and revered throughout the country. They travelled from fall to spring, revelling in venerable beliefs that still ring true. There is, however, a danger when idealizing such a traditional way of thinking. Today's polarized climate may have led to sharp divisions within and between countries, but we as a species have never been so in tune with each other.

Increased globalization comes with many benefits and drawbacks. A higher awareness of events happening across the globe and the greatest connectivity we have ever known is accompanied by changing trends and eco-anxiety. The struggle to slow down and recentre is something Beresford-Kroeger states can be minimized by spending time around trees. In the era of the Anthropocene, a connection with nature is asphyxiated by our digital nooses and shortened attention spans. Reflection within nature reminds us where we came from, and where we will return. Not only physical medicine can be gained from forests but emotional healing as well, as spending time in green spaces with no distractions can help the brain rewire and relax. A source of tranquillity amidst our eco-anxiety is needed more than ever, but forests are being disregarded by those who need to pay the most attention. While reforestation is occurring in small efforts, the ancient forests that contribute the most to carbon sequestration and mental clarity are being razed. Individual sustainable efforts such as avoiding meat and carpooling are helpful to a certain degree, but this novel implores systemic change. Recognizing the paramount significance of protecting ancient forests and the biodiversity within them is the solution for conserving resources for our finite future as much as we can. It is vital to heed Beresford-Kroeger's advice written in her novel, but perhaps even more so to comment on the dangers of romanticizing tradition in today's ever-evolving climate without contemporary adaptation.

Diana's Dream

The author of *Our Green Heart: The Soul and Science of Forests* was the last child in Ireland to receive an ancestral Druidic education. Beresford-Kroeger grew up on a farm with her great-aunt and uncle in the valley of Lisheens in southern Ireland, nurtured by Mother Nature. She lost her parents when she was young and quickly adopted gratitude for her surviving family and the Celtic culture they steeped her in. When she got to college, she studied biochemistry in a botanical

© Creativitas: Critical Explorations in Literary Studies. Content published under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

context, curious to find scientific proof behind the stories of the *seanchaí* she grew up listening to. She was taught that the valley was alive, actively caring for its inhabitants in return for respect and coexistence. This book is the culmination of her life's work, where she integrates her traditional Celtic upbringing with scientific facts in order to help people learn about climate change and how forests around the world have the power to mitigate it. The interconnectedness of her lessons changes how readers perceive this piece of nonfiction. The ease with which she amalgamates childhood memories with biogeochemistry almost forces the information to be remembered, driving nostalgia through her writing. Nevertheless, she fails to note any shortcomings of her Druidic upbringing, creating doubt that there may actually exist a perfect spirituality.

Brehon law emphasizes healing through nature, mutual reciprocity and gratitude for the life we bring each other. While Beresford-Kroeger was brought up on holistic Celtic culture, she wanted to prove to herself that what she had learned was backed by facts. She became a Brehon ward, an official student of the Celts. After earning two doctoral degrees in biochemistry and biology, she began traveling the world in search of confirming her upbringing. Along her journey, she learned from other cultures how nature forms their foundational spirituality in a similar way, her thirst for knowledge never quenched. In her novel, she intersects chapters on global healing and endemic biodiversity with information about her own arboretum. This is an area of her own garden in her 160-acre home in Ontario, Canada, where she has collected and categorized thousands of seeds of different tree species. While this seemingly endless hobby may seem almost impossible, Beresford-Kroeger is determined. This arboretum is rich in seeds of knowledge, and can be utilized in the future to clone and replant rare, ancient forests. With these viable genetic replicates, the seeds can be shipped to their respective native regions and planted. This restoration of native trees will expedite climate mitigation, cooling down the planet and restoring the nutrient balance of the ecosystem. Throughout her writing, it is evident that she channels the *seanchaí* storytelling she witnessed as a child. Her complex background, coupled with knowledge of science and Druidic culture are conveyed in a calm tone, reflecting confidence and proficiency. She hopes her message can span across all audiences - proving to the scientists and academics how the spiritual connection with nature so revered by the Druids is the next step to survival.

Expanding Our Ecological Consciousness

Innovation and progress have always been the primary goal of the human race, being one step ahead, prioritizing advancement in the face of pernicious consequences. We have thus entered the Anthropocene, where human activity dominates the planet. Aptly stated, "Greed so often clouds clarity of thought" (Beresford-Kroeger 163), and the means by which progress occurs is now exhausting our resources and our altruism. Eco-anxiety is a growing phenomenon as well, with people feeling depression and anxiety associated with change in climate. These emotions can be riddled with guilt, as we are becoming increasingly aware that we are the sole proprietors of Earth's bleak future.

However, there is some level of comfort that can arise from knowing we caused climate change— the fact that we can reverse it. While current makeshift ideas like geoengineering sulfate aerosol injections into the atmosphere are flawed, nature-based solutions such as replanting ancient forests pose more promising results. Grassroots movements are pioneering sustainability, and slowly, people are starting to care. While it may not be at the same veneration as ancient Druidic sacred meditation in the trees, environmentalists of every expertise are starting to recognize the importance of plants and their contributions to culture and health. Beresford-Kroeger's novel implies that the first step of caring about nature is forming experiences and a mutual gratitude for the world around you. This lost art form is smothered by the digital age, with concepts like ethnobotany being overshadowed by plant blindness. This cognitive bias is defined by viewing vegetation as simply a background and not recognizing the ecological, evolutionary or experiential significance of plants (Thomas et al. 42). While not a perfect term in the slightest, the essence of plant blindness remains: "plants and people have evolved fundamentally different relationships with time, with implications for how they and we interact and relate to the environment" (Thomas et al. 46). As life gets busier and biodiversity diminishes, plants are being disregarded and instead viewed as commodities. This is the main warning of *Our Green Heart*, urging people to spend more time in nature. The only way something can be protected is if it is cared for, and people can only start caring for something if they associate it with a positive life experience. A childhood defined by time outdoors breeds compassion with the earth and all the organisms within it. A sense of spiritual calmness can be gained by spending time in a forest or even just seeing green spaces in an urban area (Barton and Rogerson 79), reducing plant blindness and alleviating eco-anxiety.

© Creativitas: Critical Explorations in Literary Studies. Content published under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

Reconnecting with nature can enrich empathy, a quality needed now more than ever amidst our individualistic society.

Druidic Origins as Caretakers

Part of this book's charm is the homeward-bound, hopeful recollection of a child's perception of the countryside. Beresford-Kroeger found a sense of comfort and a soul connection with all life forms. She learned the cyclical reciprocity of nature at a young age, cognizant of life and death on her family's subsistence farm. Celtic culture is overwhelmingly defined by the preservation and protection of knowledge, ranging from medicinal to philosophical, with the *seanchaís* embodying environmental stewardship (Beresford-Kroeger 11). Considered the high priests of the Celts, Druids found beauty and significance in the serenity of nature, the volumes spoken in the silence of the hills. This knowledge and way of living have been passed down through generations, with Beresford-Kroeger's great-aunt, Nellie, bringing her up with this outlook as a priority. They would often travel to the sacred ash tree on her farm, known as *nion* in Old Irish, spelt using the Ogham alphabet. This script formed the basis of Europe's first language, and its tree-like letters reflect how nature and the forest not only form the structure and foundation of culture but also its method of communication (Beresford-Kroeger 13). Nellie would stand in front of this ash tree and sit in a deep meditative silence, only interrupted by the shaking of tree leaves. The connection formed between the two species, known as *tost*, was incredibly significant to how the author began to form, comprehend and appreciate her relationship with the earth around her. She recollects that her family taught her how "the landscape breaks its silence and speaks to those who are willing to listen" (Beresford-Kroeger 15). It is rare for such contemplation to be performed at all, let alone in nature, an intentionality lost throughout time. The essence of this memory conveys the message found throughout the entire book and the aim of the Druidic culture: respect the sacred interconnectedness of nature and coexist alongside the harmony of the earth.

The empathetic perspective found within Druidic customs is defined by a reverence for nature. Our society today is overly concerned with trying to achieve hyper-efficiency while fighting against technological distractions. However, it has been proven that spending time in nature has the ability to reduce stress and boost cognitive function (Barton and Rogerson 80). Beresford-Kroeger links Druidic morals with biophilia, the theory that human beings have an intrinsic, genetic predilection for nature (Hamilton 57). She continuously points out that we are

transactionally taking advantage of nature and the resources it provides, too focused on how our species can benefit instead of considering our impact on the planet as a whole. Our biophilic nature, while it may be just a hypothesis, is rooted in facts — the Druids recognized it, and so should we. There is an evolutionary advantage in coexisting harmoniously with nature, giving back what we take only so we can be rewarded again. This movement of mutualism should be revived, with conservation at the forefront of our interactions.

Modern Spirituality

In *Our Green Heart: The Soul and Science of Forests*, the author remarks that Brehon laws are being examined in contemporary Irish courts to offer an ancestral pro-environmental perspective amidst today's struggling climate. This may bring about a much-needed feeling of hope, where a past ideology could be utilized as inspiration to learn and adapt to present circumstances. Brehon legislation required reparation, which Beresford-Kroeger says would therefore not allow geoengineering to be considered as a climate change mitigation strategy (Beresford-Kroeger 142). This specific geoengineering idea includes the injection of aerosol particles into the stratosphere, thereby creating a cooling effect. There are several drawbacks and unintended consequences to this idea, however, including depletion of the ozone layer, possible increase in acid rain and a change in weather patterns (US EPA), requiring further study in a broader region and time scale than has been conducted. Beresford-Kroeger feels strongly against this, stating that "Geoengineers want to fix climate change quickly so that we humans can continue our rape and plunder of nature with the fewest interruptions possible" (140). She believes the scientists behind these project designs do not wish to restore our resources or the balance between ecosystems; instead, they are driven by ego and greed.

Ecological stewardship and an understanding of nature in an evolutionary context, how we depend on plants to survive, could be the mindset shift that leads to positive pro-environmental action. Engaging more with nature and planting native flora, can attract pollinators and help stabilize food security. While Druidry may not resonate as a widespread religious identity like it used to from the 4th –1st century BCE, the interactions between intellect, behavior and experience that compose this folk religion may remain (Cooper 64). The Romans smothered the Age of the Celts and traditional druids faded from history, but Modern Druidry is revitalized as a global movement bridging ancient Indo-European traditions, Celtic mythology and Western spirituality

© Creativitas: Critical Explorations in Literary Studies. Content published under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

(Cooper 60). Again, characterized by the connection with the landscape, seasonality and innate creativity, these harmonious qualities could be useful when making political and legislative decisions to again bond people and earth.

Relevance

While Druidry offers promising outlooks on the coexistence of humanity and nature, it does not smoothly conform with modern practices of conservation nor the increased financial drive in the Western world. Contemporary environmental science has come a long way since the age of the Celts, and problems come to light when idealizing Druidic practices. As with attempting to translate any indigenous practice into contemporary thinking, the process will unfortunately entail translational gaps and generational disconnect. Not only is there an issue with the majority of cultures requiring scientific proof in the Western context to justify it, but younger generations are also inherently resistant and sceptical of tradition. Environmental philosopher Timothy Morton argues, "Putting something called Nature on a pedestal and admiring it from afar… is a paradoxical act of sadistic admiration" (5). Simply seeing the Earth with distant, preservationist eyes will never lead to the all-encompassing connection that occurs when embarking on a journey of mutual respect and gratitude. *Braiding Sweetgrass* author Robin Wall Kimmerer remarks that humanity has forgotten the "honor to be the guardian of another species" (151). We have instead prioritized high monoculture crop yields and unethically colossal hordes of livestock. Shifting to treating nature as a commodity has led us to forget to be grateful for the trophic power we hold, and anything besides immersing ourselves in the natural world is insufficient for progress.

Biochemical Ecology

This book is remarkable in the way it relays emotional anecdotes to stir the reader's feelings, while simultaneously balancing an influx of biochemical evidence. While jargon is present throughout, Beresford-Kroeger defines it quickly, able to expand the reader's technical knowledge without an air of condescension. Her first point is painted by a contrasting picture of red and green – haemoglobin and chlorophyll. She describes the chemical similarities of the two macromolecules and how they only differ by their base elements. Describing a beautiful parallel metaphor, the coexistence of the building blocks of respiration and photosynthesis clearly illustrates the harmony of plants and animals, "dependent on one another as equal partners" (Beresford-Kroeger 7). The

God complex of the human species is stifling, and our need to control our surroundings has led us to a future of scarcity and imbalance. We should instead remember our origins and deflate our ego.

She then goes on to discuss exactly how forests hold a future of spiritual, medicinal and ecological promise. Ancient forests in particular are massive carbon sinks, with their capacity to sequester carbon dioxide increasing as they age. Reforestation is a promising restoration tactic, but evolution varies by scale, so we will never reach the amount of excess carbon that needs to be taken out of the atmosphere in enough time (Beresford-Kroeger 41). It cannot be solely relied upon to mitigate climate change. Boreal forests in particular are responsible for the majority of the oxygenation of the planet, completing the cycle by storing 1460–1600 billion metric tons of organic carbon only in the northern permafrost region, twice as much currently held in the atmosphere (Shuur). As the climate warms and permafrost melts, ancient stores of carbon, methane and microbes trapped in the ice are released. This directly contributes to the greenhouse effect through the climate's positive warming feedback loop, along with the possibility of introducing ancient deadly diseases that our immune systems are unprepared to defend against. Furthermore, ancient native trees contribute to their species' germplasm, "the knowledge necessary to survive" (Beresford-Kroeger 31). The deforestation of these plants is decreasing biodiversity and the genetic transfer of positive traits that can be passed down to help younger trees survive stress and temperature variation, markers of global warming. We are losing potentially beneficial medicinal compounds as well, since "the older the forest, the greater the treasury of medicine" (Beresford-Kroeger 43). Through deforestation, we are disregarding a plethora of scientific discoveries and unearthed history.

Trees in the boreal forest release anhydrous compounds into the air, that when absorbed into the outer layer of plants and animals, not only signal the start of the spring season, but also harbor antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and antitumor attributes, to name a few (Beresford-Kroeger 151). These medicinal aerosols from pine trees regulate blood pressure and boost the immune system once they dissolve in sebaceous oil on the skin and enter the bloodstream (Beresford-Kroeger 158). Forest bathing, the process of spending time around trees for these known physical and mental health benefits, is a practice utilized worldwide to recenter the spirit.

All of this to say, Beresford-Kroeger supports her spiritual advocacy of forests with their endless ecological and medical contributions. From describing the roles of fulvic and humic acid

© Creativitas: Critical Explorations in Literary Studies. Content published under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

in senescence (how leaves change color in fall) to the healing properties of saltwater, this book is dominated by scientific prowess. The author's modest way of expressing the knowledge she gained from her two PhDs is complemented by her message that the most relevant knowledge she ever learned was from Druidic storytelling. She implores the reader to take note of the scientific processes that balance the ecosystems, but hopes in turn they will connect with the emotional kinship that can be formed with nature.

The Bioplan

Beresford-Kroeger ends her book with her driving point and true purpose of her career: the Bioplan. Holding the future of the planet in our hands is overwhelming, and hopelessness is difficult to overcome, but she is hopeful that we can undo what we have done. Her plan is threefold: protect ancient virgin forests, plant native trees and implement nature education worldwide. Collective action is first and foremost modelled by individuals, so she encourages people to "plant native trees, one per person per year for the next six years" (Beresford-Kroeger 176), totalling to approximately 50 billion trees. This would stabilize the carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, and the increased levels of greenery in urban areas will lead to mental stability and "aid in the reduction of asthma, stress and blood pressure" (Beresford-Kroeger 178). She recommends oak trees as the first step, as there is a guarantee to find a species of oak native to each country, and outlines specifically how to grow a full oak tree from its acorn at home. She marks her Bioplan with a push for environmental curriculum and self-learning. Urban populations have lost the awareness of their surroundings and forget that the forests have defined their past, present and future (Beresford-Kroeger 178). Learning more about nature will lead to a fascination with the living world, forming experiences with nature that will define and develop into pro-environmental behavior and advocacy.

Beresford-Kroeger's arboretum is home to thousands of rare, ancient seeds, and she has worked on a method to discover how she can clone these seeds to send them across the world to be planted. Ancient trees have been found to prefer a lower soil pH for growth, demonstrating how cloning and planting ancient trees in their native environments could grow well in our acidifying climate. Throughout her life, she has studied how to save forests, whether it be through herbaria, somatic cloning, or freezing haploid cells. The dried plant specimens found and catalogued in herbaria across the world can keep viable DNA stable, a way to prevent the complete loss of a

species and freeze time. Secondly, the somatic cells found inside plants can be isolated in vitro to develop into a fully formed adult plant through independent vegetative reproduction. Lastly, haploid sexual cells can be frozen and remain indefinitely viable for fertility preservation and genetic research (Beresford-Kroeger 187). These three methods are methodically detailed, allowing for easy implementation by scientists to reinstate native forests across the world. It is apparent that Beresford-Kroeger's lifelong research has accumulated to form this kind of prophecy, a failsafe approach to save the earth's oldest flora, and now she needs to only wait. She has dedicated her life to learning and now she teaches others, travelling across the globe to lecture what she has discovered. Perhaps through these journeys she will send out her message of hope, and the Druidic culture of old can be the guiding force to help save our home.

Closing Morality

"Today in this climate of destruction, unity of thought must be recaptured. People of the world must learn to appreciate the wonder of their own human biodiversity and use it as a medicine to mend their torn spirits" (Beresford-Kroeger 96). This quote manages to embody the unwavering feeling left with after finishing this book. Realism, opportunity and disappointment wavered, conflicted by our future prospects yet collective dawdling to mitigate the climate crisis. Food security is threatened by a decrease in pollinators and emergence of smaller seeds, and Beresford-Kroeger laid out a plan to reduce the atmospheric carbon dioxide as efficiently as something ensuring long-term success can be. Every aspect of this world is finite, and we should be doing our best to live and care for it to the best of our abilities. Working and coexisting with the land, protecting the biodiversity of not only the species surrounding us but also embracing the diversity within ourselves. Our origins as the earth's caretakers have been forgotten, and the least we can do is cooperate with each other to try and fix the irreparable damage we have inflicted. The beauty of our prolific human race is that every individual has a different perception of the world around us, just like every seed grows up to be a different tree. Recognizing and embracing our differences allows us to maximize our creativity, and incorporating the Druidic roots of harmony and compassion into modern conservation biology will lead us to a future reminiscent of their peaceful prosperity.

© Creativitas: Critical Explorations in Literary Studies. Content published under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

References

Asdal, Kristin, et al., editors. *Technoscience: The Politics of Interventions*. Unipub, 2007.

Barton, Jo, and Mike Rogerson. "The Importance of Greenspace for Mental Health." *BJPsych International*, vol. 14, no. 4, Nov. 2017, pp. 79–81. *Cambridge University Press*, https://doi.org/10.1192/S2056474000002051.

Beiner, Guy. "Seanchas." *New Literary History*, vol. 56, no. 2, 2025, pp. 381–94.

Beresford-Kroeger, Diana. *Our Green Heart: The Soul and Science of Forests*. Random House Canada, 2024.

Cooper, Michael T. "The Roles of Nature, Deities, and Ancestors in Constructing Religious Identity in Contemporary Druidry." *Pomegranate*, vol. 11, no. 1, Sept. 2009, pp. 58–73. *journal.equinoxpub.com*, https://doi.org/10.1558/pome.v11i1.58.

Hamilton, Lawrence S. "Forest and Tree Conservation Through Metaphysical Constraints." *The George Wright Forum*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2002, pp. 57–78, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43598918.

Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Milkweed Editions, 2013.

Luo, Hongxue, et al. "Biochar Enhances Blue Carbon Stability in Seagrass Ecosystems." Journal of Applied Ecology, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1111/1365-2664.70320.

Morton, Timothy. *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. Harvard University Press, 2009.

Schuur, T. "Permafrost and the Global Carbon Cycle." NOAA Arctic, 31 Oct. 2019, https://arctic.noaa.gov/report-card/report-card-2019/permafrost-and-the-global-carbon-cycle/.

Thomas, Howard, et al. "Plant Blindness and Sustainability." *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, vol. 23, no. 1, Jan. 2021, pp. 41–57. *Silverchair*, https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-09-2020-0335.

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt, et al. *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*. U of Minnesota Press, 2017.

US EPA, OAR. *About Geoengineering*. Overviews and Factsheets. 24 June 2025, https://www.epa.gov/geoengineering/about-geoengineering.