**Ways Through the Wood:**

**The Rogue Cartographies of Robert Holdstock’s Mythago Wood Cycle as a Cognitive Map for Creative Process in Fiction.**

**Abstract:**

In this article I would like to discuss Robert Holdstock’s Mythago Wood Cycle – *Mythago Wood* (1984); *Lavondyss* (1988); *The Bone Forest* (1991); *The Hollowing* (1993); *Gate of Horn, Gate of Ivory* (1998);and *Avilion* (2009) – in the context of creative writing praxis. I will argue that Holdstock’s Mythago Wood Cycle offers a powerfully resonant metaphor for the creative process: how stories are created and written (informed by the oral tradition), and how we, as readers and listeners, interact with them. As a novelist, scholar of folklore and folk tales, and professional storyteller it is something I am familiar with and fascinated by, and it dove-tails with my current Creative Writing PhD at the University of Leicester: a dramatization of the creative process in novel form, and so this is a reflection on my ongoing investigation into creative writing research through practice.

Key words: *Creative Process; Robert Holdstock; The Fantastic; Liminality; Woodland.*

**Introduction**

The novelist Robert Holdstock died in November 2009 aged 61, leaving behind a series of science fiction, fantasy, horror and mystery novels (the latter under the pseudonym Ken Blake). The cycle he is best known for is the Mythago Cycle/Ryhope Wood (the terms are used interchangeably by the novelist and his publishers: here I will opt for “Mythago Wood Cycle”; and use Holdstock’s plural “mythagos”) series of novels, six in total running from 1984-2009. John Clute, co-editor of the *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, summarizes the cycle thus:

The sequence as a whole is a central contribution to late-20th-Century fantasy, and is almost embarrassingly dense with fantasy tropes. (1999: 475)

The first novel to be published in the series, *Mythago Wood* (1984), starts with the disappearance of the scholar-father, George Huxley, which leads to his two sons (Christian, and his younger brother, Steven) returning in 1947 to the family home, a lodge on the edge of Ryhope: a small section of ancient woodland situated in Herefordshire, on the Borders between England and Wales. They are shocked to discover the woodland’s boundaries seem to have *moved*, and it has overwhelmed the lodge. The father’s journal is unearthed and it relates an increasing obsession with the woodland and various “mythagos”, the core concept of Holdstock’s cycle.

The author provides several definitions of this slippery term. The first is offered in *Mythago Wood* by Christian Huxley to his brother, Steven – explaining how in ancient woodland the “aura” around all living things, creates “a sort of creative field that can interact with our consciousness”. Paraphrasing their father, Christian says:

And it’s in the unconscious that we carry what he calls the pre-mythago – that’s unconscious that we carry what he calls the pre-mythago – that’s *myth imago,* the image of the idealized form of a myth creature. The image takes on substance in a natural environment, solid flesh, blood, clothing, and – as you saw – weaponry. (1984: 49)

The sons venture in the various “zones” (ash, oak, thorn, et cetera) of Ryhope asynchronously, resulting in dramatically different consequences. They find themselves sucked into the mythic landscape of Ryhope, which is an extended portal or “Time Abyss” (Clute 1999: 946-947): the further in you go, the bigger (or older) it gets. This trope appears throughout Fantasy fiction, it is “common to fantasy, uncommon anywhere else” (ibid.: 586). It crops up in Jorge Luis Borge’s *The Aleph* (1945) as an object that contains the whole universe, in the year the first atomic bombs were used in warfare and, as such, is not surprisingly a lingering device of the Atomic Age. However, the sense of expansive interiority and dilatory disjuncture are common descriptors in tales of “hollow hills” and other portals to the “Otherworld”.

It is not until Holdstock’s last published novel, *Avilion* (2009), that Steven and Guiwenneth are reunited. They settle down in the valley in an old Roman villa (an architectural mythago conjured from Steven's memory) and have a couple of children, Jack and Yssobel. *Avilion* resumes the story at the point when this idyll is shattered. Guiwenneth has disappeared and Yssobel has gone to find her – heading inwards to Avilion/Lavondyss. Jack (half human, half mythago like his sister – both “red” and “green” journeys outwards to the edge of Ryhope – desperate to see the world of his father, the Lodge where it all started, the village of Shadoxhurst, and hopefully find some clues that will help in the search. By the time Jack reaches “the fields we know” it is the present day (the original disappearance of the three Huxley men – George, Steven and Christian – occurred in the Forties). As all travellers of Faerie discover, time runs differently in each world. In an intertextual touch Steven has quested Jack with finding his old copy of H.G. Well’s *The Time Machine* (1895)in the Lodge. Jack's presence there dislodges the ghost/mythago of his grandfather, George Huxley – and we have some insight into the original chain of events.

Overall, Ryhope Wood acts as both a portal to otherworlds (the deep past; Faerie) and as a place of initiation, transformation and generation, interfacing in a mysterious way with anyone foolhardy enough to penetrate its fastness to create physical manifestations of folklore and ancestral memory.

The novels conversation with genre is worth noting. As Raelke Grimmer concluded in this journal:

Far from being prescriptive, actively engaging with genre and using such conventions as tools in writing aids the creative process. It is by thinking about genre and crossing genre boundaries that new genres emerge in a renegotiation of the changing social contexts in which writers create their works. (Grimmer 2017)

I would argue that Holdstock’s cycle does this, although it is conventionally categorized as Fantasy, and has received accolades as such (winning the World Fantasy Award in 1984). For some, such a designation stigmatizes it beyond the pale of academic discourse, for, as Le Guin wryly puts it, as a literary tradition, Fantasy is “distinguished in college English departments mainly by being ignored” (2004: 42), albeit with notable exceptions (e.g. the sister genres of Gothic and Science Fiction). Holdstock’s fiction has, in singular fashion, followed “a deep current in one direction – towards rejoining the ‘ocean of story’, fantasy,” in Le Guin’s sense of “things not actually present” (ibid.). And yet there is a hybrid quality to Holdstock’s cycle as it imports science fictional and faux-scholarly textual elements into the prose. Events are given a pseudo-scientific frame and are layered with psychological ambiguity. Through this stylistic cross-hatch Holdstock the scientist, trained as a medical zoologist, debates with Holdstock the genre author.

Holdstock first used the term “mythago” in a short story published in 1981 (winning the British Science Fiction Short Fiction Award with it in 1982). The short story was written “under pressure” (Holdstock, 2009), in a writers’ workshop in Milford-on-Sea, 1979. When the eponymous novel was published in 1984 it went onto win the BSF Novel Award, the World Fantasy Award the following year, and many other prizes. Over the course of the next twenty-five years Holdstock charted a complex and enticing mythos which continues to generate fan interest and critical attention. There is a small but growing scholarship around his work (e.g. Morse; Matolscy 2011).

I first began reading Holdstock in the 1980s when I came across an extract of *Mythago Wood* (1984), “The Horse Shrine”, in a book about trees. Because of the non-fiction context and the journal style it was written in, I took it to be a description of an actual place and experience – at least I recall *wantin*g it to be true. This frisson stayed with me throughout reading the first novel – it was more than the usual suspension of disbelief. As Brian Aldiss suggests, Holdstock’s mythos is so tangible that it is easy to forget it is relating imaginary events: “It is hard to believe that the Wood does not exist in reality. Happily, it exists in Unreality.” (2001: 1)

Although I did not know it then I was experiencing what Tzvetan Todorov famously described in his definition of the “Fantastic”:

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know... there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world.  The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions:  either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and the laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality—but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. … The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty... The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event. (1975: 25)

Whilst the uncertainty remained during my reading of *Mythago Wood* I experienced the fantastic as Todorov describes, or, as Mendlesohn defines it, the Liminal, in her speculative taxonomy of Fantasy: “The anxiety and the continued maintenance and *irresolution* of the fantastic becomes the locus of the ‘fantasy’.” (2008: xxiii) It was a visceral experience that made my heart beat faster. This physical reaction was exacerbated by the alluring ideas and gripping plot; by the earthy physicality with which Holdstock described the intrusions and presence of the preternatural characters; by the vividness of the sylvan environment he conjured; and the tantalising premise: that you could stumble upon such a place as Ryhope Wood. Although situated in Herefordshire (which was farther away for me then), it could be almost *any* small woodland – indeed the one I had on my doorstep. It stirred in me a strong sense of Vaughan Williams-like recognition (“I had that sense of recognition … here was something which I had known all my life, only I didn’t know it…” cited by Holdstock 1984) and an “intense sense of belonging” (Gersie et al. 2014: 14). The seductive, almost intoxicating, premise of Holdstock’s Mythago Wood is that *any* woodland can provide such an interface.

It is a portal that you could step through at any moment.

Whenever we enter the green shade of a forest our minds and bodies are affected. We generally relax, breathe the clean air, enjoy the bird song, glimpse wildlife, savour flora, enjoy the shift in the quality of sound. The health benefits are well known – it does not take a scientist to tell us how walking in a wood makes us feel, although Shinrinyoku, the Japanese concept of “forest bathing” and sylvan therapy is now being promoted as good for one’s well-being.

Yet this experience is something I wish to consider here in terms of writerly process and reader-response.

In the ecosystem of the text, the Shinrinyokueffect occurs in a three-fold way. *Before* publication, in writing about such an environment Holdstock accessed a space which helped him generate extraordinary ideas, characters and situations. *During* thereading of his Mythago Wood novels, the reader can then also access that space. And then, when we walk in a woodland, *after* reading his novels, the quality of our experience is transformed.

I posit that Holdstock’s Mythago Wood Cycle offers an extended metaphor for the creative process – the novels are fecund with stories *about* story, how they are created, told and remembered. My focus here will be to discuss them as meta-narratives and what principles we can draw from them for our own creative use, not in terms of ideas, but for methodological inspiration. The dramatization of the creative process relates directly to my own research – a novel exploring the cross-fertilization of folk cultures between the Scottish Lowlands and the Southern Appalachians. The backdrop is very different, but the notion of borders – physical, political, spiritual, their creative tensions and byproducts – resonates through Holdstock’s oeuvre and many others in Fantasy fiction, as Clute observes: “Borderlands”; “Liminal Beings”; “Thresholds” (1999). Of the latter, Clute says: “thresholds are maps to the meaning of the text”. The way thresholds are depicted and their transitions are handled offer the *clew* to the text’s labyrinth. Within the Mythago Wood Cycle it is the central leitmotif. Yet in terms of generic expectations, the novelist’s treatment of the tropes of Science Fiction and Fantasy was transgressive. Holdstock’s genre-fluid work foreshadowed Fusion Lit, or the New Weird. In this respect he was a pioneer of a growing migratory pattern within imaginative fiction, as Atwood observes:

When it comes to genres, the borders are increasingly undefended, and things slip back and forth across them with insouciance. (Atwood 2011: 7)

Brian Aldiss notes the “ungraspable” quality of Holdstock’s work (Foreword to French edition of *Mythago Wood*, 2004). Although this could be a nod to the Mythago Wood Cycle’s characteristic evanescence, it could also be euphemism for the author’s convoluted plots. This “hardness’ (Clute 1999: 475) is apparently intentional but can be seen as deliberate obfuscation, textual smoke and mirrors masking other faults. Holdstock’s prose is riddled with pseudo-science and psycho-babble. There is erratic narrative traction and often weak female characters. The prose is often dense with expositional info-dump, dialogue is frequently delivered in the style of the classic “boffin” explanation in 1950s B-movies (e.g. the three-page plot summary in *The Hollowing*, 1994: 82-84). Holdstock himself acknowledged the influence of 1950s British science fiction TV serial, The *Quatermass Experiment* (1953), and its collision between the scientific and the superstitious. Describing his love of pseudo-science, Holdstock said:

You can use time travel, psychic powers and ghosts not just as plot devices, but as tools to explore human life, the nature of ritual and dreams. In fact you can use them to look at the functioning of the human mind, and the development of story. (interview, cited in Nichols, 1993: 100)

And yet, despite these inherent flaws, the overall effect is gripping and strangely convincing. The pseudo-scientific juxtaposed with the fantastical produces a similar effect to a Buddhist koan. Holdstock’s prose produces the effect of the “sound of a tree falling in a forest if no one was there to hear…” In the paradoxes his prose produces the reader’s mind is flipped into a different consciousness where something can slip through. Holdstock echoes this in his description of writing his first two novels which broke the trail for the later books:

Now, the images in *Mythago Wood* and in *Lavondyss* surfaced from my unconscious. I deliberately allowed them to surface, and I relaxed sufficiently to let weird ideas come up. (ibid)

We are not meant to fully understand or believe Holdstock’s “explanations” for his world – they just serve to flip our minds into a different modality. As a Fantasy/SF novelist, Holdstock perhaps is one of Imaginative Fiction’s most eloquent interrogators of consciousness (Lodge 2002: 1-91). Often it seems the worlds-within-worlds that he charts are not physical places, but the interior processes of human mind.

**The Mythago Wood Cycle**

The Mythago Wood Cycle of novels demarcate a fertile territory which Holdstock has made arguably his own, as novelist Michael Moorcock suggests: “No other author has so successfully captured the magic of the wildwood” (dust-jacket endorsement, *Merlin’s Wood*). Clute summed up Holdstock’s concept as: “a notably original structure of story through which the most taxing fantasies can be told” (1999: 475). The books do not constitute a series in the conventional sense (Holdstock resisted a direct sequel to *Mythago Wood* for twenty-five years): it was not until relatively late that they began to be packaged as such (2 vols. 2007). The cover font, artwork, and gold-leaf motif of the first paperback editions from Grafton suggested an aesthetic and thematic affinity, but the chronology and narrative causality of the sequence remained obscure until later editions. Holdstock did not take the obvious track, but opted for a Frostian “road less travelled”, deliberately eschewing the expectations of the conventional Fantasy saga (typically a quest or bildungsroman).

Between them the novels attempt to chart Holdstock’s *terra nova* – a liminal place between the mythic and mundane. Each novel offers a different traverse into the “unknown region” at the heart of Ryhope. It is a project future-proofed against completion, for it is mapping the unmappable: the depthless reaches of the human imagination. Each novel offers little more than a spirited foray into this nebulous zone. They are raids on the Annwn of the “underconscious”, as Holdstock terms it (interview 1993: 102).

The five layers the French scientist Lacan describes in *The Hollowing* (1994) models the palimpsest of meaning and interpretation we can superimpose on the novels. On one level they are old-fashioned adventure stories in the tradition of H. Rider Haggard and Arthur Conan Doyle. In Ryhope’s “abyssal chthonic generator” (Clute’s evocative, slightly Lovecraftian term), we meet *She* and *The Lost World*, alongside variants of Shangri-La and Neverland. There are elements of the Club Story (Clute, 1999: 2007), and the Boys’ Own adventure of “The Man Who Would Be King” (Kipling, 1888). Male protagonists dominate throughout the Ryhope novels (George, Christian and Steven Huxley in *Mythago Wood*; Richard and Alex Bradley in *The Hollowing*; Christian Huxley and a band of heroes in *Gate of Horn*; Huxley, snr, Wynne Jones and Steven in *The Bone Forest*). It is only in *Lavondyss* that we have a substantial female protagonist (Whittingham 2011: 96-113), the young, precocious Tallis Keeton; and only in the final novel, *Avilion*, that some kind of gender balance is achieved, as it relates the later years of Steven and Guiwenneth and their two children, Jack and Yssobel. Otherwise, the female characters are either feisty, otherworldly objects of desire (Guiwenneth), coldly passive aggressive (Alice Bradley), or troubled and unattainable (Helen Silverlock). That is not to say the female characters lack strength or autonomy, but they are rarely foregrounded.

A taxonomic approach is offered (with strong caveats about such “Fuzzy Sets”) by Mendlesohn’s speculative categories (2003: xviii-xxv), here listed in brief with my descriptors in italics:

* The Portal-Quest – *the Fantastic is entered via a portal and does not bleed back out*.
* Immersive – *the Fantastic is normative, as in classic Secondary World Fantasy*.
* Intrusion – *the Fantastic erupts through into the ordinary world.*
* Liminal *– the Fantastic and the mundane uneasily co-exist*.
* The Irregulars – *a destabilisation of the above. The black swans and outliers.*

On the surface the novels appear to be classic Portal-Quest fantasies, grown-up Secret Gardens; but the narrative direction is more complex than that with characters crossing back-and-forth between the mythic interior and mundane exterior of Ryhope, or at least attempting to. Characters fall out of synch with their own timeline, a fate common to many travellers to Fairyland; and they exist in a liminal state, a nightmarish limbo of status, neither alive nor dead, home or in exile. The wood extends itself, overwhelming the Oak Lodge, and sometimes mythagos venture to the edge of Shadoxhurst, and so there is an element of the Intrusion Fantasy. However, the direction of the magic constantly shifts, suggesting a closer affinity with the Liminal, in which “the fantastic leaks back through the portal” (2008: xxiii). The restless hybridity of the cycle perhaps qualifies it, ultimately, as one of Mendlesohn’s Irregulars. There is no sure footing in Holdstock’s Ryhope – once caught within its vortex the apparently solid lineaments of reality start to crumble. Throughout the sequence, thematic commonalities (disappearances; separation; loss; decay; madness) create a melancholic, autumnal tone. It is the elegiac, quintessentially English ambience of Ralph Vaughan Williams, who Holdstock was fond of listening to while writing: the strains of the Folk Tradition filtered through a Classical register, evoking the genius loci of this green and pleasant land. Yet there is something more chthonic as well, perhaps Birtwistle’s “Gawain”; or the rude airs of unadorned folk music, the slightly feral edge of the Traveller or Road Protest scene of the early 1990s, the latter consciously drawing upon mythic and folkloric iconography in their direct actions (Letcher 2001). These different “soundtracks” co-exist within the wood – sylvan songs operating at slightly variant frequencies or vibrations. One moment we are listening to “The Lark Ascending” (1921), then suddenly it’s Jethro Tull’s “Songs from the Wood” (1977). The needle jumps.

The five layers of Ryhope could be seen as a spatio-temporal (Eckman 2011) representation of this concatenation of influence: Topwood (Human); Two-wood (Folk); Three-wood (Fairy); Four-wood (Legend); Five-wood (Myth). Although these demarcations are inevitably speculative, porous and open to challenge, they roughly delineate the traditions and energies which Holdstock riffs upon in his cycle, giving the novels their uniquely potent blend.

Echoes and reflectionsoccur a lot throughout the book: things overlap. Macfarlane calls woodland “a place of inbetweeness … of correspondence” (2007: 98). The polder (Clute 1999: 772-773) of Ryhope Wood has a porous boundary – the real world leaks into it and it leaks into the real world (one of Holdstock's new characters Caylen Reeve, a charismatic shaman figure living in the village, epitomises this). This symbiotic nature is not surprising, for Mythago Wood is a cypher for the imagination, a zone of subconscious creativity (as one of the characters says: 'Avilion is what we make it”*)* – and is at its most fertile where the two worlds (waking and dreaming/conscious and sub-conscious) meet. Snyder says of such liminal places: “A frontier is a burning edge, a frazzle, a strange market zone between two utterly different worlds.” (1990: 15)

Holdstock is not afraid to plunder (or cross-reference) his own treasure hoard. Christian's army of the lost, Legion, marches into the book from the pages of *Gates of Horn, Gates of Ivory* and that wily Greek sea captain, Odysseus, pops up as a love interest to the young Yssobel – a kind of leftover “mythago” from the *Merlin Codex* (Holdstock's later Helleno-Celtic crosshatch trilogy). This self-referencing could become a law of diminishing returns, but instead it satisfyingly capitalises on previous books in the sequence and draws the threads together. The multi-linear narrative structure is bold – intercutting between mainly Jack and Yssobel's journey, but sometimes switching ambitiously from first to third (Guiwenneth's, Steven's, Christian's). In his weaker work, this cut-and-paste method can leave the reader floundering. Here, Holdstock carries it off. The prose is well-honed and lucid. The characters of Jack and Yssobel are convincing – indeed Yssobel's voice comes across the clearest and this is more her story than anyone’s. The portrayal of the older Steven and Guiwenneth is a believable depiction of marriage – albeit a mythopoeic one – and Steven's transformation into his father touching (there is an element of the self-deprecating self-portrait). Holdstock includes a selection of his poetry – one of which, “Fields of Tartan” is based upon his grandfather's memories of the First World War. It is a risqué move, but the novelist incorporates this into the narrative effectively, and the personal reference gives the whole thing added poignancy. Holdstock also dedicates the book to the memory of his father, who died before it was finished: again, this fact gives the story an added depth, as the novelist depicts an otherworld where loved ones never die. It is a novel about homecoming –“What we remember is all the home we need”– and in *Avilion* Holdstock has finally come home, to the delight of his patient fans. This is a fantasy novel willing to depict mature relationships (and as such foreshadows Ishiguro’s 2015 venture into fantasy, *The Buried Giant*) and shows Holdstock's maturity as a fantasy novelist. *Avilion* conveys something fundamental about the human condition: why we, the human creature, need to dream, to explore, to discover, to take risks, even to suffer – if we are to truly grow. Donald E. Morse emphasizes the contribution Holdstock’s fiction offers in its insight into the human condition, articulating: “…what happens when humans meet their limits as humans, as well as the consequences for transgressing those limits” (Morse 2011: 3).

There is an elegiac note running throughout Holdstock’s last novel: “We held and held until we broke,/ But in the breaking, we held,/ and in the holding we will find Avilion” (2009). The eschatological is always present in the Mythago Wood Cycle, but here, is perhaps foregrounded more than in any other of the series. There is a sense of completion, of summation, and of letting go.

**Mapping the Wood**

From Tolkien onwards the convention in Fantasy novels has been to include a map of the “Secondary World” setting. As Diane Wynne-Jones writes: “No Tour of Fantasyland is complete without one.” (2004: 1): “If you take this Tour, you are going to have to visit every single place on this Map, whether it is marked or not. This is a Rule.” (2004: 3) Eschewing this hoary device – Atwood calls it to “think cartographically” (2004: 71) – Holdstock’s Mythago Wood Cycle is unusual in *not* including such a device. References are made to such a map existing within the text, as Steven Huxley recalls in the first novel:

I could remember one quite clearly, the largest map, showing carefully marked trackways and easy routes through the tangle of trees and stony outcrops; it showed clearings drawn with almost obsessive precision, each glade numbered and identified, and the whole forest divided into zones, and given names. (1984: 23)

But the absence of an *actual* map in the text forces the reader to use their visual imagination and fill in the blanks: to go within the “Ryhope Wood” of our own minds.

Holdstock’s deep-mapping of his fictional Ryhope Wood over the six novels, plus in the odd outlier novel, novella and short story (*The Bone Forest,* 1991; *Merlin’s Wood,* 1994), is analogous to the “isolarion” of 15th Century cartography (Macfarlane 2008: 88). We get detailed fragments, but rarely the bigger picture. This subjective obfuscation is part of Holdstock’s strategy: we cannot see the wood for the trees. This is intrinsic to the forest’s spell, as Sara Maitland suggests:

The mysterious secrets and silences, gifts and perils of the forest are both the background to and the source of these tales. (Maitland 2012: 6)

Holdstock’s prose acts like electrical stimuli to different parts of the brain: the pseudo-scientific jargon the pre-frontal cortex; the human characters, the emotional centre; the mythic “archetypes”, a deeper, more ancient part. The topographical becomes phrenological. Wood and mind overlap. The “separate” functions of the left- and right-side of the brain has been discredited in recent years. Neurologist Gilchrist, at pains to debunk the simplistic dualism which compartmentalizes left- and right-brain functions, says: “Nature gave us the dichotomy when she split the brain. Working out what it means is not in itself to dichotomise: it only becomes so in the hands of those who interpret results with Cartesian rigidity.” (2012: 11)

Modern neurology suggests a more complex dynamic, but as a metaphor for the overlapping of worlds the notion of the bipartite brain is a resonant one. Within our skulls, two worlds meet – but they are not spatially configured into left and right.

Lindsay Clarke suggests a useful model for the creative process (2004). Using the sacred geometry of the *vesica pisces*, he says one circle represents the outer world, the other, the inner world, and where they meet, “the locus of their collision” (2004: 10), that is the birthplace of creativity: the mandorla of the imagination: “the greater the area of overlap, then the larger and more inclusive the embrace of our imaginative vision” (ibid.). Standing at this threshold, straddling the worlds, it is our job as writers, Clarke suggests, to hold that door ajar, for it “is through the meeting of opposites that something new appears” (2004: 11). As wise gatekeepers we have a degree of responsibility as to what passes through our hollowings into the outerworld.

Gilchrist echoes this principle: “Creativity depends on the union of things that are also maintained separately – the precise function of the corpus callosum, both to separate and connect” (2012: 42). Holdstock’s fiction does just that: separations and connections provide the neural network for the cycle, resonating both within the ecosystem of the novels and without, to the oral tradition, folklore, world mythologies, and the literary canon. Holdstock’s prose provides the connective tissue between the wood and the mind.

Yet such links may be closer than assumed, as Brodmann’s Map (figure 1, below) suggests. One of several the pioneer neurologist rendered based upon mammalian brains, it was an influential attempt at depicting the localization of brain function and to the untrained eye appear uncannily like topographical zones of woodland, hills, tributaries and terrain.

Figure 1. Brodmann's Areas, 1909 (reproduced from Creative Commons)

Atwood suggests, in her discussion of “ustopias”, her hybrid term for dystopias/utopias which proliferate in Science Fiction and Fantasy, cartographical concerns are critical: “any writer of ustopias has to answer 3 necessary questions: where is it, when is it, and – in relation to maps – what shape is it? For unless we readers can believe in the ustopia as a potentially mappable place, we will not suspend our disbelief willingly.” (2004: 73)

Artist and poet David Jones produced a similar artefact, “Map of Themes in the Artist’s Mind” (1943). Another war-traumatized veteran (like Christian and Steven Huxley), Jones’ singular artistic output, with its palimpsest of the mythic and the harsh realities of 20th century warfare, could be almost a prototype for George Huxley, indeed for Holdstock himself. Both made a Nennius-like “heap of things” from their respective soundings into the cauldron of history and myth:

I have made a heap of all that I could find. (Jones 1951: 9)

One of the key characteristics of Ryhope Wood is its ambience of *ancientness*. The accepted definition of ancient woodland is “any wooded area that has been wooded continuously since at least 1600AD” (UK government website 2014). The appealing quality of Ryhope is that it has remained there since the end of the last Ice Age, so ten thousand years old. It provides a portal into the past – the so-called Dark Ages, Roman, Iron Age, Bronze Age, New Stone Age (Neolithic); Mesolithic; even Palaeolithic – before the Ice, back to the origins of humankind.

This is primary woodland, Steve, untouched forest from a time when all of the country was covered with deciduous forests of oak and ash and elder and rowan and hawthorn. (1984: 23)

The way Ryhope offers a taproot into the ancient past mirrors the evolutionary cross-section (or “tree-rings”) of our own brains, with the older, “lizard” part of the brain at the base of the skull. The zonification of Ryhope, as described by Lacan in *The Hollowing* (it is not until this 1994 novelthat readers finally get a sense of an overview) echoes the broad consensus designation of neurological function within the brain:

Ryhope was more-or-less circular, though a deep path cut into it from the south-east, leading to a mill-pond. Two streams flowed into the wood, only one flowed out. Inside the perimeter were bands and enclosures, with names like Oak-Ash Zone; Elm Track; Primary Genesis Zone; Quick Season Gorge and Wolf Caves. (1994: 130)

Figure 2. Speculative map of Ryhope Wood by Kevan Manwaring, 2016

In my above illustration I have attempted to depict the zones and locations Holdstock refers to, but the project is one the author himself was resistant to: the absence of maps in the novels – a convention of the Fantasy novel – is telling. But more intrinsically, his complex, coded charting of Ryhope resists a fully omniscient perspective.

Lacan lists four ways into the wood, although none are easy: the mill-pond; the sticklebrook; Hunter’s Brook; Roman tin mine. Yet the cartography extends *downwards*, as well as across, with five “underlayers” beneath the mundane three square miles of Ryhope: topwood; two-wood; three-wood; and beyond. These “underlayers” are connected by a perilous network of portals, referred to as “hollowings” (1994: 131). Accessing these can be extremely hazardous, resulting in temporal dislocation, with characters falling out of “synch” with their own earthly lives, sometimes fatally (a fate of many unwitting characters of folklore who venture into Faerie). Lacan explains about the nature of these portals:

“A hollowing is a way *deeper*,” he said unhelpfully. “We are going further into the wood, but there is a way under us. Not in physical space, you understand. Just *under,* going to other planes, other lands, other *otherworlds.* It’s dangerous to enter a hollowing. The wood is criss-crossed with them, woven with them. Another system of space and time.” (1994: 104)

These hollowings could be an analogue for synaptic leaps of inspiration – the lightning-crackle of neurons across the interstices of the brain. It echoes with what Holdstock termed “underconsciousness”:

One of the ways I write is very much to set up a task, get an idea, and leave the unconscious – or *under*conscious – processes to come up with the explanations. My self-consciousness is producing words on the paper, but there’s a whole process going on behind. (interview, cited in Nichols,1993: 102)

These “backwoods” Holdstock alludes to are his own Mythago Wood, and yet it is a zone that many writers tap into during the process of character creation. Through his own idiosyncratic approach Holdstock taps into something universal.

**Touching the Maker**

Echo and response form a common dynamic within the Cycle. Each protagonist who enters Ryhope is a kind of Narcissus, looking into the pool, in love with their own reflection, unaware of the Echo their presence has generated (it is no coincidence that Holdstock’s non-Mythago novel is called *Ancient Echoes*), looking on, eavesdropping. In *The Hollowing,* which, out of all of the cycle most lucidly provides an exegesis of this genesis, a team of researchers are inexorably drawn into Ryhope’s many portals, lost in their own haunting dream,Holdstock comments on this process, via the Frenchman, Lacan:

“They are drawn to us,” Lacan murmured again. “It is a function of these creatures. They are compelled to find and touch their maker, their creator, whichever one of us it might be… ” (1994: 106)

Holdstock adds to the mix an intriguing notion, inverting the usual causality:

Our world is the spirit world as far as some mythagos are concerned. They emerge to touch their maker, the mind from which they are drawn. (1994: 118)

Throughout the cycle Holdstock seeds characters exploring their own “origins”. They may not be aware of their own fictionality, but they might have some sense of being “created” out of the mind of beings which, in themselves, might be fictional (in the way the existence of Deity is questioned). In his essay, “The Embodiment of Abstraction in Robert Holdstock’s Mythago Novels”, W.A. Senior suggests the novelist’s characters offer a reversal of mythopoesis (“the physical is drawn from the concept”, 305). As Holdstock, the author, creates his characters, so do the “characters’ within the narrative give form to the mythagos. If Holdstock is a “sub-creator” (in Tolkien’s phrase) then his characters are sub-sub-creators. Senior suggests “Holdstock is writing about the nature of art, of being a writer… Characters as creators within their own worlds hold up a mirror to the author.” (308) This is often an involuntary and hazardous process. Mythagos are born, springing from the mind of the character, an Athena to every Zeus, only to become hostile to their progenitor, neglected, hunted, desired, or destroyed. This process provides, in microcosm, a dramatization of the author’s own parthenogenesis.

The most obvious reading of Holdstock’s is a Jungian one, as has been noted by several commentators (Senior; et al). It is one Holdstock himself fully subscribed to:

My feeling is that we inherent pattern structures from our more primitive ancestral forms. All over the world you see patterns human cultures share in common. (interview, cited in Nichols, 1993 :103)

Carl Jung defined the term “archetype” (*arke –* ancient; *typos* – pattern*)* his neologism for “primordial images” as “conscious representations” of eternal principles; “representations that can vary a great deal without losing their basic pattern.” “They are without known origin and they reproduce themselves in any time or in any part of the world.” (Jung1964) Comprising of universalized cultural constructs such as the Mother, Father, Lover, Shadow, Child, and so forth, Jung argues that their validity is proven by the way they seem to arise organically within his patients’ dreams, and throughout world myths and legends. Archetypes are the *dramatis personae* of early literature. Over the centuries authors have learnt to give them the veneer of subtlety, refracting their overpowering, primal energies, but scratch beneath the skin of most fictional characters and the archetypal mask is revealed. Holdstock deliberately played with this set of coalescent character “patterns’:

So I was playing … with patterns that we hold on the cerebral cortex. But we don’t know what they mean until the environmental circumstances trigger them. Which is something I believe in. Or rather, I don’t particularly believe in the symbols I used; I believe in the principle. Art often expresses not just the representation of an object but its relationship with the underconsciousness. Or the collective unconscious, if one believes in such a thing. The shared pattern recognition we have binds us all. (interview, cited in Nichols, 1993: 103)

Nichols adds that there is a “shared recognition of myth” (ibid.), and that “all legend goes back to historical truth”. This euhemeristic notion is epitomized wittily by Richard Bradley in *The Hollowing*, where he calls the mythagos he’s encountering: “A prehistoric commedia dell arte” (1994: 132). Lacan confirms he is closer to the truth than he realizes. It is not hard to find analogues for the rambunctious cast of the Venetian street theatre: the Captain, the Lover, the Poet, the Thug, the Trickster. In various guises they crop up throughout literature and the oral tradition, sometimes ubiquitously. Of the Robin Hood mythago, “Hood”: “There are hundreds of them in the wood, the stereotyped Robin Hood. It’s a combination of race memory and enriched imagination. Everyone has a similar idea about Hood. Errol Flynn has a lot to answer for!” (1994: 158)

It is interesting to note the influence of popular culture on folklore, a reversal of influence. The Errol Flynn reference is perhaps indicative of Holdstock’s generation, while Generation X might cite Michael Praed or Jason Connery in Richard Carpenter’s TV portrayal, *Robin of Sherwood,* Kevin Costner, Patrick Bergin or Russell Crowe in big screen versions*,* and Millennials perhaps a dominant Maid Marion, “hoody” Robin Hood, or superhero archer from iconoclastic TV portrayals.

This process was experienced directly in a visit I undertook in early 2016 to a woodland which could have easily stood in for Ryhope Wood, Puzzle Wood in the Forest of Dean – a distinctive woodscape riddled with Ent-like yew trees and moss-covered dells, in fact the remains of Roman iron mines known locally as “Scowles”. A popular location for film and TV, it has been used for productions such as *Robin Hood* (2006-2009)*, Merlin* (2008-2012)*, Dr Who* (2005-)*, Atlantis* (2013), *Wizards vs Aliens* (2012)*, Jack the Giant Slayer* (2013)and *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015)*.* It is almost impossible to walk amid its sylvan labyrinth without having the cast of these dramas “emerging” from the symbiosis of wood and mind. The effect is involuntary. As Holdstock notes: “The wood itself has its own say in what is going to be produced out of its store of archetypes” (interview, cited in Nichols, 1993: 104). Holdstock acknowledges the popularity of Joseph Campbell, especially his best-known work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), in which he charts out what he calls the monomyth. This notion appealed to Holdstock: “I am attracted to the idea of all stories coming from one first story, that in fact there is a monomythic idea that surfaces in every writer” (ibid, 1993: 105). To use Holdstock’s own terminology (as developed in *The Hollowing*), the writer’s “Little Dream” intersects with the “Big Dream” of humanity’s collective myth-hoard. The universal “source” is individualized by the author-creator’s idiosyncracies, memories, beliefs and influences. The macrocosmic becomes the microcosmic.

**A Child in Time**

Another important aspect of the Mythago Wood Cycle is its evocation of childhood mythscapes. For Holdstock, childhood memories of playing in snow clearly fed into the creative process of *The Bone Forest*:

When I wrote that I was right back in my parents’ house looking out at the snow-covered garden through the frosted glass. So there’s an engagement with my childhood. (ibid1993: 107)

This pervasive influence (of a magical childhood) can be traced back to the importance of his storytelling grandfather and the landscape of his early years. He “spent his childhood between the eerie Romney Marsh and the ancient woods of the Kentish heartlands, landscapes that inspire much of his work to this day” (ibid.).

Memories of a particular mill-pond lingered and provided a similarly numinous locale as Tolkien’s Sarehole Mill. That, the Midlands, the Welsh Marches, and the Tolkien’s family home, all fed the embryonic imagination. Tolkien’s “cottage of lost play” became the nursery of Middle Earth (Manwaring 2014). Francis Spufford (2002) provides a survey of his personal childhood landscape of literature (The Forest; The Island; The Town; The Hole): the one helps feed the other. The more we read, the more our sense of possibility grows. Michael Chabon (2009) suggested “childhood is a branch of cartography”; Robert Macfarlane, in his exploration of landscape and language, *Landmarks*, proposed the inverse: “Cartography is a branch of childhood” (2015: 326), citing the case study of Hinchingbrooke Country Park, where former primate behavioural psychologist, Deb Wilenski (2015: 317-327) studied the way children “map” a place through their imagination, mythologizing it just as Tallis Keeton is portrayed doing around the edges of Ryhope in *Lavondyss* (Sad Song Meadow; Windy Cave Meadow; Morndun Ridge; Old Forbidden Place). Holdstock suggests these mythscapes are an expression of the child’s relationship to the adult world:

I think myth or legend comes from a child listening to the accounts of the adults, and seeing things that are larger than life to them. We never throw off our childhood perspective, we just super-impose adult perception on it. Stories of giant boars and great creatures and huge knights and vast woods seem to me to be a reflection of the child’s eye. So the child is very important in the man. (Macfarlane 2015: 108)

**Birds of the Mind**

“I simply wrote what came naturally.” Holdstock interview (Nichols, 1993: 100)

Holdstock, writing his haunting Fantasy classic *Lavondyss* (1990), says: “out of allowing these birds to fly through my mind, and create images and links with the characters, I felt that I was touching something quite primitive. I enjoyed that sensation” (1993: 106). Nevertheless, Holdstock struggled with “that sensation” at times, experiencing depression during the period of its creation, as he describes in an article on “the Mythago Process”:

The book took three years to write and there is no question that I became depressed in the middle of the writing. (2003)

Depression and creativity is a rich subject beyond the scope of this article to explore (see Koestler, 1965; Flaherty 2005; Storr 2011), but it seems clear that it played an important role in Holdstock’s early Mythago novels. It is tempting to read in his protagonists’ entrapment in and futile attempts to escape Ryhope Wood an extended metaphor of Holdstock’s own struggles with mental health.

In *The Hollowing,* the inclusion of a production of “Gawain and the Green Knight” provides a meta-narrative. At one point Alex Bradley, who is featuring in the production as “Lord Bertolac” describes how he added to the text:

Alex’s innovation to the story had been to make the pagan Green Knight the guardian of a fabulous talisman. At the end, Gawain, disguised as a hunting falcon, tricked the monstrous knight out of his chapel, entered the mound to the fairy Otherworld and stole the treasure. (1994: 27)

Thus in microcosm we have an example of Holdstock’s broad approach to his source material in the Mythago Wood Cycle – he draws upon the mineral bedrock of existing texts and story-cycles (Arthur; Robin Hood; Jason) and creates his own narrative tendrils, which spiral about and loop into others. Holdstock’s material is not new – it is how he reconfigures and intersects the existing corpus which is his innovation. With the Mythago mythos, he has created a mechanism to not only tell stories about stories, but also to generate new ones. To Holdstock, this was not such a process of invention, but retrieval, of reclaiming lost tales (Tolkien 1997:138).

This Tolkienian retrieval is echoed, in a more psychotherapeutic context by Hanna Segal: “All creation is really a re-creation of a once-loved and once-whole, but now lost and ruined object, a ruined internal world and self. It is when the world within us is destroyed, when it is dead and loveless, when our loved ones are in fragments, and we ourselves in helpless despair – it is then that we must re-create our world anew, reassemble the pieces, infuse life into dead fragments, re-create life.” (Segal: 2005) And yet, refuting this principle somewhat, Holdstock seems to be drawing upon a *positive* childhood pool of memory: the mill-pond, his grandfather’s stories, “the bleak Romney Marsh and the dense woodlands of the Kentish heartlands” *(Avilion,* dustjacket), the pleasures of early reading. This challenges the notion that the art one makes as an adult compensates for “the absence of things longed for in childhood” (Atwood, 2004: 11)

However, Holdstock’s mythos *is* a perfect expression of “instauration”, his novels are recurrent “act[s] of restoring or repairing” (OED), often after “decay, lapse or dilapidation” (*Webster*). As Vaughan Williams comments (in his fictional guise): “Nothing is lost for ever” (1988: 174). Clute defines Instauration Fantasy as:

…fantasies in which the real world is transformed; they are fantasies about the MATTER of the world. (1999: 501)

Clute says of these meta-narratives of the fantastic that “they are rare”, but cites Holdstock’s *Mythago Wood* as one of the key examples. He suggests “it is currently the cutting edge of fantasy – the place where fantasy has no excuse not to be” (1999: 502). One of their chief characteristics is their self-reflexivity, they are stories about storymaking and telling. By accessing the “source” of narrative instauration fantasies seek to renew not only the story-world of the characters, but story itself. The closed system of genre is punctured. They transcend the entropy of the formulaic by interrogating its hidden mechanisms.

I’m interested in the origins of story, in the beginnings of our need of stories for entertainment, and you can use the actual tools of story to explore story itself. Which is what I was attempting to do in *Lavondyss*. (interview, cited in Nichols, 1993: 100)

Context in a storytelling experience is everything, and Helen relates a Jack tale during a hiatus of Richard’s first traverse through a hollowing beneath “topwood”. Citing George Huxley’s journal from summer 1930, Helen Silverlock in *The Hollowing* “whispers” to Richard Bradley:

Finally, a Jack tale – I have called it “Jack His Father” – close to the “core legend”, I think. Jack is a shape-changer. His name in the story is Cungetorix, son of the clan chief Mananborus, who was an historical figure. This early legend contains only an ingredient or two of the later folk-tale about the Beanstalk that it will become in the telling.(1994: 161)

Holdstock suggests, through his mouth-piece character, Huxley, a sense of the mythic taproot,the core story beneath the layers of later tellings and literary glosses. The way in which this anecdote is related through the double-frame of Huxley-Silverlock emphasizes this palimpsest effect. Also here we have a central theme of the Mythago Wood Cycle epitomized: “Jack the Father” – both the recurring paternal issue, but also the sense of parthenogenesis. Jack here becomes the self-created one. At the same time that Holdstock’s characters become sub-creators, their mythagos develop self-awareness and autonomy, much in the way of Ted Hughes’ “Wodwo” (1976): “I seem to have been given the freedom/of this place what am I then?”

The success of their production, as with character creation in fiction, seems to hinge on relinquishing control, as Holdstock explains: “When I got down to writing the book it became a very demanding exercise in touching my own unconscious thoughts. I was allowing a lot of ideas to surface unbidden. I would spend a week allowing one image to shape and form. The image for example of a woman transmogrified into a tree. That was very difficult to live with because it was so violent and bizarre. Where that image came from I have no idea, but I know it was coming from within me…” (1993: 105) As a well-educated scientist Holdstock would have no doubt come across the Apollo and Daphne story from the Hellenic tradition so there is a possibility this also was working upon his subconscious in that moment of inspiration. Nevertheless, this organic, intuitive approach leads us to the natural centre of this methodology.

**Figure 3. Model for creative process based upon Holdstock’s Mythago Wood by Kevan Manwaring 2016**

My model is based upon the mytho-cartography of Ryhope Wood (see Figure 2). Adopting the palimpsest approach of Holdstock’s narrative universe I have overlaid my interpretation of the author’s creative process on what we know of his isolarium.As such it is subjective and speculative – and probably as illustrative of my own projections and pre-occupations as is it of Holdstock’s intentions. I shall outline it here in the hope it will generate future debate and interpretative cartographies. As Holdstock writes in *Lavondyss:*

To each his entrance to the realm. To each his gate. (1988: 180)

Two streams are known to lead into the wood, the Sticklebrook and Hunter’s Brook. These could be read as visual information received from the eyes, stimulating the mind. Here, the paradigms of “nature” (the natural, non-human, the intuitive) and “science” (the anthropocentric, the rational) create the parallax view of Holdstock’s primary influences: his training as a Medical Zoologist in many ways straddles both of these worlds, and so in a sense they provide a false dichotomy. And yet, throughout the Mythago Wood Cycle we have the scientific superimposed upon the natural world of the wood, and vice versa, as the wood very viscerally imposes upon the scientist-protagonists. These streams eventually merge as they “pass through” the zones of the imagination and underconscious (the spatio-temporal metaphor is just that, these processes happen sometimes in a micro-second flash of inspiration and are rarely conscious). The streams are fed by four key elements: family (Oak Lodge); folklore (Horse-shrine/Wolf Cave); pre-history (Roman tin mine); and childhood memory (Mill-pond). The entire water-table, if we extend this metaphor further, draws upon the complementary refugia of Science Fiction and Fantasy. The superconscious (symbolized by the haughty inhabitants of Ryhope Estate) could be seen as the critical voice (either Holdstock’s own, or others); and Shadoxhurst represents the community of intent (SF/Fantasy community) which is impacted by the presence of this zone, both feeding on it and providing, inadvertently, food – in terms of sales, reviews, discussion, awards, critical commentaries, fan fiction, merchandise and so forth. The “output” of this process is epitomized by the “mythago”, but in fact consists of the wider cast of characters which populate Holdstock’s unique mythos.

Other models exist, such as the one created by Andrew Melrose and Jen Webb based upon W.B. Yeats’ “gyre”, as applied to the collaborative creative process (2015), and further research awaits to be done.

**Conclusion**

The concept of “bio-mimicry”, “an approach to innovation that seeks sustainable solutions to human challenges by emulating nature’s time-tested patterns and strategies” (biomimicry.org, 2016) suggests we can learn from nature and selectively adopt its strategies: mechanisms of defence, camouflage, courtship and propagation.

In *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1997)*,* David Abrams posits an ever deeper, embodied proprioceptive response to “nature”, suggesting that when we tell stories that “make sense” we are enlivening our own receptivity to our natural environment:

A story must be judged according to whether it makes sense. And “making sense” must be here understood in its most direct meaning: to make sense is to enliven the senses. A story that makes sense is one that stirs the senses from their slumber, one that opens the eyes and the ears to their real surroundings, tuning the tongue to the actual tastes in the air and sending chills of recognition along the surface of the skin. To make sense is to release the body from the constraints imposed by outworn ways of speaking, and hence to renew and rejuvenate one's felt awareness of the world. It is to make the senses wake up to where they are. (1997: 265)

Holdstock’s novels achieve this “chill of recognition”. A walk in a woodland is never the same after reading *Mythago Wood*; a flurry of snow or a frosty dawn suddenly evokes the icy singularity of *Lavondyss*;the sight of a green man in a church pew or boss-stone becomes a *Hollowing*; the clash of a Border Morris side takes us to *The Bone Forest*; a shady stream can lead us into the deep river of myth beyond the *Gate of Horn, Gate of Ivory*;andin the slow-burning interstices of love we find *Avilion.*

Rhizomatic, that is to say, root-based, membranous structures – non-hierarchical, resilient, and wide-reaching (Deleuze & Guattari 1988) – offer a possible model of Mythago Wood’s creative ecosystem. Taking one specific example from the natural world, *mycelia* are “invisible” forest membranes thriving just below the surface of the mulch, a pale lattice in the dark loam. Some of the largest living organisms on the planet, mycelia can cover many square kilometres. In the words of Professor Alan Rayner, mycologist Fellow of the Royal Society and founder of Bio\*Art (an art-science think-tank based in Bath, Somerset, founded in the late 1990s) they are “the fountains of the forest”, providing an enduring and nurturing network. Unlike top predators who rely upon a precarious food-chain and ecosystem for their survival, mycelia thrive because of their lack of hierarchy, diasporic platform, and minimal needs. They quietly go about their work – the business of forest growing – out of the limelight, under the radar, for and of themselves. This is the particular genius of Holdstock’s Mythago Wood – that it can generate its own material, almost independently of the author. In the current franchise-obsessed argot, Holdstock created a “universe” which could in theory be expanded by fans and fellow authors. It is a place that readers, writers and critics can continue to access and explore without any denuding of its creative *viriditas.*

One eco-critical reading of Holdstock’s Mythago Wood Cycle would be to see it as a fictional response to the ecological crisis which became extant in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the height of Holdstock’s Mythago output (O-zone; rainforest depletion; species extinction; indigenous tribes under threat – which Holdstock dramatized in his novelisation of the 1985 John Boorman film, *The Emerald Forest*). The very notion that even three square miles of ancient woodland could contain such imaginative biodiversity could be seen as an argument for the protection of *all* such woodland. Although such ecological concerns are never made explicit, the aesthetic revelling in “primal woodland” offers an undeniable subtext for its defence. Holdstock is cited as an exemplar in *An* *Ecobardic Manifesto* (Nanson, et al, 2004)*,* and his approach chimes with that illustrated in *Storytelling for a Greener World* (Gersie et al, 2014), which suggests: “Sustainable living in all its facets and manifestations is rooted in a deep knowledge of place and an intimate relationship to it.” (2014: 15)

Holdstock’s work remains as a battle-cry for the protection of all such “habitats”, not just actual woodlands, but the *nemetona* of Fantasy fiction, oral storytelling, mythography, folklore, academic research, and critical discourse.

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