

The Wood Within: The Deathless Vegetal as a Component of Posthuman Corporeality in Robert Holdstock's Mythago Novels

Mónika Rusvai

HJEAS

ABSTRACT

The global environmental challenges we face today necessitate a reconciliation between man and all beings that he once labeled monstrous: women, animals, plants. Modern fantasy literature is a potential contact zone with these culturally constructed Others. The paper argues that Robert Holdstock's Mythago novels offer a redefinition of the human through a corporeal reintegration of the vegetal. Based on Dawn Keetley's theses of plant horror, vegetal "deathlessness" is defined as a plant's ability to blur the anthropocentric dichotomy of life and death. Holdstock heavily relies on vegetal deathlessness throughout the Mythago texts: the vegetal physically enters the protagonist's body, stretching and transforming it beyond the limits of human time and space. The result is a hybrid entity enriched by the more-than-human experience. Through the close reading of the Mythago novels, the paper intends to reveal that despite this mutual trespassing, humans and plants are interdependent in their endeavor to maintain the landscape. (MR)

KEYWORDS: critical plant studies, nonhuman, plant horror, vegetal monstrosity



Introduction: The deathless vegetal

Plant blindness, the common practice of humans through which we ignore plants as harmless parts of the background, greatly hinders us from staying in touch with the plant kingdom.¹ Within the current ecological crisis, however, this blissful ignorance is unforgivable—or, to use the catchphrase of the Anthropocene: plant blindness is *unsustainable*. One way of making vegetal life visible in various forms of media is to unveil the unknown, fearful, monstrous side of plants. In everyday situations, plant blindness makes us ignore plants as harmless components of the background, but speculative fiction may cast light on the vegetal monstrosity that lurks in the shadows. Contemporary fantasy is a common playground for the nonhuman Other, and it contains

spaces that are apt to harbor the uncanny vegetal, which often appears as the Gothic forest trope. This paper wishes to focus on how the monstrosity of plants is used to unravel deep knowledge about both plants and people in Robert Holdstock's Mythago-novels.

The absolute alterity of plants compared to the human species is rooted in the bodily alterity of the vegetal. Through the anthropocentric gaze, plants are defined by their limitations in comparison to the human body. Consequently, this gaze construes the vegetal Other as immobile, insensitive, physically weak, and more importantly, unable to defend itself against (human) force. All these perceived deficits of the plant body are used, up to this day, to justify the abuse and objectification of the plant kingdom. As Michael Marder argues, "non-human, non-animal living beings, such as plants, have populated the margin of the margin, the zone of absolute obscurity undetectable on the radars of our conceptualities" (2).

No wonder we have this limited perception of plants as we only ever get in touch with them through watching, using or consuming their *bodies*. The vegetal mind was unknown for centuries and only recently have natural sciences and eco-philosophy developed interest in it.² For our present consideration, the most interesting assumption of plant philosophy is that a plant's meaning is closely intertwined with its corporeality. Since ancient times, Western thinkers have devalued plants and placed them at the bottom of the hierarchy of species based on their perceived lack of reason. Despite the recent philosophic and scientific interest in plant intelligence,³ Emanuele Coccia's observations are still legitimate: "Plants are the always open wound of the metaphysical snobbery that defines our culture. The return of the repressed, of which we must rid ourselves in order to consider ourselves as 'different': rational humans, spiritual beings" (I Prologue). The inseparable nature of plant mind and plant body appears to be one of the most important reasons for humans' failure to perceive and acknowledge plant intelligence. For trees, unlike for humans, bodily growth is a lifelong process, and they speak "through shaping their own matter" (Irigaray 129). Plant meaning is thus, quite literally, embodied meaning. In comparison, starting out from the construed hegemony of the mind over the body, humans seem to have gradually separated their corporeal being from their meaning; so, by the time the Anthropocene began, they had practically forgotten about (or suppressed?) their corporeality. Nevertheless, confronting vegetal otherness within the safe settings of fiction may aid us in the re-discovery of our own embodied identity so that we can heal our artificial separation from the more-than-human world.

In all its differences, the nonhuman plant body is perceived by humans as monstrous and as such, it is a boundary-crosser and a “harbinger of category crisis” (Cohen 6). However, it is not only the body–mind dichotomy that collapses in vegetal corporeality: the human perception of the divide between life and death is also blurred by the perceived otherness and consequent monstrosity of the plant body. The end of a plant’s life is less clearly demarcated than ours. You may cut down a tree, but its stump will be covered with new sprouts the next spring, a carefully chosen twig sets roots into the ground—and there are a hundred other ways through which plants seem to outlive themselves. As Marder points out, “[t]he life of plants is situated on the brink of death, in the zone of indeterminacy between the living and the dead” (53). I would not call them immortal in their stubborn defiance against death; instead, I propose to use the term *deathless*, suggesting that vegetal beings have a significantly different death experience than we do due to their bodily construction. I argue that fantasy literature offers multiple tools to lay bare this abject, undead quality of the vegetal.

Speculative fiction often applies the method of displaying monsters to show the frightening side of nature, yet in innovative fantasies, the significance of the monstrous runs deeper. As Arasu and Thornton highlight,

[t]he monster is a figure in fantasy whose existence suggests the possibility of other modes of being, perceiving, and communicating—ways which challenge anthropocentrism and the teleological hierarchy that places humans as the end-point of evolution. Associated with queerness, liminality, and Otherness, the monster becomes a powerful metonymy for exploring the socially constructed boundaries of normality. (153)

Thus, in its role as a boundary crosser, the monster becomes a potential partner in the renegotiation of the human–nature relationship.

British author Robert Holdstock’s (1948–2009) *Mythago Cycle* consists of six novels—*Mythago Wood* (1984); *Lavondyss* (1988); *The Hollowing* (1993); *Gate of Ivory, Gate of Horn* (1997); *Merlin’s Wood* (1994); and *Avilion* (2009)—and several short stories, which also rely on the concept of a semi-sentient woodland. Except for *Merlin’s Wood*, which portrays Brocéliande, a wood in Brittany, the novels of the *Cycle* focus on Ryhope Wood: a small patch of ancient woodland located in the English countryside. Its vegetation, however, possesses a supernatural skill, as trees are able to connect to the human intruders’ minds. When a mythago-genesis occurs, these unusual trees use the contents of the human collective unconscious to physically manifest mythic

heroes and landscapes within the immense inner realm of Ryhope. Thus, the ancient narratives embedded in human minds are constantly re-enacted within the wood, and the vegetation changes all the time so that it can accommodate these stories.

Mythagos, the mythic heroes and creatures that are the products of the mytho-genetic process, can be seen as plant-human hybrids that have a unique bodily complexity. First, they are made up of human *and* vegetal components: the narratives sucked out of human minds give purpose to mythagos, whilst their physical body is created from “leaf and woodland matter” (*Merlin’s Wood* 345). As one mythago, Guiwenneth explains her form of existence, “I am wood and rock, not flesh and bone” (*Mythago Wood* 161). Secondly, even though their body is made of woodland matter, it has the appearance and functions of a normal human body. Depending on the characteristics of the mythic figure they were modeled on, most mythagos consume human food and drink, they are able to copulate with ordinary humans, they bleed when hurt and are able to feel pain. The true nature of mythago bodies is only revealed after death: when they die, what appears to be their bones turns into deteriorated wood. Throughout the *Mythago Cycle*, Holdstock provides graphic accounts of this process. The description of the dead body of Tallis’s infant son in the second novel, *Lavondyss*, is a dramatic example. Tallis enters Ryhope as a teenager, and later she becomes the lover of Scathach, a half-mythago man. They have a son, who only lives for five months. Holdstock describes the baby’s remains as follows: “The bones of her son lay exposed at last, the sad wood which they had become crushed and broken after many years of being dragged through the forest and buried beneath her other goods” (*Lavondyss* 226). In his next novel, *The Hollowing*, Holdstock depicts hundreds of mythago corpses who fell victim to the protective field around Old Stone Hollow (the main station of the researchers who wish to uncover the secrets of Ryhope): “It was as if a graveyard had been unearthed and scattered. Leaves sprouted on drooping jaws. What appeared to be piles of firewood were hunched, agonized figures, their ribs returning to the earth” (*The Hollowing* 84).

Yet no bodies are wasted in Ryhope, as this uncanny woodland is deathless on two levels: on the one hand, it is deathless as a superorganism that manages to continuously rejuvenate, and on the other hand, it is deathless on the level of individual mythagos that are also cyclically reborn so that they can continue re-enacting their own narratives.⁴ Through this extensive reliance on vegetal deathlessness in his depiction of Ryhope, Holdstock consciously brings the plant body into focus and offers a revised definition

of the human through the corporeal re-integration of the monstrous vegetal. As it will be further explored, it also poses the question whether language as a product of anthropocentric human reality can ever become a sufficient tool in subverting plant blindness, or it may merely succeed in restating the limitations of the Anthropocene condition.

A darker shade of reenchancement

Traumatic fissure from the more-than-human world is key to the definition of the human in the Anthropocene. In this section, I focus on the relationship of humans with the plant kingdom as an embodied encounter and argue that despite the frightening components of vegetal otherness, seeing plants for what they are in their corporeality entails a form of re-enchancement that helps us gain a new perspective on our role within the biosphere.

Tolkienian fantasy literature is generally associated with nostalgic, pastoral, peaceful landscapes as starting points. Tolkien himself said in his lecture “On Fairy-Stories”: “To the elvish craft, Enchantment, Fantasy aspires, and when it is successful of all forms of human art most nearly approaches” (64). There is, however, a different meaning of the so-called “green country” in heroic fantasy that brings into view a disturbing combination of eco-*philia* and eco-*phobia*. To explain this interrelation, let us first consider two observations made by Ursula K. Le Guin. She claims that “Tolkien’s Middle Earth is not just pre-industrial. It is also pre-human and non-human” (86). Then she points out that this non-human setting “reminds us of what we have denied, what we have exiled ourselves from” (86). Through these assumptions, Le Guin brings into focus the ambivalent nature of our relationship to the more-than-human world. The major problem with the disenchantment of the modern world is that it simplifies this complexity and mutes the longing for a natural world that we humans can truly participate in. For Jane Bennett, “the question is not whether disenchantment is a regrettable or a progressive historical development. It is, rather, whether the very characterization of the world as disenchanted ignores and then discourages affective attachment to that world. The question is important because the mood of enchantment may be valuable for ethical life” (3).

In my view, the re-enchancement of the world may become a way to regain this “affective attachment to the world,” while bearing in mind that facing the vastness of the “pre-human” world is a belittling or even frightening experience. *Rewilding* is a term extensively used in connection with

projects that work on increasing local biodiversity through human intervention.⁵ Similarly, if we wish to reposition humans in relation to nature in an attempt to weaken the constraints of the Anthropocene, the discourse about the more-than-human world could also make use of some rewilding: the conscious inclusion of nature's fearsome and repulsive side. And rewilding the analysis of modern fantasy would also require more focus on the monstrous plant body.

Plant horror is the subfield of critical plant studies that focuses on the abject qualities of plant bodies. Dawn Keetley summarizes plant horror in six theses, three of which are closely related to plant corporeality. The first one is that "[p]lants embody an absolute alterity" (6). In the physical sense, the plant body is indeed the farthest away from the human in its limited mobility, muteness, and lack of organs. No wonder that from our human perspective plants mark an "absolute rupture of the known," as Keetley contends in her sixth thesis (22). But the most interesting questions are raised by the fourth thesis, which states that "[t]he human harbors an uncanny constitutive vegetal" (16). For the plant-conscious analysis of fantasy, these three statements bring great potential, as they point in the direction that despite their alterity, plant bodies are in fact closer to human bodies than we ever imagined—or ever feared. As Marder observes, "[w]e cannot help but feel a tinge of the uncanny in the demand that we discern the constitutive vegetal otherness in ourselves" (36). Fantasy, however, does not stop at the point of generating fear. Colin Manlove points out that in horror fiction "the supernatural is left entirely alien, for the point is the shock, the 'frisson of the supernatural', that is experienced both by the characters and the reader" (164). As opposed to this, familiarity with the Other is central to fantasy texts (Manlove 165). In fact, many fantasy texts, the *Mythago Cycle* amongst them, are centered on the construction of the familiarity with the Other. Thus, these texts manage to draw a more complex picture of humans' place within the more-than-human world.

As described, the mythagos have a plant-human hybrid body. This is how Christian Huxley defines them in *Mythago Wood*: "myth imago, the image of the idealized form of a myth creature. The image takes on substance in a natural environment" (40). The latter observation about substance plays a significant role in my arguments concerning human-mythago encounters. For humans, interacting with a mythago is an uncanny experience in many ways. A mythago is a hybrid creature in two respects: it is guided by a narrative taken from the human mind, yet its body is made from woodland matter.

Additionally, despite being made of woodland matter, it has a human shape and human bodily functions.

This complexity of the mythago body is achieved through the mythogenetic process, whereby the trees of Ryhope Wood suck out the contents of the human mind and materialize them. Thus, a non-material human component is incorporated into a vegetal body, which could readily be considered an instance of plant horror. Nevertheless, the reverse process occurs on a daily basis in the primary world: plant bodies get transformed into human bodies (and thoughts) and all this goes by the name of human metabolism. Through the consumption of vegetal bodies, we are eventually made of plant life. Mythagos thus confront us with the inherent hybridity of all kinds of living bodies within the biosphere. And just as the body–mind dichotomy collapses in vegetal corporeality, it does so in the case of mythagos. These mythic figures generated by Ryhope transcend the limitations of the Cartesian dualism of mind and body as they exist in holistic *bodyminds*: the very shape of their body is defined by the narrative that was taken from the human mind that participated in their creation, and this non-material inner component is literally inseparable from mythago corporeality. This apparent negation of the body–mind dichotomy points towards horizons beyond the anthropocentric conceptual paradigms.

These qualities of mythagos are decisive in the human–mythago encounters described throughout the *Mythago Cycle*. As Bennett points out, cross-species encounters can be a source of enchantment (17) and inspire wonder (31). However, the situation is more complex when someone is faced with the monstrous. In such cases, Bennett argues, we should consider the “context of the encounter and the significance of the categorical boundary that they confuse, not to mention the particular body and sensibility that have been affected” (30). The monstrosity of the mythago body is rooted in the uncanny human–plant hybridity that makes these creatures both attractive and repulsive in the eyes of the human protagonists. Crossing the human–plant boundary can be frightening in both directions.

In the *Mythago Cycle* it is clearly revealed that the human components of mythagos can induce as much fear as the radical alterity of the plant body, while at times even vegetal Otherness can create wonder and awe. On the one hand, the human side of mythagos also harbors components of disturbing Otherness. The free will of mythagos is severely limited because they are compelled to fulfill their individual quests prescribed by the mythic narratives that they participate in. This inner drive is so powerful that it overwrites their moral codes, and very often they are ready to ruin their own

lives so that they can re-enact the story sequence they were born with. All this becomes deeply unsettling when Holdstock reminds his reader again and again that this compulsion to repeat the (harmful) patterns of their ancestors is also deeply embedded in the human protagonists—and into every single human being. On the other hand, the vegetal side of mythagos can also amaze human protagonists and readers. Daurogs, manifestations of the green man archetype, appear in several novels of the Cycle, and in their summer forms they are ready to aid human protagonists. By appearance, daurogs are anthropomorphized trees that can walk around on long limbs and can talk in weird chatter. On certain occasions they are ready to communicate with humans. For instance, in *The Hollowing*, the teenage protagonist, Alex, is taken care of by a female daurog. While the boy is trapped inside the creations of his own mind, she helps him travel through the rootweb, and this is how Alex is eventually located by the researchers who team up with Alex's father to find him.

This complexity of the mythagos is further enhanced through the relationship between the mythago and the human whose mind was used in its creation. From the human character's perspective, such a mythago is quite literally an uncanny being: it is made partly of hidden components from the human's Self (more specifically, from the personal *and* the collective unconscious in the Jungian sense), yet it is materialized as the (vegetal) Other. Due to this intricate connection between the two, human and mythago are attracted to each other. For the human protagonists, this attraction often results in the objectification of the mythago in a creator-creature scenario, where the creator is overwhelmed by the desire to possess its creature. The problem is, however, that no human has full agency in the mytho-genetic process. Throughout the *Mythago Cycle*, Holdstock shows on multiple occasions how human protagonists deceive themselves into believing that they are the true creators of mythagos, but in truth, Ryhope always keeps the upper hand. It is a shocking experience when human characters recognize their own powerlessness and vulnerability in the face of the Other. "They [the mythagos] *take* from us," George Huxley bursts out in *Gate of Ivory, Gate of Horn*, "I should have known that. They reflect us, and they *take* from us. We are them. They are us. Mythagos! Two shadows of the same mind. I was curious; therefore, so was she. I was angry. Therefore, so was she" (chap. 2). Even though this realization of the Wood's far-reaching agency is perceived by the characters as frightening and overwhelming, Holdstock always offers opportunities to learn from the vegetal Other.

The (vegetal) Other incorporated

Confrontation with vegetal deathlessness—the most abject quality of the mythagos’ human yet nonhuman body—is brought into the forefront in human–mythago relationships throughout the *Mythago Cycle*. In the first novel, *Mythago Wood*, George Huxley and his two sons, Christian and Steven, obsessively wish to possess the object of their desire, the mythago Guiwenneth. Conflict arises because each of these three men believes that the wood used *his* mind to manifest the Celtic warrior princess. The question of Guiwenneth’s true identity becomes even more complicated when the two brothers are faced with the vegetal deathlessness of mythagos. At the beginning of the novel, Steven travels back to England after he has recovered from a war injury and learns that his older brother has fallen in love with a strange woman from the nearby woodland. At this point, Steven is blissfully unaware of the fact that Guiwenneth is a mythago. To his horror, he finds out that the woman has died, and Christian has buried her in the garden by the chicken huts. Steven then plucks up courage to uncover the grave and finds the decaying body. Later on, when he confronts his brother with what he has learned, Christian explains to him that Guiwenneth has probably already come back to life within the wood. He says: “She’s lived a thousand times, and she’s never lived at all. But I still fell in love with her . . . and I shall find her again in the woods; she’s in there somewhere” (*Mythago Wood* 32). And soon enough, Guiwenneth returns, but this time Steven believes that her image sprang from *his* mind. The rebirth of the mythago marks only the beginning of Christian’s and Steven’s long chase after the beloved woman. Even though Guiwenneth has two children with Steven in the last Mythago novel, *Avilion*, she eventually slips away to fulfill her own quest as a mythic character, leaving a desperate Steven behind. Despite its almost intimate connection with a human’s mind and its ability to rejuvenate, the mythago body is not there to be claimed and used by its human originator. Thus, the Huxleys’ initial anthropocentric and colonial position is challenged by the gradual disobjectification of the deathless mythago body.

In *The Hollowing*, the ultimate Otherness of vegetal decay is brought into question when characters mistake a dead mythago for a human corpse. When the teenage protagonist, Alex, looks through a magic wooden mask (the Moondream mask that Tallis lost in *Lavondyss*), his dreams are sucked out, and the boy falls severely ill. He is taken to hospital but escapes from it and gets lost. His body is found a year later but in such a state of decomposition that proper identification is impossible: “The skull had been so badly crushed, by two or three blows, that precise dental association was

impossible, but from the size of the bones, the male features of the pelvis, scraps of clothing in the same grave, and the fact that it was found so close to Shadoxhurst, the conclusion at the inquest was that the remains were those of Alex Bradley” (*The Hollowing* 31). Six years later, a team of researchers working in Ryhope Wood contact the boy’s father, Richard, to inform him that they have found his son inside the forest. Overwhelmed by a surge of hope, Richard now remembers that the bones were not just decayed but *rotten*. When the researcher Helen asks him what he means by that, Richard says:

“They were woody.”

“They weren’t bones,” Helen said dogmatically, her eyes alive with certainty.

“It wasn’t Alex. We have a word for what it was. A *mythago*. A false thing. And the boy we’ve located *is* Alex. Believe me.” (*The Hollowing* 49)

Even though the dead mythago is visibly composed of wood matter, the fact that he was made through the boy’s mind and shaped in his resemblance proved enough to turn absolute vegetal alterity into confusing similarity, which questions the assumption that plant corporeality is truly that different from human corporeality. This connection between the two may suggest that there is an uncanny fluidity between human and nonhuman corporeality and among the right circumstances the two might transform into one another. One may even suspect that the right circumstance is death, or more precisely, the deathlessness of the vegetal body that seems to propel this flux of human and nonhuman, living, and nonliving matter.

The most interesting inquiry into this issue may be found in the second novel, *Lavondyss*. When the young female protagonist, Tallis, reaches the innermost region of Ryhope, she embarks on a spiritual journey. First, her human body is literally torn apart by the vegetal in a manner that evokes the medieval green man imagery: “She stretched open her mouth, screamed, then spewed out the great twisting branch. It came like a hard, brown snake. It flowed from her. It divided into two, then curled back on each side of her head, bursting into bud, then leaf, to wrap around her skull” (304). Tallis is thus transformed into a giant tree, and after she observes the wood for a while from this arboreal perspective, tree-Tallis finds herself in the Ice Age version of the same myth that her own life is a re-enactment of. In this ancient form of the narrative, tree-Tallis is cut down, and her carved trunk is used as a monument to commemorate a deceased grandmother. As a result of this process, tree-Tallis gets in contact with the old woman’s body: “Below her was the corpse of a woman. Tallis had seen the grimacing features as she was

carried to the grave. Now, as she impacted with the body, she felt the bones stir. A sap rose in her, human warmth in the veins of the wood” (307). The description shows the human and vegetal body as physically intermingled. Later on, the grandson replaces the grandmother’s image with the wood, and turns to her in his despair: “He called on Grandmother Asha through the oak statue that was Tallis. ‘You are a part of the first forest. You have seen all things. You have lived through all times. You are bone and wood, Grandmother, so you must know how to save us. Please send us food’” (308). Similarly to Guiwenneth in *Mythago Wood*, who looks human but is “wood and rock, not flesh and bone” (*Mythago Wood* 161), tree-Tallis as a magical replacement for the dead grandmother becomes a vegetal–human hybrid entity that is associated with the ability to intervene in the events inside the wood and send birds to the starving family. With regard to corporeality, this is the point in Tallis’s journey where the vegetal and the human are the most closely intertwined, and this is the deepest the girl ever gets inside the wooden realm. On her way back, as the human component in her body increases, Tallis first metamorphoses into a daurog, then she finally returns into a human body. But to her shock, the journey to the first forest has taken its toll and she is now an old woman.

Conclusion

Through the magic of Ryhope Wood, mythagos like Guiwenneth and even humans like Tallis can partake in vegetal deathlessness. In the wooden realm, all bodies are revived in one way or another, so that they can re-enact the mythic narratives that keep this uncanny ecosystem in motion. To achieve this, Ryhope relies on hybrid corporeality: there is no body within the wood that is not intruded upon by the vegetal Other; however, this general hybridity is not as fictional as we might think. Ecocriticism has already begun to deconstruct human corporeality as something entirely separate from its nonhuman environment. For instance, Stacy Alaimo argues that we should imagine “human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world” and thus it becomes “ultimately inseparable from ‘the environment’” (2).

Since the vegetal Other in Ryhope blurs the body–mind dichotomy, I suggest that trans-corporeality should be extended to denote the intermeshing of different *bodyminds* that exchange both material and immaterial components. Revival and repetition are natural characteristics of plant life in the primary world, but they are also natural processes carried out by the human psyche. Narratives rooted in the collective unconscious are

ready to sprout new leaves each time they are retold, and even when individual storytellers die, the story is kept alive. Relying on Holdstock's depiction of plant–human relationships, we can redefine the human as a creature that is inseparably linked to the more-than-human world. First, the human as an embodied creature is intermeshed with nature through trans-corporeality. Secondly, the human as a psychic being resonates with the processes that keep the entire ecosystem in motion.

Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Mónika Rusvai, Research Associate at the Library and Information Center of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, does research in scientometrics, environmental humanities and critical plant studies. She is the author of two fantasy novels.

Notes

1. The term plant blindness was originally coined by James H. Wandersee and Elisabeth E. Schussler in 1999. The authors intended to combat the evident consequences of zoocentric thinking that very often borders on anthropo- and zoochauvinism. In 2020, Kathryn M. Parsley coined a new term for the phenomenon: plant awareness disparity (PAD), which is supposed to relieve plant blindness from its ableist undertones. Nevertheless, it is yet to be seen whether PAD makes its way into general usage within critical plant studies. Under any name, however, the issue of plant blindness has to be addressed shortly, as the phenomenon leads to harmful consequences in cultural production, scientific research as well as in environmental policy. The immobility and muteness of plants might serve as an explanation for our limited ability to notice them, simply because our nervous system focuses on potential threats from the environment. Yet, as Matthew Hall warns in his book *Plants as Persons* (2011), it is problematic to present the zoocentric attitude as “inevitable for all human beings” (6).

2. Even in the natural sciences there is an ongoing debate about what terminology should be applied in describing the plant mind. Can we talk about a nervous system in the absence of neurons? Is there such a thing as plant intelligence? Anthony Trewavas's *Plant Behaviour and Intelligence* (2014), Richard Karban's *Plant Sensing and Communication* (2015), and the anthology *Communication in Plants: Neuronal Aspects of Plant Life* (2006), edited by František Baluška, Stefano Mancuso, and Dieter Volkmann, are among the many recent books that address these issues. Current eco-philosophy appears to be bolder in talking about the workings of the plant mind. Recent examples include Michael Marder's *Plant Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (2013) and Emanuele Coccia's *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture* (2018).

3. For some recent input into plant intelligence research, see Paco Calvo et al, literature review, “Plants Are Intelligent, Here's How.” By now most authors admit that a new term is needed to explain plant behavior, but in place of plant intelligence, some support plant cognition (such as Jonny Lee's recent article: “What Is Cognitive about ‘Plant Cognition?’”). For a concise discussion of plant senses, see Daniel Chamowitz's book *What a Plant Knows: A Field Guide to the Senses* (2013).

4. In this respect, the two levels of mythago deathlessness clearly resonate with the two levels of the Jungian unconscious (personal and collective). As Ildikó Limpár points out, “Ryhope Wood, as a mental landscape, performs both aspects of the unconscious: the mythagos strongly connect to their ‘owners,’ who, thanks to Holdstock’s careful design, are of various ethnicities of the world, and, as a consequence of that, the variety of their mythagos reflects humanity’s history as well as its diverse cultures, making the Wood indeed this store-house of archetypes” (146).

5. The well-known rewilding experiments around the world include the Pleistocene Park in Siberia and the reintroduction of wolves into the Yellowstone ecosystem. A recent monograph by Paul Jepson and Cain Blythe provides a scientific overview of rewilding attempts, identifying four types (trophic, Pleistocene, translocation, passive), while also formulating worries that a strict definition of rewilding might actually hinder these processes. As they argue, “[m]any practical rewilders worry that definitions of rewilding formulated by academic experts will constrain their ability to innovate and experiment with new approaches to conservation. They fear that international conservation policymakers will use such definitions to specify what rewilding should or shouldn’t be, and how it should be practised” (4 *Rewilding’s Practical Origins*).

Works Cited

- Alaimo, Stacy. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2010. Print.
- Arasu, Prema, and Drew Thornton. “Sleeping with the Fishmen: Reimagining the Anthropocene Through Oceanic-Chthonic Kinships.” *Fantasy and Myth in the Anthropocene: Imagining Futures and Dreaming Hope in Literature and Media*. Eds. Marek Oziewicz, Brian Attebery, and Tereza Dédinová. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. 150–60. Print.
- Baluška, František, Stefano Mancuso, and Dieter Volkmann, eds. *Communication in Plants: Neuronal Aspects of Plant Life*. Heidelberg: Springer, 2006. Print.
- Bennett, Jane. *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001. Print.
- Calvo, Paco, et al. “Plants Are Intelligent, Here’s How.” *Annals of Botany*, 125.1 (2020), 11–28. *Oxford Academic*. Web. 20 Feb. 2024.
- Chamowitz, Daniel. *What a Plant Knows: A Field Guide to the Senses*. New York: Scientific American, 2012. Print.
- Coccia, Emanuele. *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture*. Polity, 2018. E-book.
- Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. “Monster Culture (Seven Theses).” *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. Ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996. 3–25. Print.
- Hall, Matthew. *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany*. Albany: SUNY, 2011. Print.

- Holdstock, Robert. *Avilion*. London: Gollancz, 2010. Print.
- . *Gate of Ivory, Gate of Horn*. Gateway, 2014. E-book.
- . *Lavondyss*. London: Gollancz, 2015. Print.
- . *Merlin's Wood*. London: Orion Publishing, 2009. Print.
- . *Mythago Wood*. London: Gollancz, 2014. Print.
- . *The Hollowing*. New York: ROC, 1995. Print.
- Irigaray, Luce. "What the Vegetal World Says to Us." *The Language of Plants: Science, Philosophy, Literature*. Eds. Monica Gagliano, John C. Ryan, and Patricia Vieira. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2017. 126–35. Print.
- Jepson, Paul, and Cain Blythe. *Rewilding: The Radical New Science of Ecological Recovery*. Icon Books, 2020. E-book.
- Karban, Richard. *Plant Sensing and Communication*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2015. Print.
- Keetley, Dawn. "Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror; or, Why Are Plants Horrifying?" *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film*. Eds. Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. 1–30. Print.
- Limpár, Ildikó. "'A Heap of Broken Images': The Mythological Waste Land of the Mind: *The Hollowing* and *Ancient Echoes*." *The Mythic Fantasy of Robert Holdstock*. Eds. Donald E. Morse and Kálmán Matolcsy. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011. 141–55. Print.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. "The Critics, the Monsters, and the Fantasists." *The Wordsworth Circle* 38.1/2 (Winter/Spring 2007): 83–87. Print.
- Lee, Jonny. "What Is Cognitive about 'Plant Cognition'?" *Biol Philos* 38.18 (2023). *Springer Link*. Web. 20 Feb. 2024.
- Manlove, Colin. "Introduction to Modern Fantasy" (1975). *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*. Ed. David Sandner. Westport: Praeger, 2004. 156–66. Print.
- Marder, Michael. *Plant Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*. New York: Columbia UP, 2013. Print.
- Parsley, Kathryn M. "Plant Awareness Disparity: A Case for Renaming Plant Blindness." *Plants, People, Planet* 2 (2020): 598–601. New Phytologist Foundation. Web. 20 Feb. 2024.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. "On Fairy-Stories." *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories*. Eds. Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson. New York: Harper Collins, 2008. 27–84. Print.
- Trewavas, Anthony. *Plant Behaviour and Intelligence*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014. Print.

Wandersee, James H., and Elisabeth E. Schussler. "Preventing Plant Blindness." *The American Biology Teacher* 61.2 (1999): 82–86. Print.