SIX : THE ETERNAL MIND

...so shalt thou see and hear
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
Of that eternal language...
Samuel T. Coleridge.

Previous chapters have demonstrated how archetypal patterns and symbols can be accessed by writers and used to enrich their writing, amplifying meaning and adding powerful subliminal resonances of which the reader is not consciously aware. Writers such as Ursula Le Guin, J. G. Ballard, Alfred Bester, John Crowley and others have utilised these archetypal symbols to augment and enhance their subject matter. They have skilfully harnessed many multi-functional images into service as useful aids in the exploration of their individual ideas about personal or racial redemption, about the acceptance of what is alien or Other, and about the power of the imagination.

There are, however, some sf and fantasy writers who have sought to recreate the mythic sense in a more complete form in their writing, utilising not merely the components of myth - that is to say, the persistent archetypal images or symbols - but the broader structures of familiar myths, the stories themselves. Samuel R. Delany, for instance, has attempted to 'rewrite' myth, recasting and reshaping ancient formulæ in new guises in order to update the relevancies and meanings of these classic patterns. As a precociously intellectual young writer still in his twenties, Delany produced, in 1967, the novella The Einstein Intersection (1992). This is, ostensibly, a retelling of the Orpheus myth, with elements of the Theseus and other myths intermingled. Although this book won a Nebula award in the year of its publication, the acclaim that it received was, in my opinion, probably more a testimony to the unexpectedness of its intellectual pretensions within a

field not frequently noted for scholarly content, rather than a tribute to its artistic success. The Einstein Intersection, despite being hailed as Delany's 'most satisfying work' (Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, 1993:316), is profoundly unsatisfactory.

Set on an injured earth in the immeasurably far future, a mutant musician defies Kid Death to find his murdered love in an underground labyrinth presided over by a master computer called PHAEDRA - an acronym for Psychic Harmony and Entangled Deranged Response Associations - and menaced by various dangers that include a bull-like creature. But, despite the vivacity of the writing, the overall impression is one of sketchiness. The Minotaur of Greek legend, for instance, is a powerful imaginative creation precisely because it suggests a plurality of meanings. Delany's bull-creature, however, seems to be there simply in order to prove that he is 'rewriting' myth. Delany has also thrown some dragons - those well-loved staples of fantasy writing - into his tale. But, where in Ursula Le Guin's work, for instance, the dragons are potent creatures, trailing in their wake all sorts of emotional and intellectual resonances, the dragons of The Einstein Intersection are simply oversized, tameable lizards. And while the central character assures the reader that it is a great feat to be able to control and ride them, they, like the bull-creature, appear decorative rather than functional. Mastering the dragon, in The Einstein Intersection,, holds none of the powerful and cathartic implications suggested by Ged, for instance, who has learned to be a 'dragonlord', or by Tehanu, who instinctively speaks the 'dragon tongue'. In addition, despite Delany's characteristically assured use of language, the tone is often adolescent, achieving only a superficial energy. There is, for instance, a comic-book approach in the use of descriptive sound effects that is regrettably juvenile ('*Roaaaaaaa...!*', for example, or '*Clack! Clack! Clack!*'). Finally, allusions to the mythic sources are pointed with such bluntness that the reader is denied a truly revelatory sense of

exploration and consequent discovery. All these considerations prevent Delany's writing from achieving the kind of tone which carries with it those resonances that are embodied in the genuinely mythic. Thus, while the whole may well exercise the reader's intellect, the sense of awed response is not evoked in an entirely succesful manner. Delany has allowed himself to be satisfied largely with the pictorial aspects of these symbols and has been unsuccessful in harnessing them to characters and ideas that arouse a genuine emotional response. The writer does myth a disservice in here reworking the archetypal *motifs* in such a way that they become rather facile creations, what William Righter has called 'no more than a tag' (1975:81). Delany has, finally, been unable to capture the complex nature of the archetypal image, which Jung has explained thus:

> [Archetypes] are, at one and the same time, both images and emotions. One can speak of an archetype only when these two aspects are simultaneous. When there is merely an image, then there is simply a word picture of little consequence. But by being charged with emotion, the image gains numinosity (or psychic energy); it becomes dynamic…
>
> (Jung, 1978b:87)

Achieving this dynamic quality is particularly difficult for writers who toy with the patterns and images of myth. Mythic imagery is, in itself, neither poetic nor literary. It is only the manner in which the artist shapes his or her material that can make the ancient symbols speak powerfully. It is how the writer 'sees into' (to borrow a useful term from Herbert Read's Art Now [1960]) the myth and then gives it embodiment which is important. It would seem, then, that 'writing myth' is not simply a matter of dressing age-old symbolisms and narrative patterns in fresh intellectual apparel. Claude Lévi-Strauss's contention that myth is simply another form of 'language' without any special meaning and that, therefore, it can be 'translated' into any other 'language' without losing its meaning, is

manifestly erroneous. The failure of Samuel R. Delany (and other writers such as Roger Zelazny) testify to this. Myth may lose its meaning quite easily, it seems, if it is not handled correctly. Simple translation or transposition of the mythic images and symbols is obviously not enough to guarantee success. It seems that the author must succeed also in imparting the specific sense of awe and wonder which is an essential component of the mythic experience.

An entirely different approach - one which may be called transformation - appears to be what is needed. Robert Holdstock, a British writer of mythic fantasy, appears to have succeeded in this. He has found a less self-conscious, far more intuitive path into the realm of myth. His approach may even be said to be 'anthropological', for in many of his novels and short stories he attempts to plumb the mindset, the origins, from which mythic imagery might emerge. He seems fascinated by the enigmatic - and perhaps primitive - thought processes which give birth to 'mythopoeic' imagery. Bravely, he attempts to explore those mysterious aspects of the psyche from which such mythopoeic emanations flow, struggling to create within the minds of his protagonists a state which is so primordial that the genesis of symbolic thought patterns and image-creation are suggested. He is, in effect, trying to penetrate through to the mythopoeic mind core itself, to that shadowy area of the unconscious psyche in which 'autochthonous' and 'myth-forming structural elements must be present' (Jung, 1991f:126).

> These products are never...myths with a definite form, but rather mythological components which, because of their typical nature, we can call "motifs", "primordial images", types or - as I have named them - *archetypes*...a generally unintelligible, irrational, not to say delirious se-

> quence of images which nonetheless does not lack a certain hidden coherence.
>
> (Jung, 1991f:127)

Holdstock uses many of the images that have been discussed in earlier chapters: the mandala, the labyrinth, the forest, the beast and the journey are some of these. It is his ends that seem unique. He has shown, in the steady development of both his creative skills and of his concerns, an unswerving interest in the sources of these primordial and archetypal thought processes. Rather than using mythopoetic images as components of a story-telling process which amplifies other concerns, he attempts - particularly in some of his more recent works - to explore the evolution of the symbolic image. He engenders what C. Kerenyi calls a 'torrent of mythological pictures' (1985a:3) in his attempt to recreate in his protagonists that particular emotional state which must ensue in order to conjure up that 'delirious' and unrestricted sequence of archetypal patterns. In his progress towards the suggestion of such mind states, Holdstock has shown ever-increasing control.[1]

Holdstock's three early sf novels are all set on alien planets, where his characters are forced to retreat further and further into their own psyches. Here, it is the estrangement from foreign and essentially unassimilable environments that forces the protagonist inward, towards an encounter with the primordial mind. In Eye Among the Blind (1976), Earth-

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[1] Robert Holdstock is not entirely alone in his quest for the primordial self. Paddy Chayefsky, the eminent American playwright, screenwriter and novelist, has, in his novel Altered States (1978), also shown at least a passing interest in this theme. In a well-researched book which impresses through its scientific detail and also attests to the manner in which sf can make the crossover to mainstream writing, he explores the personal odyssey of a young scientist obsessed with finding the path back into primal memory, which he is convinced is stored in the brain's limbic system. He wants to 'find a true self, an immutable self.... to get down to the embedded rock of life, what Saint Joan would call the bare and barren soul' (43). The novel is fascinating, even moving at times, but since it does not work primarily through the creation of archetypal images, discussion of this work would not be entirely appropriate to this study.

wind (1987) and Where Time Winds Blow (1981) he has - with initial clumsiness, but with steadily developing skill - explored the manner in which alien environments may force the human mind into an encounter with hitherto unreachable areas of the psyche. In all three books he has used a similar device to suggest the convoluted path that his protagonists must follow as they journey towards some interior and emotional focal point. The image of a mandala-like labyrinth recurs constantly, as well as the harsh concept that part of the personality - sometimes even some essential physical attribute - must be jettisoned in order to reach fulfilment.

Thus, in Eye Among the Blind Holdstock's 'hero' explores the underground passages of Ree'hdworld, seeking an emotional truth and sense of repose which has hitherto eluded him. Finally, he must literally give up his sight in order to 'see' more clearly. In Earth-wind, where the oracular wind called Earthsong blows through subterranean caverns and passages, Elspeth Mueller suffers mutilations of the flesh and of the mind, losing her memory and regressing to primitivity. On Vanderzande's World, in Where Time Winds Blow, Leo Faulcon explores the labyrinthine rift valley of the timewinds, and then gives up something of his humanity in order to achieve a transcendental state of being. In each of these books, the central image is of an immensely convoluted maze-like passage along which the protagonist must travel, moving slowly towards the centre from the outer rim, until the core is reached. At this central point - the belly of the world and a place of cosmic revelation and regeneration - Holdstock suggests that his protagonists achieve some enormous change of perception, a sort of apotheosis. This transformation, however, if revealed to the central character, is never shared fully with the reader. Because each of these early works is unsatisfactory in its resolution, the reader is left with a strong impression that Holdstock is feeling his way towards a point which is, as yet, not quite clear even

to himself. In reading the series, the reader's sensation is one of moving, with the author and with each successive book, towards greater clarity. It is only in the light of his later work that the writer's purpose becomes fully intelligible. While he does appear, in these early novels, to be working towards the suggestion that it is not only the interior journey which is necessary for self-revelation, but also that it is in the innermost recesses of the mind that life may be lived most vividly, his intentions seem somewhat opaque and confused in argument.

It is in a later series of works that the writer's vision becomes more sharply focussed and able, therefore, to convey his purposes more successfully. Here Holdstock abandons futuristic settings and concentrates his conception of what Wordsworth termed the 'eternal mind'[2] into a smaller, more restricted geographical area, a space which becomes a potent metaphor for the human psyche itself. This space is a small piece of contemporary England's Kentish countryside, an unspoiled wooded area which he calls Ryhope Wood. This primordial stand of trees becomes the setting of his 'Mythago Wood' cycle, and it is in these writings that his ideas are explored with growing assurance and with ever more finely-tuned focus.

Mythago Wood (first published in 1984) is the first of the series. Here it is that he begins his most mature attempt to probe the genesis of the chthonian images that appear in his earlier works. Lavondyss: Journey to an Unknown Region (1990) and The Hollowing (1994) continue this thematic development, as does the novella The Bone Forest (1992), and it is noticeable that both his writing skills and the prodigious flow of imagery show

[2] 'Intimations of Immortality', l. 113.

increasing grace and fluency. Here his interest is in what may cause the birth of animistic beliefs: he struggles to put into metaphoric language the coming-to-life of some of those primordial and powerfully pagan images which are ubiquitous in the myths and legends of rustic England.

Within this cycle of books Holdstock attempts to give concrete and artistic expression to Jung's contention that archetypal memory is a primary and powerful component of the human psyche.[3] He seems also to have accepted Jung's belief that memory falls into two quite distinct categories. Jung maintains that some archetypal images are 'ontogenic'. As such, they are personal to the particular mind that creates them, for they grow from the individual experiences and histories of men and women. But, if Jung is correct, archetypal images may be typified also as 'phylogenic', that is to say, not simply personal but racial, inscribed indelibly on the collective memory of the human species.

> Just as the body has an anatomical pre-history of millions of years, so also does the psychic system. And just as the human body today represents in each of its parts the result of this evolution, and everywhere shows traces of its earlier stages - so the same may be said of the psyche.
>
> (Jung, 1993:381)

Thus Holdstock attempts to conjure up images from some remote and unmeasurable past, images which are, he suggests, stored in some mysterious way in the cortex of the human brain. In The Bone Forest and Mythago Wood his intuition leads him to formulate a bizarre and yet utterly convincing creation. In both books there is a central and dominating image, the Urscumug, a terrifying figure that ranges the pages of these novels. An

[3] Indeed, during a telephone interview in January 1997, Robert Holdstock mentioned that he had found Jung's Man and his Symbols (1978) profoundly influential in the 1970s.

amalgam of animal and human attributes, the Urscumug is an attempt to embody what might have appeared to the primitive mind as a primal father figure - creator, protector, judge and executioner all in one.[4] The Urscumug is a sort of shadowy precursor of the avenging and punitive Yahwe, the deity of the Book of Genesis. It is a nightmare emanation of the intellect which prefigures the later, more sophisticated, cosmic Father of the Old Testament. In an interview (January 1997), Holdstock said that he wished to try to create a primal father that was analogous to the concept of the primal mother as both creatrix and detroyer. In the violent and monstrous Urscumug - a genuinely chthonian figure - he has personified this image with a great deal of vigour and success. While this primordial image is never actually encountered in The Bone Forest (despite the obsessive searching of the protagonist), in Mythago Wood it becomes quite tangible. A looming and powerful incarnation stinking of decayed leaf matter, urine, and other animal odours, the Urscumug materialises as a pursuing and vengeful force, both destroyer and saviour. Its archaic nature suggests also the animal potentiality within the heart of man, something beyond human consciousness, for it is simultaneously suprahuman and subhuman. And, in reinforcement of the primordial overtones conveyed by the Urscumug, the story is one of passionate conflict between two brothers, as well as between sons and father - an archetypal theme which is, perhaps, as old as mankind itself. Christian Huxley, one of the brothers, describes the awe-ful figure to his younger brother:

> Part boar, part man, elements of other beasts from the wildwood. It walks upright, but can run like the wind. It paints its face white in the semblance of a human face. Whatever age it lived in, one thing's for sure, it

[4] The prefix "Ur' refers, obviously, to the 'original' and 'primitive' sources of the image, while 'scumug' is an imaginative creation drawn from the author's knowledge of Celtic and Inuit languages, from which he drew sounds, experimenting with them and blending them until he found a word that pleased him (Holdstock, 1997:pers. comm.).

> lived a long time before man as *we* understand 'man' existed; this thing comes from a time when man and nature were so close that they were indistinguishable.
>
> (Mythago Wood, 1995:65)

G. S. Kirk, author of Myth: Its Meaning and Function in Ancient and Other Cultures, is ambivalent regarding Jung's theory of archetypal images. Yet he is compelled to admit that Jung was 'a master of intuition' (1978:277) . It is certainly true that many brilliant scientific advances have come about by imaginative and intuitive leaps into the unknown.[5] And Robert Holdstock, working within the boundaries of the Jungian hypothesis, appears - through his own intuitive and artistic vision - to have found an entirely individual way to suggest the genesis of symbolic thought in the primordial mind. In the process, he achieves an interesting synthesis of the imaginative and the dramatic in his evocation of both phylogenic and ontogenic memory, and he is often remarkably successful at suggesting not only the archaic and enigmatic nature of the archetypal image, but also the state of mind which might engender its birth.

There have been others besides Jung - philosophers, anthropologists, ethologogists, ethnologists and theologians - who have ventured theories about the origins of mythic and symbolic thought processes. Émile Durkheim, Bronislaw Malinowski and James Frazer were simply a few of the anthropologists much interested in the genesis of myth. Frazer, writing in the first quarter of this century, regarded magical rites as being the prologue to religion. For him, mythic thought and ritual was a primitive phase of human development that would, inevitably, be superseded by science. Influenced by Malinowski, an entire

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[5] The most frequently-cited connection between intuition and scientific discovery is probably that of 19th century chemist, Friedrich August Kekulé von Stradonitz, whose discovery of the ring structure of the benzene molecule he ascribed to an inspirational dream he had, of a serpent biting its own tail. Interestingly, this image is also of archetypal and symbolic significance.

school of anthropological thought began to study myth in relation to the functions and needs that it fulfils within individual societies. This movement culminated eventually in the structuralist theories of Lévi-Strauss, who analysed myth not as a response to the numinous or the ineffable, but as a product of the need to solve problems of communication and social organisation. Other students of myth, such as C. Kerenyi, Mircea Eliade and Joseph Campbell, have followed the Jungian lead; they regard mythic symbolism as the expression of universal values and relevances, rather than purely functional structures specific to the needs of any one community. In the final analysis, as G. S. Kirk has pointed out, all theories are equally speculative, for it would seem that no single theory can be ever finally proved nor disproved.

> How a myth originates in a non-literate culture can never be determined.... One must remain aware...of the limitations of *a priori* arguments in a field about which so little is known, and of the restricted value of personal intuitions on the part of the literate, demythologized and Aristotelianized academics.
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> (Kirk, 1978:281)

However, there does seem to be some degree of consensual thinking about certain aspects of the mythic thought process. Jung is not alone in drawing parallels between myth and dream imagery. Most commentators (Freud, Eliade and Kerenyi amongst them) have agreed that myths seem to be as perplexing as dreams in the manner in which they may deny rational analysis while simultaneously appearing to carry enormous significance. Because of this, many myth commentators feel that myth formation precedes rational thought processes. For much the same reason, myth seems to share a great deal with religious thought, for religion also frequently resists intellectual argument and finally comes to rest on 'faith'. Thus, many also agree that myth and religion seem related in that

they 'invoke a passionate response' (Kirk, 1978:30). Ernst Cassirer has suggested that mythic symbolism comes from the intense visceral apprehension of the natural world that surrounds man, and from all the concomitant emotions aroused thereby, such as hope, fear, hate and love (in Kirk:265). There seems to be general agreement - whatever the current opinion is about the foundation of the mythic process - that the human mind has a natural propensity to form symbols, to create patterns which seek to confer meaning on a confusing, arbitrary and often brutal natural world. In other words, myth may be seen as imbuing human existence with a sense of relevance. In Jung's terminology, it could be said that mankind has always had a potent sense of the 'numinous', of the inscrutability of creation and of the cosmos, and of what Catholic liturgy would define as the 'mysterium tremendens'. Even the sceptical Kirk (1978:47) admits that '...man has a tendency to reduce the manifold world of his experience to an orderly system whose operation he can to some extent predict.'

Robert Ellwood, in The History and Future of Faith: Religion Past, Present and to Come (1988), also seems to feel that 'metaphor-making referents' are probably inherent in the psyche, inherited and passed along via genetic structures that may well be present even in instinctual animal behaviour. In humans, with their developed language and thought processes, these become more elaborate and overt, taking form in consciously exercised patterns of behaviour, such as ritual and story-telling. He calls the primitive capacity for symbolic thought - which he regards as essential for the evolution of spiritual thinking - 'proto-language' and suggests, much like Jung, that it is 'embedded' in the genetic inheritance of the human race.

> ...the capacity for proto-language and proto-religious thought [is] *already*

> embedded in the human psyche, having been carried over from the animal kingdom. Before the human dawn, our animal ancestors already bore a complete set of 'religious' gestures.... One thinks of the ritualized activity by which certain species define territory and inaugurate mating, or the responses - often highly symbolic - by which animals deal with danger, rivalry, and the presence of food and water.
>
> (Ellwood, 1988:27)

Indeed, there is a body of evidence from researchers in the field of animal behaviour that does seem to bear out this theory. Wolfgang Köhler, writing as early as 1916, details how he observed wild chimps executing what he was compelled to regard as a sort of primitive dance. Clumsy as the movements were, they struck him as unusual because they appeared to fall into a regular and almost ritual pattern. The chimps appeared to 'keep time' with each other in an orderly manner, while moving repetitively around a central point (in Young, 1991:116).

In further corroboration of the existence of 'proto' thought is an incident documented by primatologist Jane Goodall, who is perhaps the contemporary world's most famous observer of primate behaviour. Goodall has spent most of her life studying wild chimpanzees - man's closest relative in the animal kingdom. Amongst such deeply disturbing discoveries as the fact that chimpanzees are occasional carnivores, cannibals and warmongers, and the surprising discovery that they also demonstrate primitive tool-making abilities, she records (1990:202) how a party of chimps, coming unexpectedly upon a waterfall, appeared to experience an intense emotional reaction to this manifestation of nature's power. Hair erect, they began to perform spontaneous and exuberant displays, swinging above the water, charging alonside the river and hurling rocks about in a transport of extrovert behaviour. Dr Goodall speculates (tentatively) that this performance may have

been a very primitive expression of awe. She surmises that such emotions may have been experienced by man's early ancestors and that such 'proto-religious' feelings may well have led early man to religion.

> For ten minutes the three performed their wild displays.... Were the chimpanzees expressing feelings of awe such as those which, in early man, surely gave rise to primitive religions, worship of the elements?
>
> (Goodall, 1990:202)

Ellwood stresses that such proto-religious thought is not religion in any sense of the word as we know it. Religious language, proper, he points out, is relatively new to humankind. Initially, such symbolic thought processes would have been simply an attempt to grasp the meaning of the outer world, to appropriate or manipulate it in order to alleviate its terror and mystery. Furthermore, it is quite possible that the perception of the numinous and the cosmic would have pervaded every aspect of primitive society. Proto-religious thought would not have been compartmentalised but would have suffused all of life. It would have been simply a part of daily experience 'connecting humankind to the cosmic environment' (Ellwood, 1988:30) .

Whether or not Robert Holdstock is aware of such observations and theorising is uncertain. But in his novel The Hollowing (1994) he creates an episode that suggests that he has, through a purely intuitive process, hypothesised a state of mind which approximates just such primordial interaction with the natural world. His protagonist, Richard Bradley, enters a mode of existence that suggests an instinctive acting out of ritualised proto-religious action and thought. His lengthy sojourn in the mysterious spaces of Ryhope finally affects him strangely: he becomes what Holdstock calls 'bosky', absorbed into the

seasonal life of the wildwood, into the cycle of birth and rebirth with which all creatures and vegetation within the wild places must comply - and from which modern man has sundered himself, denying this as an imperative which shapes his existence.

> As scientific understanding has grown, so our world has become dehumanised. Man feels himself isolated in the cosmos, because he is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional 'unconscious identity' with natural phenomena. They have slowly lost their symbolic implications. Thunder is no longer the voice of an angry god, nor is lightning his avenging missile. No river contains a spirit, no tree is the life principle of man, no snake the embodiment of wisdom, no mountain cave the home of a great demon. No voices now speak to man...nor does he speak to them believing that they can hear. His contact with nature has gone....
>
> (Jung, 1978b:85)

In a long episode that is striking for its creativity, its imaginative fervour, its erotic connotations and its impulsive forward movement, the writer describes how Richard Bradley's rationality is swept away, the conscious aspects of his mind subsumed into the purely instinctual and conative. His intellect eclipsed, Richard plunges into an instinctive interaction with the rhythms of the woods, surrendering himself to the thrall of the wild places and seeking his love, Helen Silverlock.

> ...he moved at ease through the wildwood, through the dappled light, gathering the scents of rose and wood anemone, bud and sap, gathering all of these to the miasma that flowed with him. The scent-trail that he followed was strong, and he knew the woman was close. When the land dropped towards a moist hollow, filled with thorn and hazel thickets, he knew he had found her.
>
> (The Hollowing, 1994:289)

Later, after days of unsuccessful courtship, Richard is compelled by some strange, atavistic memory to adorn himself in yet more primitive garb, becoming absorbed into the instinctive life of pure sensation and irresistible biological imperative as he readies himself for an elaborate mating display.

> ...he went to scavenge for leaves and feathers, to make himself the ritual garments of display, a primal urge impelling him to decorate himself.
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> All day he constructed his display. He used thin splinters of tough grass to sew leaves of birch down each of his arms, and of oak across his chest, and of shining beech, emerald green, down the front of his legs. He was careful to pierce only the surface skin and not draw blood...
>
> He selected long heron feathers for his chin, working them through the long, thick hairs of his dark beard so that they hung like a white fringe. Black crow feathers formed a fringe across the base of his belly. He used chalk and light clay on the exposed skin of his body, then dabbed the purple and red juices of sloe and belladonna to make eyes on the clay-white.
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> (The Hollowing:192 - 193)

Richard Bradley and Helen Silverlock now seem, like two exotic New Guinean bower birds, to become embodiments of some ancient and primal fertility rite, powerfully animated by the desire to display, to mate and to procreate. Holdstock successfully conveys the strangely inhuman and yet numinous power of this urge, its *possessing* quality. He makes of this whole scene something quite extraordinary, in which the reader senses the dissolution of rationality and conscious volition. Surprisingly, neither character becomes dehumanised, but seems simply to personify some primal aspect of the life process. Rather than becoming ridiculous, the two personalities involved in the strange encounter are moving in their inability to resist the chthonic power and manifestation of the life force. The episode recalls Wordsworth's words from the first section of 'The Prelude'

(1969:426, ll. 391 - 393), in which he speaks of how he was overcome by 'a dim and undetermined sense / of unknown modes of being' (ll. 391 - 393). Here Holdstock has managed to suggest, to the reader, such a sensation very succesfully.

It is in his Ryhope Wood series of books that Holdstock's artistic vision becomes most fully integrated with his story-telling abilities. In Lavondyss: Journey to an Unknown Region his protagonist is the child, Tallis Keaton. As has been previously noted, children are often symbols of potentiality and possibility, their unformed minds and their evolving thought patterns signalling the movement forward towards greater emotional and intellectual awareness. Tallis Keaton becomes a potent embodiment of the capacity to experience 'proto-thought'. She is endowed by her creator with an unusually intense apprehension of the world that surrounds her, for she senses the mystery and power of the cosmos which envelops humankind. She has a very vivid and distinct sense of 'place'. For Tallis, streams, fields, rocks and trees are all permeated with spirit, with tangible presence to which she reacts with childlike simplicity. In her need to appropriate the world for herself, to make it her natural habitat, she finds that she has to name each part of it. Until she can 'find' the right and true name for each part of the countryside and woods that surround her, she feels that she has no right to familiarity with these places. Thus, she searches for names which evoke - or perhaps invoke - the spirit of place. A mighty oak becomes Strong against the Storm, a field becomes Sad Song Meadow. She creates for herself a set of taboos and rituals that are strongly reminiscent of the sort of apotropaic games that children play when, for instance, they feel compelled to avoid the cracks in flagstones.

> The name came to her as suddenly as the dread she had earlier felt. It was Morndun Ridge. The name thrilled her; it had a dark sound to it, a storm-wind sound. With the name came a fleeting sequence of other images: the

> sound of wind gusting through hides, stretched on wooden frames; the creak of a heavy cart; the swirl of smoke from a high fire; the smell of fresh earth being thrown up from a long trench; a figure, tall and dark, standing, dwarfed by a tree whose branches had been cut from the trunk.
>
> Morndun. It sounded like *Mourendoon.* It was an old place, and an old name, and a dark memory.
>
> Tallis rose to her feet again and began to step forward, out on to the stepping stones. But the water seemed to mock her and she drew back. She knew at once what was the cause of her concern. Although she knew the secret name of Barrow Hill, she hadn't yet named the stream. And she couldn't cross the stream without naming it or she would be trapped.
>
> (Lavondyss, 1990:47)

Tallis's naming games give her a pathway into a strangely convoluted labyrinth, the interminably branching world contained by Ryhope Wood. For it is in this cycle of books that Robert Holdstock first suggests that within the shadowy and primordial confines of Ryhope Wood is a larger space in which his protagonists may explore their psyches and find a mysterious form of happiness. Here, there is some kinship with the work of J. G. Ballard. Ballard's disaffected protagonists, too, withdraw into the alien environment, finding satisfaction in adapting to - and perhaps dying in - strange worlds. And, in the process, Ballard's dystopic landscapes also become metaphors for states of mind. But in these cases, the mind landscapes are an adaptation to a new and mutating external reality. The initial stimulus for this psychic mutation comes from without, from the changing world that gradually and irresistibly encroaches on the protagonist. In the case of Holdstock's writing, however, the landscape through which his characters must adventure is internal, for it is generated from within the psyche itself. This highly individual approach is consistently present and constantly evolving in his Mythago Wood cycle of novels.

Like J. G. Ballard's alienated protagonists, those of Holdstock often appear to lead emotionally scanty lives. His adult characters seem remote from their wives, and even from the children that they love. Their relationships appear unsatisfactory and they seem to be imbued with an all-pervading sense of isolation from the social life which surrounds them. For each of them, Ryhope Wood, the 'wild wood', creates a vortex which ensnares them and forces them to begin to interact once again with their own inner beings, living a constant stream of turbulent, violent and sensuous adventures. However, unlike Ballard's protagonists - who usually face a newly evolving future - Holdstock suggests that his are entering an archaic and eternal world, a zone which metaphorises the primordial energy of the psyche, the enduring unconscious mind of all humanity. The landscape to which they finally withdraw is one that is older than humanity itself and is charged with primeval energies.

Holdstock must, of necessity, use many of the archetypal symbols and images that have been put to such good use by Le Guin, Aldiss, Crowley and others, and which have been discussed in earlier chapters. He cannot fail to do so. They are the stock-in-trade of the novelist who grapples with the primordial mind, attempting to penetrate those baffling, even terrifying, regions of the psyche. However, he has shown remarkable artistic intuition and creativity in finding even more enigmatic symbolic images, some of which are subtly menacing and which seem to speak to the reader from the darkest recesses of the unconscious mind. Intrinsic to his particular vision is Holdstock's sense of place, the awareness of which helps to augment the individual qualities of his writing. His sensibilty seems to be particularly rural and 'English': his evocation of the primeval wood, as well as the uses to which he puts his landscape, is singular.

Ryhope Wood, outwardly only a small remnant of the primordial forest which once covered much of England's surface, becomes - once entered - an unrestricted area which teems with exuberant and violent life. The Wild Wood and the Forest have always been archetypal images of great power, for they are always 'alien places that baffle and confuse' (Lowry, 1982:77).

> Since ancient times the near-impenetrable forest in which we get lost has symbolised the dark, hidden, near-impenetrable world of our unconscious.
>
> (Bettelheim, 1991:94)

These are places in which one may meet and confront one's deepest fears, fears as ancient as the forest itself. And since the forest is a place of darkness and labyrinthine ways, it is a place in which one may easily become lost - a place which symbolises the chaos and disorder of the primordial, unconscious mind. In Mythago Wood, Christian Huxley, who has followed his father into Ryhope Wood, talks of the wood as the 'heartwoods' (189), clearly indicating its metaphoric significance.

These heartwoods are a place of mystery and terror, a tangle of signs and portents that are not easy to decipher. Holdstock is adept at suggesting the power of the greenwood, the countless millennia of history buried beneath the accumulated soil and leaf litter of England, the brutality and beauty of past ages, as well as the significance of primitive rite and custom. The wildwood, in his hands, becomes an exceptionally apt metaphorical setting for the journey inwards, the movement towards the psychic core.

Frazer points out that what remains of the forests of Europe are pitiful remnants of the vast wooded areas that once existed.

> For at the dawn of history Europe was covered with immense primaeval forests, in which the scattered clearings must have appeared like islets in an ocean of green. Down to the first century before our era the Hyrcynian forest stretched eastwards from the Rhine for a distance at once vast and unknown; Germans whom Caesar questioned had travelled for two months through it without reaching the end.... In our own country the wealds of Kent, Surrey and Sussex are remains of the great forest of Anderida, which once clothed the whole of the south-eastern portion of the island.... In the reign of Henry II the citizens of London still hunted the wild bull and the boar in the woods of Hampstead. Even under the later Plantagenets the royal forests were sixty-eight in number. In the forest of Arden it was said that down to modern times a squirrel might leap from tree to tree for nearly the whole length of Warwickshire.
>
> (Frazer, 1996:131-132)

It is not surprising, therefore, that the forest depths have become potent places of peril and possibility, or that they are so ubiquitous an image in folk and fairy tale through the ages. The forest must have, for countless ages, been a looming and threatening place of danger to the settlements which struggled to maintain themselves with a modicum of safety and peace; a place haunted by wolves, boars and social outcasts, all of which were unacceptable to civilized life. It was only much later, when the forests had been destroyed, when the boundaries of the wild places had been pushed back into smaller and more manageable areas that did not threaten human life, that more romantic and nostalgic attitudes towards the wild places became common currency. Kenneth Clarke (1966:18), in his study of the evolution of landscape as it is portrayed in art, reminds us that

> Mr Aldous Huxley once observed that if Wordsworth had been familiar with tropical forests he would have taken a less favourable view of his Goddess. There is...something in the character of great forests which is foreign, appalling, and utterly inimicable to intruding life.

Thus it is that in these dark, convoluted and 'appalling' places Hansel and Gretel and Little Red Riding Hood face dangers that test to the utmost their fortitude, their ingenuity and their moral capabilities, and from which they must struggle to emerge sound of life and limb. And it is in the tenebrious spaces of Ryhope Wood that Holdstock's protagonists, too, are tested, for it is within the forest that humans are cut off from all that is familiar; home and hearth and all the ramifications of social life and its protections. Significantly, his protagonists are often children, for children are aware and alert in ways that adults have forgotten. One of the ways to travel safely through the convolutions and dangers of the mindforest and to emerge safely on the other side, is to keep the child alive within the adult sensibility. Thus, in Lavondyss, Wynne-Jones says to the now grown-up Tallis, '...don't forget. Let the child ride *with* you' (410).

The many adventures and characters of the Mythago Wood cycle are all interconnected in one epic adventure that consumes many lives and decades, and which is, in fact, never quite completed. In brief, however, the journey into the Wild Wood begins as two researchers, Huxley and Wynne-Jones, discover that within Ryhope Wood are mysterious areas of energy. These areas are 'awakened', as it were, by activity in the most primitive parts of the brainstem, a cerebral activity which induces a process that they call 'mythogenesis'. Huxley's ancient and partly ruined journal, found by the child Tallis many years later, in Lavondyss, attempts to explain.

> [Wynne-Jones] has come to believe that the mythogenetic effect works not only to create the untouchable, mysterious figure of lore and legend, the hero figure, it also creates the forbidden *places* of the mythic past...But WJ has glimpsed these realms he calls *geistzones*, archetypal landscapes generated by the primordial energies of the inherited unconscious, lost in

> the lower brain.
>
> The *geistzone* is a logical archetype, logically generated by the mind. It can be both the desired realm, or the most feared realm: the beginning place, or the final place; the place of life before birth, or life after death; the place of no hardship, or the place where life is tested and transition from one state of being to another accomplished. Such a realm would appear to exist in the heartwoods.
>
> (Lavondyss, 1990:202 - 203)

The 'mythagos' of animals, birds, trees and people, and all the other grotesque and inexplicable creatures which Huxley and Wynne-Jones encounter, are embodiments which spring from the contents of their own minds. They erupt from the deepest, most primordial levels, from those areas which they themselves cannot bring under conscious control. As the two researchers venture further and further into Ryhope Wood, they discover and enter areas that seem to exist in some shadowy realm that resists geographic mapping. Some of these areas generate mythagos of great age and primitivity, figures of fearful and impenetrable meanings. The constant encounters within the mind forest, some fleeting, some more prolonged, suggest the unchecked stream of thoughts that goes on at various levels of consciousness. Of these, some are subliminal - the protagonist glimpses them only fleetingly with his or her peripheral vision. Others are evanescent or concrete to varying degrees. This maelstrom of energy also seems symbolic. It suggests the life force, constantly present, yet also strengthening or fading, like the flickering of a fire. Some of the mythagos are frighteningly violent, others are more benign. They become emblematic of the content of the subconscious mind, which is filled with a chaos of whirling energies, some darker and more primitive than others. Ryhope Wood becomes, finally, one great metaphor for mind.

Holdstock skilfully evokes the mystery, horror and enigmatic significances of these encounters. In The Bone Forest, he creates, for instance, a riveting and frightening incident in Ryhope Wood. Huxley, lost and fearful, experiences a pivotal and emblematic moment in time, the moment when man and horse encounter each other in some primeval meeting of terrified recognition.

Huxley sees, running through the forest, four immense horses which scream in fear, 'each impaled on its back with what he assumed quickly were the signs of *taming*' (The Bone Forest, 1992:33). These emblematic horses, tormented by flaming torches, the sharpened stems of wheat and corn, and the shafts of arrows thrust painfully into their hides, stream past Huxley. Behind follow their 'tormentors'. Huxley's journal describes the even more alarming sequel to this enigmatic event.

> Toward dusk, the horses were sent into the world again, running, slapped to encourage them, back along the broken tracks.... On their backs, tied firmly to cradles of wood, the horrific shapes of their pale riders watched the gloom, dulled eyes seeing darker worlds than even this darkening forest. The first to depart was a chalk-white corpse, grotesquely garrotted. Then, a man, still living, swathed in thorns, screaming. After that, a ragged creature, stinking of blood and acid smoke from the part-burned but newly-skinned pelts that were wrapped around him.
>
> Finally came a figure decked and dressed in rush and reed, so that only his arms were visible, extended on the crucifix-like frame that was tied to the giant horse. He was on fire; the blaze taking swiftly. Flame streamed into the night, shedding light and heat in eerie streamers as the great stallion galloped in panic towards me.
>
> ...

> I am still shocked by the nature of the sacrifices and the awareness that the murdered men seemed *willing* participants in this early form of acknowledgement of the *power of the horse*.
>
> Was I witnessing one of the first true *intuitions* of early humankind? That the beast could be both friend and foe to a tribe that increasingly looked for control over nature itself?
>
> (The Bone Forest, 1992:36 - 37)

The horse is, of course, a potent and emblematic figure in both art and literature, testifying to the hold that this particular creature has over the imagination of the human race. The combination of its beauty and strength must have always exerted an irresistible emotional and aesthetic influence on the minds of men. Its swiftness, power and energy would have, to the primitive mind, made it seem inextricably related to the mysterious forces which moved the cosmos, the appearance of sun, moon and stars and the cycle of the seasons. To harness such energy, whether for peaceful or warlike purposes, must have seemed infinitely desirable. There is enough evidence in European mythologies alone to testify to the awe with which the creature was regarded. Winged horses drew Apollo's fiery chariot daily across the heavens. The horse was sacred to Poseidon, god of the sea, and foam-tipped waves are spoken of as 'sea-horses' to this day. Pegasus, the winged horse, a symbol of the power of the unfettered imagination, is enshrined amongst the constellations. The ancient Celts venerated the horse as a sacred beast capable of transporting people to otherworldly places, and Nordic mythology also accords the horse an important role. Alexander the Great was admired for the manner in which, although a mere boy, he 'tamed' the great war horse Bucephalas, and it was widely believed that there was something supernatural in the bond he had with this animal. A more modern example of the manner in which the horse symbolises the streaming, untamed sweep of the subconscious mind and of the libido is graphically portrayed in Henry Fuseli's painting, 'The Night-

mare', in which the supine figure of a dreaming woman is oppressed by the terrifying apparition of a glaring horse's head.

Holdstock, in describing the encounter of Huxley with the horses, has attempted - and not without success - to create a vision that evokes for the reader all these associations, and which arouses something of the awe and wonder that must have afflicted primitive man in his fearful interactions with his mysterious and untamed world. Jung (1991f:129) talks of the way in which 'unconscious material streams, as though from opened side-sluices, into the field of consciousness', and certainly the power with which these huge and potent beasts rush past Huxley suggests all these connotations quite overwhelmingly. They suggest something of the way in which emotion, sensation and subliminal mental activity may be released from the subconscious mind to sweep with irresistible force through the imagination. But the scene also attempts to capture something of what the writer imagines might have been man's brutal efforts to gain power over his environment, and over the potent and enigmatic creatures that shared his forests and plains. Holdstock has attempted to take the reader deep within the mythic imagination, into what Jung calls the 'dark hinterland of the psyche' (1991f:128). The effect is extraordinarily minatory and convincing.[6]

Several times, as Holdstock delineates such chthonian figures and encounters, there is the sense, for the reader, of entering a genuinely ancient and elemental mindstate, for the mystery and terror of things primordial is powerfully invoked. In both Lavondyss and The

[6] The vigour of Holdstock's vision in this regard is even more striking when one compares it to the pallid evocation of the Neanderthal mind in, for instance, a novel like Jean M. Auel's The Clan of the Cave Bear (1981) - a novel which, nevertheless, achieved great popular success. William Golding's deeply moving The Inheritors (1955), which has aroused little interest, is far superior in this regard.

Hollowing, Holdstock creates an extraordinary image that seems to call to what is most atavistic and archaic in the human psyche. In Lavondyss (374 - 375), Tallis Keeton, irretrievably lost in the vastness of Ryhope Wood, is the first to encounter the enigmatic mythago of the Daurog.

> ...it took a quick, awkward step forward, sinewy body cracking like old wood underfoot.... It had stepped into a strand of light which played off the darkening face but caught the remnants of the leafy green which swathed the skull, the shoulders and the upper torso.
>
> Its fingers were long, many-jointed: twiglike. What Tallis had taken for a forked beard she could see, now, were curved tusks of wood growing from each side of the round, wet mouth. The tusks branched, one limb reaching up to the leafy mass on the head, the other reaching down, becoming tendrillar, tendils curling round the torso and the arms, then down the spindly legs, supplying lobate, oak-leaves as a covering for the scored, scoured bark-like flesh below. The creature's member swayed as it moved, a thin thorned length of tendril that flexed like a worm between the rustling thighs.
>
> ...Flat nostrils opened in the bark of its face. It was growing rotten, this thing, this Daurog, and was shedding summer's growth.... The Duarog didn't appear to blink, and streams of sap ran from the edges of its eyes. When it opened its mouth a slow drip of slime curled from the wet void; the mouth-tusks glistened.
>
> (Lavondyss, 1990:374 - 375)

Although it is the dark places of Tallis's own imagination which have created this strange figure, Holdstock suggests that it is also a racial memory, present in the archaic core of the human mind. For this mythago is, of course, a primitive embodiment of the Green Man - a pagan image which is prevalent all over Europe. It appears, paradoxically, with great fre-

quency in medieval church decoration of all types, from the carvings on stone portals, pediments and corbels to those on wooden pews. Like the vulpine figure in the crypt below Canterbury Cathedral (see p. 214 of this study), these foliate and sinister figures suggest that, despite the weight and authority of the church, there was still a need to propitiate, until comparatively recently, ancient and mysteriously potent forces of nature. Indeed, as Ellwood points out, recent research has proven the truth of this supposition.

> Meticulous research in social history is now beginning to paint a picture of popular religion up to the eve of the Reformation rather different from the conventional vision of a sea of Catholic piety. We perceive a population only lightly Christianised, in which various disorganised but potent pagan carry-overs were at least as trusted as the Church....
>
> (Ellwood, 1988:3)

Here, from William Anderson's The Green Man: The Archetype of our Oneness with the Earth (1990), are two descriptions of gothic stone-carved Green Men, the first in Bamberg, Germany, the second in a Wiltshire parish chapel. Each of these could have been a progenitor of Holdstock's visionary Daurog.[7]

> His leaf mask is formed of one acanthus frond, swelling out from the brows.... The lobes of the frond make a beard, moustaches, cheekbones, forehead and hair. The lips and mouth, the nose and nostrils, the eyes with their heavy folds and deep-drilled pupils...are finely modelled, rising naturally out of the leaf forms to create a face that is...powerful, accustomed, to rule, all-knowing and all-seeing. His command of everything that goes on in his domain is reinforced by the manner in which the holes formed by the overlapping of the leaf lobes seem to make a series of eyes

[7] In a short story called 'Thorn' (1992), in which he suggests the ancient and fecundating power of these images, Holdstock tells of a stonemason who is carving a green man image in the gallery of a village church and who feels the green man's 'cold, old breath' (102) on his fingers.

> through which he observes the world.
>
> I know of no sculpture which is at once so frightening and so beautiful.
>
> (119)

> Out of his mouth pour the twisting twigs of hawthorn rising in a swirling rhythm of undulating leaves between which hang bunches of haws. Four birds perching on the outsize leaves peck at the haws. The vigour of the foliage indicates spring: the presence of the berries indicates autumn. As for his face, it is of a power to make you draw back and compose yourself....
>
> (120)

Surprisingly, the impulse which led to the generation of images such as the Green Man is still alive today, although its vitality is depleted. Frazer's The Golden Bough testifies to its continuance. This monumental work of scholarship is essentially a compilation of myths and rituals of fertility, especially those connected with the seasonal decay and regeneration of vegetation. Although Frazer's influence waned sharply during the period when anthropology became more of a science, his work still carries important literary resonances and is well worth acquaintance. His thesis was that all myth, ritual and magic that is associated with vegetal growth stem from the long-forgotten but widely practised sacrifice of the 'king of the wood'. That his work made questionable assumptions, drew doubtful conclusions and was patronising in its attitude to the 'savage' mind, is undeniable. Nevertheless, he delineated - somewhat like Freud (whom he abominated) - a vast and hitherto hidden area of human behaviour. His catalogue of the symbolism of European rustic customs stresses the links between human sexuality and agricultural ritual and bears witness to the prevalence - even currently - of many of these rituals, albeit in much diluted form. Just as the pagan connections behind Christmas trees and Easter eggs have been largely lost, so today most people are unaware of, and would probably be repelled

by, the brutal associations of what now seem to be merely quaint and picturesque customs such as May Day pageantry and Morris dancing, both of which are still enacted on village greens and in town squares.

> ...if these old spells and enchantments for the growth of leaves and blossoms, of grass and flowers and fruit, have lingered down to our own time in the shape of pastoral plays and popular merry-makings, is it not reasonable to suppose that they survived in less attenuated forms some two thousand years ago among the civilised peoples of antiquity? Or to put it otherwise, is it not likely that in certain festivals of the ancients, we may be able to detect the equivalents of our May Day, Whitsuntide and Midsummer celebrations, with this difference, that in these days the ceremonies had not yet dwindled into mere shows and pageants, but were still religious or magical rites...?
>
> (Frazer, 1996:168)

Robert Holdstock, in much of his work, and particularly in his Mythago cycle, seems to be attempting to reach back in time to those uncharted moments in human history when the human mind would have been inclined to invest natural objects with vigorous supernatural qualities. As Frazer testifies (1996:191 - 194), trees have always been regarded as sources of magical and prophetic power. The great and ancient oak at Dodona, in Epirus (now Albania), for instance, was sacred to Zeus and was a renowned oracle in pre-Christian times. It is considered not unlikely that Alexander the Great, a man of remarkable intellect, consulted the oracle here (Renault, 1983:57). In Italy, Frazer tells us, 'every oak was sacred to Jupiter' (1996:192), and that the Druids

> ...esteemed nothing more sacred than the mistletoe and the oak on which it grew: they chose groves of oaks for the scene of their solemn service, and they performed none of their rites without oak leaves.... Indeed the very

> name of Druids is believed by good authorities to mean no more than 'oak men'.
>
> (Frazer, 1996:193)

The oak, with its prodigious longevity, its mighty growth and its great sturdiness, must have impressed even the earliest of humans. Furthermore, the great trees of the primary forests would have seemed to inhabit otherworldly zones which ordinarily were inaccessible to mankind, for the roots of trees penetrate deep below the crust of the earth, while their branches reach upwards into the airy spaces of the sky, giving them commerce with both the dark underworld and the abode of sky spirits. Trees also provide prodigal bounty. They afford shelter to creatures of all shapes and sizes, and food in the form of nuts and fruits. Even more miraculous is the fact that each year they appear to die, shedding their outer garments of leaves and standing with their bare skeletons unprotected against the fierce elements. Yet, each spring they regenerate themselves, becoming reborn and putting forth the tender shoots of new growth. It is not surprising, therefore, that many cultures have created a mythic and sustaining 'tree of life'. Ancient Egyptian and Sumerian sources frequently depict such trees, while the Nordic world tree, Yggdrasil, is perhaps the most famous.

Trees must have become symbolic very early in human history, becoming endowed with supernatural potency and significance. Holdstock's bizarre Daurog are an attempt to recreate the manner in which the primeval mind might have struggled to come to terms with the enigmatic rotation of the seasons and the wondrous forces of fertility, death and regeneration. His oakjacks and hollyjacks, willowjacks and jackhazels are spectacular images. They are remarkably successful attempts to create primitive embodiments of the mythic Jack-in-the-Green figures which personify the spirit of the tree and which still

appear in seasonal rustic pageantry. Frazer's Golden Bough attests to the powerful hold of the tree spirit over the human imagination, cataloguing an impressive array of country rituals in which such animistic belief still lingers. He describes the festival of 'Green George' in Transylvania and Rumania which has, for instance, as its central figure 'a lad who is concealed from top to toe in green leaves and blossoms' (153). He mentions the English Jack-in-the Green, 'who walks encased in a pyramidal framework of wickerwork, which is covered with holly and ivy...' (155). In all these instances, the mummery seems to be associated with aspects of vegetal fertility and regeneration. Anderson's description of a ceremony he witnessed at Hastings, England as recently as May 1990, makes this aspect of the mummery clear:

> The Jack in the Green has erupted from beside the sea. A tower of leaves about eight feet high surmounted by an open crown of flowers with a mask face disgorging vegetation, he is escorted by several Green Men. Their hair, flesh, clothes and adornments are all green.... The Jack and his escort process through the streets of the town followed by sides of Morris dancers and clog dancers.... It is a splendid day with the sun shining down on the water beneath the castle heights, exactly right for the purpose of the ceremony: the release of the spirit of summer.
>
> This happens in the last dance, for which the Jack descends from his mound and bobs up and down on the edge of a side of Morris dancers performing a stick dance.... The dancers drive their wooden swords into the leaves of his covering. The crowd cheers and the Jack in the Green falls over dead.
>
> (Anderson, 1990:9)

Thus the concept of birth must also admit to the existence of death. If the spirit of the tree suggests the magical potency of the reproductive cycle, it must also suggest that there is a corresponding seasonal decay. Often the customs surrounding these festive figures

have unsettling undertones that suggest they were once associated with more sinister practises such as ritual sacrifice. Thus, like much of nature, Holdstock's Daurog mythagos are intensely ambiguous, for their motives are uncertain and unpredictable. They seem to be at once protective and threatening, and are imbued with all the enigmatic and slightly sinister qualities with which Green Man imagery is charged. In their summer aspect of sappy growth they may present the creatures of the forest, both animal and human, with their bounty of fruits, nuts and berries. Their leafy growth may give protection from the elements. But in winter, like the trees which become bare and comfortless, the Daurog are transformed into more feral and threatening manifestations, which Holdstock calls Scarag. In The Hollowing, the boy Alex is intensely aware of the dual nature of these mythagos. 'Try not to hurt them. When spring comes, they'll be our friends' (357). And indeed, for this lost child, the Scarag finally provide what is, in essence, a form of rebirth, giving him back full consciousness and memory. Wynne-Jones, whom Tallis has encountered deep within the heartwoods, attempts to explain the genesis of these strange images:

> They were...probably engendered by the association with the first post-Ice Age forest of the Mesolithic period ten thousand years or so before the birth of Christ. By Bronze Age times the 'green man' - Green Jack, or Hooded Robin, the medieval 'wodehouse' - had become a solitary forest figure, partially deified, reflected in and mingled with such elemental forms as Pan, and Dionysus, and vaguely remembered Dryads. But to the Mesolithic hunter-nomads they formed a forest kingdom, a race of forest creatures, saviours, oracles, and tormentors all at the same time; they arose in the mythogenic unconscious both to explain nature's hostility to the people's actions, and to express the hope of survival against the unknown.
>
> (Lavondyss:379)

It is this aspect of Holdstock's work which seems to be most remarkable, for he has created a unique synthesis of intellect and emotion, achieving something of what Jung described as the 'dynamic' qualities inherent in the true archetype. The manner in which his protagonists begin to interact with the emanations of their own minds is suggested with a great deal of immediacy and conviction. Jung (1978b:69) has said that '...in former times men did not reflect upon their symbols; they lived them...', and Robert Holdstock conveys this vigorous 'living out' of the dream, managing also to suggest both the uniqueness and the generality of the images generated by the minds of his protagonists. The mythagos have - for the most part - an impressively vital quality, and the writer's strong emotional commitment to his vision contributes to the success of his writing.

However, in devoting so much space to an explication of Holdstock's images, I do not wish to suggest a completely uncritical viewpoint. There are disappointments as well as delights to be found in his work. Inherent in an understanding of the archetypal symbol is the concept of the image as a transformational device. In pointing towards the inner realm, the archetype - to function most effectively - should lead towards some process of growth, should guide the protagonist along a path that leads towards full maturity or - in Jungian terms - individuation. The psyche has a miraculous capacity to heal itself, and the symbolic process is one way for humanity to transcend its limitations. This, also, is the meaning inherent in the labyrinthine journey towards the central point of the mandala. But, while Robert Holdstock takes his protagonists deep into this symbolic landscape, in a certain sense they fail to find completion through what should finally be a profoundly transformational experience. In a sense, therefore, the journey seems unfinished.

While the fascination of Holdstock's writing lies in his successful creation of primitive mindstates and of the subsequent images which are then engendered in his characters, his protagonists - like those of J. G. Ballard - are obsessive. Once they yield to Ryhope it is impossible for them to turn back. They travel, even while resisting, more and more deeply into the wild wood, moving irrevocably further and further away from the world that lies beyond the heartwoods. Disappointingly, once claimed by this mind landscape which is so seductive in its violence and beauty, they do not return. Even though they fear it, they must yield to its allurements. All finally abandon forever their 'normal' lives, plunging deeper into the maelstrom of emotion and sensation engendered by the magical combination of Ryhope and the power of mind. The spell of the wild woods is, finally, irresistible: neither Tallis, Richard Bradley, Wynne-Jones, or any of the Huxley family are able ever to emerge from the mindforest, to take up life in the mainstream of humanity where it should be lived most effectively and fully.

> As crossing the threshold into the adventure separates the hero from ordinary men and women, crossing the threshold from the adventure back into the commonday world separates the hero from all those who are hopelessly lost in dream, who live with ghosts, and who cannot be reached from the world outside themselves. The threshold separates the hero not only from the commonday world and his adventure, on the way in, but it also stands between the hero and insanity on the way out.
>
> (Hare, 1988:128)

This inability to accept normality seems, in the final count, to be something of a failure. It hints at an unhealthy self-absorption. If one chooses to live only within the mind, chooses to interact only with the products of one's own imagination, then one has rejected, in the long run, the outer world, has judged it wanting, incapable of providing true happiness or fulfilment. Despite the bewitching quality of Robert Holdstock's vision, it seems to be,

finally, inadaquate. Perhaps because his characters seem to be intrinsically normal - not pathological in the way of Ballard's characters - their surrender to the wildwoods is more disturbing. The long journey into the labyrinthine world seems, finally, to be an end in itself; his protagonists are never able to leave the mindforests and mindcaverns. Integration - at this point in Holdstock's development, at any rate - does not follow upon discovery. His protagonists simply become more sundered from the outer world, when one cannot help but feel that they ought to become better equipped to contend with it. For Holdstock, the journey becomes a final retreat and a rejection of the social contract.[8]

However, one of the intriguing qualities of Robert Holdstock's work is the sensation - perhaps more so than with any other writer discussed in this study - that the reader is following work in progress. For this particular writer, the journey is not yet over and it is quite possible that he is still working through some internal process that may ultimately lead in another direction. While not wishing to belabour the importance of his work - he himself would probably be the first to admit (despite the seriousness with which he pursues his craft) that he writes primarily to entertain - I suggest that he is a writer whose future work may present interesting development.

What makes Holdstock's work seem strikingly original is the direction in which he has chosen to go: inward, towards the 'dark hinterland' of the psyche. Also impressive is the richness, the vitality and the evocativeness of the archetypal symbols that he has summon-

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[8] In a later book - not dealt with here - called Ancient Echoes (1996), the writer does seem to have become aware of this problem. He chooses now to allow his protagonist to live in two worlds simultaneously, that is to say, in the mind forest as well as in the world of mundane reality. However, this dichotomy within the personality of the main character still seems more like fragmentation than integration. It seems that Robert Holdstock has not yet solved the problem of how to fuse successfully the dark, secret life of the mind forest with the needs of daily experience.

ed from the recesses of his own imagination, and then transformed for his particular purposes. He seems to be instinctively aware, as Jung has said, that:

> In earlier ages, as instinctive concepts welled up in the mind of man, his conscious mind could no doubt integrate them into a coherent psychic pattern. But the 'civilized' man is no longer able to do this. His advanced consciousness has deprived itself of the means by which the auxiliary contributions of the instincts and the unconscious can be assimilated.
>
> (Jung, 1978b:84)

Holdstock's work, while appearing purely fantastic, is thus set within an intellectual and theoretical framework which imparts something of that discursive quality which is essential to the sf genre. Not simply tales of mystery and gothic horror, his stories demonstrate the rich amalgam that can occur when the fantastic and the scientific are blended with innovative and imaginative gifts. His work demonstrates, as does the work of writers discussed in previous chapters, the potent and the protean qualities of both sf and fantasy. Furthermore, it becomes clear from the works discussed here, that these genres can move in a multitude of directions, and that they can be possessed of visionary power.