The Enchanted Landscape:

Mythic Arts, New Romanticism, and Enchantivism on Dartmoor

by

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A thesis accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In Folklore and Public Culture

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University of Oregon

Summer 2026

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Master of Arts in Folklore and Public Culture
Title: The Enchanted Landscape: Mythic Arts, New Romanticism, and Enchantivism on Dartmoor

In southwest England, Dartmoor is a wild place, a mixture of contrasting environments from stark moors to thick mossy woodland, punctuated by granite tors and archaeological features. This thesis argues for the presence of New Romanticism in the region; the sublime experience of landscape on Dartmoor is combined with local folklore to create a sense of enchantment through adapting and negotiating old narratives, building collective identity and action. Manifested by the mythic arts community on Dartmoor, many traditional forms of art-making specifically harness Romantic values of imagination, emotion, and a connection with nature resulting in Enchantivism, social and environmental campaigns that are initiated and supported by these encounters with enchanting images and figures. This thesis explores examples grounded in these themes that unify the local community into collective action, in particular: an oak table in the woods, a giant legend that embodies the genius loci, and a mythic art exhibition.

Acknowledgements and Dedication

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the faculty of the University of Oregon's Folklore and Public Culture program, who captain a very rare and unique ship- one that traverses the seas of this field with commitment, reflexivity, and joy. In particular, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Martha Bayless, Dr. Leah Lowthorp, and Dr. Rachelle Saltzman, who have each brought their own unique insight, humor, and guidance to my thesis committee. I also wish to thank my family, especially my partner and my children, who have shown unwavering and unconditional support.

Finally, I would like to convey my deep gratitude for the community of mythic artists and folklorists on Dartmoor who shared their time, wisdom, creativity, and experience. My research, fieldwork, and the resulting publications are a reflection of the enchantment created and held in this special place. I dedicate this work to them.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The southwest of England is a wild place. Nestled on a peninsula between Cornwall to the west and Somerset and Dorset to the east, Devon is a rural English county noted for its tangled forests and vast, stark moors (Fig. 1). This region includes the area of Dartmoor, a designated National Park known for its granite tors, Bronze Age and Medieval settlements, and wild ponies (Fig. 2).[1] The focus of my research and fieldwork is on the Dartmoor and directly surrounding areas, specifically on how folklore is uniquely embodied by the mythic arts community through intersections of heritage, social memory, and environment, and how the collective vision of restoring and re-storying the land through service and enchantment is constructing new strategies for social and environmental solidarity, sustainability, and resistance. I'm also interested in how historical mythic motifs, iconography, and practices are being revived and used in these modern contexts. The intersection of Dartmoor's landscape, local folklore, and mythic art community fosters a modern counterculture movement of New Romanticism, directly transforming creative folk practices and subject matter into a potent mechanism for social and environmental action, a process defined here as Enchantivism. Rather than treating folklore as a static relic of the past, these narratives and images are actively deployed to navigate modern ecological and social anxieties, setting the stage for an ethnographic exploration of enchantment as a transformative and generative grassroots force for systemic change.

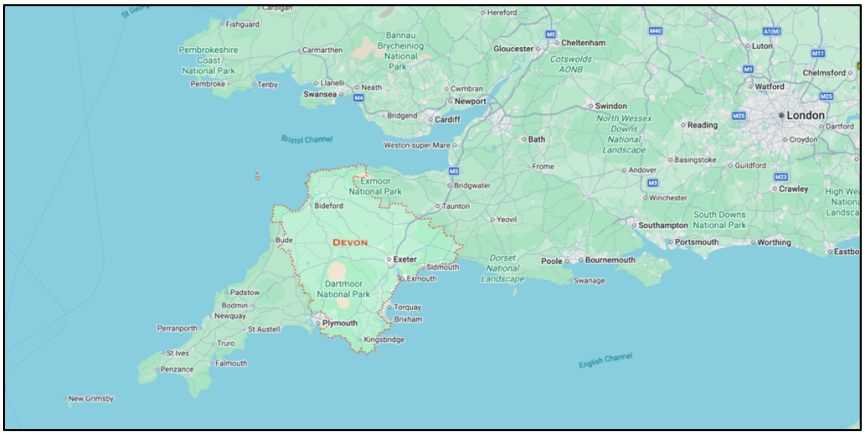


Figure 1. Location of Devon, Southwest Peninsula of England, Google Maps, 2026.

[1] Tors are large rock outcrops that rise from the summit of a hill. (See Fig. 4).



Figure 2. Location of Dartmoor National Park, Google Maps, 2026.

This research organically explores social, environmental, and political themes that are increasingly emergent, from Dartmoor communities highlighted in this work to global examples. By examining a region that is both relatively isolated and experiencing a recent influx of newcomers, the role and expressions of folklore can be understood in relation to an experience of landscape that is locally considered distinct and rare within England. How local folklore is embraced and embodied on Dartmoor is an important case study in the modern position folklore holds in coping with and navigating great change. This thesis intends to show the possibilities of such expressions when derived from a landscape that offers a sublime experience of nature and heritage; how examples of Romantic representations of Dartmoor's landscape and folklore offer new insight into intentional place-making, identity, and action. These expressions can and do result in inspiring social movements via enchantment that are not only impacting both local and national campaigns, but ways of knowing and interacting with the land itself.

This thesis represents a portion of the work undertaken over approximately eighteen months of online and bibliographical research combined with on-site fieldwork on Dartmoor the summer of 2025. This study only considered Dartmoor and the communities and landscapes within or near this region; primary locations of research included the villages and towns of Chagford, Moretonhampstead, Postbridge, Totnes, Ashburton, and

Teignmouth. (Fig. 3). The resulting data came from these various sources, lending the voices of individuals, communities, and organizations to this documentation. The interlocuters included in this study are either self-identified mythic artists, or those who work closely with them in some capacity. This study also includes participant observation at relevant events that are detailed in this thesis, such as Widdershins III, an exhibition of local mythic art, "The Great Oak Table," built to serve and enchant a community, and The Lost Giants' creation of "Old Crockern," which brings a legend to life for social activism. My primary focus during interviews was on the artists who participated in a mythic art exhibition entitled "Widdershins III," held at the Green Hill Arts gallery in Moretonhampstead on Dartmoor. Of the artists featured in this exhibition, I was able to speak with Angharad Barlow, Rima Staines, Jim Crawley, Natalie Simpson, Danielle Barlow, Claire-Shauna Sanders, Terri Windling, Andrew Sinclair, Diane Coates, Brian Froud, Wendy Froud, Hazel Brown, Alan Lee, and exhibition curator Carol Harvey. While in Moretonhampstead, I interviewed Suzi Crockford, known online as "A Dartmoor Witch," who makes musical instruments and spell bundles from natural materials sourced from the moor. I also spoke with Abby Stobart, Gillian Webster, and Helen Gilbert of MED Theatre, a developmental community arts organization. I met Helen Bruce, a storyteller, author, and officer at the Dartmoor Preservation Society for an interview in Ashburton, where I also visited Field System, a shop and event venue that supports and highlights local folklore art and objects run by Milly Brown and Mark Jessett. In Ashburton I also sat down with writer Sophie Pierce and artist Alex Murdin, who run the Dartmoor Tors Festival. While in Chagford, I attended a Midsummer Feast as well as an Open Day at Pigwiggen Wood, owned by Elizabeth Jane Baldry, a harpist and British fairy-tale film-maker, with whom I later sat down with for a discussion at her home in Chagford. Also in Chagford, I met with award-winning puppeteer, writer, and director William Todd Jones, resulting in an unexpected adventure, and during one of my visits with Terri Windling, I spoke with her partner, Howard Gayton, a director, performer, playwright, and teacher specializing in Commedia dell'Arte. I went rambling with storyteller and writer Lisa Schneidau to Wistmans' Wood and Crockern Tor, both places of Dartmoor legend, as well as with Dartmoor guide and author Emma Cunis to explore the area around Kes Tor, rich with the ruins of Bronze Age roundhouses, stone rows, and burial chambers. I spent a week with founders Amerie Rose

and Harry Key at the Folk Preservation Society. Due to scheduling, I conducted three interviews online after my fieldwork trip: Henry Everett, a storyteller I met at several events while on Dartmoor, artist Ethan Pennell, who created *The Dartmoor Folklore Map*, and Ava Osbiston, who is a textile-based artist in South Devon and part of the Thresh & Bray Theatre Collective, which creates performances rooted in relationship with place. Finally, my field work also included reciprocal community engagement through active participation and service; I taught workshops on printmaking and illuminated manuscripts as well as offered lectures on feminism and fairy tales and presentations of my research at both MED Theatre and the Folk Preservation Society. The voices and perspectives of my interlocutors are woven and centered throughout this work.

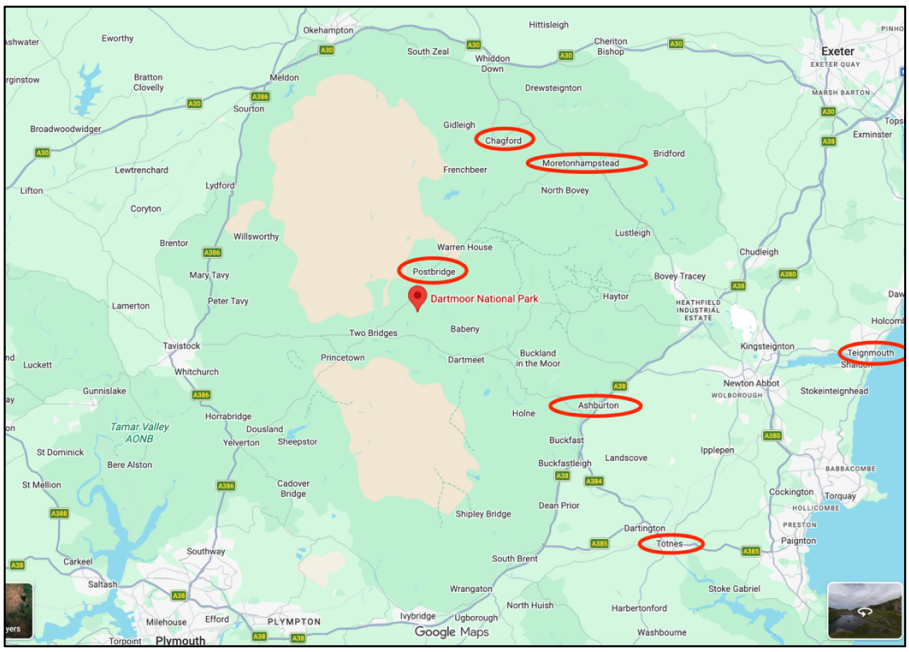


Figure 3. Primary Research Locations of Dartmoor Villages, Google Maps, 2026

Ultimately, this thesis argues for the presence of New Romanticism in the region; that the sublime experience of landscape on Dartmoor is combined with local folklore to create a sense of enchantment through re-storying, adapting and negotiating old narratives to build new collective identity and action. Embodied and expressed by the mythic arts community on Dartmoor, many traditional forms of art-making specifically harness the Romantic values of imagination, emotion, and a connection with nature that results in

Enchantivism, social and environmental campaigns that are initiated and/or supported by these encounters with enchanting images and figures.

In the next chapter, "The Enchantment of the Moor: Romanticism, the Sublime, and Social Activism," I lay a theoretical framework for how my fieldwork documents a counterculture movement inspired by the landscape and local folklore. In Chapter Three, "Dartmoor, A Sense of Place," I examine the layered experiences of Dartmoor; from the natural environment, to the deep attachment to heritage, to the lore that settled in this region, Dartmoor provides observers an encounter with the sublime that results in distinct folkloric expressions and identity, and draws people into a feeling of enchantment, belonging, and attachment. In Chapter Four, "The Mythic Arts on Dartmoor," I discuss the thriving mythic arts community in this context, exemplified by an exhibition of mythic art, Widdershins III, held at Green Hill Arts in Moretonhampstead. And in Chapter Five, "Dartmoor and Enchantivism," I offer examples of re-storying and restoring the land through community projects and activism, highlighting "The Great Oak Table" and The Lost Giants' "Old Crockern" projects as tangible examples of enchantment as a catalyst to resistance and action. A concluding chapter ties the threads of these topics together.

Dartmoor is the largest surviving prehistoric landscape in northwestern Europe, dotted with remaining, visible evidence of ancient human life, a rich archaeological trove of artifacts and information including ritual spaces like stone circles, the foundation of Neolithic roundhouses, and burial mounds.[2] The moor itself was covered in forest up until around five thousand years ago when humans came and cleared the trees for farming and grazing their animals. As English Heritage properties curator Win Scutt describes, "what appears to be a natural wildscape is actually a human creation."[3] Because the land was cleared of most forest and the climate became significantly wetter and colder during the Bronze Age, the soil became less fertile and restricted tree re-growth, the combination of which resulted in the formation of blanket peat bogs.[4] This eventually limited use until the Middle Ages, when the climate improved along with England's economy and farming and

[2] English Heritage. "Dartmoor's Historic Landscape," *English Heritage*, accessed 14 March 2025. https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/learn/histories/dartmoor/

[3] English Heritage. "Dartmoor's Historic Landscape," *English Heritage*.

[4] Dartmoor National Park Authority. "Bogs and Wetlands: Dartmoor Fact Sheet," *Dartmoor National Park*, 2004. https://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0022/164137/lab-bogs.pdf

villages returned to the moor.[5] Tin ore mining and stone quarries came and went, as did textile production; industries that made their mark on the land.

Dartmoor eventually became a popular area for tourism in the nineteenth century after being venerated by Victorian artists, writers, and antiquarians for its landscape and ancient sites, drawn in by the wild beauty they had seen in paintings or read about in poetry and prose.[6] It was these same Victorian creatives, joined by historians and archaeologists, who campaigned for conservation of the land and its history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, leading to the designation and establishment of Dartmoor National Park in 1951.[7] One of England's first national parks, the land is tended by the Dartmoor National Park Authority, which balances the management of farming, tourism, recreation, ecological concerns, and historical sites, though four ancient sites within Dartmoor are cared for by the organization English Heritage.[8]

Dartmoor is within a region that is marked off or framed by more ordinary surroundings. One way is simply by geography; the peninsula on which Dartmoor lies is bound on three sides by the sea and maintained a historical and cultural distinction from the rest of England for centuries. Its rurality and lower infrastructure have led to a continued remoteness for its residents, although it remains a popular tourist season tradition, especially on the coast which is considered the "English Riviera." The population of Dartmoor is around 35,000 residents, hosting around three million visitors per year; most of the residents work in service or trade in support of tourism, although a high percentage (31.7%) are retired.[9]

While many locals are invested in traditional customs, practices, and festivals, Green Hill Arts curator Carol Harvey notes that in Moretonhampstead, many have come from the outside, motivated to leave their city for Dartmoor's flora, fauna, and folklore. They often bring their interests with them and work with the local community to create new opportunities and experiences based on these inspirations.[10] This is not to say that there

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[5] Dartmoor National Park. "Welcome to the Dartmoor Story," *Dartmoor National Park*, accessed 25 May 2025. https://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/wildlife-and-heritage/dartmoor-story/dartmoor-story-pages/welcome
[6] Dartmoor National Park. "Welcome to the Dartmoor Story," *Dartmoor National Park.*
[7] Dartmoor National Park. "Welcome to the Dartmoor Story," *Dartmoor National Park.*
[8] English Heritage. "Dartmoor's Historic Landscape."
[9] Dartmoor National Park Authority. "State of the Park Report." Your Dartmoor, February 2025, 12. https://www.yourdartmoor.org/__data/assets/pdf_file/0033/177792/SotP-final-Feb-25-v2.pdf
[10] Carol Harvey, interview with author, June 2025.

aren't issues. Dartmoor has felt the impact of this complex dynamic through strained resources and challenging discourse, creating conflict between newcomers and those who have lived in this region for generations and highlighting issues of gentrification, immigration, class, and rights to land. Chagford-based author and storyteller Lisa Schneidau added nuance: "There is a term for it on Dartmoor: you're a blow-in. If you come from somewhere else, you're a blow-in — if you don't have three generations in the churchyard. And it is used as a disparaging term." The term "blow-in" reflects the tension between locals who have lived on Dartmoor for generations and the influx of newcomers who can be a strain on resources and systems.[11] Folklorist, writer, and artist Terri Windling describes the geographic unevenness of gatekeeping and inclusion that exists in the wider county: "There is among some communities, not Chagford, but among some communities, you're an outsider if you haven't been here for generations. It varies from community to community… We don't have it so much here. It exists in pockets."[12] But the growing interest and practice of folklore on Dartmoor is also creating powerful intersections between demographics that result in social cohesion and models for ecological stewardship that are not only benefitting this community, but are being noticed and replicated in other parts of the United Kingdom.

In addition, many of the people and groups involved in the Dartmoor community have also been intimately involved in social and environmental issues, such as the "Right to Roam" movement and the related "Stars Are for Everyone" campaign, which has been fighting for three years alongside the Dartmoor Preservation Society and the Dartmoor National Park Authority for the right to maintain wild camping on Dartmoor. Recent cultural events, such as the Dartmoor Tors Festival, organized and promoted by writer Sophie Pierce and artist Alex Murdin, and the Celebrating the Earth seasonal revels informally organized by artist Terri Windling and Lisa Schneidau, were created to elevate the concept of having access to and a relationship with the land as a basic human right.[13] Using the structure of festivals and walking heritage tours or cultural expressions like art and storytelling based on the landscape to illustrate and manifest real social change, these

[11] Lisa Schneidau, interview with author, July 2025.
[12] Terri Windling, interview with author, July 2025.
[13] Th Dartmoor Tors Festival website: https://dartmoortorsfestival.co.uk/

intersections of tradition and action offer persuasive opportunities to create new social identity through a variety of languages and rhetoric via activities and symbolism, which calls for a permanent daily practice of embodied connection with Dartmoor as a place and a people.

The folklore of Devon is both a product of and an influence on this environment; because of its location, topography, and history, the southwestern peninsula of England was left relatively isolated and the people who did inhabit this wilderness left a mixture of Celtic, Saxon, Danish, and possibly other heritage, including a strong tradition of myth and legend.[14] Dartmoor has a rich and unique folklore full of pixies, giants, ghosts, witches, spectral packs of black dogs, and the devil, which all exemplify the profound impact the terrain and the past have had on social memory.[15] Though Devon as a whole is still sparsely populated compared to other counties, it is experiencing a modern resurgence of collective identity and vernacular expression. Particularly infused into the quotidian rhythm of life on Dartmoor, this revival reinforces the creation of a unique community seeking connection with each other and with the land itself by excavating and/or preserving local heritage and folkloric practice. In the Dartmoor region, this is especially true of the mythic arts. "Mythic Arts" refers to visual art, literature, architecture, and music that are inspired by, or depict myths, legends, and other folklore. This is a popular, socially relaxed use of the term myth, or mythic, that extends into mythic thinking, or the enduring practice of making meaning and constructing belief around the human condition and the divine, whereas traditional forms and study of myth are generally defined as sacred narratives that address the nature of reality and existence, the "what was, what is, or what will be."[16] There are artists of all kinds on Dartmoor, many of whom describe themselves as being a part of the mythic arts community.

Heritage is not just artefact, but a process by which notions of the past are integrated into an understanding of the present, often with a sense of how these beliefs might influence or shape the future; a performance of "past-ness as a placemaking

[14] Ralph Whitlock. *The Folklore of Devon* (London: B.T. Batsford LTD, 1977), 15.
[15] Michael Dacre. *Devonshire Folk Tales* (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2010), 10.
[16] Tok Thompson and Daniel Wojcik. *Exploring Anthropology through Folklore and Mythology*, (New York: Routledge, 2026) 5, 96.

practice."[17] On Dartmoor, heritage is centered and marketed as an opportunity to "step back in time" into a "unspoilt ancient landscape," a long-standing discourse between land, history and myth.[18] Dartmoor is not just a temporal borderland, but a place where myth and reality also blend, where the process of heritage feeds the imagination; a modern region that is actively marketed as "preserved," supported with descriptions and images of being a "magical landscape" or "otherworldly" by local media such as tourism partner *Visit Dartmoor* and *Devon Life*, which is run by the magazine *Great British Life*.[19] The *Visit Dartmoor Guide* begins:

> Dartmoor is a magical, enchanting National Park…full of wide open spaces where the word freedom really does have some meaning…with sweeping vistas that stretch for miles, ancient woodlands brimming with mystery, herds of free-roaming wild ponies, gently flowing rivers, and towering granite tors, Dartmoor's landscapes are an open invitation to connect with nature…there can be no question that Dartmoor and its landscape has helped fire people's beliefs and imagination. From the thick mists that suddenly appear and roll across the moor to the dark, bottomless mires and the craggy granite tors, each lends an air of mystery and magic, all ripe for associated legends and tales…it is truly magical.[20]

It is precisely this living combination of stories connected to the landscape, embodied by many in the Dartmoor community and supported by a local framework of language and customs that negotiate with the past to create a powerful experience, one that enchants residents and visitors alike. As scholars David Harvey and Joanne Parker note in their exploration of the "performance of divine power" through the folk heritage of a specific and unusual archaeological site, Dartmoor "is a place that has tremendous affective potential as connected stories circulate and sensationalize, titillate and terrify," and that, within this context, can produce intense emotion and resonance for the immediate or ongoing experience of the audience as well as be utilized as a social resource.[21] The Dartmoor landscape is not merely a collection of granite tors and wind-swept gorse, nor simply a source of local folklore; it is an active participant in the lives who dwell within it. In

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[17] David Harvey and Joanne Parker. "Myth, Reality, and Revelation: The Performance of Divine Power on Dartmoor." *Parergon*, Volume 36, No. 2 (2019), pp. 93-94. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/pgn.2019.0056

[18] Visit Dartmoor. "Visit Dartmoor: The Heart of Devon [Guide]." *Visit Dartmoor*, last modified 2026, https://visitdartmoor.co.uk/visit-dartmoor-guide/

[19] David Harvey and Joanne Parker. "Myth, Reality, and Revelation: The Performance of Divine Power on Dartmoor,"95.

[20] Visit Dartmoor. "Visit Dartmoor: The Heart of Devon [Guide]." *Visit Dartmoor.*

[21] David Harvey and Joanne Parker. "Myth, Reality, and Revelation: The Performance of Divine Power on Dartmoor,"95.

this thesis, I investigate how the mythic arts of Dartmoor shape current collective identity and fuel contemporary resistance efforts. By exploring the local vibrant community of mythic artists living on the moor, this study examines the emergence of a contemporary "New Romanticism."

While folklore has been perpetually developed, transformed, and reinvigorated as a foundational part of British culture, local folklore is experiencing renewed interest across the United Kingdom. As Totnes-based artists Rima Staines observes, "at the moment there's a real burgeoning of interest in folklore and folk stuff. I mean, in this country I've noticed, so much so that you've got Morris dancing in national newspapers – there are exhibitions springing up. I think folk is having a moment."[22] According to the *Guardian*, "folklore customs dating back centuries are suddenly cool with a new generation keen to connect with the planet and defy the establishment;" the revived interest isn't nostalgic but a realization that these customs are a way of reconnecting with community and, especially in the case of seasonal traditions, the planet.[23] As writer Sophie Pierce and artist Alex Murdin remember, "[there was a time] folk was kind of vilified in the same way that community art was kind of vilified. It was completely seen as beyond the pale, completely away from this urban-centric view of what interesting and important stuff was… seen as very parochial and backward-looking… all that good stuff was always there, but it's just the way it's being seen is kind of changing."[24] Carol Harvey adds, "people tend to associate heritage with the past, but heritage is, again, a living, breathing thing that includes the now. Beltane Morris [for example] has opened my eyes up to folklore being now, being present as much today as it was yesterday or a hundred years ago."[25]

The research of this community, in which folkloric practice and expression is strong, exemplifies the excavation, preservation, and creation of modern British folk practice viewed through the lens of a distinct time and place, contemporary Dartmoor. These expressions are also culturally and environmentally significant, and as such this study may

[22] Rima Staines, interview with author, July 2025.
[23] Alice Fisher. "Cool as Folk: Why Britain's Young Rebels are Embracing Ancient Rites." *The Guardian*, 12 February, 2023.https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2023/feb/12/folk-customs-britain-young-generation
[24] Sophie Pierce and Alex Murdin, interview with author, July 2025.
[25] Carol Harvey, interview with author, June 2025.

benefit the community in documentation, expansion of outreach, and recognition or opportunity from British heritage organizations or conservation efforts.

Finally, because of its relative isolation and specific circumstances, Dartmoor is an exceptional case study of how the land and its stories, translated by mythic art, are received by, and in many cases unites, differentiated identities. This work illustrates the broader significance of understanding the impact mythic arts can have on communal reflection and action. Dartmoor is a micro-example of national and global efforts. While this research is focused on a small region in England, it shares a relationship with other, similar occurrences around the globe. The region's specificity acts as both a guide and shows possibility, while elements of universality connect Dartmoor to a macro-perspective of a world-wide movement, providing a valuable lens through which to understand the role of imagination and narrative in shaping more sustainable and meaningful relationships with the environment and community, and modeling ways in which other, interested communities could, too, enchant themselves, inspire hope for the future, and enable long-term change.

Chapter Two: The Enchantment of the Moor: Romanticism, the Sublime, and Activism

> We're on an upland environment with this mosaic of habitats of woodland and moorland, and you've got the two coastlines either side, and so there's a really elemental feel to it… the diversity of it in one tiny space with all these different habitats and very elemental climate weather patterns… those two together make me feel that there's a wildness to it… I feel inhabited by this place when I come here. I feel like I'm in the middle of a dream.[26]
> Dartmoor resident, author, and guide Emma Cunis

To understand how the mythic arts transforms into social and environmental action, I'll first briefly discuss the theoretical and historical background which scaffolded the analysis of my research and focus of my thesis, synthesizing New Romanticism, the sublime, and enchantment as ingredients for the social activity witnessed in my fieldwork. By re-evaluating the classical concepts of the sublime and enchantment, and their relationship to the Romantic movement, I explain how intense emotional experiences of art based on a specific landscape and related folklore can spark collective identity and argue that encounters with enchanting images do not encourage passive escapism; instead, they function as dynamic catalysts for activism.

Occasionally during my interviews, an artist would warn that they try to refrain from romanticizing Dartmoor, yet I identified a consistent pattern of language and image from artists, other residents, travelers, and artifacts based on Romantic values. There is a distinction between romanticization, or casting an unrealistic rose-colored lens on the region, and what I am describing as both deliberate and unconscious choices made to draw upon the physical and narrative surroundings and recognize enchantment in daily life. My observations point to an intersection of enchantment through experiences of the sublime causing deep emotion connection that is then considered within the context of current and real social and ecological concerns, a New Romanticism. In my fieldwork, these themes are not an occasional occurrence; enchantment, the sublime, and Romantic values are consistently named, either explicitly or implicitly, and discussed within the context of

[26] Emma Cunis, interview with author, July 2025.

Dartmoor's landscape and folklore. Literary and artistic imagination seen through both historic and contemporary expressions alter or influence today's perception of Dartmoor.

Romanticism was a nineteenth-century countermovement to the Enlightenment and Industrialization, a time in which the label meant more than being a dreamer, when a Romantic, and especially Romantic artists, identified proudly as such with the implication that they had enough courage to face the realities of their age.[27] Anthropologist Vanessa Sage argues that the ideas of Romanticism lived on, that they are as much a part of the present as of the past; that the fundamental themes of imagination and emotion, experience, individualism, subjectivity, idealism, the particular, the infinite, the metaphysic, aesthetics, beauty, nature, and enchantment simply travel forward and are re-translated.[28]

There is no single academically sanctioned definition of New Romanticism, but for the purpose of this thesis, it is a contemporary re-engagement with Romantic tendencies of perception, in particular, wonder and enchantment, imagination, the sublime, emotional attachment to landscape, and a critique of industrial modernity. This re-engagement is adapted to current social and environmental crises; within local communities, folklore, myth, ancestral memory, and the natural environment can function as catalysts for reimagining relationships with place, transforming cultural and ecological awareness into embodied practices of belonging, stewardship, and collective action. While still sharing the desire to question technological developments in order to reevaluate the role of humans in relationship to nature, this new version is positioned to account for the complexity of the Anthropocene; according to artist and researcher Sebastian Gatz,

> New Romanticism asks to re-ask questions whose answers are considered common sense in the current Western worldview– a worldview which led us into the troubled now. New Romanticism asks to invent new nows… [New Romanticism] asks to acknowledge a trend of a rival of Romantic ideas with the difference that it is opposing contemporary– more complex and to an extend autonomous– techno-industrial developments, de-centers the human from its epistemological position and acknowledges more complex entangled actors and worldviews. In a sense, it is conceptualized here as being more eclectic and embedded in a– supposedly– more complex world but shares the hunger for irrationality and emotionalism with the original movement. [29]

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[27] William Vaughan. *Romanticism and Art*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 9.
[28] Vanessa Sage. "Encountering the Wilderness, Encountering the Mist: Nature, Romanticism, and Contemporary Paganism. *Anthropology of Consciousness*, Vol. 20, Issue 1, American Anthropological Association, 2009: 29, 32.
[29] Sebastian Gatz. "New Romanticism: It's Time for New Realities." *Transpositiones* (2022), Volume 01: 56-58.

Philosopher Kate Soper rightfully warns that a nostalgic or idealized view, or simplified interpretations of Romanticism, especially in the context of environmentalism, de-contextualizes and mis-translates what was and is a valid counterculture movement; but in order to confront, process, and respond to crises like climate change and resource exhaustion, it will take a "different kind of imagination" to consider what is socially and ecologically possible at this point and perhaps it is the legacy of Romanticism that can "help to keep alive that needed imagination."[30] In studying a similar question in relationship to Romanticism and modern Paganism, anthropologist Vanessa Sage points out that these movements are countercultural in that "what they counter – for example, the Industrial Revolution, and what is imagined to be the barrenness and loneliness of modern social life – are critical themes at this moment in history," and that, critical to Romanticism, there is a present view that nature is in need of enchantment.[31] Christopher Partridge, Professor of Contemporary Religion, agrees that contemporary Paganism and the emergence of deep ecology is essentially neo-Romantic, noting that the historicization of an ecological viewpoint is a Romantic tradition, especially when such perspective also holds the belief that those ideas are a beneficial foundation for modern eco-enchantment.[32] The concept of New Romanticism therefore provides a broader framework for understanding the return to imaginative and personal encounters with landscape. I argue this would include the stories embedded in that same land. It was while I was on site on Dartmoor that I became interested in the ways in which the Romantic movement might have been carried forward and translated to contemporary ideology, as a source of imagination as well as counterculture inspiration for social action. In particular I noticed the way perceptions of ancient living, as Partridge points out, were often used, in this case by many mythic artists, as a foundation in discourse on community identity and pressing concerns.

Within this framework, the sublime and enchantment can be understood as two distinct yet overlapping devices through which such encounters take shape. While the

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[30] Kate Soper. "Passing Glories and Romantic Retrievals," In *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches*, Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby (eds), (University of Virginia Press, 2011), 17, 19, 27, 28.

[31] Vanessa Sage. "Encountering the Wilderness, Encountering the Mist: Nature, Romanticism, and Contemporary Paganism," 28.

[32] Christopher Partridge. *The Re-Enchantment of the West: Volume 2*. (London: T&T Clark Intl., 2005), 43, 47.

sublime emphasizes the emotional intensity of confronting forces, scales, and temporalities that transcend the individual, enchantment concerns the reawakening of attention to the vitality, agency, significance, and magic of the more-than-human world. Examining these concepts individually makes it possible to trace how particular experiences of landscape move from moments of personal perception toward broader cultural and communal practices of meaning-making, particularly through art.

The idea of the sublime, particularly in art historical discourse, is most often recognized as an experience and expression of the eighteenth-, and even nineteenth-century landscape, both real and artistically rendered, though interpretations have been varied and even applied to other subjects.[33] The term has ancient Roman roots as an investigation of the powerful emotional impact art can have.[34] Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) explored the differences between the two experiences and sought to explain our fundamental human responses to self-preservation versus sociability; the sublime involves pain and danger without risk, and beauty prompts us to love, and so "the sublime is associated with the qualities of vastness, power, obscurity, privation and difficulty; beautiful things are characterized by smallness, smoothness, gradual variation, and delicacy."[35] He noted the sublime as experiences which offer thrilling pleasure alongside fear and even horror.[36] Immanuel Kant built on this idea, suggesting that when confronted with "the absolute great," something of overwhelming size or power, we are simultaneously overwhelmed and experience great pleasure, and that such an experience can lead us to the realization that our imagination surpasses reality, an awareness that can garner both deep respect for what we witness and the control over our own reason and morality.[37] Romantics, however, built on Kant's Enlightenment-fueled reflection and elevated the role of imagination and emotion to shape (or reshape) reality, using the experience of the sublime as a conduit. Later descriptions of the sublime connected it to the transcendental, removing discussions of beauty to focus on humanity's relationship to absolute and

[33] Robert Williams. *Art Theory: An Historical Introduction*, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 103.
[34] Simon Morely. "Introduction," In *The Sublime: Documents of Contemporary Art*, 12-22, Simon Morely, ed., (The MIT Press and Whitechapel Gallery, 2010), 14.
[35] Robert Williams. *Art Theory: An Historical Introduction*, 101-102.
[36] Simon Morely. "Introduction," In *The Sublime: Documents of Contemporary Art*, 15.
[37] Robert Williams. *Art Theory: An Historical Introduction*, 107.

spiritual emotion.[38] Contemporary conversations about the sublime include beauty, power, and acknowledge urbanscapes, modern technology, and social and environmental concerns. The modern sublime seeks authentic experiences of "the other," of nature, of immanent self-transcendence.[39] The sublime has always had the power of transformation, a challenge by which, in the face of intense sensory and emotional encounters, the self is strengthened and resolved. According to the Centre for Philosophy and Art, it is this adaptability that extend the sublime into an ecocritical awareness of what our own hubris and attempts to manipulate the natural environment have wrought and the terrible dangers that may result.[40]

Dartmoor is certainly perceived as beautiful, but it is distinct from much of England in the presence of the sublime, boasting a vastness in which the landscape dramatically unfolds in all directions, one that can be seen from an elevated vantage point. (Fig 4.) Artist and writer Terri Windling describes her relationship with Dartmoor as deepening every year, noting a similarity to the Sonoran Desert where she spent many years, in that they are both "huge landscapes. Very powerful, very present landscapes that dwarf you. You come to them as a small creature, like any small creature, human or more than human. And the land is big and dominant and ancient and will go on beyond you."[41] Because of its climate, geographic location and isolation, and historically perceived lack of usefulness by the elite, there is little development to impede and contaminate the view on Dartmoor. Most evidence of human presence there is in ancient markers like the foundations of neolithic roundhouses and stone circles, all of which remain on the landscape since their installation. Giant granite tors emerge from the top of hills, and the weather is so variable as to offer sun, wind, rain, hail, fog, and snow, sometimes in the same day. William Crossing, who explored Dartmoor in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, gathering and documenting its history, customs, artifacts, stories, and material culture remarked,

> It is to its tors that Dartmoor owes so much of the grandeur of its scenery…the jutting crag and the rocky pinnacles rising from the clatter powerfully arrest the attention and awaken thoughts of the sublime…It is when a storm is gathering that

[38] Robert Williams. *Art Theory: An Historical Introduction*, 215.
[39] Simon Morely. "Introduction," In *The Sublime: Documents of Contemporary Art*, 18.
[40] Centre for Philosophy and Art. "The Sublime," Centre for Philosophy and Art, YouTube, 16 March 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bc1AOwY-kxg.
[41] Terri Windling, interview with author, July 2025.

> Dartmoor is most sublime. To watch, in those spots from which "man is far way," the oncoming of the tempest inspires one with awe. At first there is a deep silence…but Nature is hushed only for a time. From the great cloud sailing across the darkened sky a few raindrops fall and a low rumbling is heard. Then a vivid flash lights up the moor, followed by a peal of thunder, the rain descends in torrents, and the storm rages among the ancient hills.[42]



Figure 4. Belstone Tor, Dartmoor National Park
Visit Dartmoor, www.visitdartmoor.co.uk/autumn-on-dartmoor-is-magical-the-perfect-time-to-come-and-visit/

British author and poet Arthur Salmon, who wrote early twentieth century travelogues and literature-inspired guides focused on rambles through the English West Country, described Dartmoor in the following way:

> It is magnificent to see sunset flame across the moors from this eastern borderland. Patches of cultivation, open moorland dotted with sheep, lovely river-valleys, and wide undulations of heather and gorse fade into horizons of the westward summits. There is always the changeful charm of atmosphere. The scene may be of vast, glorious peacefulness, but it is great also when there is the confusion of cloud-strife, rain raking the hillsides- when the spirit of the moor is abroad in storm and darkness, when colour is quenched in wet and driving wrack. It is easy then to picture the moor as the phantasmal haunt of lost races. Dartmoor has many moods, variable as the soul of man- sometimes of gentle pensiveness and dreaming, touched with sentiment, sometimes of fierce striving passion or inconsolable woe,

[42] William Crossing. *Gems in a Granite Setting: Beauties of the Lone Land of Dartmoor*. (Plymouth, England: Western Morning News, 1905), 10, 11, 15.

> sometimes of desolation deepened to despair. In all these there is a quality of the unconventional and untamed, a sense of the nearness of mystery, the brooding of the unseen, the force of powers that we sometimes feel to be in profoundest sympathy with our own longings and imaginings, sometimes in the most vexed antagonism. Here, as elsewhere, we find very much what we bring, but we find it intensified, vivified; it may lure us into a kindly home, or repel us as a desert. Even the repulsion has its own manner of charm, because it braces us to self-assertion and manhood. Whoever comes, if his eyes be open, will see tracts of primitive mother earth, untamed and unsophisticated. He will see what Devon was before it was cultivated; he will be in a haunt of strange traditions, lingering superstitions, wild fancies.[43]

Both Dartmoor-based artist Angharad Barlow and storyteller and folklorist Lisa Schneidau remarked on the energy of this changeability, how the beauty is matched by a hard and harsh environment that "can chew people up and spit them out."[44] Scholar of myth and storyteller Martin Shaw describes it as "rugged, with vast granite tors, mires, seemingly endless stone circles and tribal remnants, sudden mists, and small ponies that are mad for roaming. Our waters are usually flowing, not still, rivers heading green and silver to the ocean," ending with, "It's still easy to die up here."[45]

It is the combination of all these factors that arguably create the sublime on Dartmoor, and contemporary visitors are not the only ones to remark on its impact. The rugged, vast scenery has drawn many people, especially artists and writers, to Dartmoor. While a comprehensive discussion of the art historical relationship between the sublime and Dartmoor is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to know that Dartmoor was "discovered" by British artists in the second half of the eighteenth century who, barred from their Grand Tours in Europe due to the Napoleonic Wars, were forced to seek inspiration from scenes in Britain; along with the dramatic landscapes of the Lake District, Wales, and the highlands of Scotland, Dartmoor fit the criteria.[46]

Of all the Romantic painters influenced by the aesthetic of the sublime, the work of JMW Turner (1775-1851) is widely recognized as successfully capturing the effect of infiniteness; through the juxtaposition of dark and light, distinct and bold style with subtlety, and experimental scale, Turner's work presents a sublime that can be evoked but

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[43] Arthur Salmon. *Dartmoor*. (London & Glasgow: Blackie & Son Limited, 1913), 41-42.
[44] Lisa Schneidau, interview with author, July 2025; Angharad Barlow, interview with author, June 2025.
[45] Martin Shaw. *Scatterlings*. (Devon, England: Cista Mystica Press, 2016), 43.
[46] Peter Mason. *Dartmoor: A Wild and Wonderous Region (A Portrayal of Dartmoor in Art 1750-1920*), (Exeter: The Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2017) 13-15.

not quite achieved, a promise of the sublime without the real sense of danger.[47] Turner visited Dartmoor in the early nineteenth century to sketch, which resulted in only a few paintings a decade later but allowed him to develop what would become his signature technique; his importance in the portrayal of Dartmoor is his lasting influence on other artists who would paint the West Country, and specifically Dartmoor, such as John Glover and Frederick John Widgery (Fig. 5, 6, 7).[48]



Figure 5. *Buckfastleigh Abbey* by JMW Turner (~1826), watercolor
Peter Mason. *Dartmoor: A Wild and Wonderous Region (A Portrayal of Dartmoor in Art 1750-1920*), (Exeter: TheRoyal Albert Memorial Museum, 2017) 20.

[47] Alison Smith. 'The Sublime in Crisis: Landscape Painting after Turner', in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*, Tate Research Publication, January 2013, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research publications/the sublime/alison-smith-the-sublime-in-crisis-landscape-painting-after-turner-r1109220

[48] Peter Mason. *Dartmoor: A Wild and Wonderous Region (A Portrayal of Dartmoor in Art 1750-1920*), 16-19.



Figure 6. *The Teign near Drewsteignton, Devonshire* by John Glover (1829), watercolor
Peter Mason. *Dartmoor: A Wild and Wonderous Region (A Portrayal of Dartmoor in Art 1750-1920*), (Exeter: The Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2017) 21.



Figure 7. *Moorland Scene* by Frederick John Widgery, (unknown, ~late 19th/early 20th c.) oil on canvas
Peter Mason. *Dartmoor: A Wild and Wonderous Region (A Portrayal of Dartmoor in Art 1750-1920*), (Exeter: The Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2017) 36.

These and many other artists have captured the essence of what is often described on Dartmoor as an overwhelming feeling of pleasure in the beauty of the landscape and an oft-unprecedented connection to the ancient past, along with an unsettling feeling of smallness in time and space. Dartmoor Preservation Association Communications Officer and Storyteller Helen Bruce believes that,

> The landscape here is what inspires a special flavor. The dominance of the rocks on the tors, just the stark contrast and the color, it has an inherent magnificence. And in the true sense of the sublime, you know… it also needs…a lack of immediately obvious modern touches. But somehow the modern consciousness, we allow [ancient evidence of human activity] to integrate with landscape.[49]

Storyteller Henry Everett adds his thoughts with,

> I think granite is an extraordinary thing. And I think that that does things to our physiology that we can't quite comprehend… So, I think granite has a pull to particular people. I think the way that the rivers have shaped Dartmoor has made it really accessible and also endlessly explorable and so you're really invited into Dartmoor but when you're in it, it's like you're in the labyrinth now, and there are endless ways go find your own journey and I really love that about Dartmoor. I think there's some magic about river, tree, and stone together and whenever they come together, there is something sublime that brings out the wonder in me.[50]

Sophie Pierce and Alex Murdin make special note in their book, *Rock Idols: A Guide to Dartmoor in 28 Tors*, that "these ancient stones radiate poetry and power."[51] If charisma is a sub-category of the sublime, as C. Stephen Jaeger posits, then the assertion that "the distinction between life and art is weakened in the eyes of the beholder when either a real person or a representation possesses charisma" seems applicable here.[52] I argue that in the face of such charismatic, sublime scenery and compelling myth and lore, the beholder is enchanted by the encounters they experience on Dartmoor which weaken the borders between the alluring presence of the ancient past in stone and story and the reality of the present, enchanting people into a desire to live in a world that contains magic.

The sublime and enchantment intersect in intimacy of experience. While the sublime deals with overwhelming emotions from encounters of immense and

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[49] Helen Bruce, interview with author, July 2025.
[50] Henry Everett, interview with author, August 2025.
[51] Sophie Pierce and Alex Murdin. *Rock Idols: A Guide to Dartmoor in 28 Tors.* (Bath, England: Wild Things Publishing, 2025), 7.
[52] C. Stephen Jaeger. *Enchantment: On Charisma and the Sublime in the Arts of the West*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 3.

uncontrollable forces, enchantment is produced from smaller moments of wonder and perceived magical participation or resonance. The word enchantment has taken an etymological journey, from its Latin roots of "chanting or singing" and "bewitching" which evolved into the Old French "to charm or use magic," and then the later figurative use of "allurement, fascination, or delight" in the 17th century.[53] Enchantment does not always mean spellbound, left without reason or control. It can also mean being charmed, experiencing a deep pleasure in something resulting in a new relationship or belief. Jane Bennett defines enchantment as an experience of being "struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives among the familiar and the everyday."[54] These latter definitions relate to social movements that use stories and art to (re)enchant landscapes, reconnect communities with land, and restore biodiversity and healthy ecology.

While a full debate of Max Weber's disenchantment of the world will not be encompassed in this thesis, it is relevant to briefly address his claims of de-magicalization associated with the religious and scientific rationalization of Western society.[55] This is a deeply colonialist view that ignores and trivializes magic and enchantment enduringly present in the world, including in but not limited to Western culture. In his book *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences*, Jason Ā. Josephson-Storm also rejects Weber's position and instead posits that "we live in a disenchanting world in which magic is embattled and intermittently contained within its own cultural sphere, but not a disenchanted one in which magic is gone. Restated, magic never truly vanished."[56] I also share Jane Bennett's queasiness with the claim that disenchantment needed to occur in order to produce enchantment; instead, as she suggests in her book *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, enchantment is "something we encounter, that hits us, but it is also a comportment that can be fostered through deliberate strategies…yet another way to enhance the enchantment effect is to resist the story of the disenchantment of modernity."[57] In her study of Romanticism in modern Paganism, Vanessa Sage notes that

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[53] Etymonline. "Origin and History of *Enchant*." *Etymonline: Online Etymology Dictionary*. Accessed November 2025. https://www.etymonline.com/word/enchant

[54] Jane Bennett. *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, (Princeton University Press, 2001), 4.

[55] Max Weber and Sam Whimster (ed.). *The Essential Weber: A Reader*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 408.

[56] Jason Ā Josephson-Storm. *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 305.

[57] Jane Bennett. *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, 3-4.

the two counterculture movements have much in common besides a hope to midwife enchantment into the world,

> Both are products of modernity; both emphasize imagination and emotion; both question the place of rationality in how we know what we know; both put stress on the individual and ask what his or her place is within a larger community; both look to the past for a model of the future; both are political, idealistic, and utopian at times; and both take nature to be the main vehicle for the realization of their goals. However, as a concept, nature is up for grabs. The flexibility with which it can be used is what provides both movements with such a rich playground for possibility.[58]

I argue that, in addition to nature as a rich source of possibility for enchantment through the lens of New Romanticism, the same is true of various forms and expressions of folklore. New creative work made in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries frequently incorporate elements of traditional folklore; this is certainly the case in contemporary British culture, very often in an intentional pursuit of enchantment.[59] Richard Jenkins' description of enchantment connects the concept to this creative use of narratives and motifs from the British folklore tradition:

> Enchantment conjures up, and is rooted in, understandings and experiences of the world in which there is more to life than the material, the visible or the explainable; in which the philosophies and principles of Reason and rationality cannot by definition dream of the totality of life; in which the quotidian norms and routines of linear time and space are only part of the story: and in which the collective sum of sociability and belonging is elusively greater than its individual parts.[60]

Taken together, the concepts of New Romanticism, the sublime, and enchantment provide a scaffold for understanding how encounters with the landscape and the lore that has settled within it can generate new forms of meaning, attachment, and awareness. These encounters do not always stay confined to individual experiences nor aesthetic appreciation, but can become collective, enabling communities to channel emotion and imagination into forms of cultural and ecological action. It is within this process that the concept of Enchantivism occurs.

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[58] Vanessa Sage. "Encountering the Wilderness, Encountering the Mist: Nature, Romanticism, and Contemporary Paganism," 36-37.

[59] Carolyne Larrington and Fay Hield. "Making 'Modern Fairies': Making Fairies Modern." *Folklore* 132 (March 2021): 73.

[60] Richard Jenkins. "Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-Enchantment: Max Weber at the Millennium." *Max Weber Studies* 1 (2000): 29.

The term Enchantivism is defined by Craig Chalquist and Garret Barnwell as "the many ways in which we make lasting change by telling reenchanting stories about our relations with ourselves, each other, or our ailing-but-still-beautiful planet; sharing our reflections and inviting others' [reflections] on the relevance of these stories; and then letting the stories impel creative and thoughtful responses to how things are."[61] They work with this term as a subfield of terrapsychology and terrapsychological inquiry, or the deep psychological "field of imaginative studies, ideas, and practices for re-storying and thereby re-enchanting our relations with the world, with each other, and with ourselves."[62] I argue that this term also aligns with the anthropological study of enchantment and activism, treating wonder as a core component of the human experience, building social and cultural worlds, and acts of resistance. The term Enchantivism describes the power of story, particularly folklore, to enchant using structure, motifs, and symbols to comprehend both the reasons and reality of the world's social and environmental crises, and as a guide for behavior moving forward, to create long-term transformation through activism.

As an example of this recognition of the relationship between enchantment of folklore and the possibilities of folklore in action, the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project "Modern Fairies and Loathly Ladies" brought together a group of UK-based artists in 2018-19 to respond to a selection of British folklore; the principal aim was to investigate how the artists would "reimagine and re-mediate the fairy material in order to make it 'modern.'"[63] A number of artists had a distinctly environmental message; poet Sarah Hesketh was inspired to create an Instagram project involving a fairy alter ego which included the following poem,

> tell everyone
> I am tired
> of watching the forests burn
>
> it is time for us
> to remember
>
> we have always been
> a species of magic

[61] Craig Chalquist and Garret Barnwell. *Terrapsychology: Further Inquiry into Self, Place, and Planet*, (New York: Routledge, 2024), 3.
[62] Craig Chalquist and Garret Barnwell. *Terrapsychology: Further Inquiry into Self, Place, and Planet*, 2.
[63] Carolyne Larrington and Fay Hield. "Making 'Modern Fairies': Making Fairies Modern," 74.

To which artist Jackie Morris responded, signaling the supernatural as an ally of resistance,

> tell everyone
> the green man stirs
> even as leaves
> turn to gold
>
> he comes…[64]

Dartmoor artist Terri Winding, who was included in the interviews for this study, also participated in this project, writing a poem that explores tree-fairies and other spirits who inhabit trees as also, at some level, the tree themselves, highlighting the autonomous, and mysterious life trees live and reassuring the reader that someday they might be able to understand the soundscape of trees, which hold "stories older than/the oldest tales of humankind."[65] The project directors point out that a number of artists addressed the theme of fairies as guardians or protectors of nature, noting that some artists recognized the potential of fairies to represent the loss of our connection to the natural world and also the catalyst to a righting of that relationship,

> In contrast to the nineteenth-century anxiety that industrialization and urbanization had caused the fairies and other nature-spirits to retreat to distant, inaccessible spaces where they no longer came into contact with humans, a new eco-aware imagination regards the fairies as mobilizing in defense of wild habitats. The threat that fairies can pose and the hostility they sometimes show to humans in the traditional tales is now motivated by human degradation of the environment.[66]

According to *Talking Stories*, an online encyclopedia of traditional ecological knowledge embedded in hunter-gatherer storytelling, folklore is a particularly effective conduit between the human and non-human world, has been a primary way in which the collected knowledge of cultures has been aggregated, stored, and transmitted across generations; while the explanatory parts of myth and legend may be considered counterfactual or fantastic, the details of flora, fauna, and geography are often accurate,

[64] Carolyne Larrington and Fay Hield. "Making 'Modern Fairies': Making Fairies Modern," 78.
[65] Carolyne Larrington and Fay Hield. "Making 'Modern Fairies': Making Fairies Modern," 81.
[66] Carolyne Larrington and Fay Hield. "Making 'Modern Fairies': Making Fairies Modern," 80.

mirroring the local environment.[67] These narratives reenact events that shaped, and continue to perpetually shape, significant features of the local environment, and as a result, provide sensory snapshots of a group's territory which allows them to explore and understand it virtually.[68] The performance of folklore, verbally and visually, is also a method of enchantment, pulling the viewer into the otherworld and then back into the tangible world.

Folklore is one layer of maintaining and transmitting social and ecological information, and has become an ingredient of activism as a way of not only expressing and sharing this knowledge but also as a way of creating an intimate connection between the audience and the issue at hand. In particular, carefully chosen mythology and folklore is sometimes included to accompany or enhance activist communication, especially when related to ecological and cultural topics. This functions differently for various communities but traditional narratives and art forms can often provide a vocabulary to contextualizing, understanding, and processing social suffering.[69] In addition, as researcher Selina Springett points out in her analysis of art-making and enchantment of ecology for political activism, art-making can play an important role in bridging communication between the scholarly and wider, public communities about specific issues; by utilizing folklore to give a voice to the non-human world and translating them into a understandable and relatable mediums, artists are able to work within and outside academic discourse, reimagining and enchanting away from anthropocentrism.[70]

Enchantivism is not Romanticism regurgitated; it selectively retrieves and transforms Romantic approaches to awareness. In a sense, Enchantivism can be understood as the praxis of New Romanticism: a process through which the affective experiences of the sublime and enchantment are translated, through mythic art and community practice, into active forms of cultural, social, and ecological engagement. There are many examples of Enchantivism in action, wherein tales from myth and folklore have been invoked to connect

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[67] Talking Stories. "Literary Prehistory," *Talking Stories* Website, University of Oregon. Accessed November and December, 2025. https://talkingstories.uoregon.edu/literaryprehistory/

[68] Talking Stories. "Traditional Ecological Knowledge," *Talking Stories* Website, University of Oregon. Accessed November and December, 2025. https://talkingstories.uoregon.edu/traditional-ecological-knowledge/

[69] Thierry Veyrié. "Monsters, Disaster, and Organic Balance: Digesting History Through Oral Traditions," (*Ethnologia Actualis* 21, no. 1, 2021), 74.

[70] Selina Springett. "Art-making for Political Ecology: Activism Through Enchantment," (*Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* (2022), Vol. 36, No. 3), 485.

wider audiences with a cause. This device is born of a genuine, profound relationship with land and/or culture and the traditional stories that anchor them. In addition, these stories are either already related to or seen in support of traditional ecological knowledge by those who invoke them. As an example from the United States, at the Standing Rock protests in North Dakota, activists named the Dakota Access Pipeline "the black snake" after and created art that incorporated a Lakota prophesy about a giant black snake that would destroy and devour the world to help people understand the dangers of oil pipelines and the sacredness of water (Fig. 8). At another river across the sea on the border of England and Wales, activists from both countries, including those from the action group "Save the Wye," host active campaigns to address and protect the River Wye and its tributaries from ongoing ecological decline; in particular, the Goddess of the Wye, a giant puppet made from locally gathered materials by art activist Kim Kaos, binds the communal "hopes and wishes for the river" in both the crafting of the puppet and its use in ceremony, which has had a "powerful and deeply spiritual impact in campaigning"(Fig. 9).[71] In Chapter Five of this thesis, I give an example from Dartmoor of "Old Crockern" that uses similar devices to connect folklore and ecology for gathering and demonstrating.

[71] Kim Kaos. "Giving the River a Voice," *Permaculture* 123 (Spring 2025): 12-14.



Figure 8. *Justice for Standing Rock* by Leta Gray (2016), ink
https://letagray.com/artwork/4133366-Justice%20for%20Standing%20Rock.html



Figure 9. *Goddess of the Wye* by Kim Kaos (2023), mixed material
https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-hereford-worcester-65934300

New Romanticism, the sublime, and enchantment all provide a framework for understanding the encounters of landscape and folklore described in my fieldwork. New Romanticism reflects a renewed engagement with nature, place, imagination, and the more-than-human, while the sublime and enchantment offer distinct but interconnected ways of experiencing these relationships. Through folklore, storytelling, ritual, and mythic art, such experiences can move beyond the individual to become culturally shared, moving from individual perception to collective practice. It is within this movement that Enchantivism emerges; the ways in which enchantment, rooted in the myths, memories, and environment of particular places, becomes a catalyst for community formation, place-making, social negotiation, and ecological engagement. Mythic art is central to this process, providing a means through which communities can interpret, re-story, and actively construct their relationships with landscape and with each other.

Moving beyond theoretical abstraction toward the specific environments in which these relationships take shape, Dartmoor provides a particularly productive context, where these elements are deeply intertwined. How Dartmoor is perceived is not simply inherited but continually produced through the ways people encounter, remember, narrate, and creatively engage with the moor. The following chapter, therefore, moves into the material and historical terrain of Dartmoor, examining its ecology, historical features, and folklore to establish the conditions through which its distinctive sense of place emerges. It then considers how this sense of place is expressed and renewed through the work of local mythic artists, grounding the theoretical concepts developed here in the landscape and communities from which Enchantivism emerges.

Chapter Three: Dartmoor, A Sense of Place

I'm stepping over moss-covered rocks and ducking between branches heavy with lichen and leaves as I follow behind William Todd Jones, famed puppeteer, writer, and director. He is taking me to a secret location within a Dartmoor wood; after I asked him where Dartmoor can be seen in his work, he leapt up and told me to get in the car, which I did without hesitation. We're headed to what he describes as the place he takes with him wherever he is in the world, a special location that he infuses at least a drop, sometimes more, of the spirit into every project. As we ramble through the trees, he asks me to imagine the past; how Neanderthals probably survived on this land, to picture the generations of people who would have used the medieval clapper bridge, to look at what he identifies as old tin mining pathways and see the intimacy between people and how we use and relate to land. Every now and again he points out a face created by the pattern of bark or stone or the tracks of animals, such as badgers. He says,

> Nothing dies here, just transformed. There's a word that I love, and it sort of describes it with 'palingenesia,' a continual of birth, death, and rebirth. But it's interwoven like Celtic knotwork, so it doesn't start and end, it all happens continuously. So palingenesia is what I feel in this place…it's moving into another form. And as much as I can be certain, you are stepping in the same footsteps of countless thousands of years people have passed [through here].

Eventually we reach the place he wants to show me. We scramble down some rocks next to a creek and take in the scene. It is lush and green here, gnarly roots shoot out over the water decorated by moss and ferns. This particular spot is laden with big boulders and that, along with the slope of the hill, has produced a deep channel carved into the stone over time where a small cascading waterfall emits a small roar as it falls to the continuing creek below. Dozens of tiny waterfalls surround it, creating a pattern of watery lace (Fig. 10). He explains,

> I've never known this not to flow and my sense has always been and will always be, whatever else happens. I've seen it frozen, you know, like water held in ice. And when the sun sets, you know, just these great rays of light. And then in the spring, you know, just this steam exploding out of it. And the sound is just so beautiful. But for me, this cleft rock, it represents, you know, my heart and nature…you can see the time in it. A tree is long, a mountain is much longer…in my 40 years of coming here the thing that has changed is me, not it. When I've been in Namibia, Botswana,

Kenya, South Africa, Mozambique, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Ecuador, Panama, Colombia, North America, Canada, [this place is] still with me."[72]



Figure 10. Undisclosed location on Dartmoor, 2025.
Photo taken by Samantha Matalone Cook

While Chapter Two established the framework I use for my argument that enchantment and the sublime are not passive states, that in the context of New Romantic expressions they become catalysts for Enchantivism, these concepts do not exist in a vacuum; they require concrete physical geography to anchor them into a specific illustration of their functions. This chapter builds on the last by examining the specific material and historical environment of Dartmoor, providing an extension of the geographic

[72] William Todd Jones, interview with author, July 2025.

and cultural overview begun in Chapter One of this work. Moving from theoretical and ideological abstraction to the tangible reality of the moor, I explore the ecology, historical features, and folklore through the land itself. This chapter looks at how a distinct sense of place is constructed by the people who live there, and specifically how this is expressed by the local mythic artists.

Dartmoor has long occupied a distinct, liminal space in the British imagination as an eerie, sublime, and deeply mythologized landscape. English writer William Howitt, who also wrote the myth-inspired poem *Dartmoor Days; Or, Scenes in the Forest: A Poem*, describes his sublime, enchanted experience of Dartmoor in his 1840 publication *The Rural Life of England*:

> But still move on through the fair fields of Dorset and Somerset, to the enchanted land of Devon… There are wastes and wilds, crags of granite, views into far-off districts, and the sound of waters hurrying away over their rocky beds, enough to satisfy the largest hungering and thirsting after poetical delight. I shall never forget the feelings of delicious entrancement with which I approached the outskirts of Dartmoor. I found myself among the woods near Haytor Crags. It was an autumn evening. The sun, near its setting, threw its yellow beams amongst the trees, and lit up the ruddy tors on the opposite side of the valley into a beautiful glow. Below, the deep dark river went sounding on its way with a melancholy music, and as I wound up the steep road beneath the gnarled oaks, I ever and anon caught glimpses of the winding valley to the left, all beautiful with wild thickets and half shrouded faces of rock, and still on high those glowing ruddy tors standing in the blue air in their sublime silence. My road wound up, and up, the heather and the bilberry on either hand shewing [sic] me that cultivation had never disturbed the soil they grew in; and one sole woodlark from the far-ascending forest to the right, filled the wide solitude with his wild autumnal note. At that moment I reached an eminence, and at once saw the dark crags of Dartmoor high aloft before me, and one large solitary house in the valley beneath the woods. So fair, so silent, save for the woodlark's note and the moaning river, so unearthly did the whole scene seem—that my imagination delighted to look upon it as an enchanted land, —and to persuade itself that that house stood as it would stand for ages, under the spell of silence, but beyond the reach of death and change.[73]

Those who live in or have visited Dartmoor consistently remark on its unique qualities, both obvious and intangible. Even when you are looking at a painting of landscape by a Dartmoor-based mythic artist, for example one by Alan Lee (Fig. 11) or Virginia Lee

[73] Howitt, William. *The Rural Life of England*. (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1840. *Project Gutenberg*), lines 600-615.

(Fig. 12), or Danielle Barlow (Fig. 13), as Carol Harvey, a resident of Moretonhampstead described to me,

> The landscape is quite unique in the sense that you recognize elements of it that can be universal because you could probably find it where you live, or find it in New Zealand [referencing Alan Lee's concept art for *Lord of the Rings*] …but you kind of know that's here and you can't explain it, but that's the rolling hills of Dartmoor, that is the microclimate of a spot on Dartmoor, that must be Becky Falls where you've got that idea from, so there are elements of it that you just automatically feel are rooted here.[74]



Figure 11. *Boundary* by Alan Lee, (date unknown), watercolor
Photo taken by Samantha Matalone Cook

[74] Carol Harvey, interview with author, 2025.



Figure 12. Three Hares Tor by Virginia Lee (2018)
https://www.facebook.com/MythicMeanderingsofVirginiaLee

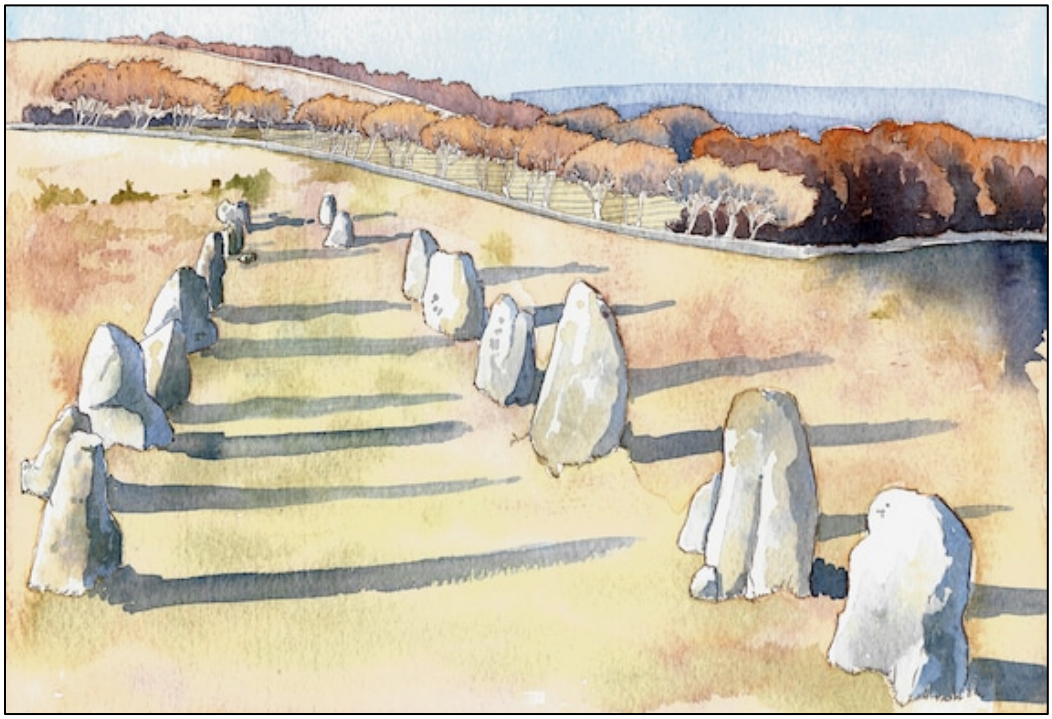


Figure 13. Kestor Row by Danielle Barlow (date unknown), watercolor
https://www.daniellebarlowart.com/

The moor's prehistoric monuments, geological formations, wooded valleys, and expansive horizons contribute to an environment in which historical and contemporary experience overlap. In terms of "past-ness as a placemaking practice," Dartmoor provides the conditions through which "the past can be perceived as tacitly 'present' through Romantic language and imagery."[75] My observations of social media, material evidence, and conversations during fieldwork suggest that these qualities can produce a profound emotional response, drawing people toward Dartmoor not only as visitors but, in some cases, as permanent residents. The landscape is frequently described by both groups in terms of awe, mystery, wildness, and magic, producing a sense of inhabiting a liminal space between the familiar and the otherworldly. In this respect, Dartmoor exemplifies the relationship between the sublime and enchantment outlined above: its scale and elemental character can evoke the destabilizing encounter of the sublime, while its folklore, historical relics, and "wildness" invite an enchanted experience.

This response is shaped not only by the physical characteristics of the moor but also by preexisting cultural ideas of rurality and the "untouched" West Country. Visitors arrive with expectations of authentic encounters with wildness and the ancient past, which are reinforced by the landscapes, folklore, and material culture they encounter. For many, this produces a temporary or liminal sense of belonging before they return elsewhere. Earlier I made the distinction between romanticization and Romanticism, but that was not to suggested that Dartmoor escapes being romanticized. The popular image of Dartmoor is not produced by visitors alone; residents themselves participate in, reinterpret, and sometimes deliberately represent this landscape through such a lens. This dynamic is particularly significant in understanding contemporary migration to Dartmoor. The moor's sublime and enchanted qualities can contribute to a romanticized vision of rural life in which living closer to the land appears as an enticing alternative to the experience of urban life. The pastoral idyll therefore operates not simply as an aesthetic fantasy but, for some, as a catalyst for real choices about where and how to live. During fieldwork, I repeatedly encountered this phenomenon in conversations with residents and visitors, particularly in relation to folklore-centered artistic events. The Widdershins III exhibition in

[75] David Harvey and Joanne Parker. "Myth, Reality, and Revelation: The Performance of Divine Power on Dartmoor," 95.

Moretonhampstead, discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, attracted visitors from across the United Kingdom as well as international attention. Yet among the most common responses recorded through gallery evaluations, casual conversations, and online observation was a desire to move to Dartmoor after encountering its representations of landscape and lore. Among residents, meanwhile, a recurring explanation for living on the moor was a sense of belonging and an affirmation of its enchanted character. Several more recent residents described having decided to relocate after visiting, explaining to me that they felt "called to the land by the nature and by the magic here." Suzi Crockford, a hedge witch and maker of magical tools on Dartmoor, believes,

> It's fundamentally the wildness [of Dartmoor]. It's the expanse of big, beautiful, abundant, unmowed wild… within that is the sense of connection with the spirit of the land, with the nature spirits, with the ancestors, with the kind of all that is… this place attracts people who want that, which means nobody's disrespecting it, which means it's really strong."[76]

Crockford was not the only one to suggest to me that Dartmoor self-selects for the people who are drawn to its elements, which is why this eco-numinous quality persists. In other words, those who are particularly receptive to the moor's landscape and enchantment may be more likely to remain, participate in its cultural life, and support campaigns concerned with its protection and renewal. In this sense, enchantment can become self-reinforcing. The people drawn to the landscape contribute to the cultural practices through which its enchanted qualities are maintained, interpreted, and made visible to others.

A reflexive and evolving cultural conversation that responds to the changing needs and aspirations of both the land and its inhabitants also exists on Dartmoor. This is particularly evident in contemporary movements toward localism, which seek to reorganize aspects of everyday life around local networks and forms of social participation through forms of local empowerment, from volunteer opportunities working with local ecology to village gatherings for seasonal festivals or storytelling around a fire.[77] Within these movements, folklore becomes an important rhetorical and cultural resource and can

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[76] Suzi Crockford, interview with author, June 2025.

[77] Dupuis, E. Melanie and David Goodman. "Should We Go 'Home' to Eat?: Towards a Reflexive Politics of Localism," *Journal of Rural Studies*, Vol. 21 (2005): 361.

function as a shared symbolic language through which communities negotiate identity, communicate values, and encourage particular perspectives among both insiders and outsiders.[78] Local folklore is highly iconic within the Dartmoor community and certain stories are known by most; local myths and folkloric figures therefore operate beyond the preservation of cultural heritage: they provide imaginative resources through which residents can reflect upon what the moor is, what it means to belong to it, and what kinds of relationships with the land might be possible.

The intimacy between Dartmoor and those who inhabit it is therefore central to the production of its sense of place. Research into environmental attachment suggests that relationships with particular environments can contribute to well-being and encourage forms of emotional and social attachment to land.[79] Suzi Crockford continues, describing this relationship in explicitly enchanted terms,

> Part of what makes... the people in this place so special…why there's a kind of hub here, is because when there is the level of magic and brightness and aliveness that's so palpable in this land, and the more of us are here, the more that's tended and nurtured and spoken about and honored and, you know, then it becomes stronger and stronger, and so we all start to properly embody it. And it I think if there's anywhere where there's a chance that British people are acting in an indigenous manner, as if they actually did belong, then it's places like this where we can feel like we belong because we, apart from anything else, we feel like we've got access to the sacred that is the ground."[80]

Her account illustrates the movement from individual experience toward communal practice: enchantment becomes not simply something encountered in the landscape but something that can be collectively cultivated, embodied, and reinforced. The resulting relationship between people and place carries implications for identity, responsibility, and stewardship. Such representations demonstrate that Dartmoor's sense of place is not fixed but continually negotiated through the interaction of landscape, memory, imagination, and community.

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[78] Garlough, Christine Lynn. "On the Political Uses of Folklore: Performance and Grassroots Feminist Activism in India." The Journal of American Folklore (Arlington, VA) 121, no. 480 (2008):187.

[79] Susan Bodnar, et al. "The Environment as an Object Relationship: A Two Part Study," *Ecopsychology*, Vol. 15, No. 2: (June 2023): 111.

[80] Suzi Crockford, interview with author, June 2025.

Such perceptions have a long cultural history. In *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle writes that "the longer one stays here the more does the spirit of the moor sink into one's soul, its vastness, and also its grim charm."[81] Although written within a specifically Gothic and Romantic tradition, the reflection resonates with contemporary accounts of Dartmoor as a landscape possessing an identity or agency beyond its physical characteristics. During fieldwork, I observed heightened and attentive language used to describe the moor, as well as a tendency to distinguish particular landscapes and objects from the ordinary by describing them as "unique," "special," or otherwise significant. Geological and geographical features such as tors are similarly elevated from ordinary environmental features into recognizable markers of Dartmoor's distinctiveness.[82] These practices reinforce the perception that one has crossed from the everyday landscape into a place possessing a particular character, atmosphere, and importance, which is considerably strengthened by descriptions and experiences of the moor as "sublime" or "enchanted."

These perceptions of Dartmoor, the encounters with the sublime and enchantment, and the resulting behavior also exhibit the values of New Romanticism through a renewed emphasis on wonder, imagination, emotional attachment to landscape, relationships with the more-than-human world, and a critique of modern industrialization and technology. These practices adapt Romantic values to contemporary social and ecological concerns. The sublime qualities of the moor, its expansiveness, elemental wildness, and antiquity challenge notions of the environment as utilitarian or separate from the human ecosystem, while folklore and mythic art provide imaginative frameworks through which these experiences can be interpreted and shared. In this sense, New Romanticism is evident not simply in the aesthetic celebration of Dartmoor, but in the ways residents and artists all use these elements as resources for negotiating communal identity and ecological responsibility, becoming both a source of wonder and a catalyst for action and demonstrating how Romantic principles can be reconfigured to address the cultural and environmental conditions of the present.

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[81] Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. London: George Newnes Ltd, 1902, *Project Gutenberg*.

[82] Lisa Gabbert. "Performative Landscapes: An Exploration." In *Emerging Perspectives in the Study of Folklore and Performance*, pp. 279-297, Otero, Solimar and Anthony Bak Buccitelli, eds., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2025), 283.

The cultural production that embodies this sense of place is especially visible in mythic art. Dartmoor is not simply an open landscape of rolling moorland punctuated by heritage sites and woodland, but a cultural landscape in which ecological features, historical remains, folklore, and abundant artistic practices continually inform one another. Mythic artists draw upon these materials to make their relationships with Dartmoor visible and experiential, transforming stories and landscape features into shared, visual forms of cultural expression. In doing so, they participate in what is often acknowledged by the same community as a process of re-storying: the recovery, adaptation, and creation of narratives through which communities interpret their environment and their place within it. Founder of The Folk Archive, Lally MacBeth, asserts that "place is so often the reason something becomes 'folk;'" Dartmoor is strongly defined by its own folklore which is strongly informed by its locale.[83] Consider "The Dartmoor Folklore Map," created by Ethan Pennell in 2025, which invites on the back,

> Take a Walk on the Wyrd Side with The Dartmoor Folklore Map. A guide to the eldritch world of ghosts, pixies, The Devil, witches, wisht places, legends, strange phenomena and more.
> It exists betwixt and between realms, moss-drenched, mist-shrouded and many hued. Enter if you dare…
> About the artist: Ethan is particularly inspired and frequently haunted by the folk tales of Dartmoor, his local stomping ground. Seven years in the making, this map has been a true labour of love. It will hopefully encourage you to seek out the featured locations and enjoy the magic of the moor.[84]

The map itself is large, folding out to an impressive 952 x 1270mm.[85] It depicts the whole of Dartmoor through vignettes of various folk tales and myths, each painted individually and then digitally gathered and placed into the exact, or most relevant, location on the map; most of the folktales have a specific place on Dartmoor they are associated with, others are regional and live mostly on the borders of the map (Fig.14). When asked why he created the map, Pennell expresses a long-standing interest in folklore stemming from his childhood, noting that his family history contains Irish and Romany heritage and his mother was adamant that she saw a fairy as a child, all of which he thinks may have had

[83] Lally MacBeth. *The Lost Folk: From the Forgotten Past to the Emerging Future of Folk*. (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 2025), 320.
[84] Ethan Pennell. *The Dartmoor Folklore Map*. Frome, England: Dennis Maps, Ltd., Revised Fourth Edition, 2025.
[85] 37.48 x 50 inches

an impact on his interest in folklore; growing up in an urban environment in Kent, he says, may have also given him a romantic view of Dartmoor.[86] Pennell believes people are drawn to Dartmoor for its connection with the non-human,

> And it's one of the wildest places in this country. In terms of sort of the vastness, we don't have massive wild places like you do in America. It's a big enough space to get lost in, in a good way. And I think also there's something unique about that particular place, the sort of layout of the land. You've obviously got the tors that have a special sort of draw themselves. There's also a vast amount of prehistoric or particularly sort of Neolithic monuments. It's like a palimpsest. You've got all these layers of history and whatnot. But of course, on top of that is the folklore. When I started researching my map, I didn't realize just how much there was. And it's still coming out from beneath the ground, so to speak.[87]



Figure 14. *The Dartmoor Folklore Map* by Ethan Pennell (2025)
https://ethanpennell.com/the-dartmoor-folklore-map

[86] Ethan Pennell, interview with author, August 2025.
[87] Ethan Pennell, interview with author, August 2025.

Pennell's description positively evokes the sublime's mixture of disorientation and pleasure while his recognition of the moor as a palimpsest acknowledges a fascination with the relationship between land, heritage, and the passage of time, arguably Romantic values. When he began this project, Ethan directly states that "for me, it was about enchantment, about bringing some magic back into the world."[88] His continuing work focuses more on pixies and fairies, which he connects to the land, noting that a lot of fairy hills are Neolithic burial sites, highlighting the connection between fairy or pixie and ancestral lore; he says that wherever you have stone circles and burial mounds, you will have fairies, and the consequences of interactions are magnified in those areas; in Dartmouth there are even stories about pixies as a lost race. "In certain parts of Dartmoor," Pennell says, "it feels to me like you're absolutely, whether you know it or not, going to be interacting with that fairy world. Like that it's a given."[89] When I asked him about the larger mythic arts community on Dartmoor, Pennell believes there is a spiritual element to people's interest in mythic arts, a journey that equally uplifts as well as descends into "the dark night of the soul," observing that both the folklore and the land it lives in mimics this balance of shadow and light, allowing people to imagine themselves into how interconnected the land, heritage, and more-than-human worlds are, and then develop a deeper relationship with those elements.[90] Ethan Pennell's next projects include more mythic art pieces and creating a book that guides readers through the map via the stories and landmarks it contains.

Photographer Claire Shauna Sanders describes how she realized that the source of her enchantment and photographic inspiration wasn't just based on her adult experience of Dartmoor, but from realized memories from her past,

> I was just thinking about something else from my childhood…that I love about Dartmoor... it's when I was a child, I've always been a massive reader. I used to read books like *The Enchanted Woods*, *The Faraway Tree*, all these kinds of things…it's the magic in the books, the magic you used to feel as a child when, you know, the excitement and that anything is possible, sort of that vibe that you'd get from reading these enchanted books... I think when I came here it was like the child in me just saying, oh my god, look, this really could be real. Because it looks like you are so close to being able to touch the magic that's hidden in nature.

[88] Ethan Pennell, interview with author, August 2025
[89] Ethan Pennell, interview with author, August 2025.
[90] Ethan Pennell, interview with author, August 2025.

This process of translating stories and landscape into shared material culture demonstrates why remembering can provide a basis for imagining. As Keith Basso argues, places acquire meaning through the stories and memories attached to them, and these meanings can shape how communities understand and act within their environments.[91] On Dartmoor, the revival and reinterpretation of folklore and historical memory therefore represents more than an engagement with the past. It provides imaginative material through which contemporary communities can consider what kind of place Dartmoor is and what kind of place it might become. Mythic art becomes particularly significant within this process because it connects memory and imagination to material landscape, allowing inherited stories to be reinterpreted through contemporary concerns.

The Romantics looked to the past for inspiration, specifically elevating the Medieval as a beacon of spiritual depth, unity of community and nature, and imaginative richness. New Romanticism emulates this tendency; on Dartmoor, the community exhibits a reverence for the evidence of the past that surrounds them, a muse expressed in every medium imaginable. As an example, an event held in a reconstructed Neolithic roundhouse, warm with a fire that sent smoke up and out of its traditional thatched, sloped roof highlighted a deep longing for a relationship with the past, not as nostalgia, but as a method of reconnecting with the old ways as a pathway to modern solutions (Fig. 15, 16).

[91] Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 5, 32.



Figure 15. Reconstructed Neolithic Roundhouse at Lower Merripit Farm (external)
https://thebraidedriver.co.uk/trail-gallery/



Figure 16. Reconstructed Neolithic Roundhouse at Lower Merripit Farm (internal w/nest)
https://thebraidedriver.co.uk/trail-gallery/

Deep in the heart of the moor, near the hamlet of Postbridge, lies the thousand-year-old Lower Merripit farm, home of renowned musicians, artists, and storytellers Nigel Shaw and Carolyn Hillyer. They describe their Dartmoor home as a place of "wild sanctuary," and much of their creative work draws directly from the surrounding moorland, seasons, ancestral traditions, and relationship with the natural world.[92]

It was on a temperate summer evening that I was invited to attend a workshop guided by Carolyn Hillyer at Lower Merripit Farm. On the website, the evening was advertised as part of a series centered on a Proto-Celtic journey through music; this evening was Kruttâ Kuro, or "the council of our singing drums," described as "a sacred circle of voice, ritual, and rhythm."[93] This workshop was centered on "the Wing" portion of the series, "opening to flight and reaching out into the wild expanse, stretching into full potential, the vibrancy of our ancient words."[94] The evening's song circle was a separate though related event to a full-day workshop of women who had been working the full day with words and art based on the theme. While I will omit certain details to preserve the intimacy of the circle, there are elements of Kruttâ Kuro that are either public or general enough for sharing, and their relevance to the topics of this thesis necessitate inclusion.

Led by Carolyn Hillyer and assisted by Gabrielle O'Connell, the entire evening was framed as a ritual, with an opening and a closing. It began with a ceremonial walk along the "heron's trail" across the land and through an area that contained several shines, accompanied by drum and voice. The group was diverse in age, from early twenties to a few women in their late seventies or early eighties, and several nationalities were represented. As we entered the roundhouse onto piles of sheepskin in our bare feet, we sang and listened to stories as Carolyn wove materials from the local flora and fauna into our experience. Examples include lichen and birch, dragonfly casings, and heron and owl bones and feathers. The herons seem to have a particularly special relationship to this place and to Carolyn's work. She spoke about their importance to the local ecosystem as well as their spiritual importance to the land and to herself. Many of the lyrics and portions of the stories

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[92] Carolyn Hillyer and Nigel Shaw. "Home," *Seventh Wave Music Website*, accessed 29 June 2025. https://www.seventhwavemusic.co.uk/

[93] Carolyn Hillyer. "Women's Workshops," *Seventh Wave Music Website*, accessed 29 June 2025. https://www.seventhwavemusic.co.uk/womens-workshops/

[94] Carolyn Hillyer. "Women's Workshops," *Seventh Wave Music Website*.

were given in her own personal interpretation of Proto-Celtic, a reconstructed (unwritten) language derived from Proto-Indo-European and the origin of all known Celtic languages; Carolyn explained at the beginning of the evening that using it offers a conduit to the land, to our ancestors, to each other. Many of the themes presented through this combination of Proto-Celtic and modern English centered on the idea of "wild, untamed freedom," on how to "trust the wings we have within us."

The experience of the Kruttâ Kuro song circle offered a tangible sense of the work Carolyn Hillyer has been, as is continuing to do on Dartmoor. From her website,

> I live on a thousand-year-old farm in the ancient belly of Dartmoor, a mist-veiled landscape of wild hills, peat bogs and heather moors in the south-west of England. I draw the inspiration for all my work from the raw beauty and primordial memory of the ancient earth, and the untamed spirit of the sacred paths that women walk upon it. My creative offerings form a textured weave of books, women's workshops and festivals, song albums and concerts, paintings and art installations, traditional drum making, and the tending of this place of wild sanctuary on Dartmoor.[95]

She has expanded this work to a virtual program called "WEGJÊ KERDÂ (Weaver's Trail): A Women's Soul Pilgrimage into Ritual Landscape, Wild Shrines and Sacred Hearth" on her Braided River website, to "infuse an online experience with the raw energy of the moors and the untamed beauty of ancient feral dreamscapes."[96] The program is described as a deep journey of words and images, laid out in a cycle of thirteen moons, into a self-paced study and online gatherings that uses elements of Dartmoor- the landscape, folklore, ancient sites and language as oracles and catalysts to extend the impact felt in the Dartmoor landscape to a global audience.

Hillyer's work illustrates the movement from the New Romantic sensibility described above toward the active practice of Enchantivism, drawing upon distinctly Romantic values: wildness, imagination, ancient artifacts and language, emotional attachment to the land, and an energetic connection to the more-than-human world, rekindling communal and ecological practice. The moor is not simply represented as sublime or enchanted; participants are invited to experience it through ritual, song,

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[95] Carolyn Hillyer "About," *The Braided River Website*, accessed 15 August 2026. https://www.seventhwavemusic.co.uk/aboutus/

[96] Carolyn Hillyer "About," *The Braided River Website* "; Hillyer, Carolyn. "Weaver's Trail," *The Braided River Website*, accessed 15 August 2026. https://thebraidedriver.co.uk/the-journeys/weavers-trail/

movement, storytelling, that are intentionally attuned to its flora, fauna, and ancestral associations. Folklore and reconstructed language function as catalysts through which the past is brought into the present and through which relationships between people, land, ancestors, and the more-than-human are imaginatively renewed. In particular, both Hillyer and the other participants on the evening I attended expressed that the use of Proto-Celtic language deepens this sense of belonging not just to the land, but to the heritage it holds; Hillyer explains that Proto-Celtic was used by people who lived in deep relationship with the land and spirit over four thousand years ago and that the lyrical exploration of its "mythic spirit" is a medium to understanding, protecting, and reviving this bond, how we return to living in a sacred balance with ourselves, with each other, with the land we live on. In this sense, Hillyer's mythic art operates as a form of place-making: it transforms her own relationship with Dartmoor into a shared experiential practice through which others are encouraged to sense and inhabit the landscape differently. The subsequent extension of this work through Weaver's Trail further demonstrates how such practices can transmit the feeling of a particular landscape beyond its physical boundaries. Enchantment thus transcends individual responses to Dartmoor and becomes a transferable cultural practice, precisely the movement from experience into collective action that I identify here as Enchantivism. It also exemplifies how, in the framework of New Romanticism, the objective isn't a return or emulation of the past; the past becomes imaginative material for addressing the present.

The examples set forth in this and subsequent chapters suggest that enchantment does not remain an individual response to a sublime landscape; it becomes a means of producing relationships, identities, cultural production, and forms of engagement with the land. Enchantivism can therefore be understood here as the active process through which the perceived magic, heritage, nature, and energy of Dartmoor are transformed into contemporary practices of belonging, creativity, and stewardship. The following chapter examines these practices more closely through the material and historical landscape of the moor and the mythic artists who actively participate in its ongoing creative dynamism.

Chapter Four: The Mythic Arts on Dartmoor

The preceding chapter established Dartmoor as a landscape in which ecology, history, folklore, and lived experience intersect to produce a distinctive and continually evolving sense of place, which is continually shaped through the ways people perceive, remember, narrate, and creatively engage with the moor. Mythic art is an important medium through which this process becomes visible. Drawing upon folklore, local heritage, ancestral memory, landscape, and the more-than-human world, mythic artists preserve, interpret, and re-story Dartmoor through their work, transforming relationships with place into creative and often communal experiences. Their art represents more than an existing sense of place: they contribute to its ongoing formation, allowing inherited narratives to be reimagined in response to contemporary social, cultural, and ecological concerns.

This chapter turns therefore from the broader view of Dartmoor to specific artistic practices through which that sense of place is expressed, negotiated, and renewed. Through the example of the Widdershins III exhibition and the work of select individual mythic artists, it considers how folklore, imagination, and enchantment become embodied in artistic practice, and how such practices can function as a connection and mediation between past and present, community and landscape. I argue that the mythic art produced on Dartmoor embodies Romantic qualities through its emphasis on the sublime, imagination, wildness, folklore, ancestral memory, and an emotional relationship with place. When aligned with ecological stewardship, community, and the more-than-human, mythic art represents a facet of New Romanticism in which wonder and enchantment become active forms of place-making and cultural engagement. In this transition from sense of place to artistic practice, mythic art also emerges as a meaningful vehicle for the principles and action of Enchantivism. As mentioned in Chapter Two's discussion of the sublime, many artists have sought to articulate what is frequently described on Dartmoor as an intense aesthetic response to the landscape, characterized by a profound appreciation of its natural beauty and a heightened awareness of its deep historical and archaeological significance. This experience is often accompanied by a more unsettling recognition of

human impermanence and relative insignificance within the vast temporal and spatial magnitude of the landscape.

Observations gathered from both local residents and visitors indicate that the distinctive juxtaposition of wild nature and ancient cultural remnants can generate a profound sense of belonging and place attachment, while also prompting a desire to adopt or continue ways of living that are more closely attuned to, and aligned with the natural environment and the associated folklore. For example, while visiting the Folk Preservation Society in Teignmouth, I offered three workshops to support their schedule of events tied to the Teignmouth Folk Festival, two of which particularly illustrate my observations. The first was a lecture and discussion on fairy tales through a feminist lens; participants were engaged, with a keen interest in the subject. Several participants connected well-known fairy tales to themes they notice in local folklore, and at the end of the session expressed a feeling of kinship and creativity; one participant said "Now I just want to go home and paint based on this!" while another said that she was re-thinking how she writes her folk music, specifically how she can center the feminine folk voice as authoritative, within both historic and modern perspectives. I also held a linocut printmaking workshop at the Folk Preservation Society, and almost every participant chose (unprompted) an image that depicted both a natural element found on Dartmoor (e.g., flora, granite tor) combined with a folklore theme (e.g., ancient standing stone, folk tale), highlighting the value placed on the environment and stories steeped in the community. I also offered a workshop at the MED Theatre in Moretonhampstead on illuminated letter design, discussing the history and relevance followed by a mentored session creating personalized illuminated letters. Once again, most of the participants chose and asked for assistance in incorporating local flora and fauna, and a mixture of local and more universally known folk characters and creatures into the composition around the letter of their (sur)name, intimately connecting these themes of place with their own identity.

Dartmoor's landscape is seen by many of its residents as dramatic, setting a stage of both ecological distinction and mythic inspiration; the word liminal came up frequently as a way to describe Dartmoor, which relates to how it is often seen as a palimpsest, perpetually shifting between layers of perception, as Ethan Pennell described earlier. This environment has long been shaped not only by natural processes but also by the enduring presence of

human communities whose identities are deeply intertwined with the land. There is a deep history of rich and unique folklore here, central to this relationship between humans and nature, which is still embodied by the communities that call this rural place home. This continuity has maintained a symbiotic relationship between community stewardship of the land and the spirits that inhabit this distinctive landscape. William Crossing described the liminal qualities of Dartmoor in the following passage, “my researches in that region of tor and stream I have never tired of pursuing, a love for its dear old hills, extending back as far as memory will carry me, attracting me to its wild solitudes, where, by the side of the stone circle and moss-covered cairn, we seem to stand on the borderland between the present and the distant past.”[97] Artists Brian and Wendy Froud said in their interview that they are “always dealing with things that are liminal,” citing liminality as an attraction they are always seeking.[98]

In an interview with the three co-directors of MED Theatre, a community theatre company offering workshops for all ages based in Moretonhampstead, each spoke of the now deceased founding director’s affection for Dartmoor, treating the features of the landscape from rocks to animals, as conscious and ensouled, and following his example, the group draws heavily on Dartmoor folklore for their programs and performances. They described his insistence that Dartmoor's "stark reality" not be romanticized, while at the same time disclosing a personal, near-mystical pull toward the moor, exemplifying how Romanticism can be both embraced and resisted. The sublime also appears in their descriptions of the moor's harsh power ("it’s a hard life for the people who live here. It’s an unforgiving environment"), of deep geological time (rocks that move "over millennia"), and especially in how they intimate how working with local folklore provokes a realization that it is part of a vast ecosystem of archetypal myths shared across the world; it is this last point in particular that guides the commitment to and energy in their artistic work.[99]

Dartmoor is also seen by many who live there as a borderland, both geographically and in how it is saturated with myth and folklore that exist in a magical threshold: stories of pixies, giants, ghosts, witches, spectral packs of black dogs, and the devil abound, derived

[97] William Crossing. *The Ancient Stone Crosses of Dartmoor and its Borderland*. (Exeter: James G. Commin, 1902), ix.
[98] Brian and Wendy Froud, interview with author, July 2025.
[99] MED Theatre (Abby Stobart, Gillian Webster, and Helen Gilbert), interview with author, July 2025.

from the long and culturally diverse history of the region. Dartmoor's isolation, its wild rugged terrain, and the changeable weather constitute one kind of border into encounters with non-human while it also serves as an apparent portal into the magical otherworld. As Helen Bruce puts it, "Dartmoor is a thin place, a boundary between past and present, myth and reality. [It all] feels especially close."[100] This begins to offer a sense of the common local perspective that Dartmoor's environment encourages mythic thinking: the shape of a tor becomes a giant, the face within the stone becomes a spirit of the land, the mist heavy around the oak is a portal, or a trick of the pixies. The genii loci, or resident spirits of the land, on Dartmoor are intimately intertwined with the geography that birthed them. The pixies or the legend of Old Crockern, for example, are cultural artifacts that emerged from sacred, historical, and ecological relationships between humans and the landscape, and also dictate modern behavior and values within the Dartmoor community. They manifest in many ways on Dartmoor.

The role of the landscape, and especially the tors, in mythmaking is both place-making and human psychology; humans have been worshipping and marking the land with stories for thousands of years, but it is also innately human, as Sophie Pierce and Alex Murdin point out, to project human ideas and feelings onto the landscape around us.[101] "For thousands of years myths and legends have grown up around the tors, and it's easy to see why. They fire the imagination."[102] Dartmoor artist Angharad Barlow adds,

> There's something in …the sort of ancientness of the granite, it holds, I mean it's full of quartz, so it's a time piece, it's a recorder- it's recording time…It's made up of quartz, Dartmoor's quartz, black tourmaline. I mean, it's hardcore, from a stone crystal perspective, that walks underneath the land. It's like the kind of resonance of it is very base, sort of really rooty…it holds on to so much because it records. And so, living in these old granite buildings and being in these old granite [other places] …and the sacred sites and the stone roads…they are like a time capsule because they've got the frequency in them…So it was always like, you just turn the dial to tap into that frequency to see what's gone in the past in a way. And so… it's always felt magical to me, even as a child."[103]

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[100] Helen Bruce, interview with the author, July 2025.

[101] Pierce, Sophie and Alex Murdin. *Rock Idols: A Guide to Dartmoor in 28 Tors.* (Bath, England: Wild Things Publishing, 2025),9.

[102] Pierce, Sophie and Alex Murdin. *Rock Idols: A Guide to Dartmoor in 28 Tors.* (Bath, England: Wild Things Publishing, 2025), 7.

[103] Angharad Barlow, interview with author, June 2025.

The transmission of folklore has never left the land here, passed on by generations of farmers and other Moorlanders. Chagford resident and Dartmoor guide Emma Cunis mentions that, ""If you talk to any local on Dartmoor, someone who's grown up here or their family's been here for generations, they may not talk about this stuff, but for sure they feel it. And in the little quiet moments in between the practical stuff of talking about the farm or their family, they'll mention something."[104] Indeed, one need only declare to a local that you are about to go rambling on the moor to often provoke a warning not to be "pixie-led." Angharad Barlow reminisces that she feels lucky to have grown up in rural Britain where elders normalized fairies as a "part of life, a normal thing" and she "grew up on a diet of story."[105] Many performances of folklore on Dartmoor are consistently and abundantly offered directly on the moor, often in the location connected to local myth and lore, finding ecological and folkloric engagement by physically being in the borderland.
Chagford-based artist Danielle Barlow describes her work as being intimately and inextricably intertwined with the land,

> What I generally paint is my experience with the landscape, in whatever reality that might be. So sometimes, you know, it might be the play of light on the landscape because it's purely in this reality. But really, often, it's much deeper than that. And, you know, it's where the layers of realities intersect and where myth touches on it and where my own personal visions have taken me…that when I'm doing my personal work… it is almost entirely about the magical nature of reality. It's often quite symbolic, personal symbolism rather than universal symbolism. It's often the plants, the actual things that grow here. Plants, and animals too, but if plants in particular. I'm really in love with plants and that sort of exploration of plants and the energy and magic they carry and how they interact with the landscape too…there's certainly a lot of plants in folklore and myth.

She often depicts the relationship she has with plants and magic in her work, seen particularly in her spell wheels, which illustrates her "attempts to pin down that magical relationship between things, whether it's plants and other beings in the nature of a spell" (Fig. 17).[106]

[104] Emma Cunis, interview with author, July 2025.
[105] Angharad Barlow, interview with author, June 2025.
[106] Danielle Barlow, interview with author, July 2025.



Figure 17. Between the Making and the Unmaking by Danielle Barlow (date unknown), watercolor
https://www.daniellebarlowart.com/spell-wheels-and-totems

To be clear, Dartmoor, and Devon as a whole, is not especially, or more, rich in folklore than other regions in Britain, but its longevity, robust collections of cultural artifacts, continued transmission, and finally, public attachment between the distinctive landscape and its folklore give it a special quality. The way in which each one of these elements has sustained an evolving role for Dartmoor's folklore of social negotiation and community identity also has its own uniqueness, especially evidenced by the mythic arts community on Dartmoor.

In the Dartmoor region, the folklore revival is a complex combination of continuous stories and practices that never left the land merged with a revitalization of less known, dormant, or more generally national traditions and tales, some of which are being reframed or adapted to meet the needs and values of a changing community and a wider shift in perception. In this way, those who live on Dartmoor and those who visit are perpetually exposed to the powerful combination of a sublime experience of landscape and the enchantment of its folklore that provides the pathway to not just the pastoral idyll, but the prospect of an inherently more magical life. This seduction is especially captured by the mythic artists who reside on Dartmoor. Again, "Mythic Arts" refers to visual art, literature, architecture, and music that is inspired by, or depicts myths, legends, and folklore. This

distinction is separate from "folk art." As the Museum of National Folk Art explains, a more specific definition of folk art is elusive but tends to consider the artistic practice of a community that reflects cultural life and traditions.[107] Mythic art can intersect with both folk art and what would be considered fine art, which is work created primarily for its aesthetic and emotional or intellectual response rather than practical function. Dartmoor has borne or attracted a substantial mythic arts community, including both local creators as well as more internationally known writers and artists.

The historical and environmental influences on Dartmoor have created a distinct and essential place of mythic art practice. While folklore has been perpetually present over time, and the arts community has steadily grown since the eighteenth century, for the last half century the mythic arts community has been growing in a concentrated and intentional way. According to Elizabeth Jane Baldry, "The people who come to live [on Dartmoor] are invested in it, in the land and in the lore."[108] Terri Windling indicated that there are "large communities working at the intersection of art and folklore here on Dartmoor," to which Elizabeth Jane Baldry adds that the mythic arts and nature have a symbiotic relationship on Dartmoor, which permeates the local mythic arts production and is embodied by its community members.[109] Artist Danielle Barlow describes Dartmoor as "a gathering place of artists, creatives, people who kind of are awake to the myth."[110]

The mythic arts community on Dartmoor is best understood not as a single, bounded group, but as a series of overlapping networks connected through shared interests in folklore, landscape, and creativity. Nearly everyone I interviewed expressed a strong sense of affection for the local mythic arts scene, frequently describing it as unusually warm, supportive, and welcoming to newcomers. Yet the interviews also reveal a more complex social structure beneath this apparent cohesion. An inner circle associated with Brian and Wendy Froud, Alan Lee, and Terri Windling, and extending to most of the artists featured in the Widdershins III exhibition, overlaps with a broader network of folklorists, activists, storytellers, musicians, theatre companies, galleries, and community

[107] International Museum of Folk Art. "What is Folk Art?" *International Museum of Folk Art*, accessed 20 August 2026. https://www.moifa.org/learn/what-is-folk-art.html
[108] Elizabeth Jane Baldry, interview with author, July 2025.
[109] Terri Windling, interview with author, July 2025; Elizabeth Jane Baldry, interview with author, July 2025.
[110] Danielle Barlow, interview with author, July 2025.

organizations. As the co-directors of MED Theatre described it, the community is essentially "a big Venn diagram" of intersecting groups working with similar themes, "or maybe even a little kaleidoscope because some of these little beautiful gems are shifting back and forth between [us]."[111] This understanding is important because the information gathered in my fieldwork complicates any conception of a singular "mythic arts community" while demonstrating the local networks through which ideas, practices, and relationships circulate.

Despite these differences, participants repeatedly described the community as functioning more like a support network or found family than a formal art institution. Informal gatherings, especially in Chagford, create spaces in which artists and community members who share the same interests can share food, conversation, community rituals and revels, creative struggles, and ideas. One example is the "Pudding Club," which Alan Lee describes as past get-togethers with many of the long-time Dartmoor mythic artists to which "everyone would bring a little kind of pudding to share, and also something they've been working on, a couple of drawings or a bit of writing."[112] "Celebrating the Earth," run by artist Terri Windling and storyteller Lisa Schneidau, holds seasonal events, such as wassailing in January or a Yule mummer's play in December, also illustrating how many gatherings led by local mythic artists tend to center community values and needs. Several participants emphasized that artistic practice is inherently isolating and that the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with others engaged in similar work is therefore particularly valuable. They described this kind of camaraderie as something that was hard to find, while others contrasted the Dartmoor community favorably with more competitive or impersonal art worlds they had experienced elsewhere. The emphasis placed on gathering in person is itself significant: participants repeatedly valued face-to-face relationships over exclusively online forms of community, reinforcing the importance of embodied, place-based interaction within the mythic arts.

Alan Lee also described the way the mythic arts community interacts with the landscape, observing that the sense of intimacy and shared experience does not always require physical presence; when I recounted my adventure with William Todd Jones, even

[111] MED Theatre (Abby Stobart, Gillian Webster, and Helen Gilbert), interview with author, July 2025.
[112] Alan Lee, interview with author, July 2026.

without details Lee immediately knew the area and noted that certain places draw mythic artists to them,

> One [other] way we do come together, in a kind of way…even though we might not be there at the same time…the fact that we all know that these are places which are important to us, and so, you kind of share. You go there by yourself but you know that your friends have also been there, probably fairly recently as well…it's almost kind of like an unspoken thing. The land is talking to you both. And you don't necessarily need to say much about it because it's so apparent.[113]

This sense of community is also shaped by informal mentorship. Brian and Wendy Froud, along with Alan Lee and Terri Windling, are frequently described as the "elders" of the mythic arts community—not primarily because of their age, but because of their international experience, longstanding influence, and role in mentoring subsequent generations. Alan Lee is an Academy award-winning book artist and film designer best known for his illustrations of Tolkien's book and conceptual design for Peter Jackson's film adaptations of *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. He's also illustrated books such as the *Mabinogion*, Rosemary Sutcliffe's *Black Ships Before Troy* and *The Wanderings of Odysseus*, as well as his collaboration with artist and puppeteer Brian Froud on *Faeries*. Alan Lee moved to Dartmoor from London in 1975, wanting to get closer to nature, to represent the wildness of moss and trees that have been "twisted by the wind." He expressed a desire to draw from a beautiful natural environment, and to shift from "quick turn-around jobs" to more long-form work.[114] He remembers that, like many, he knew upon arriving on Dartmoor that he had to live there and in one weekend found a house. Not long after, Brian Froud joined him, as a lodger at first, and then to stay. Brian Froud is an award-winning artist for books and film design depicting the magical realm, best known for his collaboration with Jim Henson on the films *The Dark Crystal* and *Labyrinth*, and for the Dark Crystal television series *The Age of Resistance*. Eventually, Brian met Wendy on the set of the film *Dark Crystal* and she moved to Dartmoor, where they had their son Toby, famous for his debut acting role as the baby in *Labyrinth* and now an artist in his own right. Wendy Froud is an award-winning sculptor, puppet and doll designer, and published author best known for her work with Jim Henson on *The Muppet Show* and the films *The Dark Crystal* and

[113] Alan Lee, interview with author, July 2025
[114] Alan Lee, interview with author, July 2025.

Labyrinth, as well as creating the original prototype for Yoda in the original *Star Wars* Trilogy. Terri Windling is an artist as well as a writer and editor for fantasy literature, author of over forty books. She started coming to Dartmoor in the mid-1980s, then moved to Dartmoor in the 1990s. Currently she is very "curious about the place where nature of writing and fantasy literature meet and the ways that fantasy can speak to relationship to nature, to climate change, to all those things."[115] Several participants described being drawn into the community or encouraged in their artistic development through relationships with these established figures, sometimes referring to Brian and Wendy Froud in particular as "fairy godparents." Two of those artists are Jim Crawley and Natalie Simpson, who feel like they've been welcomed into a community that "believes in [them]," one which is connected, supportive, and "gets it" when approached with questions that range from practical technique to establishing boundaries with the Fae realm because "not all artists would understand this particular way of needing to work" [with magical beings].[116]

Inclusion within the Widdershins III exhibition was similarly described by some participants as occurring through past participation or personal recommendation rather than an open process of competition or selection. This informal structure contributes to the familiarity and continuity that participants value. When speaking about the larger, regional art scene, however, some artists raised questions about broader issues of cultural capital, access, and exclusion. For example, textile artist and performer Ava Osbiston observed that Devon's artistic culture remains predominantly white and middle class, asking, "who gets to make the art, who is the consumer of the art, who's viewing the art, who's drawn to be here, who's not drawn to be, who's not in the conversation? There are people here who do not feel that they can be artists, even though they are artists to the core."[117]

The community also understands itself through a developing generational lineage. The artists describe a progression from foundational figures (such as Brian and Wendy Froud, Alan Lee, and Terri Windling), through a second-generation of artists (Virginia Lee, Danielle Barlow, David Wyatt, Angharad Barlow) and toward a newer generation sometimes characterized as the "inheritors of the Frouds" (like Jim Crawley, Natalie

[115] Terri Windling, interview with author, July 2025.
[116] Crawley, Jim and Natalie Simpson, interview with author, July 2025.
[117] Aba Osbiston, interview with author, March 2026.

Simpson, Armorel Hamilton). The foundational, first-generation artists all express both hope and curiosity for the newest mythic artists' future. This was said with pride, not criticism, as mentoring is described warmly and repeatedly, although there is a spectrum of approaches to mentoring amongst the foundational group. Alan Lee, for example, characterizes his role primarily as one of "general encouragement," while Angharad Barlow seeks to create tangible opportunities, especially for young people, and questions whether contemporary folklore revival movements, and the artists and makers within it, do enough to move beyond simply "bringing the past into the present" without doing the hard work of "stitching in the future."[118] This distinction is particularly relevant to many of the concepts mentioned in this thesis: the vitality of the community depends not only upon preserving inherited traditions but upon determining how those traditions might be adapted to generate new cultural possibilities.

Across these different networks, participants repeatedly identified several qualities as central to what they value about the community. They emphasized in-person connection over online interaction, generosity over fame, community over institutional prestige, and rootedness in the actual landscape and its folklore over abstract artistic identity. Terri Windling contrasted genuine, dedicated creative practice, offering an example of how Brian Froud continued passionately painting through a time of lean, unpublished years, while others described the community as more "earthed" and "honest" than other artistic or academic environments they had encountered. Most significantly, several participants suggested that it is the relationship to Dartmoor itself that allows such cohesion of diverse artistic practices: despite differences in medium, aesthetic, and ideology, the work repeatedly returns to the land.

While limited in scope to the restrictions of this thesis, this description of the mythic arts community also reinforces the importance of distinguishing the mythic arts community on Dartmoor as several overlapping groups. Examples such as The Folk Preservation Society, Morris dancing networks, MED Theatre, Green Hill Arts, Field System, and other organizations participate in overlapping but distinct cultural networks. Some are strongly rooted on Dartmoor, while others define their communities through shared

[118] Alan Lee, interview with author, July 2025; Angharad Barlow, interview with author, June 2025.

interests rather than geographical proximity. The directors of Field System, for example, deliberately seek artists using "folk" as a thematic rather than strictly geographical category and creating a space for artists, including queer, working-class, and rural participants, who might otherwise feel excluded from conventional gallery environments.[119] These overlapping networks suggest that the community's coherence lies less in formal membership than in shared creative practices and values, and a desire to establish meaningful relationships with land and with one another.

Widdershins III

Walking into the gallery of Green Hill Arts, I'm immediately confronted by an extraordinary sculpture of the Troll Witch, created by Jim Crawley and Natalie Simpson. She is summoning a moot, a council of all the creatures in all the realms, and it is as if I am being greeted as the last to arrive. I look to the right and there are figures adorned with the embroidered textiles of Angharad Barlow, like they've just come out of the woods of the art just behind. This section of the gallery is like dawn; the colors are soft and muted in peach, beige, pink and blue. Terri Windling's paintings invite me to come closer; they are embellished with collage and written text that tells a story, perhaps ones that they've brought to share to the group that's gathered here? Danielle Barlow's work offers a sense of ritual that connects deeply to the land while Marja Lee Krujit offers the same but atmospheric instead of earthy. Brian Froud's portraits of feminine nature spirits are intimate, they draw me to the back wall where I meet Wendy Froud's fairies making use of the resources that Hazel Brown has offered in miniature. Andrew Sinclair's grumpy centaur sculpture allows me to pass into the back room, where the mood shifts from a gathering to more of a contemplation of all the places these creatures have come from, of all the possibilities that might be brought into the moot. This back room is very organic-feeling; the reality of photographs of Dartmoor's landscape and folklore by Claire Shauna Sanders hang starkly above the collection of sketchbooks by Brian Froud and Alan Lee, contemplations and experiments into other realities. Alan Lee's large watercolors depicting scenes from *Lord of the Rings* bring a sense of place back to my experience; this may be a

[119] Brown, Milly and Mark Jessett (Field System), interview by author, July 2025.

painting of Middle Earth, but having been on the moor, it is clear that the line between the two is blurred. Rima Staines' work is otherworldly and act as talismans in their subject matter and design, after which I am danced back into the main room by Diane Coates' exploration of new approaches to Morris dancing. This left wall of the gallery is like walking into the forest on a warm afternoon; blues, greens greys, yellows, browns allow the creatures in this section to come forth. In some ways, David Wyatt's paintings mirror the work that Danielle Barlow's did earlier, creating a sense of ritual, but from a distance, as if I'm an observer instead of a participant. In the meantime, the sculptures of Armorel Hamilton, Toby Froud, Jim Crawley, and Natalie Simpson look like they have just emerged from the paintings (by Hazel Brown) just behind. They are playful and curious, a tangible presence that make this council feel real and immanent. Virginia Lee's work brings me back to the beginning with a striking symbiosis of Dartmoor's landscape and the stories that live within it. It is here that I'm confronted by a man who asks me what I'm recording in my notebook. After I respond, he excitedly tells me that he is a guide, taking people out onto the moor to work with Norse mythology using runes as a conduit. I ask him his impressions of the exhibition and he is clearly moved; he tells me that it resonates with the spirits he often sees out in nature, and then scrolls through his phone, showing me photos of the rocks and logs he has documented with faces and then pointing to the art in the exhibition that match these images. After thanking me for my time, he gives me his card in case I'd like to join him for a walk on the moor, and then departs. I turn back to the Troll Witch and give her a little respectful bow; Carol Harvey, the curator, has just called me to the back for tea (Fig. 18-28).

In addition to the folkloric study of this exhibition, my personal recollection of the space serves two important functions: the first is to illustrate that the exhibition had power in its presentation on this landscape, offering a moment in which I could suspend the analytical side of research and share a similar experience as the community I am researching, much like attending the singing circle in the neolithic roundhouse with Carolyn Hillyer; the second is to note that the response of the unexpected visitor at the end aligned with the primary themes of this thesis.



Figure 18. Sketchbooks and drawings by Alan Lee, Widdershins III Exhibition, 2025
Photo taken by Samantha Matalone Cook



Figure 19. Sketchbooks and drawings by Brian Froud, Widdershins III Exhibition, 2025
Photo taken by Samantha Matalone Cook



Figure 20. *Veivamm* by Brian Froud, Widdershins III Exhibition, 2025
Photo taken by Samantha Matalone Cook



Figure 21. *Once Upon a Tree*, by Virginia Lee, oil on board, Widdershins III Exhibition, 2025
Photo taken by Samantha Matalone Cook



Figure 22. *Weed Wife* by Rima Staines, oil on wood, Widdershins III Exhibition, 2025
Photo taken by Samantha Matalone Cook



Figure 23. Right side of Green Hill Arts gallery (from door): Work by Angharad Barlow, Terri Windling, Pauline Lee. Widdershins III Exhibition, 2025
Photo taken by Samantha Matalone Cook



Figure 24. Left side of Green Hill Arts gallery (from door): Work by David Wyatt, Hazel Brown, Virginia Lee, Jim Crawley, Natalie Simpson. Widdershins III Exhibition, 2025
Photo taken by Samantha Matalone Cook



Figure 25. *Ghost Road at Leigh Bridge* by David Wyatt, Widdershins III Exhibition, 2025
Photo taken by Samantha Matalone Cook



Figure 26. *Old Mother Hempnette Wise Woman & Herbalist*. Faerie Box by Hazel Brown, 'Old Homely Woman' by Wendy Froud. Widdershins III Exhibition, 2025
Photo taken by Samantha Matalone Cook



Figure 27. *Young Girl* by Wendy Froud. Widdershins III Exhibition, 2025
Photo taken by Samantha Matalone Cook



Figure 28. *Troll Witch* by Elfenwild (Jim Crawley and Natalie Simpson), Widdershins III Exhibition, 2025
Photo taken by Samantha Matalone Cook

During the summer of 2025, Green Hill Arts, a fine art gallery in the town of Moretonhampstead, presented Widdershins III. Open from June 20 until August 30, 2025, this exhibition brought together a robust gathering of renowned mythical and fantasy artists whose works evoke the mystery of Dartmoor. Widdershins III featured work by the following artists, all of whom offered unique and enchanting interpretations of time, place, and folklore: Alan Lee, Terri Windling, and Brian and Wendy Froud, Danielle Barlow, Angharad Barlow, Hazel Brown, Jim Crawley and Natalie Simpson, Diane Coates and Andrew Sinclair, Toby Froud, Armorel Hamilton, Marja Lee Krujit, Pauline Lee, Virginia Lee, Claire Shauna Saunders, Rima Staines, Terri Windling, and David Wyatt. This exhibition explored Dartmoor's timeless role as a place of magic, where boundaries between the mundane and the mystical blur. Walking "Widdershins" (counter-clockwise) is the traditional way to enter the realm of myth and enchantment, according to Carol Harvey, when explaining the origin and significance of the name.[120] From the sweeping moors and ancient stone circles to the hidden creatures and spirits said to roam its hills, the exhibition explains that Dartmoor provides a perfect backdrop for stories of the fantastical and the otherworldly.

From the exhibition wall text:

> Dartmoor is the inspiration of many an artist, but not all in the conventional sense of the typical 'Dartmoor landscape.' In this instance, our artists have been inspired by what lies beneath, a strong history of Dartmoor folklore. Folklore, at its best, lives on through generations and is not a fixed entity, to be a part of a history all but forgotten. The folklore of Dartmoor adapts and evolves; it is what the inhabitants of Dartmoor make it. The artists included in this exhibition have managed to capture the soul of this land through their own creative reflections of both environment and story…
>
> There is no doubt that Dartmoor truly is an inspiration. If we open our eyes and relax our minds, we, too, can be lead on a journey of investigation and intrigue. While exploring the following pages, allow yourselves to be transported into the realm of fairies, trolls, angels, sea creatures, centaurs, and pisxies [sic]; imagine yourself as a species of the 'realm of mystery' preparing to meet others you have no idea exist.

Carol Harvey says the exhibition text was written to give permission "to tap into your own [magic]," telling me,

[120] Carol Harvey, interview with author, 2025.

> Because I think we all grow up with those myths and imagination and fairies and there's a point in life when you're too old, society dictates you're too old…so there's a lot of people that kind of step back from it…but actually this exhibition allows you to access that again and re-evaluate it for what it gives you and where you are with it…here you are permitted to imagine, you are permitted to acknowledge that you saw that, that you can see that in the woods, that you can see the tree spirits, that you can see our ancestors, that you can breathe it, you can. It's permission to do so, where in our modern history, it's stamped out of you, so this gives permission to return to it."[121]

This is the third iteration of the exhibition, with many of the same artists and some new. The original idea came from Hazel Brown, who used to reside in Moretonhampstead and has long known fellow mythic artists Alan Lee and Brian and Wendy Froud.[122] The concept for an exhibition then solidified into an intentional, self-identified collection of artists who specifically work with mythic subjects in art and storytelling. As each show evolved, the first in 2013, then 2016, and the most recent in 2025, a core group of artists, the thread that binds not just the exhibition, but the mythic arts community on Dartmoor, is intimately involved in suggesting new artists for the show. This time was no different. The curator of Green Hill Arts and of Widdershins III, Carol Harvey described a selective process of choosing the right pieces for the vision and cohesion of the exhibition that would represent the kind of storytelling that imbues folklore and the "Dartmoor imagination" that expresses the land and the heritage for both place and mythic arts.[123] All of the artists in Widdershins III are rooted in the landscape and the heritage of the region, but also in the people who live here, including fellow artists, and the exhibition showcases how individual work represents communal aspects of Dartmoor. Angharad Barlow describes the experience of Widdershins II as a homecoming, full of family and friend, artists she has known in her community for decades, and also a provocation for what comes next, exploring the themes from a different perspective and re-storying the individual as much as the community and the land. She sees the creative practice as a conduit to exploring story, which becomes a tool kit for personal and social work.[124]

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[121] Carol Harvey, interview with author, 2025.
[122] Carol Harvey, interview with author, 2025.
[123] Carol Harvey, interview with author, 2025.
[124] Angharad Barlow, interview with author, June 2025.

The experience of the exhibition is mediated by the artists, who negotiate between the magical and human worlds. Carol Harvey describes the artists in this exhibition as grounded, with layers to their work that range from the obvious to the deep unconscious or ethereal; that they are "living and breathing what they're doing but they are also very open, they are okay with being exposed," which she says differentiates this group of mythic artists from other artists she has worked with.[125] "They all have a belief in this place [Dartmoor]…so they open themselves up to this environment… go into this otherworldliness and allow their imagination."[126] Some of the artworks depict Dartmoor's intersection of landscape and "the other, magical world," such as Virginia Lee's "Moorland's Stream of Dreams" which is grounded in localized sacred geography, whereas others base their composition on their experience of Dartmoor while exploring broader subject matter, like in Alan Lee's "the Black Stream," a watercolor illustration for *The Hobbit*, which mimics the tangled ancient grove at Wistman's Wood (Fig. 29, 30).[127] Guy Shrubsole, author of *The Lost Rainforests of Britain*, recognizes that many of Alan Lee's illustrations have been inspired by the pockets of temperate rainforests that still exist in Britain, and especially those on Dartmoor.[128] He especially points to Lee's portrayal of the Ents, the giant dryad-like beings who serve as the guardians of Fangorn Forest in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Two Towers*, as strong examples of this influence, noting that in a BBC interview, Alan Lee recounted using magnified photographs of the bark from trees on Dartmoor to design and create the texture of these characters.[129] Carol Harvey muses that "for Alan Lee to go halfway around the world and bring Dartmoor to New Zealand" is an example of the strong, unique impression and influence of otherworldliness in the landscape that Dartmoor has on artists there.[130]

[125] Carol Harvey, interview with author, 2025.
[126] Carol Harvey, interview with author, 2025.
[127] Alan Lee is Virginia Lee's father.
[128] Guy Shrubsole. *The Lost Rainforests of Britain*. (London: William Collins Books, 2022), 153.
[129] Guy Shrubsole. *The Lost Rainforests of Britain*, 154.
[130] Carol Harvey, interview with author, 2025.



Figure 29. *Moorland's Stream of Dreams* by Virginia Lee, Widdershins III Exhibition, 2025
Photo taken by Samantha Matalone Cook



Figure 30. *The Black Stream* (Illustration for *The Hobbit*) by Alan Lee, Widdershins III Exhibition, 2025
Photo taken by Samantha Matalone Cook

Carol Harvey also believes that place shapes us as humans in profound and powerful ways; viewed through the lens of its mythic art, that is certainly true on Dartmoor. According to Harvey the root of this exhibition was that, in her imagination, the characters in the artwork are gathering for a moot (a council) to discuss these very things; we, as humans, are only one element of this group. From a design point of view, all the artwork is centered around the Troll Witch, and then sorted by both color or tone and style or subject matter. The shift from light and airy to complex and darker moves you through the gallery, left to right. The room in the back of the gallery feels different, as if these were other worlds, invited creatures from far realms who have yet to arrive, a contemplation of the universal experience of the issues that might be discussed at the moot.

This careful curation was appreciated by the attendees, as evident in excerpts from the Widdershins III exhibition guest book:

> "So beautiful. What a collection of marvelous [sic]. Emotional on seeing some creatures. Do they move around at night?"
> "Thank you so very much, the most magical and inspiring exhibition I've ever seen. What a gift for the wild spirit."
> "We believe in fairies!"
> "Note to self: note more magic!"
> "I have enjoyed these magical pictures and words. We are so lucky in Devon to have so much natural magic around us in nature."
> "Thank you for giving me a part of myself back that somehow I lost."
> "We are escaping in a mystical world! Thank you for the beautiful exhibition!"
> "Almost impossible to depict elemental beings but these are almost alive-extraordinary!"
> "This is f-ing cool!"
> "The energy in here is beautiful and strong!"

The Widdershins III exhibition at Green Hill Arts emerges as mythic arts community ritual, a moment when the collective artistic expression of otherwise independent artists become "tangibly in community" describing the exhibition as "magic... sewn together" by its curator Carol Harvey.[131] Both Suzi Crockford and Elizabeth Jane Baldry observed that despite the diversity of individual artistic mediums and approaches in the exhibition, "you see Dartmoor in all of them."[132] This is the third iteration of the exhibition, functioning in

[131] Carol Harvey, interview with author, 2025.
[132] Suzi Crockford, interview with author, June 2025; Elizabeth Jane Baldry, interview with author, July 2025.

the community not only as a display of artwork but as a ritualized gathering through which a shared aesthetic and relationship to place becomes visible. At the same time, its organization reveals the practical difficulties of producing a community through art. The exhibition is largely volunteer-run and operates with limited resources, while curators must negotiate questions of artistic fit, representation, display, and interpersonal relationships. These tensions demonstrate that community is not simply something that exists prior to the exhibition; it is something continually negotiated and produced through participation.

Taken together, the interviews undertaken thus far on Dartmoor's mythic art community reveal a community characterized by both affection, gratitude, and a genuine sense of having been included, but few describe it uncritically. Its significance therefore lies not in the existence of a unified or harmonious group, but in the ways relationships are continually shaped and negotiated through art, folklore, landscape, and shared experience, especially by multiple generations. The mythic arts community actively seeks to create a social infrastructure through which enchantment can be collectively experienced and transmitted, while its tensions reveal the limits and challenges of that process. In this sense, the community itself becomes an important site of Enchantivist practice, a space where stories and artistic traditions are not simply preserved, but gathered, challenged, reinterpreted, and put to work in the present. The question of what these practices ultimately do, particularly how they transform attachment to place into forms of social and ecological action, leads directly into the discussion of Enchantivism.

The mythic arts examined in this chapter embody Romantic values through their emphasis on the sublime and enchantment through the subjects of folklore and landscape, as well as their interest in both individual and communal interactions with the more-than-human world. Rather than any wistfulness for what was, however, mythic artists on Dartmoor tend towards contemporary discourse on how the past can be used as a spiritual, emotional, and practical resource for dealing with contemporary concerns. In the frame of New Romanticism, the fundamental themes of imagination and wonder, aesthetics and experience are actively used within artistic compositions that center Dartmoor's geological, mythological, and ecological features, engaging both individual and communal perception of place. The mythic artists on Dartmoor join a larger movement of artists taking up the

new Romantic spirit, leaving the quotidian behind in favor of devising new relationships between the individual and nature, developing provocative poetic counterworlds, and taking up the yearning for a paradisiacal, beautiful, fairytale-like state without omitting the abysmal, uncanny, and the uncertain.[133] I argue that through these creative expressions, a relationship with Dartmoor is cultivated by its mythic artists that encourages stewardship; that the enchantment of mythic art moves aesthetic appreciation to shared, active engagement in the social and environmental issues that affect Dartmoor. It is within this movement from experience to practice that Enchantivism emerges. Enchantment becomes not merely something encountered on Dartmoor's landscape, but something actively created, communicated, and sustained through art, folklore, and community. The Mythic arts, therefore, is a catalyst for Enchantivism, demonstrating how the intersection of story and land is fertile ground for social and ecological change.

[133] Max Hollein and Martina Weinhart, eds. *Ideal Worlds: New Romanticism in Contemporary Art.* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2005), 17.

Chapter Five: Dartmoor and Enchantivism

The preceding chapter demonstrated how Dartmoor's mythic arts draw upon Romantic values, using the sublime nature and the enchantment of both the landscape and its folklore to transform aesthetic experiences into communal meaning and activity. Through the intersection of story and land, mythic art inspires a new or deepened relationship with Dartmoor, often resulting in opportunities that provide a sense of belonging and stewardship. The following chapter builds on the foundations of the previous four by examining Enchantivism as an emergent framework that explores the way mythic artists channel enchantment through stories and art to reconnect communities with land while also pursuing environmental and social action.

Through selected examples from Dartmoor, including detailed sections on "The Great Oak Table" and The Lost Giants' "Old Crockern," this chapter examines how the New Romantic values demonstrated previously can generate an attachment to landscape that mobilizes communities towards active engagement with present and pressing concerns, providing imagination as a resource for responding to said challenges. The examples that follow are given to illustrate the varied ways in which the mythic arts participate in strengthening environmental and social resistance; storytelling can be seen as a catalyst to the otherworld, a familiar device which might reimagine and redefine what environmentalism could become, revealing how enchantment can become not an escape from contemporary realities, but a means of engaging with and transforming them.

Enchantivism is both in concert with and benefits from the renewed popular interest in folklore. Ruth Webb is a co-founder of the Lost Giants in Cornwall, which makes large-scale giants and beasts using methods from a giant-making tradition born in Lostwithiel, Cornwall. She notes that the folk revival that is re-creating, celebrating, and re-imagining folk traditions is not likely a coincidence, as it "has come at a time when many wish to restore damaged land, to repair our relationship to it and to each other. In times like this it is common to look back to past traditions as a way to try and reimagine the future."[134]

[134] Ruth Webb. "Land That Can't Be Owned," In *Magic & Myth: Folklore on Dartmoor*. (Okehampton: Museum of Dartmoor Life, 2024) 7.

She stresses this connection between land and folklore, noting that "as we lose the tree, the river, the boulder that the story grew around, so we lose a part of our culture, our lore, and with this, ways of living and a sense of belonging."[135]

Totnes-based artist Rima Staines suggests that part of the issue is that as a society, we struggle with the mythic because we no longer believe it, we don't often trust unless there's a "double blind trial and a peer-reviewed paper about it, and myth doesn't work like that."[136] She proposes a shift is needed for a "deep understanding of truth," which invokes a classic Romantic critique that reason and science have displaced the mythic and irrational as valid ways of understanding truth. Dartmoor scholar of myth and storyteller Martin Shaw observes that,

> We think we are living in a world that isn't mythic anymore, but we're not…The earth itself thinks in myth. There is an aliveness in it. It speaks across species, a form of ecological communication that invites us into the unknown forest…stories immediately take the concerns of the day but they give them images so our souls can apprehend them…Growing your hands back, riding the back of a wolf, courting a firebird…these are all images of navigating the mysteries in a very uncertain time. Within a story, COVID would be a spirit, depression would be a monster, and climate emergency would be a serpent wrapped four times 'round the world, gradually squeezing the life out of it.[137]

Helen Bruce writes that perhaps we have reached a time in which we need to hear stories from the land's perspective, that,

> If we [humans] consider how myths offer space for us to consider voices and priorities other than our own, then they begin to seem vital. Retelling these stories takes on an urgency and importance beyond preserving an oral part of culture. It becomes about rediscovering our relationship with landscape, and about relearning how the land has inspired our stories and how these stories have gone on to define how we interact with the world around us. If we believe that humans can be turned to stone, and that stone can transform into granite-skinned spirits, then perhaps it's harder to distance ourselves from the needs of the land.[138]

English folklorist and museum curator Jeremy Harte argues that the English woodland is a liminal space in which the boundaries between man, animal, and tree are

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[135]Ruth Webb. "Land That Can't Be Owned," In *Magic & Myth: Folklore on Dartmoor*, 7.
[136] Rima Staines, interview with author, June 2025.
[137] Martin Shaw. "Valemon the Bear: Myth in the Age of the Anthropocene." *Emergence Magazine*, 21 March, 2023.
[138] Helen Bruce. "The Importance of Myth," In *Magic & Myth: Folklore on Dartmoor*, 5.(Okehampton: Museum of Dartmoor Life, 2024), 5.

blurred, and that the myths and legends of the forest represent a freedom from the constraints of society.[139] In his essay "Forest Murmurs," he points out that the "independence of forest people was legendary," specifically invoking the tale of Robin Hood as a point of tension between the civilization and natural autonomy.[140] "Robin is the forest visible," Harte says, which underlines the role folklore plays in artistically expressing the relationship a community has with the land.[141] While the sociopolitical history and consequences of land enclosures is beyond the scope of this thesis, Harte illustrates the mirror that folklore provides on the perspective that the British have on access to the land, or the denial of such. Robin Hood is an exceptional example of a tale that is both place-based (Nottingham) and has traveled beyond those borders. Even on Dartmoor, Robin Hood is performed; beyond its national popularity, it is often associated with Dartmoor's past as a royal hunting forest and the concept of the commons, which gives people grazing and foraging rights on public and private land. One of the local community groups, Celebrating the Earth, is run by mythic artist and storytellers Terri Windling and Lisa Schneidau, who organize seasonal events to "reconnect with nature, harness our strengths, and build a sustainable future." The group staged a "mischievous and magical" version of a Mummer's play about Robin Hood in which the gender of Robin Hood and Maid Marian were swapped, highlighting an old English tradition in theatre of dressing as the opposite sex and also using the format to support a modern social negotiation of gender roles.[142]

Most of the events I observed on Dartmoor had a direct and deep connection to the land through stories of both myth and legend, with fairy, beast and/or human, in the context celebrating the season to focusing on specific elements of the natural environment. Many use words or symbolism relating to the concepts of "wild" and "free," of rewilding (restoring) and re-storying the land on their promotional material. Some examples include a performance by storyteller Henry Everett on mad spirits and wild gods (stories of Puck and Pan) living in the Dartmoor woodland, a story walk-about that focused on the

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[139] Jeremy Harte. "Forest Murmurs" In *Folklore and Nation in Britain and Ireland*, Matthew Cheeseman and Carina Hart (eds), (New York: Routledge, 2021), 58-60.
[140] Jeremy Harte. "Forest Murmurs" In *Folklore and Nation in Britain and Ireland*, 58.
[141] Jeremy Harte. "Forest Murmurs" In *Folklore and Nation in Britain and Ireland*, 59.
[142] Celebrating the Earth, "Celebrating the Earth Facebook Group," Facebook, accessed 5 February 2025. https://www.facebook.com/groups/630433998087467

ecological folk tales of "wild Dartmoor," and a new show called "Chasing Crockern: In Search of the Spirit of Dartmoor," a sensory storytelling experience that "brings the spirit of the moor alive." Angharad Barlow's community-built "Bee Temple" explores how individual and collective identities create powerful social systems. As Barlow noted, "[The bees] are indivisible from the collective, yet they leave the hive and they are also an individual with an individual role."[143] The Moor Barton Wilding project combines habitat restoration and storytelling and art events to "rewild land and people;" I attended a campfire performance of Greek myths that centered the forest and brought the ancient heritage of England into conversation with the project's mission.[144] The Folk Preservation Society, founded by Amerie Rose and Harry Key, is a community space in Teignmouth that gathers around "exploring what it is to be folk today, what it was in the past, and what it might be in the future;" members, who upon joining write their name in the hand-made and bound membership book, are offered opportunities to interact and perform with folk expressions like art and music that straddle the practice of excavating old traditions and inventing new versions.[145] These, along with the other examples described in this thesis, are evidence of a strong identity that combines myth and environment through performance. The influence of history on these traditions is also apparent in the setting (e.g., the local medieval church, a specific site on the moor) and the activities, all of which have deep historical roots.

These events, and especially those that feature performance or ritual, are expressions of identity through social memory and history of place. They exhibit influence and inspiration taken from the land, individual interest in mythic arts, and the creation of a modern community that bases their collective identity on all of the above. As folklore is a function of shared identity, the group members and their relationship to these expressions may vary in motivation or participation but there is a constancy to their involvement and contribution.[146][147] These variations of individual identity threads can be complex, but

[143] Angharad Barlow, interview with author, June 2025.
[144] Moor Barton Wilding. *Moor Barton Wilding Website*, accessed 1 August 2026. https://www.moorbarton.org/
[145] Amerie Rose and Harry Key, Folk Preservation Society, interview with author, June 2026.
[146] Alan Dundes. "Defining Identity Through Folklore," in *Folklore Matters*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 4.
[147] Richard Bauman. "Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore," The Journal of American Folklore, Vol. 84, No. 331 (1971, 32.

woven together lend a strength and function to the to the fabric of the shared identity, which is often celebrated in these folkloric expressions and practices.

The offering of so many events, including those that are instructive or mentoring in the skill of storytelling, speaks to a practice important to local folk community, not just to pass on but as an obvious and vocal response to both local and global concerns. There is an obvious and robust relationship between folklore and an emphasis on the environment, the restoring and re-storying, and an acute awareness that while the moor might historically be a human creation, the story of the moor can also be imagined and shaped into a sustainable and ecologically sound future by human hands again. As Elizabeth Jane Baldry explained to me,

> We have to tell new stories. You can't shift hearts and minds by telling people that they're just wrong or stupid or ignorant. All we can do is try to tell a better story about how magical, how wonderful, how beautiful the land is. And if you can create a moment of enchantment within the landscape…that's something that hopefully will make people think 'ah, ok, this is worth saving. This is worth valuing. This is a treasure. This is something beautiful.[148]

Danielle Barlow echoes this point,

> My job as an artist is to provoke — I don't know if that's quite the right word — but to inspire awe and reverence for the land. And that is how we move forward in the difficult times ahead: until people can feel that magic themselves, can be awed by the wonder of this land. I mean, how are they going to care about it? How are they going to make any changes if they don't actually care?"[149]

On Dartmoor, folklore is not a relic, but a living, breathing practice which, amongst a more recent national revival, has unified the community into collective action. As Carol Harvey explains, "folklore and fairy tales and dancing are all part of our way of communicating and telling the world how we want to live."[150] The events above and following are framed by their creators and stewards as acts of service, ones that qualify as Enchantivism; the bridge to service is often a deep attachment, or enchantment, in which a person is moved enough to commit and take action. The other, related, outcome is a sense of accountability, in which enchantment induces a sense of ownership and responsibility.

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[148] Elizabeth Jane Baldry, interview with author, July 2025.
[149] Danielle Barlow, interview with author, July 2025.
[150] Carol Harvey, interview with author, June 2025.

For example, Angharad Barlow muses about the level of respect given to the hedgerow when you know that the fairies live there and there may be consequences to their anger, which "feels more powerful than 'don't throw your trash in the hedge'."[151] In this way, enchantment functions as a lived moral and ecological practice, not simply a metaphor.

Enchantment works precisely because it isn't controlled. Artist and performer Ava Osbiston points out that "if we're [creating art] in order to make change, it becomes propaganda rather than art. It becomes marketing. So if the motivation is 'I want to change people in this particular way'…you cannot dictate what happens in that process when you create something."[152] Rima Staines explains that enchantment, and the outcomes that result, are an organic process, "[the art] has to go underground and go under and then come back up in the other person, and you cannot dictate what happens in that process."[153] In the cases below, Dartmoor mythic artists use various means to respond to enchant, to be in service and accountable to the community and the land. Helen Bruce observes that on Dartmoor,

> [There is] this amazing cyclical reciprocity of the land inspiring story, and story informing culture, and then culture forming ways to interact back with the land. And I guess what's important is that the stories are interpreted in a way in culture that inspires culture to interact respectfully with the land. And I think that's the point with stories that we're focusing on getting in at that point — with using folklore in activism.[154]

In the aforementioned book *The Lost Rainforests of Britain*, Guy Shrubsole discusses the impact Dartmoor had on Alan Lee's work, noting that "the most obvious eco-warrior in *The Lord of the Rings* is Treebeard," who, enraged by the industrial destruction of a portion of Fangorn Forest, raises and army of Ents to attack and reclaim the land, actions successfully executed by guardians who are modeled after the trees on Dartmoor.[155] Alan Lee also illustrated the cover for *The Lost Rainforests of Britain*, explaining to me his thoughts after Guy Shrubsole included his visit with Lee and the connections between Tolkien and the environment into his book,

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[151] Angharad Barlow, interview with author, June 2025.
[152] Ava Osbiston, interview with author, March 2026.
[153] Rima Staines, interview with author, June 2025
[154] Helen Bruce, interview with author, July 2025.
[155] Guy Shrubsole. *The Lost Rainforests of Britain*, 155.

> Little things like that make you feel perhaps you are a part of a movement. And perhaps the way you are seeing things isn't just your emotional [sic], and it's kind of a common response that you can make people feel differently or encourage people to feel differently about the land if you give it that imaginative dimension. That it's not all about ecology and it's not all about diversity and land management and all of that. That can drive you on a sort of intellectual level, but to convey a sense of union with the land and imaginative excitement with the landscape, that feels like another kind of small step that you can make to kind of heal the land, essentially. And I think that's something I've always had…and if you can tell stories about things and paint pictures about woodlands and what a woodland can feel like and the kind of adventures that you might have there, the kind of history that they might have had, that's going to encourage people to have value. That's another step on the road to sort of getting into balance with nature.[156]

Dartmoor is a compelling site for examining Enchantivism directly as a product of enchantment that moves beyond artistic expression to become action. In this setting, art plays a significant role as vehicle for conversations about social and environmental change. Artist Rima Staines marks that artists are often the trailblazers, the pathfinders:

> The artists are the ones that go first, you know, and if you imagine a kind of clear-cut forest or, you know, post-apocalyptic landscape where there's only nettles growing amongst the ruins, The artists are the ones that colonize that place first. They cross the borders first. And make interesting studios in the corrugated iron outposts of the end of the world. But if the artists have made camp there first, and turned what they see into a language that's understandable for more people... then they become pioneers, I suppose, not to sound grandiose, but I think that is part of the artist's role. But it does mean that the artists have quite a hard time of it, actually. It is not easy.[157]

Artist Danielle Barlow adds to how art, and especially mythic art, can respond to a longing for belonging and lost rituals,

> And somehow those mythic arts…kind of does open a door for people to, to kind of connect with their community to go, this is a community thing… we still feel this need in our little isolated lives, we might do all sorts of sociable things, but that idea of, of a community coming together to do something, whether it be a celebration or whether it be to achieve something for activism, for protest, for celebration, you know, all those things, which we are kind of missing from our communities. And there is a hankering for now. I think that visual storytelling is such an open door into that.[158]

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[156] Alan Lee, interview with author, July 2025
[157] Rima Staines, interview with author, June 2025.
[158] Danielle Barlow, interview with author, July 2025.

I argue that on Dartmoor, mythic art is part of an ecosystem of folklore that sees enchantment as a basic human right as much as the land is, and that the health and welfare of both is measured by the presence of imagination and stewardship by the artists in this community. In this context, folklore becomes a dynamic mode of engagement that fosters reciprocal relationships among the mythic artists I interviewed, place (Dartmoor), and the genii loci (the spirits who inhabit the land).[159]

The Great Oak Table

The Pigwiggen Wood lies in a reclaimed area of Dartmoor, near Chagford. A harpist and filmmaker specializing in fairytale retellings, Elizabeth Jane Baldry spent her life savings to buy a piece of land at an auction twenty years ago. She described this property on her first visit as just a field with poles holding up newly planted trees and a mess of dumped debris everywhere. As she walked further, she reached "the narrows," a hidden valley lush with trees and "fairy steps" that adjoins a section of rare temperate rainforest. She knew then that she needed to protect this area, and has done so for two decades, naming it after the fairy knight in the seventeenth-century poems of Michael Drayton.[160] A few years ago, a new idea for the land emerged: to build a community table. She appealed to the Facebook group she had already created to support the restoration and preservation of this land, "Friends of Pigwiggen Wood," and began a social media campaign to fund the project that would re-enchant the landscape through the familiar act of gathering around a table, exemplifying the intersection between the land, the mythic arts, and social action centered by this community in everyday life.

The project was a way to tap into two things Baldry deeply cared about: addressing the increasing isolation of individuals she saw by connecting her community in nature and contributing to environmental and social sustainability. She explains,

> It's about nature connection, it's about human connection, it's about food and celebration, and magic and enchantment, really. All those things. And I love the folkloric element, and tables are themselves such symbolic things in that we gather

[159] On Dartmoor, relationships with the genii loci vary from genuine belief to an appreciation of symbolism and story as a representation of social and ecological values.
[160] Specifically, the poem that inspired Baldry is Drayton's 1627 mock-heroic fairy poem "Nymphidia, The Court of Fairy," which features the fairy knight Pigwiggen.

> around tables. Humans have shared food together forever, and out in the open air, people are kinder. It's not like taking people into an institution where they're sitting in, at tables…this is something wild and free outside.[161]

She already owned the land and knew exactly where these community gatherings would happen, and then the idea took on a life of its own. She reminisces about searching for a tree that would become the table,

> I just knew it had to be oak because oak is so rich in folklore and it carries such a sense of permanence and magic…and it's very rich in British folklore particularly. There used to be parliaments under oaks and gospel oaks and marriages under oak trees…all this kind of thing, it's very rich in British folklore. And so, I knew it had to be oak, and then I had this crazy, mad idea: what if it was just one single incredible tree? So that began a year-long search to find a tree, and this beautiful 500-year-old oak tree, this Tudor oak tree…so it was a sense of the stories in the tree…I loved that. And the stories that will still be in there, and the fact that this is like the mid-point in the life of the tree. It's five hundred years in the growing and five hundred years serving the community as a place of gathering and magic. [162]

The tree itself was indeed a five-hundred-year-old oak tree that had fallen in a storm on the land of an old manorial estate about 40 miles north of Chagford. The owner of the land upon which it once stood couldn't bear to chop up such an ancient tree, and so left it where it fell until a more noble fate could be found. Its fate eventually entwined with that of the Pigwiggen Wood.

The campaign was created on Crowdfunder, a UK-based platform for public-sourced funding, to raise £15,000 for materials and labor. The goal was met within eight days and a £5,000 stretch goal was introduced; an oak throne designed by her neighbor Alan Lee, the award-winning illustrator and concept artist, would be carved and built from the remaining wood to sit empty at the head of the table as a symbol of the natural world. A video appeared on the crowdfunding page of Alan Lee with his sketchbook, revealing a solid throne with a high back, in which a round portal is circled by Celtic knotwork. Two corvids are carved on either side of the high back and carved antlers radiate out from behind the back of the throne. The artist also indicated he'd like to plant two oaks at the base of the chair, to grow up and around, eventually embedding the throne within their trunks (Fig 31).

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[161] Elizabeth Jane Baldry, online interview by author, March 2025.
[162] Elizabeth Jane Baldry, online interview by author, March 2025.



Figure 31. Alan Lee with his sketch for The Great Oak Table throne.
Photo courtesy of the "Friends of Pigwiggen Wood" Facebook page.

This idea for a throne "really caught people's imagination," according to Baldry, and the stretch goal was met quickly. While the official Crowdfunder campaign has ended, the donation option remains open and the project has raised £23,730 to date.[163] Baldry shared that while many locals contributed, most of the funding came from the UK and the USA. She shared the campaign on her personal Facebook page and in several Facebook groups but credits the campaign's success to the help she received from mythic artists and writers who have much larger followings on social media, like Terri Windling, Iris Compiet, and Ellen Kushner. The majority of funders may never see the table, but the enchantment produced by the campaign's videos and other material combined with a specific course of action that would have a tangible and pleasurable result was persuasive enough to convince over two hundred supporters to donate. Even during the campaign, however, in the "Friends of Pigwiggen Wood" Facebook group posts continued to focus on the biodiversity health and changing seasons within the woods, sprinkled with relevant history and folklore,

[163] https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/great-oak-table

maintaining Pigwiggen Wood's role as an ambassador for both the land and its stories. As an example, one individual posted,

> As the woodland grows and new areas become even more beautiful and enchanted, Old Beings such as this oak will bow their heads and step aside for new thresholds of power to rise. Pray him to his rest, thank him, and let his body bring even more life to this enchanted woodland as he reverts back into the rich soil that was his cradle long ago."

This is a comment of the "Friends of Pigwiggen Wood" Facebook group in the wake of the sad news that an ancient, mighty oak tree had fallen near the fairy steps in what is described as "probably the most magical spot in the entire wood" by the group's administrator.[164] An outpouring of mourning and condolences followed, along with an acknowledgement that new life would emerge from the body of the oak.

Captions and comments on this page, which is the primary form of communication between Baldry and the interested community, are clearly in service of the in-person work with the land and community gatherings that either took place or are anticipated in the near future. One of these events, which I attended, was a reward level of the crowd-funding campaign, was an invitation-only Midsummer Feast, occurring on Saturday, 21 June, 2025. The long table was set with linens and flowers as those who supported the project dined together to celebrate the Summer Solstice, and the achievement of a vision for a community space that embodied the values that guided its conception in the first place. There were also "open days" in which the community was encouraged to "bring a picnic, book, art, board games, and an open heart, and afternoons in which Baldry collaborated with an organization in Bristol to welcome refugees to The Great Oak Table, offering an experience of land and lore to a community forced to leave their own (Fig 32).

[164] Friends of Pigwiggen Wood. "Friends of Pigwiggen Wood Facebook Group," Facebook, accessed 26 February, 2025. https://www.facebook.com/groups/231609316524856



Figure 32. The Great Oak Table in Pigwiggen Wood.
Photo courtesy of the "Friends of Pigwiggen Wood" Facebook page.

"The Great Oak Table" project is an illustrative case study of how an emotional narrative can draw upon collective memory and identity while constructing new strategies for social and environmental solidarity. The campaign created a relationship between the land and both the local and a global community. A commitment to biodiversity and myth intersected to produce a shared purpose and a sense of both embracing heritage as well as forming a new cultural identity of resilience and magic.

The Great Oak Table brings together the major themes of this thesis by demonstrating how New Romantic values, enchantment, and mythic art can become a form of Enchantivism. Baldry's decision to restore and protect Pigwiggen Wood reflects a Romantic valuation of nature, folklore, and emotional attachment to the specific location, while her use of the wood, and its Great Oak Table, as a site for gathering adapts these values to contemporary concerns of social isolation, biodiversity, sustainability, and community resilience. The oak itself becomes a particularly powerful symbol through which past and present converge: its age, folklore, and physical history imbue it with a sense of continuity and agency, especially seen in her comment "five hundred years in the growing, five hundred years serving the community," while transforming the fallen tree into a communal table changes it from a remnant of the past into an active, dynamic site of

future gathering. The empty oak throne extends this process by symbolically positioning the natural world at the center of the community, giving visible form to an ethic of reciprocity between humans and the more-than-human world, a value consistent in the mythic arts community. Through the crowdfunding campaign, online storytelling, seasonal gatherings, and engagement with refugees, The Great Oak Table and Pigwiggen Wood become both ways of perceiving the landscape and a means of organizing relationships within it. Folklore generates an imaginative relationship with place, mythic art makes that relationship tangible, and communal action translates enchantment into social connection and ecological stewardship, demonstrating the active Enchantivism happening on Dartmoor.

Old Crockern

One of the most popular folk narratives currently told in and around Dartmoor by storytellers and mythic artists is the story of "Old Crockern." This local legend has a distinct heritage and is tied to a very specific location on Dartmoor, Crockern Tor; the recent revival of "Old Crockern" for use in environmental and social activism is another example of the themes in this thesis resulting in a case of Enchantivism.

The first textual appearance of "Old Crockern" is in Sabine Baring-Gould's *A Book of the West: Being an Introduction to Devon and Cornwall* in 1899. It tells of a man from Manchester, Mr. Fowler, who came to an agreement with the Duchy of Cornwall to purchase land on Dartmoor close to Crockern Tor, where he proceeded to close off access to the land and bring in modern machinery to make the soil productive. One day, Mr. Fowler runs into a local man who tells him that Old Crockern, the spirit guardian of this land, came to him in a dream and gave him a warning for Mr. Fowler: if he continues to "scratch my back, I'll tear out his pocket." In other words, if Mr. Fowler continues to hoard and abuse the land, Old Crockern will ruin him. Mr. Fowler, of course, dismisses the threat and continues on with his modern farming. But the land would not cooperate and, within a few years, his venture had failed and he left Dartmoor.[165]

[165] Sabine Baring- Gould. *A Book of the West: Being an Introduction to Devon and Cornwall*. (London: METHUEN & CO., 1899, *Project Gutenburg*), 182-183.

This folk legend is interesting for both its social and environmental messaging as well as its historicity. It is based on real events, in which Mr. George Fowler from Lancashire bought Prince Hall Farm on Dartmoor in 1846, bringing new technology to a region deemed unfarmable and even worthless by many.[166] He enclosed about four hundred acres, land that was suddenly inaccessible to wildlife and the local community. He drained the bogs, brought in steam ploughs, and built walls to keep people and animals out in a place where traditional farming wasn't sustainable; the season is too short, the soil too thin, and the weather unyielding.[167] There isn't much evidence on what happened after 1851, when Fowler, along with his family and servants, were listed in the 1851 census as living at Prince Hall Farm, but by 1861 they were living in Lancashire again.[168] Crockern Tor itself is not just the home of Old Crockern, which by location had a direct and profound stake in what was happening below on Prince Hall Farm, but was also the historical seat of the old Stannary Parliament, which governed tin mining in Devon from the beginning of the 13th century until the end of the 18th century.[169] Decisions about law and the land were made in this very spot for hundreds of years (Fig. 33).

[166] Lisa Schneidau. "Spirit of Dartmoor? The Story of Old Crockern." Lisaschneidau.co.uk, 24 September 2024, https://www.lisaschneidau.co.uk/uncategorized/spirit-of-dartmoor-the-story-of-old-crockern/

[167] Absolute Units. "Modern Dartmoor Conflict: Old Crocker Awakes (with Ruth Webb and Lisa Schneidau)." Absolute Units: Official Podcast of The Museum of English Rural Life, Museum of English Rural Life, 19 February, 2026. https://merl.reading.ac.uk/explore/absolute-units/

[168] Lisa Schneidau. "Spirit of Dartmoor? The Story of Old Crockern."

[169] Hansford R Worth. "The Stannaries," In Worth's Dartmoor, p. 272-288. The Devonshire Association, 1953.



Figure 33. Crockern Tor
(Historical seat of the old Stannary Parliament, overlooking Prince Hall Farm)
Photo taken by Samantha Matalone Cook

The history of the "Old Crockern" legend is vague, but there are older stories of similar figures, a huntsman racing across Dartmoor with a pack of large black fiery-eyed hounds, that stretch back to at least the sixteenth century.[170] While it's rare to know where a folk narrative originates, this version of "Old Crockern" seems to have started with Sabine Baring-Gould, who lived in the area and quite possibly saw with his own eyes how Fowler was attempting to make the land productive and its impact on the community.[171] During the mid-19th century, the reputation of Dartmoor was changing. It was becoming popular for its unique wildscape, an exemplary model for new Romantic notions of preservation and Baring-Gould's writing generally reflects the position that the moor should be preserved for

[170] Emma Cunis. *Dartmoor Myths & Legends: Exploring Origins and Inspirations*. (Dartmoor, England: Dartmoor's Daughter, 2025), 29.
[171] Absolute Units. "Modern Dartmoor Conflict: Old Crocker Awakes (with Ruth Webb and Lisa Schneidau)."

its heritage and nature, for the sheep that had grazed there for centuries, and to protect the rights of commoners. He might have composed the dream part of the story using local folklore, but it was based on what was actually happening at the time.[172] The historical context of this place is the reason the legend exists and the foundation of the role "Old Crockern" currently plays in the community.

Many of the people and groups in the Dartmoor community have been intimately involved in social and environmental issues, such as the "Right to Roam" movement and the "Stars Are for Everyone" campaign, the latter of which had been fighting for three years alongside the Dartmoor Preservation Society and the Dartmoor National Park Authority for the right to maintain wild camping on Dartmoor. The case was against a wealthy landowner, Alexander Darwall, who attempted to overturn a law that allowed people to access and wild camp on property he bought with the full knowledge that it included common land. Darwall's primary argument was that the public, and especially wild campers, cause ecological harm to the land and in order to preserve Dartmoor, to make it a "productive" wilderness, recreation access must be better defined, limited, and regulated and landowner's rights upheld.[173] Darwall appealed and won against an original lawsuit last year that upheld a forty-year-old wild camping law, and a much longer tradition. That ruling was also appealed, and went to the Supreme Court, which made a final decision on May 21, 2025 in favor of the legal team representing those defending wild camping, funded by the community-organized "Stars are for Everyone" campaign.[174] The final ruling emphasized that responsibly conducted wild camping on Dartmoor Commons is a legal form of "open-air recreation," valid under the Dartmoor Commons Act of 1985 and the court made it clear that individual landowners may not impose additional restrictions beyond the ones established by governing authorities and park administration.[175] It also bolstered an ongoing debate on public access to land in England and in the United Kingdom as a whole,

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[172] Absolute Units. "Modern Dartmoor Conflict: Old Crocker Awakes (with Ruth Webb and Lisa Schneidau)."

[173] Alexander Darwall. "Alexander Darwall: Dartmoor camping case is about conservation and preservation, not denial of access." Country Life, 8 October 2024.https://www.countrylife.co.uk/comment-opinion/comment-dartmoor-camping-case-is-about-conservation-and-preservation-not-denial-of-access-265586

[174] The Stars are For Everyone. *The Stars are for Everyone Website*, accessed March 2026, https://thestarsareforeveryone.org/

[175] The Stars are For Everyone. *The Stars are for Everyone Website*.

The Dartmoor commons are privately owned, unenclosed areas of moorland in Devon, England, where local farmers hold traditional rights to graze livestock and the public has legal rights of access.

led by organizations such as Right to Roam and The Open Space Society. As a method of both community engagement with the issues presented by the above campaigns and as an act of resistance, cultural events were created to elevate the concept of having access to and a relationship with the land as a basic human right, and Old Crockern has been at the center.

Local community members working on or with the "The Stars are for Everyone" campaign specifically invoked the use of the "Old Crockern" legend for both its features that make it a compelling story to tell and to hear, and because it so remarkably mirrored the story of George Fowler. Using the power of folklore, and particularly storytelling, "Old Crockern" became the vehicle by which protesters could illustrate and manifest real social change. One of the ways they did this was by adding a visual component. The Lost Giants, a collective of designers and creators based in Lostwithiel, Cornwall, reimagined the guardian Old Crockern through traditional folk practices using materials gathered from the moorland and the community and brought him into physical being as Dartmoor's defender against greed (Fig. 34-36).[176] According to Ruth Webb, one of the Lost Giant makers, "it is a matter of fact that Old Crockern himself decided to join the campaign."[177] Summoned as part of the "Right to Roam" and "The Stars are for Everyone" movements, Old Crockern became more than a story, more than a figure to guide activist rhetoric. The symbolic giant that showed up to join and protect protesters offered persuasive proof of conviction and a tangible opportunity to create new social identity, calling for a permanent daily practice of embodied connection with Dartmoor as a place and a people. The appearance of Old Crockern in physical form features a giant with a hoop structure, a granite patterned head, deep painted peat-pool eyes, eyebrows and hair made from lichen and gorse collected from the moor, and a beard make from the clothing of the community.[178] Old Crockern was enhanced by music and dancing at these protests, giving the community a personal experience and an invested relationship with the story as much as the land, and creating a new adapted mythology by which they chose and confirmed their shared social and

[176] The Lost Giants. "Old Crockern." The Lost Giants, accessed March 2026, https://thelostgiantscouk.wordpress.com/2025/07/05/old-crockern/

[177] Absolute Units. "Modern Dartmoor Conflict: Old Crocker Awakes (with Ruth Webb and Lisa Schneidau)."

[178] The hoop structure uses circular frames joined together by wire or string and draped in cloth, creating a lightweight, transportable body.

environmental values as well as their resistance against heteronomic rules created by the upper class.[179] As Elizabeth Jane Baldry notes, “It is so very hard for the poorest people in our society to truly connect with nature [without access]."[180] In the spring of 2026, the giant was a visiting artifact at the Museum of Rural English Life in Reading as part of their “Radical Rural” exhibit. This features work by “radical artists and activists whose work embodies the spirit of England’s rural landscapes, summons the ghosts of nature past, and questions who really owns England,” thereby expanding the reach of Old Crockern while honoring his deep connection to Dartmoor.[181]



Figure 34. Old Crockern on the Moor
https://thelostgiantscouk.wordpress.com/2025/07/05/old-crockern/

[179] A short video of the Old Crockern giant arriving at a protest against Dartmoor’s wild camping ban can be found posted by “Pursuit of the Wild” on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SbsW09kfgiE
[180] Elizabeth Jane Baldry, interview with author, July 2025.
[181] The Museum of English Rural Life. “Radical Rural,” The Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading. https://merl.reading.ac.uk/whats-on/radical-rural-gallery-trail/



Figure 35. Old Crockern at a protest (The Stars are for Everyone campaign)
https://thelostgiantscouk.wordpress.com/2025/07/05/old-crockern/



Figure 36. Old Crockern at a protest (The Stars are for Everyone campaign)
https://thelostgiantscouk.wordpress.com/2025/07/05/old-crockern/

Old Crockern is a unique story, both in that, because of its previous obscurity, it remained untouched by the Christian morality that often modified more popular Dartmoor tales, and also because of the character of Old Crockern himself, who is not a god or fairy,

but a unique spirit of the land that is made of the land with his granite appearance, peat pool eyes, and skeletal structure, one that will chase you and retaliate if you threaten the land.[182] Dartmoor-based storyteller Lisa Schneidau notes, "In the end, it's about the spirit of the land telling a man, who thought he knew better, exactly where to go," adding that "Old Crockern" captured something "very primal" in the Dartmoor community. This resulted in an audience that was both powerfully drawn to the idea of tapping into an ancient, fundamental human nature interdependent with the land, and receptive to absorbing and contemplating the possibilities of this message and what it means mean for them. All of this together inspired many to action. Carol Harvey notes that,

> We as a community care about this land but also our relationship with it is so personal that we need access and we need non-interference. I didn't realize that Dartmoor is the only place that you can go and camp. I thought it was every national park, so I didn't realize that and I would embrace the fact that, if you could go off and do that, every other national park would be wonderful. Because there is something enriching by allowing yourself to be alone with the landscape."[183]

It is this point that highlights why "Old Crockern" has been successful in both its revival as a folk narrative and as a catalyst for environmental and social activism.

With the creation of a giant made by traditional Cornish methods, Old Crockern became a large-scale artistic embodiment of the genius loci, or spirit of the land, and operates as both symbolic and experiential mediator between community members and landscape. As a focal point for protests surrounding a supreme court case regarding public access to Dartmoor, its scale and visibility persuasively gathered support and engagement. This reflected a growing communal conviction on the agency of land itself and encouraged ecological awareness grounded in imagination, reverence, and a reflection on the rights humans have to access land they inhabit with autonomy. Excavated and put into popular circulation on Dartmoor, Old Crockern enchanted the public by restory-ing a prominent civic issue into an empowering and equitable narration of the relationship and responsibilities between people and place. As Emma Cunis notes, "These powerful spirits are to be respected; however, we must take care in our solicitation, as they are a law unto

[182] Many folk narratives on Dartmoor have been altered with Christian figures and symbols. There is a high concentration of narratives, for example, that feature the Devil.
[183] Carol Harvey, interview with author, June 2025.

themselves."[184] It has also brought to attention ecological concerns, prompting a direct line between folklore-related experiences on the land, such as storytelling at Crockern Tor, and active campaigns for environmental restoration and education.

"Old Crockern" is not a story that can travel to settle outside of this region. This makes its survival both more difficult and, at the same time, ensures a handling and care of the story by the Dartmoor community because of its attachment to place. But while "Old Crockern" is confined to the bounds of Dartmoor, it is not static. There is a reflexivity between the storytellers who summoned Old Crockern back into the folk ecosystem on Dartmoor – using the structure and orality of the story to consider meaning and purpose and creating visual art and performance to enhance the experience of the story – and the audience who have embraced "Old Crockern" as both an embodiment of the land and a leader of protection and conservation efforts. The story has also inspired other regions to search for their own examples of *genius loci* to summon and invoke the spirit of their own land in service of resistance and community-building. As William Todd Jones points out, "The representation of the spirit of the land doesn't have to be human, in my opinion. So the trees, or the hills, that waterfall, that has a voice."[185] In fact, at the time of writing, the makers of Old Crockern had just received a grant to develop similar figures for activist campaigns.[186] The result has been an enchantment, a deep pleasure in local folklore, which is developing into a recommitment and investment in the social and environmental values determined by the local community on Dartmoor, and beyond. As a case study on Enchantivism, the legend of "Old Crockern" exemplifies the collective vision of restoring and re-storying through service and enchantment while contributing to environmental and social resistance and sustainability.

As a genius loci, Old Crockern demonstrates how folklore, mythic art, and an emotional relationship with land can move from cultural expression into social and environmental action. Rooted in the specific landscape and history of Crockern Tor, the story embodies New Romantic values through its emphasis on folklore, the sublime power of a wild landscape, and the agency of the genius loci that inhabit Dartmoor. Yet its

[184] Emma Cunis. *Dartmoor Myths & Legends: Exploring Origins and Inspirations*, 31.
[185] William Todd Jones, interview with author, July 2025.
[186] Lisa Schneidau, private correspondence with author, June, 2026.

contemporary use is not nostalgic: the historical narrative of a landowner attempting to enclose and transform Dartmoor is reinterpreted through present-day struggles over public access, ecological protection, and community rights. Through the creation of a towering Old Crockern giant, folklore becomes embodied mythic art, transforming an intangible spirit of place into a visible, sublime, participatory figure capable of gathering and enchanting a community around shared values. Constructed from materials associated with Dartmoor—including granite, peat, lichen, gorse, and clothing contributed by the community—the giant becomes a literal manifestation of the landscape. The re-storying of Old Crockern therefore gives a contemporary social conflict an older, more enchanted narrative framework, transforming political resistance into an embodied cultural experience of belonging, protection, and reciprocity. In this process, enchantment becomes a motivation and a talisman: folklore generates emotional investment, mythic art makes that investment visible, and collective acceptance translates the investment into activism. Old Crockern thus exemplifies Enchantivism as the movement from story to embodiment, from enchantment to communal identity, and ultimately from imaginative engagement with place to active social and ecological resistance.

The tension between inheritance and innovation becomes most apparent in the community's use of myth as activism. The figure of Old Crockern, mobilized during the Right to Roam campaign, appears repeatedly in fieldwork interviews as a particularly powerful example of mythic art generating collective action. Interlocutors described the figure as “galvanizing” and as giving people permission, or motivation, to become involved. I maintain that this represents strong evidence for the question of what mythic art can do: folklore becomes more than cultural tradition and provides a symbolic language through which people can communicate about and participate in contemporary political and environmental struggles. Helen Bruce has told the story of Old Crockern many times, often at Crockern Tor, and she notes that it offers the public a chance to consider the relevance of the story and how it’s being use today.[187] She believes that while it was “absolutely inspired” to invoke “Old Crockern” for the “Stars are for Everyone” protests, it was a “bit of a gamble.”[188] She explains that those involved needed to consider,

[187] Helen Bruce, interview with author, February 2026.
[188] Helen Bruce, interview with author, February 2026.

> Is everyone ready to respond to folklore in that way? And [then] being told, "right, we're going to summon Old Crockern as a part of our protest." And it was amazing how many people were absolutely ready to be like, yeah, ok, I get that. And I think probably they had a better turn out because of that rather than just going "this is wrong, we're going to walk to here and stand," and I think it captured something very primal, actually, which was great.[189]

Yet, it's important to note that this use of folklore was not universally accepted. Both Lisa Schneidau and Emma Cunis told of how some campaigners considered the folkloric framing essential and emotionally powerful, while others dismissed it as "hippie shit" or worried that it "infantilized" the political argument. A farmer's warning to Lisa Schneidau of "be careful what you awaken" and "are you sure you want to work with that old bastard?" captures the ambiguity of deliberately mobilizing mythic material within contemporary activism but also the deep, abiding belief in the genius loci of Dartmoor.[190] The disagreement itself demonstrates that enchantment is not politically neutral: the attempt to reintroduce mythic figures such as Old Crockern into public discourse can generate both solidarity and resistance.

The examples in this chapter demonstrate how enchantment can transform from perception to action. The Great Oak Table and Old Crockern differ substantially in their scale, medium, and initial purposes, yet both demonstrate how folklore, art, and landscape can generate new forms of social and environmental engagement. In each case study considered, folklore provides more than a connection to the past: it becomes a resource through which communities can imagine and build alternative relationships with the land and with one another. This reflects the broader New Romantic impulse identified in the preceding chapters, in which imagination, wonder, and emotional attachment to landscape offer ways of challenging understandings of the natural world. As the maker of Old Crockern, Ruth Webb observes that the contemporary revival of folklore coincides with a desire "to restore damaged land, to repair our relationship to it and to each other,"

[189] Helen Bruce, interview with author, February 2026.
[190] Lisa Schneidau, interview with author, February 2026.

suggesting that the renewed interest in traditional stories is itself connected to a desire to imagine different futures.[191]

The Great Oak Table transforms the cultural meanings of an ancient oak into a contemporary site of gathering and stewardship, while Old Crockern, an obscure local folk figure, is brought into circulation as an embodied representative of Dartmoor during a contemporary struggle over public access to the land. In neither case is the past simply reproduced or preserved; inherited stories are adapted to the present, allowing folklore to become a language for articulating and addressing contemporary concerns. These examples also suggest that enchantment is significant when it produces relationship rather than escape**.** Through the mythic arts, Dartmoor is experienced as more than a scenic or fantasy landscape: it becomes a place with memory, character, and agency. The resulting attachment can take diverse forms, from gathering and stewardship at the Great Oak Table to protest and advocacy through Old Crockern. What unites these practices is an attempt to restore intimacy between people and land. As the Old Crockern case demonstrates, the representation of the *genius loci* can provide a means of imagining the land as an active participant in community life rather than as passive property. At the same time, Enchantivism should not be understood as a movement of universal agreement. Dartmoor is not a monoculture, and the use of folklore, particularly in political contexts, can generate disagreement over what constitutes meaningful and effective activism. It does, however, create an imaginative social space in which relationships to land, heritage, identity, and responsibility can be negotiated.

Ultimately, this chapter supports my argument that the intersection of story and land can become a catalyst for social and ecological change**.** Enchantivism therefore describes a process in which the experience of the sublime and enchantment in a storied landscape generates emotional attachment and responsibility toward that landscape. As this chapter demonstrates, enchantment becomes uniquely consequential when it is put to work. In addition, this utilization of the sublime and enchantment aligns with New Romantic values in its quest to "inspire affirmative climate action while acknowledging and

[191] Absolute Units. "Modern Dartmoor Conflict: Old Crocker Awakes (with Ruth Webb and Lisa Schneidau)." Absolute Units: Official Podcast of The Museum of English Rural Life, Museum of English Rural Life, 19 February, 2026. https://merl.reading.ac.uk/explore/absolute-units/

making space for the hidden places, the excluded voices, and the forgotten stories overshadowed by Western Romanticism;" like before, the uncertainty of a rapidly changing world provokes an artistic response to cope individually and stimulate collective initiatives, positioning art as a way to hold space for the unbearable without falling into denial or desensitization.[192] On Dartmoor, the result is an ongoing mythic arts practice that inspires and cultivates a community capable of responding to contemporary social and environmental challenges.

[192] Katherine Burlingame. "Bewilderment: A New Romanticism for a Damaged Planet." Environmental Humanities 18, no. 2, (2026): 432-33, 439.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have argued that Dartmoor provides a distinctive context in which the sublime, enchantment, New Romanticism, and Enchantivism converge through mythic art. Across the chapters, the sublime emerges first as an encounter with the scale, wildness, ancient heritage sites, and the elemental character of the moor: an experience that can both unsettle and delight, creating a heightened awareness of one's relationship to something larger than the self. Enchantment extends this perspective by inviting us to encounter landscape not simply as scenery or a resource, but as meaningful and storied. Together these elements provide the foundation for the New Romanticism identified in this research, in which imagination, wonder, folklore, and emotional attachment to the landscape are reclaimed for engaging with contemporary life, seen through the social and artistic practices found on Dartmoor.

My examination of Dartmoor's physical environment and sense of place demonstrated that the community actively constructs its perception of these features through the intersection between land, memory, story, and people, rather than through the landscape alone. Dartmoor's archaeological remains, geological features, folklore, ecological diversity, and continuing cultural practices provide the conditions through which a distinctive sense of place is constructed and experienced; the mythic arts community makes this relationship particularly visible, translating encounters with the sublime and enchanted qualities of Dartmoor into mediums and forms that can be shared with others. Mythic art therefore functions simultaneously as an expression of an existing relationship with place and a catalyst for creating new relationships with it.

This relationship between imagination and landscape resonates with author Martin Shaw's description of what he calls "liminal culture": historical moments in which oral tradition, nomadic lifeways, magical intelligence, and enduring relationships with wild places continue to shape cultural life.[193][194] Shaw further argues that "ways of

[193] Martin Shaw. *Scatterlings*. (Devon, England: Cista Mystica Press, 2016), 9.
[194] "Liminal culture" would have different meaning and approach in the scholarly context of ritual studies. Shaw's use of the term in his book *Scatterlings*, which is centered on "walking the mysteries of the Devonian landscape," illustrates how his experience of Dartmoor deeply informs not just the stories he tells but the framework he designs and applies not just locally, but also globally.

communicating myth get rendered by the temperament of the land," suggesting that landscapes themselves influence the forms through which stories emerge and are transmitted by its inhabitants. Dartmoor exemplifies this proposition.[195] Encounters with its dramatic topography, ancient monuments, and living folklore produce experiences that many interlocutors describe as simultaneously aesthetic, emotional, and spiritual. These encounters often generate an intensified awareness of place that extends beyond appreciation of scenery to encompass belonging, responsibility, and participation. Widdershins III was an exhibition of mythic art that brought together regional artists whose work engaged directly with Dartmoor's folklore, archaeology, ecology, and landscape. Integrating painting, sculpture, storytelling, textiles, performance, and more, the exhibition showcased inherited mythic traditions within a contemporary cultural context while creating opportunities for public participation, dialogue, and reflection. Rather than preserving folklore as a static cultural archive, the exhibition demonstrated how mythic arts actively re-story the landscape as living practices capable of fostering resilience, ecological awareness, and community cohesion.

To explore these dynamics, I presented several interconnected case studies that demonstrate the principles and practices of Enchantivism in action. As a primary example, “The Great Oak Table” in Pigwiggen Wood, is a collaboratively created gathering place that functions as a site of eco-restoration, storytelling, ritual, and belonging. As both an artistic installation and a social commons, the table facilitates encounters that encourage consideration of the more-than-human world while strengthening relationships among long-term residents, visitors, and newly arrived immigrant communities. Through shared acts of storytelling, celebration, and care, it illustrates how mythic spaces can foster belonging and reinforce communal responsibility toward place and each other. The creation of Old Crockern, a monumental giant inspired by local folklore surrounding Dartmoor's legendary guardian was conceived as an artistic embodiment of the genius loci, or spirit of place. Old Crockern functions simultaneously as sculpture, folklore, and political symbol; the figure became a focal point and mediator for collective action, visually and symbolically representing the rights of both communities and landscapes. Its scale, visibility, and mythic

[195] Martin Shaw. *Scatterlings*. (Devon, England: Cista Mystica Press, 2016), 9.

associations encouraged public participation while expressing a growing conviction that the landscape itself possesses agency worthy of respect and protection. In this context, folklore became an instrument of environmental advocacy, reframing debates about access, stewardship, and ecological responsibility through imagination, reverence, and collective memory. Collectively, these case studies illustrate how experiences of enchantment can inspire communities to imagine alternative relationships with land, challenge dominant conceptions of the natural world as a resource to be exploited rather than a community to which humans belong, and cultivate new social negotiation around shared identity, shared stewardship, and commitments to biodiversity. On Dartmoor, the restoration of ecological health is inseparable from the restoration of stories, rituals, and communal identities rooted in place.

If the sublime produces an intensified awareness of place, and enchantment provides a mode through which that place can be perceived as meaningful and alive, New Romanticism provides the imaginative and aesthetic framework through which these experiences can be creatively articulated. Enchantivism describes what happens when those experiences and expressions become an active practice; a modern continuation and evolution of Romanticism as a countercultural movement. Through mythic art, enchantment can be created, communicated, shared, and sustained; through community, it can become belonging and collective identity; and through engagement with the landscape, it can become stewardship, activism, and social responsibility. Importantly, this process does not rely on nostalgia nor is it ideologically uniform. The observed community on Dartmoor contains tensions around inclusion, class, artistic authority, heritage, and the appropriate role of folklore in activism, demonstrating that Enchantivism is not a single type of movement, but an evolving practice of negotiating relationships between people, stories, and place. Its significance lies in its capacity to reimagine the resources a community inherits in response to present circumstances and crises. As seen in through my examples, the past is neither an escape from reality nor an idealized world to which one might return, but a potential source of imaginative, emotional, and practical resources for addressing the present and envisioning the future.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that the mythic arts are significant not simply because they preserve folklore or represent Dartmoor's distinctive cultural identity, but because

they can actively transform how people understand and inhabit the landscape. They provide a means through which the sublime can become attachment, enchantment can become relationship, and imagination can become practice. As fantasy and nature author (and daughter of anthropologist Alfred Kroeber) Ursula Le Guin asserts,

> At this point, realism is perhaps the least adequate means of understanding or portraying the incredible realities of our existence…the fantasist, whether he uses the ancient archetypes of myth and legend or the younger ones of science and technology, may be talking as seriously as any sociologist, and a good deal more directly, about human life as it is lived, and as it might be lived, and as it ought to be lived.[196]

On Dartmoor, the mythic art community explores these means of understanding; their portrayal of story and land become mutually reinforcing: the landscape gives the mythic subject matter a particular character, while these stories and images give the landscape complexity. Through Enchantivism, mythic art becomes both an expression of Dartmoor's enchanted sense of place and a catalyst for re-storying that place, cultivating community, and imagining more reciprocal relationships between people and the more-than-human world.

These findings also support broader theoretical arguments concerning the transformative potential of the sublime and the charismatic. As Professor of Germanics and Comparative Literature Stephen Jaeger argues, human beings remain drawn toward the possibility of richer and more vital forms of existence than those afforded by everyday life; experiences of the charismatic, or sublime, provoke participation, conviction, and ultimately transformation, but only insofar as an individual's vulnerability or openness to the sublime's power to enchant.[197] The ethnographic evidence presented throughout this thesis suggests that Dartmoor's convergence of myth, heritage, and landscape creates precisely such conditions. Through enchantment, communities imagine alternative futures, strengthen social bonds, and cultivate ecological relationships grounded not solely in policy or utility but in wonder, care, and shared cultural meaning.

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[196] Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*. (New York: Putnam, 1979), 58.
[197] C. Stephen Jaeger. *Enchantment: On Charisma and the Sublime in the Arts of the West*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 44-47.

Although centered on a relatively small region of southwest England, the significance of this research extends well beyond Dartmoor itself. Comparable movements that integrate folklore, environmental stewardship, artistic practice, and community activism are emerging internationally, suggesting that while unique in its existence, Dartmoor represents not an isolated phenomenon but one expression of a broader cultural response to ecological and social uncertainty. Its specific location offers a nuanced model for understanding how narrative, imagination, and cultural memory can foster resilient relationships between communities and their environments while simultaneously illuminating universal questions concerning how folklore fosters belonging, sustainability, and collective action. It also exemplifies how environmental health is inseparable from and inextricably tied to the vitality and strength of the local folklore, to the presence of the genius loci. Ultimately, this thesis argues that the mythic arts possess the capacity not only to preserve cultural heritage but also to cultivate hope, inspire environmental responsibility, and contribute to the long-term work of enchanting relationships between people, place, and the more-than-human world.

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