

Ecocriticism

Trends in Scholarship

(Cf.

- ▶ Ganim, “Landscape and Late Medieval Literature”
- ▶ Langeslag, *Seasons in the Literatures of the Medieval North*, ch. 2)
- ▶ **Herder to early s. xx**: nature description reflects impact of environment over its observer
- ▶ **early mid-century** (Curtius): landscape description is convention
- ▶ **later mid-century** (Pearsall & Salter): landscape serves theology (bestiaries)
- ▶ **turn of century**: landscape description is mental culture imposed on physical space

What Hides Behind Depictions of Landscape and Space?

(Ganim, “Landscape and Late Medieval Literature”)

- ▶ **Societal forces:** agriculture as an economic driving factor
- ▶ **Power:**
 - ▶ Spatial configuration reveals power structures
 - ▶ Language use dictates how power potential is deployed
 - ▶ (Perceived) emptiness as an argument in colonization
- ▶ **Representation:**
 - ▶ Cosmography as a way of understanding the world
 - ▶ Earthly space as a microcosm of cosmic space and divinity
- ▶ **Ideologically and politically reinforced fantasy:** the world recreated through the lens of an imaginary Holy Land
- ▶ **Didactics:** mystery plays as a collective spatial memory

Lynn White, Jr: “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis”

- ▶ Research question: How did we end up in the current environmental crisis?

Lynn White, Jr: “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis”

- ▶ Research question: How did we end up in the current environmental crisis?
- ▶ Short answer: Under the influence of Christianity
- ▶ Longer answer:
 - ▶ (Judaeo-)Christianity holds that all creation exists to serve humankind
 - ▶ From s. XII onwards, the Christian West married (theoretical) science with (practical) technology
 - ▶ The resulting production process was based on capacity not need
- ▶ What solution does White offer?

Lynn White, Jr: “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis”

- ▶ Research question: How did we end up in the current environmental crisis?
- ▶ Short answer: Under the influence of Christianity
- ▶ Longer answer:
 - ▶ (Judaeo-)Christianity holds that all creation exists to serve humankind
 - ▶ From s. XII onwards, the Christian West married (theoretical) science with (practical) technology
 - ▶ The resulting production process was based on capacity not need
- ▶ What solution does White offer?
- ▶ A new religion
- ▶ On what model?

Lynn White, Jr: “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis”

- ▶ Research question: How did we end up in the current environmental crisis?
- ▶ Short answer: Under the influence of Christianity
- ▶ Longer answer:
 - ▶ (Judaeo-)Christianity holds that all creation exists to serve humankind
 - ▶ From s. XII onwards, the Christian West married (theoretical) science with (practical) technology
 - ▶ The resulting production process was based on capacity not need
- ▶ What solution does White offer?
- ▶ A new religion
- ▶ On what model?
- ▶ St Francis of Assisi

Ecocriticism

- ▶ Took shape as an organized field in the 1980s and 1990s
- ▶ Isolated work on the topic was being written as early as the 1960s
- ▶ See bibliography and course reserves, e.g.
 - ▶ Glotfelty and Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader*
 - ▶ Branch and Slovic, *The ISLE Reader*
 - ▶ Rudd, *Greenery*

(My) Descriptivist Definition

The study of humankind's natural environment as depicted in literature, and of its engagement with that environment.

(My) Prescriptivist Definition

The study of humankind's attitude towards its natural environment as depicted in literature, with a view to critically assessing our responsibilities.

Bibliography I

- Armbruster, Karla, and Kathleen R. Wallace, eds. *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2001.
- Branch, Michael P., and Scott Slovic, eds. *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993–2003*. Athens, GA, and London: University of Georgia Press, 2003.
- Coupe, Laurence, ed. *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Ganim, John M. "Landscape and Late Medieval Literature: A Critical Geography." In *Place, Space, and Landscape in Medieval Narrative*, edited by Laura L. Howes, xv–xxix. Tennessee Studies in Literature 43. Knoxville, TN, 2007.
- Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm, eds. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens, GA and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996.

Bibliography II

Langeslag, P. S. *Seasons in the Literatures of the Medieval North*.

Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015.

Pearsall, Derek, and Elizabeth Salter. *Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World*. Toronto and Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto Press, 1973.

Rudd, Gillian. *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007.

White, Lynn, Jr. "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis." *Science*, n.s., 155, no. 3767 (March 10, 1967): 1203–1207.



P. S. Langeslag