



THE NATURAL WORLD IN THE  
Exeter Book Riddles

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CORINNE DALE

THE NATURAL WORLD  
IN THE EXETER BOOK RIDDLES

# Nature and Environment in the Middle Ages

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Corinne Dale

D. S. BREWER

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## NOTE ON THE TEXT

The 'Riddles' of this volume's title refer to the ninety-five riddles included in the second half of the manuscript known as the 'Exeter Book' (Exeter Cathedral Library MS 3501, folios 101r–115r and 124v–130v). All citations from the Old English riddles are from Craig Williamson, *The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977). I use Williamson's edition for the same reason Patrick Murphy offers in his riddles monograph, namely, that 'Williamson preserves manuscript readings where [George Philip] Krapp and [Elliot van Kirk] Dobbie choose to emend'. See *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2011), p. 2 (n. 6). Whilst citations are from Williamson's edition, I use Krapp and Dobbie's Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records numbering of the riddles, since this is the more conventional system used by critics. Unless stated otherwise, all translations from Old English to modern English, including those texts outside of the riddle collection, are my own. All references to Old English poetry other than the riddles are taken from the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, unless otherwise noted.

*For Mum*

*and in loving memory of*

*Tony Dale, 'Grandad',*

*1935–2016*



## Introduction

WITH ITS DEPICTIONS of ploughing, felling, shaping and refining, the Exeter Book riddle collection offers us an insight into the way the Anglo-Saxons perceived their relationship with the rest of creation. In the riddles, humanity is seen taking from the natural world and using its resources to create weapons, clothes, food and other objects for human use. These depictions, with their apparent emphasis on nature's usefulness to mankind, led Frederick Tupper to make the following observation in his 1910 edition of the riddles:

All these riddles, whether the subject be animate or inanimate, have at least one common characteristic, their human interest. This is evinced in a dozen striking ways: but by far the most important of these is a trait of our problems, missing in other collections, but so strongly marked here as to suggest a common origin for many of the riddles – the trait of utility. The riddler may neglect place and form, and color of his subject, but he constantly stresses its uses to mankind. Indeed, men are in the background of every riddle-picture; and the subject is usually viewed in relation to them. The most significant expression of this relation is found in the motif of *Comitatus*, or personal service of an underling to his lord and master, that forms the dominant idea in many of our poems.<sup>1</sup>

There is, however, another, far less anthropocentric, way to read the riddles. Whilst it is true that the riddles depict 'man and his works',<sup>2</sup> often remarking on their subjects' usefulness to humans,<sup>3</sup> or else using the familiar human world as a point of orientation within a vast, overwhelming cosmos, the riddles also offer an alternative, ecocentric view of their subjects, one that considers the natural origins

<sup>1</sup> Frederick Tupper, *The Riddles of the Exeter Book* (Boston: Ginn, 1910), p. lxxxviii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. lxxxvi f.

<sup>3</sup> There are various riddles that describe how useful or precious their subjects are to humans. See Riddles 17 (10b), 20 (2a), 25 (2b), 26 (27a), 27 (1a), 32 (9b), 34 (3a), 35 (12a–b), 41 (6a–7b), 49 (9b–10a), 50 (2a), 54 (7b–8a, 11b–12a), 58 (5b), 70 (6b) and 84 (28a–b).

of manmade products and the individual integrity and personal plight of these useful human resources. In this book, I argue that there is a programme of resistance to anthropocentrism at work in the riddle collection, whereby the riddles challenge human-centred ways of depicting the created world. In doing so, I forge new pathways into riddle analysis and interpretation, drawing on ecocriticism and ecotheology to offer insights into a largely underdeveloped area of Old English scholarship.

In a 2009 article on ecopoetry and the Old English elegies, Matt Low states that ‘Medieval studies could do more to embrace the growing theoretical field of ecocriticism’.<sup>4</sup> ‘In studies of medieval texts’, writes Low, ‘particularly those written in Old English during the Anglo-Saxon period, little effort has been made to explore the natural world beyond its function as setting or symbol.’<sup>5</sup> Low is right to draw our attention to this problem and to address it with his own ecocritical reading of the Exeter Book elegies. Whilst efforts have been made to produce green readings of late medieval texts since the beginning of the twenty-first century,<sup>6</sup> the natural world as an entity in itself has, until very recently, been overlooked in scholarship on Old English texts.<sup>7</sup> ‘The abundance of historical, religious, and linguistic material in Anglo-Saxon texts has dominated most medieval discourses’, writes Low, and thus the ‘nature-centred characteristics

<sup>4</sup> Matt Low, ‘“Heard gripe hruson” (The hard grip of the earth): Ecopoetry and the Anglo-Saxon Elegy’, *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 42 (2009), 1–18 (p. 1).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Rebecca M. Douglass, ‘Ecocriticism and Middle English Literature’, in *Studies in Medievalism X: Medievalism and the Academy II: Cultural Studies* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 136–63; Lisa J. Kiser, ‘Chaucer and the Politics of Nature’, in *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, ed. Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), pp. 41–56; Sarah Stanbury, ‘EcoChaucer: Green Ethics and Medieval Nature’, *Chaucer Review*, 39 (2004), 1–16; Gillian Rudd, *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); and Sarah Harlan-Haughey, *The Ecology of the English Outlaw in Medieval Literature: From Fen to Greenwood* (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> See Heide Estes, ‘Beowulf and the Sea: An Ecofeminist Reading’, in *The Maritime World of the Anglo-Saxons*, ed. Bill Schipper, Stacy Klein and Shannon Lewis-Simpson (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2015), pp. 209–16. See also Helen Price’s unpublished Ph.D. thesis ‘Human and Nonhuman in Anglo-Saxon and British Postwar Poetry: Reshaping Literary Ecology’, University of Leeds (2013), and Donna Beth Ellard’s ‘Going Interspecies, Going Interlingual, and Flying away with the Phoenix’, *Exemplaria*, 23 (2011), 268–92.

of certain Anglo-Saxon texts have largely been bypassed.<sup>8</sup> Low's observation is especially true of the Old English riddles, where much scholarly attention has been given to what the riddles might have to say about Anglo-Saxon society and culture, including service, sex, social relationships, war and heroism.<sup>9</sup> With ecocriticism being an ever expanding field, especially in medieval studies, it is time to turn our attention more fully to the depiction of the natural world in the Exeter Book riddles.

In his article, Low focuses his attention on the natural world in the Old English elegies, yet, in many ways, it is the Old English riddles that more readily invite an ecocritical reading. As playful enigmas,<sup>10</sup> the riddles often depict their subjects from a first-person perspective, lending voices to non-human entities, or else enable writers to imagine non-human beings from a point of view different to their own. The Exeter Book riddles show a tree, an ox, ore and water, to name but a few entities, living, growing, dying or being reshaped in the created world. As part of his argument for 'more rigorous attention' to the natural world in the elegies, Low reasons that 'the

<sup>8</sup> Low, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> For 'service', see, for example, Jennifer Neville, 'The Unexpected Treasure of the "Implement Trope": Hierarchical Relationships in the Old English Riddles', *Review of English Studies*, n.s., 62 (2011), 505–19; and Neville, 'Speaking the Unspeakable: Appetite for Deconstruction in Exeter Book Riddle 12', *English Studies*, 93 (2012), 519–28. There are many different articles on 'sex' or 'relationships'; see, for example, Mercedes Salvador Bello, 'The Key to the Body: Unlocking Riddles 42–46', in *Naked Before God: Uncovering the Body in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Benjamin C. Withers and Jonathan Wilcox (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2003), pp. 60–96; Nina Rulon-Miller, 'Sexual Humor and Fettered Desire in Exeter Book Riddle 12', in *Humour in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. Jonathan Wilcox (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 99–126; and Melanie Heyworth, 'Perceptions of Marriage in Exeter Book Riddles 20 and 61', *Studia Neophilologica*, 79 (2007), 171–84. For 'war' and 'heroism' see, for example, E. G. Stanley, 'Heroic Aspects of the Exeter Book Riddles', in *Prosody and Poetics in the Early Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of C. B. Heatt*, ed. M. J. Toswell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 197–218; John Tanke, 'The Batchelor-Warrior of Exeter Book Riddle 20', *Philological Quarterly*, 79 (2000), 409–27; and Edward B. Irving jr., 'Heroic Experience in the Old English Riddles', in *Old English Shorter Poems*, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (New York: Garland, 1994), pp. 199–212.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the history of identifying, labelling and characterising the riddles, and for his own discussion of the riddles' character and design, see Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles*, pp. 27–37. A. J. Wyatt's description of the riddles in his 1912 edition of the collection is still one of the most pertinent: 'The riddles . . . are not riddles in the modern sense of the word, but enigmas, descriptions of an object which are intended to be at once accurate and misleading: the more misleadingly accurate and accurately misleading, the better'. See Wyatt, ed., *Old English Riddles* (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1912), p. xxviii.

authors of these earliest of English texts lived, wrote, and interacted daily, just as we do today, with a concrete, physical environment’;<sup>11</sup> with their various descriptions of humans using, shaping and transforming aspects of the natural world, the Exeter Book riddles are particularly provocative examples of humanity ‘interact[ing] daily’ with a physical environment. With a few exceptions, the riddles are, to quote Tupper, ‘very close to solid earth’.<sup>12</sup> The larger number, Tupper writes, in his 1910 edition of the riddles, ‘is devoted to man and his works: his weapons, his implements of home and field, his clothes, many of his instruments of music, his books and script, his sacred emblems, and even his food and drink. Not only man, but the lower animals, fish, flesh, and fowl, receive ample treatment.’<sup>13</sup>

The Exeter Book riddles, with their vivid narratives and descriptions, frequently dramatise how humans interact with the natural world. In 1914, Stopford A. Brooke marvelled that the riddle collection contains ‘so much deliberate nature-poetry, written for the sake of nature alone, and with an evident and observing love’.<sup>14</sup> What the collection presents, however, is not so much nature poetry, written for nature’s sake – a form of early romanticism as it were – as an ethics of human-nature interaction (to be discussed in more detail later in this introduction).

Brooke’s description of the riddles as ‘nature-poetry . . . written with an evident and observing love’ is perhaps better suited to Aldhelm’s riddles, whose author, it has been argued, describes the created world with all the care and attention of a naturalist.<sup>15</sup> A brief comparison of the subject matter of the Exeter Book riddles to the subject matter of Aldhelm’s riddle collection can help us appreciate this difference in the treatment of nature.<sup>16</sup> As the table below illustrates, Aldhelm’s

<sup>11</sup> Low, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Tupper, *Riddles*, p. lxxxvi.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. lxxxvi–ii.

<sup>14</sup> Stopford A. Brooke, *English Literature from the Beginning to the Norman Conquest* (London: Macmillan, 1914), p. 96.

<sup>15</sup> Malcolm Laurence Cameron, ‘Aldhelm as Naturalist: A Re-examination of Some of his Enigmata’, *Peritia*, 4 (1985), 117–33.

<sup>16</sup> For studies on the relationship between Aldhelm’s enigmas and the Exeter Book riddles see Williamson, *Riddles*, pp. 20 and 24, and *A Feast of Creatures: Anglo-Saxon Riddle Songs* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), pp. 7–11; D. G. Calder and M. J. B. Allen, *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry: The Major Latin Texts in Translation* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1976), p. 162 (see pages 163–74 for the proposed sources and analogues); Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe, ‘The Text of Aldhelm’s *Enigma* No. C. in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson C.697 and Exeter Riddle 40’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 14 (1985), 61–73; Michael Lapidge, ‘The Comparative

collection is populated by a great deal of flora and fauna, whilst the Exeter Book collection is populated with more man-made creations than creations of God.<sup>17</sup>

	Aldhelm's <i>Enigmata</i>	Exeter Book riddles
Flora and fauna	50	20
Human creations	24	49
Other	26	22

We might be tempted to say that Aldhelm appears to be more interested in the natural world than the Exeter Book riddle author(s), with the *Enigmata* containing over twice as many riddles based on plants and animals as the Old English collection. Such an assertion, however, is unwise. Aldhelm may show the careful attention to nature of a naturalist, drawing on Pliny, Isidore and 'his own observation of nature' to describe his subjects,<sup>18</sup> but the Exeter Book riddles offer their own unique view of the natural world, showing a particular interest in the natural origins of man-made objects. Riddle 73, for instance, does not depict merely a bow, but the bow's origins as a tree that once flourished in a wood:

Approach', in *Reading Old English Texts*, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 20–38 (pp. 29–30); Janie Steen, *Verse and Virtuosity: The Adaptation of Latin Rhetoric in Old English Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), especially Chapter Five 'Through the Looking Glass: Riddles 35 and 40' (pp. 89–109); Andy Orchard, 'Enigma Variations: The Anglo-Saxon Riddle Tradition', in *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, vol. 1, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe and Andy Orchard (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 284–304; and Dieter Bitterli, *Say What I Am Called: The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book and the Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009). See also my discussion of the ox-riddle genre in Chapter 2.

<sup>17</sup> I have compiled this table using the answers provided in *The Riddles of Aldhelm: Text and Verse Translation with Notes*, ed. and trans. James Hall Pitman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1925; repr. North Haven, CT: Archon Book, 1970). Categorising Aldhelm's riddles is a relatively simple task, since we are dealing with 'fixed' answers that were often circulated with the manuscript. We have no record of answers to the Exeter Book riddles and so, for ease of consolidation, I use the answers suggested by Williamson in *Riddles*. Any answers deemed 'uncertain' by Williamson are included under 'other', along with natural and cosmic phenomena (e.g. storms, constellations, icebergs and water) which, as less tangible or otherwise elemental aspects of the created world, ought to be treated separately from plants and animals. For a discussion of the circulation of answers with early riddle manuscripts, including Aldhelm's *Enigmata*, see Orchard, 'Enigma Variations', pp. 285–9. See also Nicholas Howe, 'Aldhelm's *Enigmata* and Isidorian Etymology', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 14 (1985), 37–59.

<sup>18</sup> M. Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600–899* (London: Hambledon, 1996), p. 9.



*The Natural World in the Exeter Book Riddles*

Ic on wonge aweox, wunode þær mec feddon  
hruse ond heofonwolcn, oþþæt me onhwyrfdon,  
gearum frodne, þa me grome wurdon,  
of þære gecynde þe ic ær cwic beheold,  
onwendan mine wisan, wegedon mec of earde,  
gedydon þæt ic sceolde wiþ gesceape minum  
on bonan willan bugan hwilum.

(Riddle 73, 1a–7b)

'I grew in a field, dwelt where earth and heaven-cloud fed me, until those who were grim against me turned me, old in years, out of the quality that I previously held when living, changed my condition, bore me out of my land, made it so that at times I must, against my nature, bend to a killer's will.'

Rather than merely describing the shape and nature of the object, the riddle writer considers the object's natural beginnings, its original form, before it enters the hands of humans. This is true of other Exeter Book riddles, too; an inkwell was once an antler (Riddle 88 and 93), mead was once nectar (Riddle 27), a Bible was once an animal (Riddle 26) and chainmail and money were once ore in the ground (Riddle 35 and 83).

But as well as an interest in materiality, the riddles also show a degree of sympathy towards, or concern for, the natural world and its use by humans. One cannot read Riddle 72, for example, without detecting concern for the suffering of the harnessed ox:

bunden under beame, beag hæfde on healse,  
wean on laste weorc þrowade,  
earfoða dæl.

(Riddle 72, 13a–14b)

'bound under beam, I had a ring round my neck; in the track of sorrow, [I] endured suffering, a load of hardships.'

It is difficult, too, to read the following lines from Riddle 83 and not notice anxiety about humanity's use of earth's materials:

Nu me fah warað  
eorþan broþor, se me ærest wearð  
gumena to gyrne. Ic ful gearwe gemon  
hwa min fromcynn fruman agette  
eall of earde

(Riddle 83, 4b–8a)

'Now the hostile one, earth's brother, holds me, he who first brought about my affliction among men. I remember very well who drained all my ancestry out of its land.'

A certain number of the riddles describe a creature's service to humans, like Riddle 72, which depicts an ox under the control of the herdsman (Riddle 72, 10a). Humanity is nearly always the master in the human-nature relationship and it is sometimes depicted as an enemy that causes the degradation or suffering of earth's non-human inhabitants.<sup>19</sup> In riddles such as 72 and 73, a subject is taken out of an idyllic natural setting and wounded or killed by humans. Certain riddles construct narratives which contrast a subject's happy past with an unhappy present, resulting, in some cases, with a feeling of nostalgia for a lost Edenic world. This yearning for a lost utopia is not found in Aldhelm's *Enigmata* and appears to be unique to the Old English riddles. (All these aspects of the riddles – materiality, mastery, sympathy and nostalgia – will be discussed in more detail later in this book.)

Servitude, mastery, exploitation, suffering, knowledge – for the Exeter Book riddles, all these avenues of exploration derive from theological sources, including various biblical narratives and exegeses. One of the main sources is Genesis, with its narrative of the Fall and its attendant notion that, after the Fall, the relationship between humanity and the natural world became one of mastery and exploitation, as opposed to the relationship of care and custodianship that characterised the pre-lapsarian world.<sup>20</sup> Another key

<sup>19</sup> Riddles that depict humans as masters (or lord) are Riddles 4, 20, 21, 23, 49, 50, 52, 54, 58, 62, 71, 73, 80 and 91. Riddles that depict humanity as enemy, or as the source of the subject's suffering, are Riddles 5, 23, 26, 52, 53, 56, 71, 72, 73, 77, 83, 91 and 93.

<sup>20</sup> Unless stated otherwise, all references to the Bible are to the Latin Vulgate, for which I use *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam*, ed. Alberto Colunga and Laurentio Turrado, 7th edn (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Christianos, 1985). All translations of the Vulgate are from *The Holy Bible: Translated from the Latin Vulgate* (New York: Douay Bible House, 1953). I have chosen the Colunga-Turrado edition of the Bible because it is closest to the version used in Anglo-Saxon England. For an overview of the complex nature of manuscript transmission in the Anglo-Saxon period see Richard Marsden, 'Wrestling with the Bible: Textual Problems for the Scholar and Student', in *The Christian Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England: Approaches to Current Scholarship and Teaching*, ed. Paul Cavill (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 69–90. See also R. Marsden, 'The Biblical Manuscripts of Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain Volume 1: c. 400–1100*, ed. Richard Marsden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 406–35. For a discussion of the transmission of the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England see Marsden, *The Text of the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon

source that I discuss in Chapters 4, 5 and 7, is the book of Job, the Old Testament wisdom poem in which God questions Job about the nature of the created world and challenges his belief in his own wisdom. Other sources include Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, as well as various patristic biblical commentaries. These include St Ambrose's commentary on the Hexameron, discussed primarily in Chapter 2, and various commentaries and exegeses by St Augustine, including his *Confessiones* and *Enarrationes in Psalmos*.

In order to understand the depictions of the natural world in the collection we must necessarily turn to theology; theology had a greater impact on how humans saw the world and their role in it than it does in the twenty-first century. Ruth Wehlau observes that Old English poetry 'represents the cosmos not as Nature, but as Creation, not as organism, but as artifice'.<sup>21</sup> For the Anglo-Saxons, the natural world was not the 'straightforward and basic entity' that it is today.<sup>22</sup> The Anglo-Saxons did not have a word for the natural world, but instead drew on a lexis based on the natural order of things (*gecynd*) and what is created (*gesceaft*).<sup>23</sup> The Middle Ages, writes Richard Jones, 'had no natural world to explain' and instead dealt with a 'more encompassing concept of nature'.<sup>24</sup> When I refer to both nature and the natural world in this study, therefore, I refer to a created world, a product of God's craftsmanship that necessarily includes supernatural elements. Despite the fact that human beings would have been considered creations of God, and therefore part of the created world, I treat nature and humanity as two distinct categories, with nature being 'all that is external to humanity'.<sup>25</sup> As will become clear in this book, however, the Anglo-Saxons saw similarities between the two categories, drawing connections between humans and nature as earthly matter that was subject to suffering and decay. It is because of the concept of the natural world outlined here that my book is an ecocritical *and* ecotheological reading of the Exeter Book riddles. It considers attitudes to nature, but also how these attitudes are shaped by religious beliefs and biblical narratives.

England, 15 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>21</sup> Ruth Wehlau, *'The Riddle of Creation': Metaphor Structures in Old English Poetry* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> J. Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 27 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Jones, *The Medieval Natural World* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Neville, *Representations*, p. 3.

## Theoretical approaches: ecocriticism and ecotheology

Ecocriticism and ecotheology are fields which work to recover the importance of the natural world in literature and theology respectively. Ecocriticism, perhaps the more familiar of these fields to literary scholars, essentially takes an 'earth-centred' approach to literary texts, whilst ecotheology takes an 'earth-centred' approach to the Bible; both read texts for what they say about the non-human world. In 2006, Ursula K. Heise called ecocriticism a 'rapidly growing field in literary studies',<sup>26</sup> and the field can be described in the same way a decade later. Ecocriticism is quite simply, to quote Cheryl Glotfelty, 'the study of the relationship between literature and the environment'.<sup>27</sup> The field, writes Glotfelty, 'takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture', and as a theoretical discourse, 'negotiates between the human and the non-human'.<sup>28</sup> It is a diverse field – a diversity that can be testified by a brief survey of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment programmes from 1995 to 2013.<sup>29</sup> In summarising the nature of ecocriticism, Glotfelty offers a series of questions ecocritics might ask of a text or of the field in general, including:

How is nature represented in this sonnet? What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel? Are the values expressed in this play consistent with ecological wisdom? How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it? How can we characterize nature writing as a genre? In addition to race, class, and gender, should place become a new critical category?<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Ursula K. Heise, 'A Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 121 (2006), 503–16 (p. 504). Heise offers a useful, comprehensive overview of the development of ecocriticism (pp. 503–6). For another comprehensive overview see Cheryl Glotfelty, 'Introduction: Literary Studies in an Environmental Crisis', in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996). For a more recent overview of the development of ecocriticism and discussions of the field's key areas of investigation see Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>27</sup> Glotfelty, p. xviii.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xix.

<sup>29</sup> ASLE, a biennial conference held at Colorado State University, is perhaps the biggest and longest running conference aimed at promoting environmental literary studies. The programmes can be found in the ASLE Archive at <<http://www.asle.org/conference/biennial-conference/archive/>> [accessed 20/09/2016].

<sup>30</sup> Glotfelty, pp. xviii–xix.

The list goes on, but the first six questions Glotfelty offers are enough to give a sense of what ecocritics are looking for and the diversity of the questions they might ask. As well as asking these types of questions, ecocritics also look for certain characteristics or underlying principles that can identify a text as 'green', or as having green tendencies. In his influential 1995 publication, Lawrence Buell argues that an ecocentric text typically contains one or more of the following characteristics:

1. The non-human environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.
2. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.
3. Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation.
4. Some sense of the environment as a process rather than a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text.<sup>31</sup>

A 'green' text might include one, some, or all of the above characteristics in a variety of combinations. As Buell says, 'few works fail to qualify at least marginally, but few qualify unequivocally and consistently'.<sup>32</sup> It is the task of the discerning critic to decide the extent to which an individual or group of texts is green.

Like ecocriticism, ecotheology is a growing field of research. It has been established for a number of decades – indeed, it has been 'greening', to borrow Glotfelty's term, since the 1970s, two decades before ecoliterary studies<sup>33</sup> – but is now enjoying increasing scholarly interest. Whilst ecocriticism has cross-pollinated various disciplines,<sup>34</sup> however, ecotheology remains somewhat exclusive to the realms of theology. To my knowledge, its theories are largely, if not entirely,

<sup>31</sup> Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 7–8. The endurance of Buell's principles is testified by their use in more recent ecocritical studies, including Alfred K. Siewers's *Strange Beauty: Ecocritical Approaches to Early Medieval Landscape, The New Middle Ages* (London: Palgrave, 2009), p. 25. See also Rudd, pp. 10, 147, 150, 163 and 155–6.

<sup>32</sup> Buell, p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> Glotfelty, p. xvi.

<sup>34</sup> For an overview of work undertaken in various fields of study see Glotfelty, p. xxi–xxii, and William Howarth, 'Some Principles of Ecocriticism', in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 69–91 (pp. 82–7).

applied to the scriptures, with literary scholars failing to draw on its principles.<sup>35</sup> This is regrettable, since ecotheology has a lot to offer literary studies, particularly studies of those texts with strong theological underpinnings, like those collected in the Exeter Book. Even in later medieval texts, where depictions of the natural world are often governed by classical culture, the principles may still be of use.<sup>36</sup>

Ecocriticism has been described as having a 'triple alliance' to science, culture and politics,<sup>37</sup> and has also been described as an 'activist' response to our current ecological crisis.<sup>38</sup> Like ecocriticism, ecotheology is, in part, a response to the recent degradation of the earth; it is, writes Peter Manly Scott, 'a style of theoretical enquiry which responds to environmental or ecological concerns'.<sup>39</sup> As the editors of *The Green Bible* explain:

The household of our planet . . . is coming apart as deforestation, the loss of topsoil, the rapid extinction of plant and animal species, the pollution of our air and water, and global warming all demonstrate.

Recently, many persons and institutions rooted in the Judeo-Christian heritage have awakened to the ecological crisis, and have begun to make a connection between their faith and the fate of the earth. Plumbing the depths of their biblical and theoretical heritage, and learning from personal improvement in environmental efforts, they are fashioning a new faith, one informed by a reverence for life.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>35</sup> One of the questions ecocriticism asks is 'what cross-fertilization is possible between literary studies and environmental discourse in related disciplines such as history, philosophy, psychology, art history and ethics?' (Glotfelty, p. xix) – there is no mention of theology in this list, and Glotfelty mentions theology later only in passing (p. xxii). In contrast, ecotheologians have acknowledged the value of ecocriticism to the study of biblical scholarship. See Timothy J. Burbery, 'Ecocriticism and Christian Literary Scholarship', *Christianity and Literature*, 61 (2012), 189–214.

<sup>36</sup> See my discussion of Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale* and the ecotheological principle of resistance in Chapter 6.

<sup>37</sup> Heise, p. 506.

<sup>38</sup> See Simon C. Estok, 'Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 16 (2009), 203–25 (p. 205). For a useful, in-depth discussion of the current ecological problems being faced in the 21st century see Celia Deane-Drummond, *Ecotheology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2008), pp. 18–37.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Manly Scott, 'Which Nature? Whose Justice? Shifting Meanings of Nature in Recent Ecotheology', in *God's Bounty?: The Churches and the Natural World*, ed. Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon (Woodbridge: Ecclesiastical History Society, 2010), pp. 431–57 (p. 431).

<sup>40</sup> Stephen Bede Scharper and Hilary Cunningham, *The Green Bible* (New York: Lantern, 2002), p. xiv.

Modern theologians draw on the Bible for new and better ways of interacting with the natural world.<sup>41</sup> It is the ecotheologian's view that, as a 'redeemed people', Christians 'can act to heal the world of sin through acts of love and care for one another and for the non-human world'.<sup>42</sup> But ecotheology is also a response to the argument that Christianity must take a large portion of the blame for the ecological crisis. The origins of the argument can be traced to Lynn White's 'bombshell'<sup>43</sup> article, published in 1967, in which White asserts that environmental exploitation is, at least partly, a 'realization of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature'.<sup>44</sup> This belief has its roots in the Genesis narrative, in which God gives Adam dominion over the natural world and the authority to name every species of animal (Genesis 2.19–20). Being 'deeply troubled' by accusations that Christianity has led to an ecological crisis, theologians have 'delved into the tradition to reexamine, retrieve, reinterpret, and reform the texts and practices responsible for such devastation'.<sup>45</sup> Ecotheology, we might summarise, has two key agendas: to explore the non-human in the Bible with a view to improving the relationship between humans and nature, and to liberate Christianity from both its 'huge burden of guilt'<sup>46</sup> and its reputation as a highly anthropocentric religion.<sup>47</sup>

One of the leading areas of ecotheological research has been conducted by the Earth Bible Team, which has published five books dedicated to exploring the non-human in the Bible, known as the Earth Bible series.<sup>48</sup> The team acknowledges that past ways of reading

<sup>41</sup> Other key studies that explore both the 'green' potential of the Bible and contemporary criticisms of its anti-environmental philosophies include: Philip N. Joranson, *Cry of the Environment: Rebuilding the Christian Creation Tradition* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear, 1984); Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1985); and Adrian Michael Hough, *God is Not 'Green': A Re-examination of Ecotheology* (Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1997).

<sup>42</sup> Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 127.

<sup>43</sup> A term used by Ernest L. Fortin in his ecotheological article, 'The Bible Made Me Do It: Christianity, Science, and the Environment', *The Review of Politics*, 57 (1995), 197–224 (p. 207).

<sup>44</sup> Lynn White, 'The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis', *Science*, 155 (1967), 1203–7 (p. 1206).

<sup>45</sup> Anne Marie Dalton and Henry C. Simmons, *Ecotheology and the Practice of Hope* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), p. 53.

<sup>46</sup> White, p. 1206.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1205.

<sup>48</sup> The five volumes of the Earth Bible Series, in order of publication, are: Norman C. Habel, ed., *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press,