*Anglo-Saxon Literary Landscapes: Ecotheory and the Environmental Imagination*, by Heide Estes. Environmental Humanities in Premodern Cultures. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017. Pp. 208. ISBN: 9789089649447 (hardcover).

Heide Estes's *Anglo-Saxon Literary Landscapes* is a far more capacious study than its title would suggest. It does not concern itself merely with landscapes or the environment, though these two concerns are central to each of the book's seven chapters. The introduction clearly articulates the project's multiple goals: to launch an ecocritical investigation of landscapes and other environmental aspects of Old English literature; to explore the entanglement of ecocritical approaches with issues of gender and class; and to put the Anglo-Saxon world into productive dialogue with contemporary ecocritical theory. As a result, the book is more a selective study than a comprehensive overview, which means that it leaves plenty of room for future scholars to build on the work begun here—and Estes helpfully provides readers with some suggestions for the forms such work might take in her conclusion. In between, the book ranges across genres, forms, and languages to consider how thinking ecocritically can change our apprehension of familiar Old English texts and to suggest ways that those texts might broaden the historical horizons of contemporary ecocriticism.

Estes begins with a detailed overview of the many critical conversations she invokes, from the archaeological evidence for Anglo-Saxon landscapes through ecocriticism and ecofeminism and their various engagements (or, more often, lack thereof) with the medieval world. Chapter one functions as an introduction to ground the reader in these various discourses, establishing the nature of ecocritical theory and its focus on change and flux rather than stasis and stability. Estes assesses the ecocritical impetus to demonstrate how humanity is intertwined with its environments, both natural and built, and she argues for engaging with this kind of environmental thinking in the broad corpus of Old English literature. The postcolonial moment and the environmental movements that gave rise to ecocriticism locate their origins in the economic and cultural structures of the Industrial Revolution, but Estes shows that "the ideas that enabled the Industrial Revolution and the climate crisis of today were already in circulation in the Anglo-Saxon period" (32).

Chapter two begins with the sea, exploring texts that conceive of the sea as "a very strong presence," and a presence with feminine overtones at that (35). Oceans and ecofeminism, waters and blood, mix and mingle in readings of *Elene*, *Andreas*, *Exodus*, and *Beowulf*. In these texts, Estes argues, the sea takes

on various forms, from mere setting to object of aesthetic pleasure to vehicle of conveyance that enables the action of the text. In some cases, the sea appears primarily to serve the needs and desires of human characters (and readers). In *Beowulf* and *Andreas*, however, the sea signifies the alterity of femininity: monstrous in *Beowulf*, in the figure of Grendel's mother and her watery hall beneath the mere, but as a sterilized maternity excised from *Andreas* through the metaphor of baptism as a rebirth in water instead of maternal blood.

Chapter three turns to the built environment to reconsider the widespread presence of ruined buildings in Old English poetry. From Estes's perspective, such ruins merge into the landscape to form the world of the Anglo-Saxon poetic imaginary, depicting its places as fluid and ever-changing through the work of nature and time. Old English poetry creates a sense of culture built on the foundations of these ruins, reusing them both literally, as settings for poetic narrative, and figuratively, in the scraps and fragments of Germanic and Latin culture that survive in the Old English tradition. *The Ruin* and the Tower of Babel in the Old English poetic *Genesis* both present images of built environments that imply the absence of human aid. The buildings in these poems crumble due to the lack of human intervention, creating unstable landscapes that mirror the human-object entanglements central to so much contemporary ecocriticism. *Beowulf*, too, reappears in this chapter with the ruined hall of Heorot, the dragon's ruined barrow, and the destruction of Beowulf's own kingdom by the end of the poem. These poems, among the most widely read in the Old English canon, portray a strong sense of place as impermanent and subject to the shifting forces of both natural and human-driven events.

In Chapter four, Estes turns to a postcolonial and ecocritical reading of the story of Saint Guthlac, whose journey into the fens to establish a hermitage "anticipates later colonizing incursions in which the land occupied by native peoples is understood as a wilderness, so as to enable discounting their occupation of and right to it" (91). This view underwrites later English and British discourses of colonial expansion, and Estes traces them back to Guthlac's taming of the fens and subversion of the British demons in the seventh century. Guthlac's past as a soldier, she suggests, sets him up as a man well-versed in the plundering and looting that accompanies conquest. Guthlac thus is more conqueror than hermit, and the trackless wilderness that he claims is unmarked—in the texts, though not in reality—by prior habitation, either human or animal. His approach to Crowland is a purely instrumental one; the wilderness and its ultimate transformation serve merely to illustrate Guthlac's sanctity and God's favor.

Estes paints a distinct contrast between Guthlac's instrumentalist view of his

environment and the depiction of the natural world in the riddles of the Exeter Book. Here, she finds objects and animals speaking for themselves, in their own voices, in ways that playfully and deliberately upend established hierarchies. Chapters five and six focus on animals and objects, respectively, exploring how the riddles turn humans into animals, animals into objects, and objects into speaking subjects—and sometimes back again. Estes offers fine and detailed close readings of these riddles, revealing how the riddle form itself allows for an apprehension of multiplicity that is impossible in linear narrative. The speaker of a riddle need not be either an ox or a piece of leather; in the space of the riddle, it can be both at once, and time, and even death itself, are overturned as the animal-derived object speaks the truth of its shifting subjectivity. Riddles "offer a sequence of depictions that suggest different relationships with the human, sometimes making the object metaphorically human, sometimes placing the thing as the object of human vision, even doubly object of human seeing humans seeing object" (152). Perhaps more successfully than any other texts in this study, the riddles decenter the human, presaging by nearly a thousand years the ethical obligations articled today by object-oriented ontology. *Anglo-Saxon Literary Landscapes* thus makes a compelling case for the medieval world as a profitable site for further exploration by ecocritical and ecofeminist theorists.

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