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Alfred Kentigern Siewers (ed.), *Re-Imagining Nature: Environmental Humanities and Ecosemiotics*. (Bucknell, PA: Rowman & Littlefield with Bucknell University Press, 2014), xi + 280 pp.



How can the humanities respond to the overwhelming evidence of ongoing environmental destruction and the cultural obliteration wrought by globalization? Uniting non-modern traditions with postmodern emphases on intersubjectivity, *Re-imagining Nature* collects essays on ecosemiotics, pre-modern philosophies of the environment, and Native American spiritual perspectives to demonstrate that the humanities can play a formative role. The volume provides an essential understanding of how networks of meaning negotiate the intertwined aspects of nature and culture in the face of the unfolding environmental challenge. Understanding nature-culture as a singular, dynamic interaction that provides meaning for human-nonhuman relationships, this perspective creates a non-anthropocentric world in which the human and nonhuman can coexist.

Perhaps the greatest strength of this volume is its introduction, “Song, Tree, and Spring: Environmental Meaning and Environmental Humanities,” in which Siewers synthesizes semiotic theory with diverse sources such as Longinus, Maximus the Confessor, John Chrysostom, John Scotus Eriugena, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Tim Ingold, and Edmund Burke, as well as Native American spiritual thought. It introduces the neologism *ecosemiosphere* as “an ecological bubble of meaning” that relies on “recognition of nature as a meld of physical and cultural communication, which can be considered spiritual as well as material” (4). Siewers integrates C.S. Peirce’s triad with the biosemiotician Jakob von Uexküll’s “nature-text” which melds “human symbolism, physical environment, and cultural narratives,” thereby eliminating the artificial nature-culture divide theorized by philosophers and scientists since the Scholastic period in the late Middle Ages. This combined model of sign-text, object-environment, and interpretant-contextual meaning/landscape is further developed by Siewers into a four-fold paradigm by means of Martin Heidegger’s mystical metaphor of Earth, Sky, Gods, and Mortals, in conjunction with Timo Maran’s restructuring of von Uexküll’s nature-text as text, environment, author, and reader. This creates a more robust model for understanding the interaction between nature and culture in four parts by essentially dividing the interpretant into an author and reader both of whom interact with the sign-text and the object-environment in an ongoing process of meaning-making. Siewers proposes that this four-fold model shows how the story-landscape functions as an indivisible combination of both the material, physical world and the human cultural space, underpinning his argument with Lawrence Buell’s identification of “ecocentric texts” and Jonathan Bate’s “ecopoetics.”

The first section of this well-organized volume develops ecosemiotic theory as a viable alternative to the loss of meaning in everyday life perpetuated by globalization and the intertwined contemporary human practices of consumption culture and ecological degradation. Siewer's essay "The Eco-poetics of Creation: Genesis LXX 1-3" uses apophatic ecosemiotics to reread the Septuagint creation story as a non-modern ecocritical text by means of the four-fold structure established in the introduction. Timo Maran's contribution "Place and Sign: Locality as a Foundational Concept for Ecosemiotics" suggests that ecosemiotic theory's basis in both semiotics and theoretical biology makes it ideally situated for analysing the interaction between local culture and local environment. In "Learning from Temple Grandin, or, Animal Studies, Disability Studies, and Who Comes after the Subject" Carey Wolfe evaluates how new social movements can contribute to ecosemiotics—in particular, how disability and animal studies challenge anthropocentric forms of environmental theory—and proposes a "shared trans-species being-in-the-world constituted by complex relations of trust, respect, dependence, and communication" (102).

The second section articulates several environmental perspectives from the Middle Ages to demonstrate that the modern perspective of human-environmental separation was not a longstanding monolith but rather one of several possible options until recent centuries. Dermot Moran's essay "'The Secret Folds of Nature': Eriugena's Expansive Concept of Nature" situates Eriugena's (815-877) pluriform nature as a dynamic model of transcendent Creation in relation to classical models of nature as a "corrective to the Galilean approach that still dominates contemporary science" (115). John Carey's contribution "The Nature of Miracles in Early Irish Saints' Lives" evaluates the miracle stories in medieval, Hibernian hagiographies' representation of divine intervention as bound or not bound by a cosmic framework. Carey provides the only explicit definition of nature in the volume: "more specifically as that total environment which preexisted humanity and its artifices, and which still—albeit with increasing difficulty—contains and sustains them, in reciprocal and mutually embedded relations" (127). The final essay, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's "Inventing with Animals in the Middle Ages" argues that medieval authors and artists "at least implicitly, approach the animal non-anthropomorphically" (142), as can be seen in texts and images from Allan de Lille (1128-c.1202) and the Physiologus tradition. Cohen's essay, however, is fraught with typographical and formatting errors that distract from his argument.

The final section of the book, "Re-negotiating Native Natures," brings diverse indigenous traditions and writers into dialogue with Western European environmental perspectives. Fr. Michael Oleska's essay "The *Yua* as *Logoi*" traces how the Byzantine Orthodox theology of Russian missionaries was integrated with the native traditions of the Alutiiq and Yup'ik Eskimos of Alaska in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Kathryn W. Shanley's contribution "Intersubjectivity with 'Nature' in Plains Indian Vision Seeking" articulates Plains Indian (Lakota, A'ani nin, and Crow, among others) practices of cosmic kinship without romanticizing the indigenous ceremonies or perspectives of interspecies relations. Katherine M. Faull's essay "The Experience of the World as the Experience of the Self: Smooth Rocks in a River Archipelago" elucidates the

ecosemiosphere of the Susquehanna valley through the interaction of the Iroquois and Delaware peoples with the Moravian missionaries, who settled there in the eighteenth century. Cynthia Radding's chapter "Human Geographies and Landscapes of the Divine in Ibero-American Borderlands" outlines Mesoamerican cosmology in relation to an adaptive and resilient ecosemiosphere that allowed meaning-making and resistance to colonialism for the indigenous people. The last essay, Sarah Reese's "Call and Response: The Question of the Human/Non-Human Encounter" exposes the "perceived ontological and philosophical incompatibility" between Euro-American and Native American traditions that is actually a function of the appropriative nature of Euro-American ontologies that delegitimize indigenous models, which instead articulate human-nonhuman interdependence (237). The essays in this section benefit from the ethnic background and personal experiences of the authors within the Native American community.

Reading through *Re-imagining Nature*, one is struck by an overarching cohesiveness and continued interaction between the essays. This likely resulted from the development of the volume from a series of interdisciplinary lectures at Bucknell University, a special panel at the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment 2011 conference organized by Louise Westling, and an ecologies roundtable at the International Medieval Congress 2012 organized by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, as Siewers indicates in the introduction. Unfortunately, many of the essays are reprints from earlier publications (see references below). Carey provides extensive revision in his material to rethink his original argument regarding Irish hagiographies; Fr. Oleska synthesizes material from two of his previous works. These reprints, nevertheless, contain valuable overviews of the topics undertaken by the volume contributors that are useful for readers not familiar with ecosemiotics, medieval philosophies of nature, or Native American spiritual practice.

Re-imagining Nature lays the foundation for humans to create socially shared meaning in everyday life by drawing on non-modern and Native American perspectives in opposition to the unsustainable model of global industrialization and environmental destruction. The fourfold model of textual understanding and the concept of the ecosemiosphere (as a local space of meaning-making that is physical and cultural) together provide a fruitful way to reintegrate humans into a natural world that Western philosophical models have deliberately disassociated themselves from for centuries. In the burgeoning field of ecocriticism, *Re-imagining Nature* presents a mindful response to the artificial culture-nature divide that adversely affects the decisions we make regarding our planet.

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