

CHAPTER 16

Eco

Why in the world would we destroy the world in which we live, our own world, our only world? What drives that destruction? Why can't we stop it?

William Wordsworth's 'Nutting' (1800) cannot answer these questions; perhaps no poem could. But this 54-line poem might help us to begin to think about them, and about questions of human-environmental interaction and ecological destruction and the ways in which literary study in recent years has started to be transformed by such concerns. In 'Nutting', the speaker recalls an occasion when, as a boy, he 'sallied' from his home to gather hazelnuts with 'A nutting crook in hand'. He remembers 'forcing' his way through the uncultivated countryside, through woods and 'pathless rocks', until he comes to 'one dear nook / Unvisited'. It is, he remembers, 'A virgin scene' and he stands there awhile 'Breathing with such suppression of the heart / As joy delights in'. This bower is, he thinks, a place where the seasons pass, year after year, 'unseen by any human eye'. He sits down in the bower enjoying the murmuring of a brook, his heart 'luxuriat[ing] with indifferent things' (ll.3-39); but then he gets up:

Then up I rose,
And dragg'd to earth both branch and bough, with crash
And merciless ravage, and the shady nook
Of hazels, and the green and mossy bower,
Deform'd and sullied, patiently gave up
Their quiet being; and unless I now
Confound my present feelings with the past,
Even then, when from the bower I turn'd away,
Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings –
I felt a sense of pain when I beheld
The silent trees and the intruding sky. – (ll.41-51)

The poem ends with what might appear to be a rather weak 'moral': we should adopt a 'gentleness of heart' in relation to nature, 'for there is a Spirit in the woods' (ll.53-4), the

speaker declares. More powerful, alarming, and provocative is the shock of this sudden, unmotivated and violent destruction. In Western literary and other culture, 'nature' is often fundamentally distinguished from the human and, at the same time, gendered as female and even as maternal (as in the phrase 'mother nature'). There certainly seem to be indications of femininity and motherhood in Wordsworth's description of the womb-like bower before it is defiled: it is a (feminized) 'virgin scene' but it also features hazels hung with (maternal-sounding) 'milk-white clusters' (l.18). The poem has consequently been read from the perspective of psychoanalysis as an expression of a child's rage (his rage and love, his rage because of his love, or need) for his mother, in terms of the desire to destroy what gives him physical, emotional, spiritual nurture. And it has been read in terms of sexual violence, as a kind of 'rape' of a feminized nature. It should also be said that, in keeping with the provocative sexualization of Wordsworth's language, there is also a case for seeing the bowers and the hazels as phallic and virile: 'not a broken bough / Droop'd with its wither'd leaves... / ...but the hazels rose/ Tall and erect' (ll.15-18).

But these are not the only ways of reading Wordsworth's poem. What is most striking about 'Nutting' is the way that the destruction of nature seems *not* to be motivated, the way that it is unexplained, seemingly inexplicable. So that we are left with the question with which we started: what drives us, or what drives Wordsworth's speaker, to destroy our world? This, in a sense, is the core ecological question, perhaps finally the only question (along with the related question: how do we prevent this destruction?). In recent years, there has been what amounts to an 'ecological turn' in thinking about literature, a turn that, as we shall argue, has the potential fundamentally to transform the way that we think about literature and about reading. Critics have begun to analyze ways in which literature engages with the destruction of nature, and with the relationship between humanity and the biosphere (of which, of course, humanity is ambiguously a part – both part of nature and not part of nature). In focusing on this interaction, ecocritical thinking complicates and adds to the more conventional idea that literature is concerned with questions of gender, race, class, economics, history, sexuality, and so on. It is for this reason that the Timothy Clark calls ecocriticism 'a provocative misfit amidst... literary and cultural debate' (Clark, forthcoming). It may be the case that writers and

critics, *as* writers and critics, can do little or nothing to prevent or resolve problems of global warming, over-fishing, widespread pollution, the destruction on epic scale of animal and plant habitats, mass extinction of species along with human-engineered ecological disasters in all forms – to prevent what Martin Amis starkly sums up as the ‘toiletization of the planet’ (quoted in Deitering 1996, 196). Writers and critics are, however, well-placed to analyze ways in which this wasting of our world is not simply material or physical, but also rhetorical – ways in which it is defined, conditioned and even, in certain respects, controlled by language itself.

Rather than focusing on the question of the subjectivity of the speaker in Wordsworth’s poem and drawing on Oedipal models of development, an eco-inflected approach would register the larger contexts with which the speaker struggles in this poem. An Ecocritical reading might notice, for example, the way in which Wordsworth’s poem seems to be structured around a series of oppositions: before/after; nature/human; wilderness/cultivation; and most explicitly, ‘virgin’ nature and its destruction and desecration by the boy. But it might also reckon with the way in which the destruction of the bower is in fact prefigured in the description of nature before the attack: in a sense, nature has already been desecrated, even in its representation as wilderness. Nature is always already contaminated by the human and by language. Death, after all, is present in the opening lines: ‘It seems a day’, the poem begins, ‘One of those heavenly days which cannot die / When forth I sallied from our cottage-door’ (ll.1-3). It *seems* that it cannot die, yet it is already in the past tense (‘I sallied’): thus there is already an intimation of mortality hanging over the day in question. It is indeed as if in Wordsworth’s ‘sallied’, ‘sullied’ might also be heard, so sallying forth would already be a sullying. And all in all there is something slightly nutty about ‘Nutting’. The boy himself seems a little crazed. (Later in life Wordsworth declared of the poem ‘I was an impassioned nutter’ (Wordsworth 1992, 391)). The speaker describes his younger self as being ‘Trick’d out in proud disguise of Beggar’s weeds’ (l.7), as if his whole bearing and ‘Motley’ appearance (l.10) is a kind of ‘trick’. It is as if his clothes are the socially and culturally constituted other of fruitful, productive, desirable nature, as if they are ‘weeds’; and as if humanity is as a beggar to nature. These and other traces of deception,

violence, cruelty, insanity, jesting, clowning and impoverishment are strangely at work within Wordsworth's pastoral opening, his apparently 'innocent' description of a country walk. So that rather than a strict opposition between a boy's harmony with nature and his despoliation of it, the language of the poem (also) presents us with the idea that that relationship is always mediated, compromised, violent. It leads us to reflect, indeed, on the idea that, as Jacques Derrida puts it, 'there is no natural violence, an earthquake is not violent, it is only violent insofar as it damages human interests' (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 92). Violence has to do with the human, starting with the violence of language itself, in its representations and appropriations of 'nature'.

Despite the 'ism' in its name, ecocriticism is not in fact constituted as yet another 'ism': it does not offer a distinctive *methodology* of reading, but draws on feminist or Marxist or historical or postcolonial or psychoanalytic or deconstructive approaches, in order to attend to a world of environmental questions. The term 'ecocriticism' is perhaps useful as a means of referring to a relatively new dimension and emphasis in literary studies and beyond, but in many respect it makes no sense. It is not a matter of choosing to be or not to be an ecocritic. We are all eco-critters, so to speak, some less responsible and thoughtful than others. Ecocritical thinking in this respect involves a change of scale and vision: rather than an obsession with human-sized objects, it attends both to the miniature realm of a blade of grass, an ant, amoeba, or pathogen, and to the mega-scale of the ocean, the mountain, or even the earth itself (as well as everything in between). An ecocritical reading might foreground those strange lines towards the end of Wordsworth's poem about the boy 'Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings' while also feeling 'a sense of pain' when he sees what he has done; and it might consider the lines as a reflection on the way that both public and private wealth are dependent on the exploitation and ultimately the destruction of nature. From this perspective, the poem would seem to encapsulate a pattern that the environmental sociologist Franz Bromwimmer analyses in his compelling study of the destructive effects of human communities throughout history, *Ecocide: A Short History of Mass Extinction of Species* (2002), in which successful societies accumulate wealth through ecological destruction to the

point at which their very existence is undermined as a result of that wasting of the environment, in an eco-unfriendly cycle of boom-and-bust.

The pattern of destruction that Broswimmer describes has, of course, accelerated in the two hundred years since Wordsworth was writing. While early societies produced their own localized form of unintended 'ecocide' and their own subsequent demise (Broswimmer examines the cases of temporarily 'successful' societies such as the Mesopotamians, the Romans, the Mayans, and others), twenty-first century global capitalism is currently facing the possibility that within the lifetime of many of us living today, our rapacious, land-grabbing, polluting rage for road- and air-travel, consumables and other material possessions will lead inexorably, unstoppably to the effective destruction of more-or-less all life on the planet. Such a future is imagined in Cormac McCarthy's Pulitzer-prize winning novel *The Road* (2006), a book that has been hailed by the British journalist and environmental activist George Monbiot as 'the most important environmental book ever written', one that will 'change the way you see the world' (Monbiot 2007). Since for some people, such praise might make the novel sound like a worthy but dull attack on global capitalism, we would like to affirm that *The Road* is also a compelling narrative written in brilliant but restrained, almost Biblical prose, and that, despite its bleak attenuations of verbal texture, it presents a richly moving and highly readable narrative of a post-apocalyptic future. For Monbiot, the importance of McCarthy's novel lies in its vivid imagining of the devastating reality of life for a few survivors after an apocalyptic event which has left the world dimmed, grey with floating ash, and in which almost all animal and plant life is dead. Nights in this world are 'beyond darkness', while days are 'more grey each one than what had gone before' (1). McCarthy imagines a desperate, barren end for a world in which language itself is dying out: The world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities. The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion. Colors. The names of birds. Things to eat. More fragile than he would have thought. How much of it was gone already? The sacred idiom shorn of its referents and so of its reality. Drawing down like something trying to preserve heat. In time to wink out forever. (93)

There are scattered, mostly mutually murderous human survivors, but the only other living animal and plant life encountered are a few mushrooms, at one point, which are quickly eaten, and at another point the distant bark of a dog – which, if its ominous silencing is anything to go by, also gets served up as someone’s dinner. The narrative concerns an unnamed man and his young son who are travelling south through a devastated America in search of the ocean and life-saving warmth – and the possibility, the tenuous and almost entirely unwarranted hope, of some community with which to settle, of some possible future. The pair walk slowly through a scorched and blackened landscape almost entirely denuded of life, scavenging for sustenance amongst the detritus left after an apocalyptic event several years earlier (a nuclear war? an impact with a large asteroid? – the text does not disclose). Since the catastrophe and the almost complete destruction of animal and plant life, survival has depended on scavenging for residual products of lost modernity such as canned food. But such products have become more and more scarce and the savagery with which the few survivors treat each other has consequently become more extreme: everyone is now starving and other people are therefore seen as rivals for food or even as themselves potential sources of food. The most shocking scenes in this often harrowing novel involve cannibalism: the man opens a locked cellar to see a group of prisoners whose limbs are to be harvested for their captors’ nourishment even while they are still alive; later, the man and the boy come across a fire, recently abandoned in panic, over which is the blackened, gutted torso of a baby on a spit. In this new world, order, morality, humanity itself has almost entirely broken down and remains only in the father’s love for his son, his determination to protect him, and in the refusal of the man and the boy to exploit others to save themselves. The importance of McCarthy’s novel for Monbiot lies in its starkly conceived, terrifying vision of a post-apocalyptic future, and its potential as a warning against our current profligate existence.

Wordsworth’s poem and McCarthy’s novel might help us to think about the kinds of ideas, and the ways of reading, that ecocritical thinking opens up. The following might be considered as some of the most important terms whereby literature can be reconceived and literary texts reread:

Externality

'Externality' is the idea that there is an environment elsewhere, outside of our immediate habitat available for exploitation – another village, town, or region, another country or, best of all, another continent or even another planet. The concept of externality links with questions of colonialism and postcolonialism in particular since this 'elsewhere' is typically a colony whose natural resources can be exploited for the economic benefit of the colonisers regardless of the effect on the indigenous population (whether human or not). It is everything that is at issue in the idea of the *exotic*. But a properly ecological thinking figures externality as a dangerous myth, bringing us up against the fact that there is only one world, in which everything is connected to everything else. It has been estimated that for all of the six billion people now alive to have a standard of living equivalent to that of the average American citizen there would need to be two or three extra earth-sized planets. But there are no such planets, and the idea that we could colonize, say, the atmosphere-thin wastes of the moon or the arctic desert of Mars seems little more than a consoling but dangerous fantasy (like ideas of heaven or any other after-life Nirvana in which the failings of this life are imagined to be magically redeemed in another, alternative 'world'): outside of science-fiction or the wilder speculations of scientists, there is effectively no other space, no externality, apart from the earth, no other world but this one. Externality in Wordsworth's poem is the compromised, sullied wilderness into which the boy sallies. In McCarthy's novel, there is a sense in which the external, the other of American global colonialism, has become internal, a sense that this externality has finally been destroyed, that there is finally no elsewhere, no place to go that is not already a devastated, alien, dead, waste land.

Ethics of the future

While ecology is concerned with the suffering now of millions of people on the planet whose lives are compromised or indeed wasted by environmental destruction and mismanagement, it is also necessarily future-oriented. Ecocriticism therefore demands a rethinking of ethics, extending the notion of our responsibility for others unpredictably into the future, since those

others include people yet to be born, as well as those who will live after our death. While the consequences of our communal addiction to road use and to cheap foreign holidays may not seem to involve significant human suffering, ecological thinking would stress that your cheap flight to a destination of sunshine and inexpensive booze is directly correlated to the unknown suffering of future generations. McCarthy's *The Road* is concerned with a man's commitment to preserving the life of his son, and in this sense with the father's sense of responsibility for future generations. At the same time this dystopian novel has to do with a thinking of an unbearable future – and the *lack* of a future – that we may be preparing for generations to come (or those generations that might in consequence *not* come) by the choices that we make today.

Nature

Raymond Williams, one of the first modern ecocritical thinkers, famously refers to 'nature' as 'perhaps the most complex word in the language' (Williams 1983, 219). Nature has itself come under renewed attention, has been re-thought and re-defined, in recent work in ecocritical writing. One of the key questions regarding 'nature' concerns its relationship with the human. Is 'nature' that which is outside of, other to, the human, as is suggested by certain forms of religion, for example those that deny the naturalism of Darwinian evolution? Or are humans *part of* nature, as is suggested by Darwinism and more generally by the Western scientific paradigm? While ecocritical thinking would tend to align itself with the 'scientific' paradigm, with the idea of the human as animal, it also pays attention to ways in which this ambiguity or uncertainty operates in literary texts and in cultural production more generally. Wordsworth's presentation of nature in 'Nutting' is, as we have seen, ambiguous: 'nature' is where the boy is not; but for the poet to register nature he must have experienced it, nature must be humanized (and in being humanized it is contaminated, destroyed). In a sense, there is no such thing as nature, no such thing as the unmediated, unsullied, non-human nature that Wordsworth's poem might seem to suggest. 'There is no nature', Alan Liu has famously remarked in a monumental tome on Wordsworth and history, 'except as it is constituted by acts of political definition' (Liu 1989, 104).

Environmental Criticism

'Environmental Criticism' is the term that one of its leading proponents, Laurence Buell, uses to describe a certain engagement with 'nature writing'. Environmental criticism can be distinguished from what has come to be called ecocriticism in that a critic like Buell is primarily concerned with the kind of writing that has as its focus the environment and its relationship with humanity – so-called 'nature writing' – while ecocriticism is also concerned with teasing out the ecological questions, implications and challenges of *any* writing, whether or not that writing might involve a conscious and explicit engagement with nature. For ecocriticism, Jane Austen's studies of upper-middle class manners and customs in a novel like *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) are as valid a source of ecological speculation and analysis as Henry David Thoreau's philosophical musings on his pond in *Walden: Or, Life in the Woods* (1854). For the ecocritic, the famous sentence that opens Austen's novel ('It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife') is profoundly ecological: 'universally' raises the question of which 'universe' we are speaking of and of whether in fact this very restrictive Anglo- or at least Euro-centric early-nineteenth century social formation can be exported to other parts of the world and to other times; a 'good fortune' is necessarily premised on ecological exploitation (whether in the form of private ownership of land, the privatization of the commons in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century enclosure movement, the slavery-based economy of Caribbean plantations, or the newly industrialized exploitation of mineral and other resources); and the fact that marriage is premised on reproduction, on the propagation of the species, means that it is necessarily linked to the questions of population and over-population that, in his controversial book *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), Thomas Malthus was beginning to bring to the attention of the English-speaking world at the time that Austen was writing. An ecocritical reading of the first sentence of Austen's novel would be alert to all of these and other 'environmental' factors in her famous novel; it would re-read the novel, indeed, according to the terms dictated by such questions, just as much as it would focus on the more obviously 'ecological' questions raised by Wordsworth's poem or McCarthy's novel.

Deep Ecology

Deep ecology is an environmental movement that rejects the notion of 'sustainable development' and suggests that capitalism, progress, even Western liberalism itself is responsible for the current ecological crisis that afflicts the world. Deep ecology might be compared to the literary and philosophical work of deconstruction in its call for a radical critique and transformation of conventional ways of conceiving of 'human' values, of humanism, even of science itself. For deep ecologists, it is a matter of new ways of thinking about our relationship with the world, a new ethics and politics that will challenge the instrumentalist view that the world is and should be available for human exploitation. Both Wordsworth's poem and McCarthy's novel allow for the possibility of a rethinking of the relationship between humans and the biosphere: Wordsworth's poem can be read as a radical critique of the colonizing tendency of humans; McCarthy's novel is, among other things, a polemic that calls for a fundamental reevaluation of environmental ethics and of the way we live now.

Ecofeminism

As we have suggested in relation to Wordsworth's poem, ecofeminism attends in particular to the figurative language in which women and nature are presented and it responds to ways in which nature and the feminine are often linked in a gesture that denigrates both. In a landmark essay from 1984, for example, Annette Kolodny comments on 'how bound we still are by the vocabulary of a feminine landscape and the psychological patterns of regression and violation that it implies' (Kolodny 1996, 176). Thus, ecofeminist critics such as Kolodny, Louise Westling, Patrick Murphy, Greta Gaard, Donna Haraway and others have highlighted and questioned the gendering of 'nature' in literary and other discourse. From this perspective, patriarchy is itself understood to be responsible for the exploitation of both nature and women. Such exploitation is produced partly by way of an identification of one with the other (women are said to be less rational than men, thus 'closer to nature', and therefore in need of civilizing, through masculine control and order). Non- or anti-patriarchal thinking, according

to this analysis, would allow for a relationship with the ecosystem that is not exploitative and would demand, indeed, an ethics and politics that is no longer driven by patriarchal codes of bourgeois individualism and what Marx calls ‘primitive accumulation’, by colonization, the violent and rapacious drive for mastery, and, necessarily, ecological destruction. Gender, like nature itself, is written into *The Road* just by the fact that there are virtually no female characters in the novel: it’s a man’s world, as the chilling saying goes. Nature – in the sense of living things – has been almost completely destroyed, and there are almost no women in this new, brutally savage world. But in the novel’s resolution the boy finds a family – a substitute father *and* mother – in a scene which at least offers the hope of new life, of women and of nature.

Anthropomorphism, anthropocentrism

To borrow a distinction that Don Scheese makes, ecocritical thinking is eco- rather than ego-centred (Scheese 1996, 307). As such, it draws our attention to the multiple ways in which literary texts figure the non-human as human – to anthropomorphism – in what is often a sentimental appropriation of the non-human for human ends. Anthropomorphism includes the casual use of what John Ruskin calls the ‘affective fallacy’ (*Modern Painters* (1860) part 4, chapter 12). For example, the lightning that strikes the old oak tree in Chapter 23 of *Jane Eyre* somehow articulates the double threat and temptation that Rochester’s proposal of marriage represents to Jane; the storm in chapter 83 of *Middlemarch* similarly reflects the ‘stormy’ passions of Dorothea and Will Ladislaw; and so on. The ruses and delusions of anthropomorphism are also at work in the celebration of natural sublimity in a poem like Percy Bysshe Shelley’s ‘Mont Blanc’ (1816), in which the mountain is figured as (or as resembling) ‘My own, my human mind’ (l.37), as well as in the famous presentation of Egdon Heath as one of the main ‘characters’, even the protagonist, of Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native* (1878). Anthropomorphism also concerns the way in which animals are regularly treated as having human motivations, emotions, language, consciousness, even morality – from countless examples of fables, children’s literature and fairy tales to more subtle anthropomorphisms such as the whale in Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* (1851), bees in some

of Sylvia Plath's *Ariel* poems (1965), ants in Derek Walcott's 'The Bounty' (1997), or the crow in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* (2000) that is presented as part of an attack on late-twentieth century conception of the 'human'. Ecocritical thinking analyses the ways in which such figurations of the apparently non-human lead inexorably to anthropocentrism, to the configuration of the world in human terms – which itself in turn leads to the exploitation of the non-human, however that category is defined, for human benefit. The world is conceived of as human-centred and therefore endlessly available as a resource for human comfort, wealth, and well-being. The ecologist Michael Robins offers a striking suggestion for rethinking anthropocentrism when he comments on human armpits (yours as well as ours, we fear): 'From the biosphere's perspective, the whole point of *Homo sapiens* is their armpits, aswarm with 24.1 billion bacteria' (quoted in Campbell 1996, 133).

So where does this leave us (apart from worrying about our armpits and deodorants)? As well as praising *The Road*, George Monbiot has expressed his enthusiasm for the first Hollywood global-warming disaster movie, *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), declaring it a 'great movie' and, despite its 'lousy science', 'one of the best movies ever released' (Monbiot 2004). But we think that Monbiot should get out more (at least to the movies). In our opinion, *The Day After Tomorrow* stinks. The science is not just lousy, it's preposterous, matched only by the blockbuster's toxic combination of melodrama and sentimentality (served up in alternating chunks at regular ten-minute intervals), by its frankly cruddy special effects, characterization and dialogue, and by the absurdity of its plot. We can hardly bring ourselves to sketch the story: a maverick climatologist, having personally briefed the US President in Washington on the coming global disaster and advised evacuation of the population of the southern US states to Mexico – it is too late to save the inhabitants of the northern states; the population of Canada doesn't get a look in – nevertheless sets out, amidst the mother of all snap ice-ages, to drive and then walk to New York in order to save his son, who is sheltering in the famous public library with a handful of other refugees, those who have foolishly left the library having perished in the -150°C freeze along with most other New Yorkers. In fact, however, *The Day After Tomorrow* shares with *The Road* a cataclysmic scenario and a recuperative

father-son narrative, and despite the radical nature of McCarthy's dystopian novel, its truly inventive evocation of a post-apocalyptic world, an ecocritical reading might finally see both novel and movie as embedded in a troubling anthropocentrism that undermines the ability of either to fully confront the ecological question. In both, father and son encapsulate the liberal-humanist idea that individual human life (rather than populations, rather than the biosphere or ecosystem) is the ultimate and finally the only value. Both are characterized by the familiar Hollywood ethical calculus (the basis of *all* 'disaster movies', indeed) which asserts that the survival of a single unique individual allows redemptive closure (and a happy ending) regardless of how many others get wiped out along the way. And both affirm the values of the so-called 'nuclear' family: at the end of McCarthy's novel, although the father dies, the boy finds another family with whom he might survive and even thrive; the movie ends with the father finding and rescuing his son, and with the son's romantic attachment to the attractive young woman with whom he has shared his life-threatening library experience. Life goes on, at least for these few people, for these individual families.

So while we share Monbiot's enthusiasm for narratives that might indeed shake up people's indifference to environmental degradation and disaster, we would stress that ecocritical readings of such texts should be alert to the complexities both of their environmental contexts and their linguistic and indeed aesthetic values. To put it simply, the failures of *The Day After Tomorrow* as a movie are bound up with its failures of ecological analysis; and the weaknesses of *The Road*, such as they are, have to do with a certain redemptive sentiment that recoils at the full implications of its own radical vision of an ecologically bereft future. It is increasingly possible, and indeed increasingly urgent and necessary, therefore, to develop forceful and compelling eco-critical readings across the entire range of literary and other writings, readings that go beyond the business-as-usual anthropocentrism of conventional liberal humanism, and that take as their focus the ecosystem itself – that place, that home (*eco-* is from Greek *oikos*, house, dwelling) in which we have no choice but to live, and, like other animals, die.

Further reading

Two essential and reasonably accessible texts to start with are Greg Garrard's lucid and intelligent introduction to the field, *Ecocriticism* (2004), and Laurence Coupe's valuable collection of fairly brief extracts from influential essays from the Romantic period to the present, *The Green Studies Reader* (2000). In writing this chapter we have been helped by seeing a draft of Timothy Clark's excellent *Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (forthcoming), which we recommend as a readable and highly informative primer. Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973) is an important and influential precursor of ecocriticism, and Bate's *Romantic Ecology* (1991) is another influential early intervention in the field, mainly focused on Wordsworth (see also Bate's more recent and wider-ranging *The Song of the Earth* (2000)). Much more demanding is Timothy Morton's *Ecology Without Nature* (2007), a sophisticated study which, like Clark's book, stresses the importance of engaging ecocriticism with deconstructive literary and cultural theory. There is some interesting recent work on ecology and early-modern literature, including Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr, *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England* (2007), Gabriel Egan, *Green Shakespeare* (2006), and Robert N. Watson, *Back to Nature* (2006). Three useful collections of essays that also offer helpful introductions are Glotfelty and Fromm, ed., *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), Armbruster and Wallace, eds., *Beyond Nature Writing* (2001), and Kerridge and Sammells, eds., *Writing the Environment* (1998). The journal *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* (ISLE) publishes essays on ecocriticism and topics around literary ecology (see www.unr.edu/cla/engl/isle/).