Recent Studies in the English Renaissance

ELR bibliographical essays are intended to combine a topical review of research with a reasonably complete bibliography. Scholarship is organized by authors or titles of anonymous works. Items included represent combined entries listed in the annual bibliographies published by PMLA, YWES, and MHRA from 1971 through, in the present instance, 2005 with additional items through 2006. The format used here is a modified version of that used in Recent Studies in English Renaissance Drama, ed. Terence P. Logan and Denzel S. Smith, 4 vols. (Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1973–78).

The ELR series is edited by Elizabeth H. Hageman of the University of New Hampshire and supported by the Department of English, UNH.

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RECENT ECOCRITICAL STUDIES OF ENGLISH RENAISSANCE LITERATURE

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The definition of ecocriticism used in this essay generally follows that offered on the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) website (http://www.asle.umn.edu/archive/intro/intro.html): the study of the relationship between literary and cultural artifacts and the natural environment. As a recently constructed field of study, ecocriticism often retrospectively embraces critical work not originally or intentionally designed as such; books and essays that fall under this rubric have been included here when the author’s attention to the physical natural world or its conceptual influence on literature and culture is a significant component of the argument. Works in which “nature” refers primarily or exclusively to human behavior or ontology have been excluded, as have works that deal primarily or exclusively with the aesthetic aspects of genres like pastoral or georgic. So too, works focusing on the sciences themselves, rather than natural philosophy’s engagement with the natural world, are omitted.
Background Studies (selected)

Smith, C. T. An Historical Geography of Western Europe Before 1800 (1976).
Whyte, Ian D. Landscape and History Since 1500 (2002).

I. General Studies

In Back to Nature: The Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance (2006) Robert N. Watson analyzes the connection between early modern religious, scientific, and artistic epistemologies and ecological alienation in works by Shakespeare, Marvell, and Traherne, and in seventeenth-century Dutch painting. Celebrations of nature, pastoral nostalgia, the search for wilderness, and sensitivity to

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II. Studies of Individual Topics

Anne E. McIhaney, “‘Whole Shoals of Men’: Representations of Women Anglers in Seventeenth Century British Poetry,” in *Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and the Environment*, ed. Michael P. Branch, Rochelle Johnson, Daniel Patterson, and Scott Slovic (1998), pp. 55–66, argues that the piscatory pastoral, a religious sub-genre that characterizes men as fishers of souls, was often adapted to models of erotic love depicting women as anglers using their beauty for bait.


Ian MacInnes argues that animal character attaches to and clarifies human identity in “Mastiffs and Spaniels” Gender and Nation in the English Dog,” TexP 17 (2003), 21–40: the English were, according to MacInnes, caught in the contrast between a sense of themselves as rude, rough, savage fighters, versus their depiction as civil but fawning sycophants. In “Clever Dogs and Nimble Spaniels: On the Iconography of Logic, Invention and Imagination,” EIRC 24 (1998), 1–36, Karl Josef Höltgen claims the special flexibility of the dog in metaphorically conveying aspects of human reason and imagination. Building on Höltgen’s work, James S. Baumlins and Barbara Watson, “‘Rational’ Dogs and Spiritual Fools: The Renaissance Iconography of ‘Natural’ Reason vs. Divine Guidance in German Artwork and English Poetry,” EIRC 30 (2004), 197–230, include dogs engaged in spiritual, as well as rational quests, as they appear in alchemical texts, the tarot, and the poetry of George Herbert. Matthew Bliss, in “Property or Performer: Animals on the Elizabethan Stage,” TheatreS 39 (1994), 45–59, argues that animals were in some plays probably able to take commands and perform, in others reduced to objects, resulting in the constant redrawing of the boundary between animal and actor. Mark S. R. Jenner, “The Great Dog Massacre,” in Fear in Early Modern Society, ed. William G. Naphy and Penny Roberts (1997), pp. 44–61, dismisses the idea that dogs and cats were routinely killed to prevent plague and other diseases, and argues instead that because such animals resembled masterless men, they became targets for fears about the erosion of social order.


C. Gardens, Landscapes, Geography. In *Green Desire: Imagining Early Modern English Gardens* (2003), Rebecca Bushnell argues that garden and husbandry manuals are a template to changing expectations among early moderns about the material and imaginative conditions of life, constructing readers and writers as well as the gardens they purported to help create. Terry Comito’s *The Idea of the Garden in the Renaissance* (1978) surveys the function of the representation of gardens as an imaginative interconnection between self and world—gardens as sacred spaces, as places of philosophy, of love. John Dixon Hunt, *Garden and Grove: The Italian Renaissance Garden in the English Imagination, 1600–1750* (1986; rpt. 1996) notes that the English garden’s theatricality, gardeners’ interest in antiquity, and the association of political authority with the garden were initially derived from Italian sources; later in the seventeenth century, choosing to follow this Italian, rather than the new French, style could itself have political implications. Roy Strong connects the history of garden design with the institution and propaganda of the monarchy in *The Renaissance Garden in England* (1979; rpt. 1998). Jennifer Nevile compares the static designs of gardens with courtly dance patterns in “Dance and the Garden: Moving and Static Choreography in Renaissance Europe,” *RenQ* 52 (1999), 805–36.


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William H. Herendeen analyzes the emergence of the river poem in early modern literature, situating it in the context of historical fascination with rivers as the markers of national identity, distinction, and unity of a people. In *The Politics of Landscape: Rural Scenery and Society in English Poetry, 1630–1660* (1979), James G. Turner analyzes the ideological uses of landscape and topography, arguing that moral analogies between landscapes and their owners, between the physical body of humans and the natural organization of the land, and between peaceful kingdoms and country estates, all of which naturalize social hierarchy, and were complicated and destabilized by Caroline politics. H. M. Richmond argues that English Renaissance poets’ ecological sensibilities can be traced to the importance of nature in their European and classical antecedents in *Renaissance Landscapes: English Lyrics in a European Tradition* (1973).

In “The Plot Thickens: Surveying Manuals, Drama, and the Materiality of Narrative Form in Early Modern England,” *ELH 69* (2002), 617–48, Martin Brückner and Kristen Poole mount a material-historical analysis of the idea of “plotting,” with its origins in geographical and legal terminology, focusing on how the theater appropriated a “geodetic vocabulary” to describe its practices.

D. *Georgic.* Andrew McRae focuses on depictions of the land, the plough, and the laborer who tills as cultural images that negotiate the social dislocations of agricultural improvement in *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500–1660* (1996). McRae likewise claims the plough is the central term in legitimizing constructions of georgic labor merged with pastoral ideals of ease in “Husbandry Manuals and the Language of Agrarian Improvement,” in Leslie and Raylor (II, B), pp. 35–62. Anthony Low’s *The Georgic Revolution* (1985) argues that the agricultural revolution of the eighteenth century was preceded and made possible by a “georgic revolution” in seventeenth-century literature and science, which transformed ways of thinking about rural life, land and labor. In “New Science and the Georgic Revolution in Seventeenth Century English Literature,” *ELR 13* (1983), 231–59, Low shows that advances in the new science helped dispel “anti-georgic” prejudices, paving the way for the georgic revolution. In “Agricultural Reform and the Love Poems of Thomas Carew; with an Instance from Lovelace,” in Leslie and Raylor (II, B), pp. 63–80, Low contrasts Carew’s poetry, which reflects the positive connotations beginning to accrue to the idea of a market economy, with that of Lovelace, which directly appropriates images on land enclosure to affirm libertinism and the latitudes of a free market.

**III. Studies of Individual Writers**

A. *Edmund Spenser (1552–1599).* Sean Kane, “Spenserian Ecology,” *ELH 50* (1983), 461–83, argues for using the principles of ecology to analyze cyclical and

B. William Shakespeare (1564–1616). In *Green Shakespeare: From Ecopolitics to Ecocriticism* (2006), Gabriel Egan analyzes Shakespeare’s plays alongside patterns of recent ecological crises, advances in genetics, geology, and nuclear fission, as well as in the context of Shakespeare’s own world’s understanding of humoral theory, dietary regime, and astrology, to argue that the plays stage competing ideas about organicism and mechanism. Egan also argues that the “much-reviled” *Elizabethan World Picture* of E. M. W. Tillyard bears a striking resemblance to ecocriticism’s “Gaia hypothesis” (the proposition that the earth is a single, unified organism) in “Shakespeare and Ecocriticism: The Unexpected Return of the Elizabethan World Picture,” *LiteratureC* 1 (2003–2004). Jeanne Addison Roberts argues that forest settings embody confusion, wandering, and error in an artificial, not realistic version of landscape in “Shakespeare’s Forests and Trees,” *SHR* 11 (1977), 108–25, and offers a feminist, psychoanalytic reading in *The Shakespearean Wild: Geography, Genus, and Gender* (1991), proposing that Shakespeare’s plays establish the “seductive and terrifying” wild, whether figured through landscapes or animals, as that which is outside patriarchal control, but which is never fully walled off by the apparent triumphs of (male-dominated) civilization. Linda Woodbridge, “Green Shakespeare,” in her *The Scythe of Saturn: Shakespeare and Magical Thinking* (1994), argues that the consequence of analogizing the state as a body and vice versa was a profound responsiveness in Shakespeare’s plays to organic nature, and a resistance to deforestation, urbanization, enclosure, and other threats to the natural world.


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important to Shakespeare’s concept of natural causes for human justice. L. T. Fitz [Linda Woodbridge], “The Vocabulary of the Environment in The Tempest,” SQ 26 (1975), 42–47, argues that while the play’s masque emphasizes cultivation, order, and fruitfulness, the “reality” of the island is that it is represented as hostile, wild, and barren. Iffat Ara suggests that women catalyze a return to the external, natural world in “Art and Nature in Love’s Labours Lost,” AJES 14 (1989), 131–41.

Simon C. Estok coins the term “ecophobia” in “Conceptualizing the Other in Hostile Early Modern Geographies: Situating Ecocriticism and Difference,” ELLS 45 (1999), 877–98, to describe the patterns of social and racial oppression in works like The Tempest, Henry V, and The Merchant of Venice, as well as Heywood’s Fair Maid of the West, that are integrally connected to the process of environmental domination and commodification. In “Teaching the Environment of The Winter’s Tale: Ecocritical Pedagogy for Shakespeare,” in Shakespeare Matters: History, Teaching, Performance, ed. Lloyd Davis (2003), pp. 177–90, Estok offers a materialist reading of nature in the play in order to argue that it fails to challenge the ecophobic perspective of Shakespeare’s world, and in “Pushing the Limits of Ecocriticism: Environment and Social Resistance in 2 Henry VI and 2 Henry IV,” ShakesRev 40 (2004), 631–58, he argues that ecocritical methods applied to Shakespeare’s two plays are especially useful in highlighting a necessary connection between social rebellion and attitudes toward nature.


Simon C. Estok introduces a special cluster on Shakespeare and ecocriticism for ISLE 12:2 (2005), 109–17, focusing on obstacles to and advantages of bringing ecological criticism to bear on early literatures. Breyan Strickler’s essay for the volume, “Sex in the City: An Ecocritical Perspective on the Place of Gender and Race in Othello,” 119–37, connects images of ecological contamination in the play with its themes of purity and pollution. Frederick O. Waage focuses on dirt, earth, and mud in advancing Estok’s analysis of what ecocriticism can contribute to a reading of Shakespeare in “Shakespeare
Karen Raber


In “‘Tongues in Trees’: The Book of Nature in As You Like It,” MLS 18 (1988), 65–74, Paul J. Willis focuses on the ways that characters in the play “read” Arden differently, concluding that Shakespeare questions the notion that nature easily translates into a book in which God’s design can be discerned. In “The Green Underworld of Early Shakespearean Tragedy,” ShakeS 17 (1985), 25–47, Charles R. Forker claims that the green world of nature and creation is still present, albeit as a lost potentiality, in tragedies like Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, and Titus Andronicus.


Edward I. Berry, in Shakespeare and the Hunt: A Cultural and Social Study (2001), analyzes the historical, social and literary attitudes for and against hunting, claiming that it was a vital locus of social conflict over definitions of monarchy and structures of social distinction and gender. Chris Fitter, “The Slain Deer and Political Imperium: As You Like It and Marvell’s ‘Nymph Complaining for the Death of Her Fawn,’” JEGP 98 (1999), 193–218, argues that from political resistance to absolutism early modern writers derived new sensitivities about tyranny toward “inferior creatures” in the royal pastime of the hunt, conveyed through the literary topos of the sobbing deer. In “The Idea of Hunting in As You Like It,” ShS 21 (1993), 72–95, A. Stuart Daley explains the technical aspects of hunting that would have been familiar to Shakespeare’s audience.

In Shakespeare Among the Animals: Nature and Society in the Drama of Early Modern England (2002), Bruce Boehrer describes the ways that animal metaphors, bestiality, interest in exotic species, and the species/race intersection in early modern drama could function as positive opportunities in the construction of biological and social identities. Anthony Dent establishes the wider historical and social contexts for Shakespeare’s references to horses in Horses
Joseph W. Meeker, “Hamlet and the Animals,” in his *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (1972), pp. 60–78, argues that if we take evolutionary biology seriously as a source for human psychology we can read a play like *Hamlet* as a drama of animal behavior, including interspecies aggression, predatory behavior, inhibition, and instinct. In “‘Why Should a Dog, a Horse, a Rat, Have Life and Thou No Breath At All’: Shakespeare’s Animations,” in *Fudge* (II, B), pp. 87–100, Erica Sheen proposes the connections between Shakespeare’s representation of animals and the institutional status of theatrical property. Jeanne Addison Roberts, “Animals as Agents of Revelation: The Horizontalizing of the Great Chain of Being in Shakespeare’s Comedies,” *NYLF* 5–6 (1980), 79–96, claims that Shakespeare’s metamorphic language about animals creates a chain of being in which animals and man share an unequal relationship to God.

Bruce Boehrer, “Shakespeare and the Social Devaluation of the Horse,” in Raber and Tucker (II, B), pp. 91–111, argues that the horse’s ability to signify high status diminished, until in Shakespeare’s plays it is associated with defunct—and often ridiculous—ideologies of chivalry. Bert O. States claims in “The Horses of *Macbeth*,” *KR* 7 (1985), 52–66, that Shakespeare’s language of spurring, jumping, and riding emblematizes Macbeth’s psychological drive, while at the same time symbolizing the play’s descent toward chaos and apocalypse. In “Horsemanship in Shakespeare’s Second Tetralogy,” *ELR* 13 (1983), 274–300, Robert N. Watson examines the trajectory of the analogy between good horsemanship and good kingship, finding that its emphasis shifts to the internal self-mastery of the ruler. Joan Hartwig, “Horses and Women in *The Taming of the Shrew*,” *HLQ* 45 (1982), 285–94, traces analogies between horses and women, concluding that Kate is subjected to the “exactitude and repetition” of equine training methods. In contrast, Jeanne Addison Roberts, in “Horses and Hermaphrodites: Metamorphoses in *The Taming of the Shrew*,” in *The Taming of the Shrew: Critical Essays*, ed. Dana E. Aspinall (2002), pp. 58–70, argues that while the play uses Ovidian metamorphoses from the romance tradition, these tend rather to show characters as static, not developing or learning, concluding that the analogy of horse and rider to women and men in marriage is not a “suitable emblem for harmonious marriage.” Peter F. Heaney, “Petruchio’s Horse: Equine and Household Management in the *Taming of the Shrew*,” *EMLS* 4 (1998), 1–12, proposes that an audience steeped in household and equine management theory would immediately have recognized Petruchio as a failure in his training methods.

traces the material, imaginative and ideological connections between bearbaiting and theater, with special attention to images of baiting in *Twelfth Night*.

Marjorie Garber, “Shakespeare’s Dogs,” in *Shakespeare and the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jonathan Abate, Jill Levenson, and Dieter Mehl (1998), pp. 294–313, explores the relationships between dog breeding and bibliographical writing on Shakespeare, concluding that both AKC breed standards and Shakespeare’s canon function as ideal origins, guarantors of “fast-vanishing” humanistic values. Bruce Boehrer, “Shylock and the Rise of the Household Pet: Thinking Social Exclusion in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *SQ* 50 (1999), 152–70, asserts that the bestialization of Shylock conspicuously avoids articulation with contemporary ideas about animal companionship, emphasizing instead the Jew’s economic parasitism; although Shylock resists this unproductive definition of himself, the failure to be economically productive paradoxically allows the assimilation of another Jew, Jessica, into the Christian community, much as pets like lapdogs established their value through their very uselessness.

Dympna Callaghan, “(Un)natural Loving: Swine, Pets, and Flowers in *Venus and Adonis*,” in *Textures of Renaissance Knowledge*, ed. Philippa Berry and Margaret Tudeau-Clayton (2003), pp. 58–78, focuses on bestiality as a touchstone for dangerous or “queer” transformation and confusion. In “Animal Rites: A Reading of *Venus and Adonis*,” *CrSurv* 17 (2005), 1–14, Loraine Fletcher argues that animals in the poem that show an ability to communicate without speaking serve as a foil to Venus and Adonis, who speak but do not communicate, using language (the sole marker of difference between animals and humans in the poem) to lie, cheat, or mislead one another. Gail Kern Paster’s “Melancholy Cats, Lugged Bears, and Early Modern Cosmology: Reading Shakespeare’s Psychological Materialism Across the Species Border,” in *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*, ed. Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson (2004), pp. 113–29, argues that comparisons of Falstaff and Macbeth to cats and bears is best understood in the context of how humoral theory undergirds early modern ideas about animals’ physical attributes. Bruce Boehrer, “Bestial Buggery in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*,” in *The Production of English Renaissance Culture*, ed. David Lee Miller, Sharon O’Dair, and Harold Weber (1994), pp. 123–50, argues that marriage, the social institution at the heart of the play, cannot escape connotations of bestiality, since it is itself based in the fear that humans only provisionally escape their more bestial selves through eternal and vigilant policing.

In “Falstaff and the Culture of the Hunt,” *UTQ* 74 (2005), 729–39, J. Drew Stephen argues that the hunt imagery in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* suggests means to punish a poacher like Falstaff. Jeffrey S. Theis, in “The ‘Ill Kill’d’ Deer: Poaching and Social Order in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*,” *TSLL* 43 (2001), 46–73, suggests that everyday practices like poaching can redefine social custom, allowing Falstaff’s poaching to function as another aspect of escape from social control.


E. John Milton (1608–1674). Karen Edwards locates Milton’s depictions of plants in the context of seventeenth-century scientific methods and discoveries in Milton and the Natural World: Science and Poetry in Paradise Lost (1999). Ken Hiltner, Milton and Ecology (2003), offers a study indebted to “deep ecology,” or the belief that only a humanity grounded in a harmonious relationship with nature can find a healthy present and future in its evolution. Hiltner notes that ecological disaster was already a familiar experience in the seventeenth century, and argues that Milton’s Satan, who defines the mind as place, represents an ecological error, remedied only by deconstructing the dualism of Christian thought and evolving a new earth-conscious version of religious belief. Jeffrey S. Theis, in “The Environmental Ethics of Paradise Lost: Milton’s Exegesis of Genesis 1. 3,” MiltonS 34 (1997), 61–81, focuses on Milton’s adaptation of the Genesis story to argue that there was indeed such a thing as responsible concern for the uses of nature in the English Renaissance. Julie Sanders, “Ecocritical
Readings and the Seventeenth-Century Woodland: Milton’s *Comus* and the Forest of Dean,” *English* 50 (2001), 1–18, advocates a material-historical reading of the poem, in which disruptions to political authority occur in forest settings, associated with carnival riot, enclosure policy, and community responses to royal interventions in local affairs. John R. Knott, “Milton’s Wild Garden,” *SP* 102 (2005), 66–82, challenges the view that Milton’s depiction of wildness and wilderness in *Paradise Lost* is always a negative challenge to order.


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J. Martin Evans reads Paradise Lost in the contexts of travel and discovery literature of its day in Milton’s Imperial Epic: Paradise Lost and the Discourse of Colonialism (1996); if the garden of Eden can be characterized as a colonial outpost of Heaven, Evans argues, then there is a materialist, historical explanation for Eden’s overabundance, which replicates the potentially chaotic, wild excesses of New World landscapes and resources. Diane Kelsey McColley, “Ecology and Empire” in Milton and the Imperial Vision, ed. Balachandra Rajan and Elizabeth Sauer (1999), pp. 112–29, notes that Milton opposes “tyrannical” versions of dominion over nature, challenging the “Nimrods and Mammons of colonization and commodification.” In the same collection, Bruce McLeod, “The ‘Lordly eye’: Milton and the Strategic Geography of Empire,” pp. 48–66, contrasts Milton’s “cartographic imagination” of Satanic, expansionist Orientalism with the religiously valorized need for regulation of space and travel.

F. Andrew Marvell (1621–1678). For Robert Markley, Marvell’s country house poem registers and attempts to influence fears about environmental degradation: “‘Gulfes, Deserts, Precipices, Stone’: Marvell’s ‘Upon Appleton House’


IV. State of Criticism

After nearly two decades of prominence for nineteenth- and twentieth-century critical studies, ecocritical treatments of texts from earlier periods are beginning
to accumulate, generating a new and provocative direction for early modern studies generally, and adding historical nuance to ecocritical theory and argument for the twenty-first century. Renaissance literature has always provided rich material for scholars interested in natural phenomena and human cultivation of natural materials, but in the last two decades these earlier historical and literary treatments of ecologically-oriented topics have been complemented by the more careful theorizing of ecostudies and environmentalism. Early modern scholarship and ecocriticism, however, continue to pose challenges to one another: the recovery of texts is a first step toward recreating Renaissance ideas about nature, but some dimension of the material environment is always resistant to reconstruction; the languages with which early modern readers approach the natural world and its inhabitants do not always translate well; and our own green politics can tend either to erase inconvenient aspects of past ecological thought or to view the past with an overly critical and dismissive eye. In this respect, ecocriticism shares a great deal with early feminism in its encounters with the literary and cultural past.

Works by Robert N. Watson (I), Simon C. Estok (III, B), and Gabriel Egan (III, B) suggests that a positive synergy can emerge from encounters between the historical past and current theory, in which each productively interrogates the other. In well-traveled areas like animal studies, a general consensus has evolved about the fluidity of the boundary between human and animal; yet a degree of debate and diversity flourishes, allowing Erica Fudge (II, B) and Bruce Boehrer (III, B) to occupy relatively contestatory positions. The value of early modern literary culture to politically activist environmentalists is evident in work by Ken Hiltner and Jeffrey Theis (III, E).

Understandably, a new field of criticism first turns to familiar figures like Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, and Marvell, and the potential of these authors is by no means exhausted. However, the conspicuously relevant work of many other writers has not yet been addressed at all: there is consequently a real need for ecocritical readings, for instance, of Philip Sidney and Thomas More, and of dramatic authors beyond Shakespeare. Travel and discovery narratives are as yet an untapped resource, while the impact of ecofeminism in the field is still relatively limited, leaving room for more discussion of writers such as Aemelia Lanyer, Mary Wroth, and Margaret Cavendish, among others. Genres like pastoral, so far overshadowed by ecocritical attention to the georgic, are worthy of reappraisal. Finally, some of the most promising and critically challenging work comes from efforts to reconsider in an ecocritical light historical contexts for land use, farming and husbandry practices, and rural pastimes. Treatises, farming manuals, surveys, and other quotidian cultural production will therefore provide a basis for new perspectives on how early moderns of all classes and regions engaged with their diverse physical environments.

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I. General Studies


II. Studies of Individual Topics

A. Gender

B. Animals
Clark, Anne. Beasts and Bawdy (1975).

C. Gardens, Landscapes, Geography


D. Georgic

Hill, Ordelle G. *The Manor, the Plowman and the Shepherd: Agrarian Themes and Imagery in Late Medieval and Early Renaissance English Literature* (1993).

III. Studies of Individual Writers


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