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Green Worlds and Ecosemiotics

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Introduction

There runs through early literatures in the British Isles a distinctive but not unique trope of overlay landscape that is variously described as the Otherworld or Green World. It occurs in some of the most famous texts from early Ireland and Wales, namely the Ulster Cycle and versions of its Tain Bo Cuailgne, the Acallam na Senorach or Tales of the Elders of Ireland, and the Mabinogi and other Welsh texts. But it also seems to emerge in famous Middle English texts, most notably Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, and as I'll argue here in The Canterbury Tales and Le Morte Darthur, among other sources. Basically the idea of the overlay landscape is a spiritual or in a sense ancestral imaginative landscape, which entwines with the actual physical geographic landscape.

First slides. It parallels in certain ways famous indigenous story-landscapes known to us in modern times, such as the Australian Dreamtime or Ojibway stories of the Great Lakes. But it also reflects biblical accounts and likely emerged from Christian ascetic cosmology in contact with native traditions.

The critic Northrop Frye in the late 1940s identified such overlay landscape in Elizabethan literature as "green world" comedy, pointing especially to Shakespeare's *Midsummer Nights Dream* and the Falstaffian world of the history plays, along with Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.

Frye claimed in typical broad-brush fashion that the "green world" formed a distinctive type of comedy in the Western world, by comparison with Greek Old and New Comedy and Dantean medieval comedy. Of the "green world" Frye wrote that, "The conception of a second world bursts the boundaries of Menandrine comedy" yet without "eternal forms or divine revelation" in any Dantean sense, involving instead "a wonderful contrapuntal intermingling of two orders of existence." In the process, for Frye "the green world suggests an original golden age which the normal world has usurped and which makes us wonder if it is not the normal world that is the real Saturnalia," making "each world seem unreal when seen by light of the other."

I'm going to argue that Frye was right to an extent, but didn't fully understand what he was dealing with because of the more segregated national nature of studies of various literatures and cultures in his time. And I'll suggest that the overlay landscape of the green world not only has medieval roots, but that they afford a distinctively Christian exemplum of an environmental function of literature being studied by scholars today under the new rubric of ecosemiotics. As such I'll propose that this green-world tradition in English literature offers insights into the relation of symbolism and environment, of culture and nature, with particular relevance to our environmental predicaments today on a couple levels. This is all still a preliminary foray for projects I'm working on, so forgive me for thinking aloud with you on all this today.

Celtic Backgrounds

Let's start with so-called Celtic backgrounds to the green world tradition. The early Irish story *Tochmarc Étaíne* ("The Wooing of Étaín"), c. 800, describes a spiritual realm that is entered through portals in Neolithic mounds in the landscape, but also in other texts through islands, springs or encounters in the countryside itself. This "Otherworld," a framework for a number of early Christian Irish and Welsh texts, is always present but not visible to mortals because of Adam's sin, according to the story. The otherworldly figure Mider tells his rediscovered wife of that realm when he sings:

> Bé Find will you go with me
> to a strange land where there is harmony?
> Hair there like primrose,
> color of snow on a smooth body;
> neither mine nor yours there;
> white tooth, dark brow;
> the troop of our hosts gladdens the eye—
> color of foxglove on each cheek.
> As flowers of the plain, pink each neck,
> blackbird's eggs, joy of eye;
> though Mag Fáil be fair to see,
> it is desolate after experiencing Mag Már;
> though fair be the ale of Inis Fáil,
> more confounding that of Tír Már.
> Miraculous of lands, the land of which I tell:
> youth not leading to ancientness there.
> Warm, sweet currents over the land,
> choicest of mead and wine;

outstanding human beings, not disfigured,
procreation without sin or illegality.
We see each one on every side,
And no one sees us;
the shadow of Adam's sin
prevents our being reckoned right.

Likewise the perhaps late-eighth-century story *Immram Brain*, "The Voyage of Bran," tells of

a spiritual realm under the sea, teeming with life that engages the human Bran. It too mingles native

tradition with a biblical sense of Paradise. The sea god sings of it to Bran:

An extraordinary beauty it is for Bran
In his coracle across the clear sea:
but to me in my chariot from a distance
It is a flowery plain on which he rides about.
What is clear sea for the prowed skiff in which Bran is,
That is a delightful plain full of flowers
To me in a chariot of two wheels.
Bran sees multiplicitous waves beating across the clear sea:
I myself see in Mag Mon
Red-headed flowers without blemish.
Sea-horses glisten in summer
As far as glances of Bran's eye traverse:
Blossoms pour forth a stream of honey
In the land of Manannán son of Ler.
The sparkle of the expanses that you go over,
The brightness of the sea, on which you row about,
Yellow and blue-grey-green are spread out,
It is earth that is great.
Speckled salmon leap from the womb
Of the shining sea, on which you look;
They are calves, beautifully colored lambs
At peace without strife . . .
The expanse of the plain, the number of the host,
Beauties shining with bright quality,
A fair stream of silver, stairs of gold,
Bring a welcome at every great feast.
A pleasant game, most delightful,
They play in fair contention,
Men and gentle women under a bush,
Without sin, without crime.
Along the top of a wood has floated
Your coracle across ridges,
There is a beautiful wood with fruit
Under the prow of your little boat.
A wood with blossom and fruit,
On which is the vine's true fragrance,
A wood without decay, without defect,
On which are leaves of golden hue.
We are from the beginning of creation

Without age, without decay of earth-freshness.
We do not expect weakness from decline.
The sin has not come to us.

Both poems differ from the common allegorical trope in Old English poetry (and much Western literature) identifying the sea and wild natural places generally with demonic forces of alienation. Indeed, the portrayal of nature in a number of early Irish texts (and in Welsh texts influenced by them), as embedded within a spiritual overlay landscape, articulates the physical environment as an unobjectifiable process rather than a presence or concept to be grasped and possessed. This occurs on land as well as by sea.

Slide. The Ulster Cycle's climactic text the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (The Cattle Raid of Cooley), whose basic elements developed like the others quoted above c. 800 according to some Celticists, displays a similar overlay landscape. Today in Ireland one can follow a *Táin* trail by car or bike or on foot, following the geography of the mythic epic across Ireland's physical landscape.**Slide.** This is true also of the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi* in Wales, as well as *Culhwch ac Olwen*, thought to be the earliest extant Arthurian tale. Both works can be traced across the geography of Western Britain. Indeed, a popular map from my time in graduate school at Aberstywyth in the *Siop y Pethe*, the town's Welsh-language bookstore, featured a map of both works overlaid fancifully on a map of Wales and environs.

In certain respects aspects of early Irish Christian visual art can be taken as analogous to this trope of overly landscape. **Slide.** The Book of Kells, for example, exhibits what has been called a stereographic effect, as a kind of pop-out in which there is a visual overlay engaging the viewer-participant. In this it functions similarly to the inverse perspective of Byzantine iconography, in which the desired effect is not for the viewer to enter into the picture and possess it with an objectifying gaze, but to engage in relationship with it. Boundaries overlap between words and images, as in the famous Chi-Rho page, just as in the Byzantine iconographic tradition icons are spoken of as written while the Incarnation is described as a thickening of Logos into Icon. The very range of meanings of *logos* in early Christian writings, including word, purpose, reason, story,

discourse, and harmony, invites a spectrum crossing from words through physical images. Indeed, St. Maximus the Confessor in the 7th century described the *logoi* of the *Logos*, or words of the Word, or harmonies of the Harmony, as equitable with divine energies both constituting and redeeming Creation. Thus the notion of the logos itself can become a kind of integrative overlay landscape, a metonymic icon.

Slide. The Saltair na Rann, an important early Irish text involving a poetic account of biblical creation, displays this as well. In it, the winds are identified with colors, which are coordinated by harmonies, which can be paralleled with Maximus' *logoi* or energies. Interestingly, the wind color wheel that can be outlined from the text corresponds with an imaginative geography of Ireland. It places the bright colors in the south of the island, where the text probably emerged, and a color associated with otherworldiness in the southwest from the ocean. The darkest colors are in the north, elsewhere a direction associated both with Satan and geographically with warrior culture as well as harsher weather. Purple is associated with the east of the island, toward the dawn and where Christ would come again.

There is another intricate aspect to this overlay of cosmography and geography, however, which is performatively and personally ascetic in nature. That is that the southern colors correspond with the so-called colors of martyrdom in early Irish tradition, and with a range of colors also associated with ancient universal types of humanity. White is furthest south, associated with the martyrdom of a life foregoing what one loves, as in monasticism; red martyrdom through death is to the southeast again toward the light of Christ; and to the southwest is the martyrdom of *glas*, an Irish color term associated with the sea and sky and otherworldiness, but also with ascetic penitence as practiceable presumably by non-monastics as well as monastics. It is a martyrdom associated with the color of the sea, as of baptism and watery prayer rites practiced by Irish monks, melding into the color of the clouds through which Christ will come again.

Slide. This kind of intricate overlay and entwinement of personal ascetic performativity, geography, and cosmography is also found in the early Welsh *Mabinogi*, which the Celticist John

Carey has argued recently was influenced at its core by Irish textual traditions dating to around the time of the Book of Kells, so in some ways with roots in the same cultural milieu as the core stories of the *Táin Bo Cualinge*. The *Mabinogi* branches were not fully formed probably until the 12th century, though, around the final literary formulation of the *Táin* but sharing some common traditions. The crowning works of the Ulster Cycle and what might be called the Welsh otherworldly poetic tradition, dating back to the reputed works of Taliesin, both emerged in an era of cultural resistance to incoming Norman colonizers around the Irish Sea. Both texts in their overlay landscapes offer a poetic resistance to objectification of the land.

The Four Branches of the *Mabinogi* provide a geographic, comographic and ascetic overlay as well. They alternate in focus from south to north Wales and as mentioned can be traced across a map of Wales today. Yet they also reflect, as I have argued in my book *Strange Beauty*, a melding of native traditions from Irish Sea cultures with popular cosmic biblical symbolism of the four creatures of Ezekiel as developed by St. Gregory the Great in the early Middle Ages.

Slide. Let me follow this example just a bit further. Gregory's popular tetrych design related to the four creatures involved alternation between right hand and left hand, which in Welsh are the same terms as for south and north. The First Branch lines up with the south and the symbol of a man and the Evangelist Matthew, associated with the birth of Jesus and the virtue of Prudence, linked to the lead character Pwyll whose name means Common Sense, while the story is about the birth of Pryderi, meaning care. Then the Second Branch lines up with the North and the symbol of the Ox, the Evangelist Luke, and the virtue of sacrifice, embodied by the character of Bran, and with the Crucifixion. The Third Branch lines up with the South and the symbol of the Lion and the Resurrection, and the virtue of fortitude through composure. The Fourth Branch goes upward to the North and the promise of a united Wales resisting the Normans, identifying with the Ascension and the virtue of Contemplation. Yet the Four Branches are also a very engaging story-geography of Wales as it differentiated itself from Norman England and celebrate with weird humor its ancient Christian past melded with native traditions in the stories.

Contrast the overlay landscapes emphasized in a number of early Welsh and Irish texts with that well-known landscape text of Old English literature, *Beowulf*. Beowulf is a foundational poetic story for Old English culture, I argue, yet it is of course not even set in England. Like Virgil's pastoral *Georgics*, the countryside is not so much an overlay landscape as an allegory of control. Beowulf subdues the Grendelcyn who live in the wilds around the hall, and it is in the hall that there is light and civilization, while the wetlands are described in hell-like terms. In highlighting the distinctiveness of the early Irish poetics of nature in the heritage of Western European culture, medievalist Jennifer Neville observes: "For the Old English poet, the representation of the natural world helps to create the context of helplessness and alienation that motivates the seeking of God. For the Irish poet, the representation of the natural world creates the context of wonder and joy that surrounds the seeking of God."

Indeed, the image of overlay landscape involves, instead of a conceptual grid or matrix of allegory and analogy like the cosmos of Dante's later *Commedia*, a direct engagement of the spiritual with actual geography, as in Chaucer's pilgrimage story. **Slide.** The symbolism is "real" itself, along the lines envisioned by Coleridge's theory of the imagination, an energy rather than an analogy. The supernatural and the natural become entwined, and the landscape becomes in effect an enchanted or living pop-out book, following the aesthetic of the Book of Kells. In the textual iconography of such overlay landscape, the essence of Being as God, guaranteeing the absolute value of the meaning of the beings and non-beings in communicative relationship in the landscape, remains a mystery. **Slide.** But the divine energies, symbolized in John Scottus Eriugena's theophanies, both constitute and redeem the communication that is life in meaning. In this, the nnth-century Hiberno-Latin writer Eriugena is the philosopher of the overlay landscape. He adapts the apophatic theology of Dionysius with its emphasis on theophanic process, melded with the logoi that are energies or hamonies in the cosmography of Maximus the Confessor. The result expresses a pre-Scholastic sense of Creation as not an analogy but living in energies of dynamic an multifaceted relationship. All this prompted the philosopher Peter Hallward to identify Eriugenan views of nature with the bodies with the rhizomic

bodies without organs of Deleuze and Guattari. The relation here between apophatic theology and Deleuzean rhizomes and notions in deep ecology of the self realized in environment suggest possible connections too between deconstruction and ecocriticism in current literary studies. Yet the rhizome in the overlay landscape is also a cosmic tree involving a mystery network of theophanic-energized hierarchy at the same time. The overlapping imagery of colors of martyrdom and colors of the winds helps image this forth. And all this arguably echoes patristic readings of the biblical Creation story, the original overlay landscape as it were.

Biblical and Patristic Backgrounds

The thickening of word into image through a cosmic harmony or song is suggested by another of Eriugena's patristic mentors, Gregory of Nyssa, who referred in his exegesis of the Song of Songs to cosmic music constituting the cosmos. This fits with the range of meanings of *logos* including harmony. If we from this consider the Creation sung into birth in Genesis 1, it is done so in a way that clearly puts the earth front and center. In the chiasmic pattern of the Creation story, the earth is central throughout, and the creation of the sun and the moon climaxes the theme of mirroring reflection in this overlay landscape of Creation. This is also seen in how in the second day the mirroring of the aerial and terrestrial waters parallels the creation of the image and likness of God, the mirroring in effect of God in man. And the Garden of Eden or Paradise lies where the four principal actual rivers of the Near East emerge, according to patristic commentators, namely the Euphrates, Tigris, Nile and Ganges or Danube. To St. Ephraim the Syrian and St. Gregory of Nyssa, Paradise grew on a mountain encompassing the Creation, which offers another archetype to the overlay landscape trope. **Slide.** An early Irish text likewise describes Paradise as lying above the earth. St. John Damascus following the Septuagint's wording considered the Tree of Life in Eden to be the All Tree, as did Eriugena, the *Logos* in whose branches the *logoi* or energies dwell as singing energies, entwining the Creation, as in also the gospel image of Christ as vine entwined with branches. Connecting with the Tree marked real contemplation as communion, rather than the Tree of the Learning of Good and Evil. The lust of power supposedly found by possessing its fruit, by knowing

and conceptualizing and dividing good and evil, marked the objectification of self and the world in a binary of subject and object.

On the contrary, the overlay landscape trope relies on a triadic relationship of symbolism found in the biblical Creation story. **Slide.** There is the Father, He Who Is, beyond not-knowing in apophatic terms. And then there are the persons of the Trinity the Son and the Holy Spirit as His presences, through which and from which the divine energies emerge in the physical landscape. This relies on a non-Augustinian version of the Trinity seen in the original text of the Stowe Missal, a rare early Irish liturgical book, and in Eriugena's writing, and echoed in other early Irish texts. This was not the Augustinian *filioque* emphasis that became essentially dyadic, melding in effect the Father and the Son in an individuality acting upon the Holy Spirit more as object, a binary of archetype and analogy echoed in later medieval thinking about nature. **Slide.** The triadic relational and apophatic emphasis of the theological and symbolic paradigms in early monastic cultures provided a key basis for the overlay landscape as an image of earth. Thus you have the triad of the physical environment of Creation, the text of Genesis' Creation story, and the overlay landscape of Paradise in early texts from around the Irish Sea, which in turn become identified with the physical geography of early Insular Christianity.**Slide.**

A non-Augustinian emphasis in soteriology also provided a background to the Insular overlay landscape trope, connected with biblical traditions and practice. John Cassian, for example, was an important transmitter of desert asceticism to early Western European monasticism, and an influence on early Irish thought as evidenced by accounts of St. Columba among other texts. The focus on the desert as a spiritual sea in the life of St. Antony would be transferred to the literal sea in the islands around the Irish Sea, most notably Britain and Ireland. An emphasis on synergy of grace and works, although labeled semi-Pelagian in Augustinian contexts, marked an apophatic relationality echoed in the overlay landscape's cosmography. In this again divine energies, or the sparkle in Creation as a modern theologian glossed the doctrine, were key. They were the *logoi* or harmonies constituting the essence of each being and guaranteeing its meaning while also being the energies by

which human beings can flow through synergy into theosis or oneness with the activities or energies

of God, according to Maximus, and in, adapted form, Eriugena.

All this again symbolizes from an ecocritical standpoint that the earth cannot be objectified, conceptualized, or possessed. It is in effect a network of information-energy encompassing yet beyond the physical. It is an overlay landscape.

Bringing It Forward—Middle English Examples

Slide. Middle English works such as the anonymous *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, as well as Thomas Malory's return of the continental Arthurian tradition firmly back into an Insular fantasy-history frame, forged the English "green world" literary tradition from earlier influences. Both Chaucer and the Gawain poet drew heavily on earlier Irish Sea motifs of the overlay landscape, Chaucer by shaping an otherworld of stories interwoven with an actual geography in *The Canterbury Tales*, and the anonymous author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* by relating a fantasy realm identified with both nature and magic to actual landscape as well. They did so at a time of cultural upheaval in the wake of the Black Death, reflecting a felt need for experiential aspects of faith related to a retrospectively viewed magical multiplex landscape. Chaucer's probable exposure to Irish traditions of the Otherworld connected with an apparent desire to reimagine an experiential native Christianity in the pre-Norman and pre-Scholastic era, expressed in *The Man of Law's Tale*. The medievalist Rory McTurk suggests that Chaucer's overlay landscape framework for *The Canterbury Tales* as a whole echoed the popular Irish narrative *Acallam na Senórach* ("Tales of the Elders"), which melded Otherworld landscape narratives with St. Patrick's missionary travels around Ireland. McTurk even argues that Chaucer's proto-iambic pentameter verse found a model in Irish traditon as well, just as its beats echo Old English patterns blended with continental syllabic style.

Slide. The famous opening of the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* sets up the work's overlay landscape from the start. Here we have nature in motion and a text that is a map of a journey on earth, very different from the motion and journey of that other great medieval pilgrimage

poem, Dante's *Commedia*, written a few generations earlier in Italy in the Catholic Scholastic tradition. In Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* the landscape is less allegorical and less virtual, and also, taking the work as a whole, seemingly incomplete, ever in process. It is nonetheless an overlay landscape draped across the physical geography of countryside from commercial London to a supposedly spiritual Canterbury that however is never reached, the journey ending apparently in *The Parson's Tale* and Chaucer's retraction. We can trace the route of the pilgrims along an old Roman road from the center of English metropolitan commerce in the waning days of the Anglo-Norman feudal regime, into a province and provincial seat (Kent and Canterbury) whose names derive from an old Celtic British people, to which the papal mission from St. Gregory the Dialogist came in the days before the Norman Conquest and found remnants of earlier British Christianity. There is already implied in the "map" of the story from the start an anti-feudal and anti-colonial movement celebratory of natural landscape and language, and of an earlier age of "saints and scholars" in the islands, along with its invocation of Thomas Beckett as an icon of the claims of the spiritual against the feudal state. The landscape, unlike that of Dante's great work, is not ultimately all about the author's textual avatar. It is about a rollicking Christian muti-logue in the countryside of many voices, including the non-human, in which Chaucer's persona is one among many parodied for the foolishness of binarized subjectivity and objectification, a Bakhtinian echo of what Julia Kristeva has described as the erotic spirituality of the non-Augustinian Trinity.

This psychology of the poem arguably projects an environmental experience, out-of-text and into multiple contexts, at odds with a developing Western sense of discrete individualism exemplified by the high medieval figures of pope, king, and ultimately the Dantean narrator-persona. A. Kent Hieatt noted Chaucer's use of myth to experientially engage or entrap the reader in a kind of empathy aimed against objectification of others or of one's self. We see this in the rogue's gallery of figures in the General Prologue and their tales, which follow from the opening quoted above. But *The Canterbury Tales* as experiential landscape can also be read as ecopoesis, encouraging a transpersonal engagement of the human with the physical environment, evoking an empathy in line with recent

work in mind science on how human beings realizing themselves more ecologically rather than in a discrete individualistic or "genocentric" Neo-Darwinist way.

Let us briefly consider the world as described in *The Canterbury Tales*' opening lines and subsequent connecting stories. We have the cycle of seasons and stars, the time of nature. We have the social time and cycles of mortality and festival of human beings. We have the created eternity of the saints. And we have in the "pricking of corages" by Nature the intimation poetically of the movement of theophanies and divine energies or manifestations in the physical world that are everlasting and beyond even eternity, as in the familiar example for medievals of how the hearts of Jesus' students burned within them when taught by the *logoi* of the Lord, unknown to them, on the road to Emmaus. For Chaucer, as mentioned in the *Parlement of Fowles*, Nature is the "vicar of the Almightie Lord," a figure whom Spenser developed in *The Faerie Queene* (in emulation of Chaucer) as shining forth divine energies with mention of the Transfiguration--probably influenced, as the literary scholar Harold Weatherby suggests, by the poet's exposure to Greek patristic studies while at newly Protestant Cambridge. One way of translating "so priketh hem nature in hir corages" into modern English involves using "sparkles" for "priketh," reminiscent of the already mentioned theological description of the divine energies in nature in Eastern Christian theology as the "sparkle in creation." Here poetically we also see an echo of the four modes of time and non-time of patristic asceticism, reflected from the origins of early literary monasticism around the Irish Sea engaged with native traditions, rather than the eternal present of Augustinian-derived Scholasticism glimpsed in Dante's work. Chaucer's opening suggests a layering of social human time, seasonal cycles of the non-human natural world, the eternity of holy saints who yet are still part of Creation, and also perhaps a suggestion of the uncreated divine energies—a layering common to the earlier Irish Sea Otherworld trope and involving what Edward S. Casey calls activist memory. All of these modes of time and non-time are entwined in the landscape of the text on the road to Canterbury, in a cloud of overlapping stories and voices ending in ascetic repentance with *The Parson's Tale*, rather than a more individualized and triumphal completed passage from hell to heaven.

We also see adaptations of the Otherworld emerge in another famous foundational English poem contemporary to *The Canterbury Tales*, the anonymous *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, involving a similar sense of overlay landscape. In that poem, Sir Gawain's travels are across a mapped geography of Britain, into Wales and ultimately to a Green Chapel that scholars link to folklore about specific sites **[Slide}** near the poet's presumed location (based on linguistic evidence) in northwestern England. And so we also have an overlay of imaginative fantasy with actual terrain and an accompanying subversion of idealized individuality, in the case of the Gawain poet in terms of the deconstruction of Gawain's individualistic knightly character in dialogue with the Otherworld. The *Gawain* poem, written near the Welsh border, features a distinctive combination of plot motifs--of yearly ritual combat and an otherworldly temptress--known from earlier Irish and Welsh sources, as well as a corrupted probably borrowing of the name of the poem's anti-hero Lord Bercilak from an early Irish story. By the end of the poem, the reader can experience a questioning of which world is more real--that of the supposedly historical Arthurian-metropolitan court, whose geography is unclear, or the clearer geography of the Otherworld overlay landscape of the Green Knight, whose message to Sir Gawain, delivered on behalf of a "goddess" of the land, seems to urge the chivalric star to become more grounded and "real," and less ideally objectifying of both himself and of others. The prick of blood is a reminder of the knight's corporeal humanity in common with other people, engaged with a natural landscape that threatens the artificiality of the feudal Arthurian court yet ultimately becomes its healer, and also connects with symbolism of the Feast of the Circumcision of Christ.

While the convention of the changing seasons seen in Chaucer's opening is a commonplace, he as usual reworks sources, including probably an Italian text on the destruction of Troy and, in structure (together with the native Otherworld paradigm), Boccacio's *Decameron*. But the remix stands distinctively within the storytelling mode of Europe's Atlantic archipelago. Thus, unlike the opening's likely adapted source about Troy, springtime culminates in *The Canterbury Tales* not in war but in experiential penitential-redemption, in an actual countryside of which the audience forms a physical

part. This is akin to the combined punning references to the dynamic Sabbaoth (Lord of hosts" and Sabbath's rest) at the end of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*—a poetic intersection of immanence and transcendence "inhabiting the earth."

In Chaucer's opening to the General Prologue, the mention of the zodiac in particular, the Ram in his half course, together with the juices of spring that seem to be flowing through all, all suggest Jeffrey Cohen's comparison of medieval notions of astrology and the bodily humors to the postmodern environmental notion of "bodies without organs." That term for non-organismic bodies comes from the writings of Deleuze and Guattari, and involves virtual realities that in their "geo-philosophy" embody a kind of ecological connectivity spanning physical immanence and bodily cultural effects--potentially a kind of eco-semiosphere, or culture of nature, based on information-energy familiar also from ecosemiotics and recent scientific theorizing, over-riding Western binaries of subject and object. While in a secular framework, the geo-philosophy or ecosophy of Deleuze and Guattari nonetheless provides as Hallward notes a contemporary vocabulary for describing in current environmental terms Eriugena's theophanic experience of nature, and thus the effect of experiencing Creation itself as an archipelago in desert and early Irish Sea Christian tradition. Eriugena uses clouds as an image of the theophanic effect of divine energies. He describes these clouds as engaging human imagination in synergy with those energies for an holistic salvation through *theosis* that includes the cosmic component of a return of Creation to God.

In light of early Irish monastic traditions, Europe's Atlantic archipelago itself could be considered such a Christian "body without organs," or in more patristically-related terminology, an iconographic landscape of theophanic energies in Creation. In his essay "Desert Islands," Gilles Deleuze discusses how the geological "double movement" of islands, both pulling away and recreating themselves, parallels human engagement with them imaginatively: Is an archipelago sea or land primarily, imagined or physical? A collective cultural imagination, through rites and mythology, in Deleuze's view could produce imaginary identity with islands in a way that "geography and the imagination would be one." Later he and Félix Guattari discussed how the northeastern Atlantic

archipelago in particular involved "a plane of immanence as a movable and moving ground… an archipelagian world where [inhabitants] are happy to pitch their tents from island to island and over the sea… nomadizing the old Greek earth, broken up, fractalized, and extended to the entire universe." In such a geo-cultural archipelago, they argue, the landscape sees, much as an icon in effect looks out at its venerator in Byzantine tradition, an effect paralleled in art and culture derivative of the early Irish Sea zone, in which landscape looks out on us (and we in a sense look out from within it) rather than cueing us to internalize and objectify it. But again the Insular overlay landscape is in effect a rhizomic cosmic tree or gospel vine, with an element of transcendence guaranteeing the absolute meaning of the communication of beings.

Elizabethan and Modern Reflections

As mentioned, Northrop Frye 60 years ago traced the green world through Elizabethan texts, particularly *The Faerie Queene* and *Midsummer Nights Dream* but also including Falstaff's realm in the Shakespearean canon and Robin Hood. I won't dwell on those here, except to mention that a key intermediary chronologically, and a link to further future efforts, was Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. The core of the Grail story Malory adapted from French romances traced back to Irish Otherworld literary cultre circa 800. Malory took the Arthurian romances and rehistoricized in Britain in his narrative style and its context in the Wars of the Roses. Edmund Burke's sublime and Samuel Coleridge's theory of the imagination arguably rejuvenated the overlay trope, reflected in Macpherson's influential Ossian poems and Gothic literature, as well as in the nature poetry of the Lake District and Coleridge's West Country, the work of Sir Walter Scott and Rudyard Kipling's Puck stories in particular. Coleridge found a direct source and support for his Romantic theory of the imagination in Eriugena. English Gothic literature influenced Dostoevsky's fantastic realism and the overlay landscape found parallels in James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales, Washington Irving's stories of the Hudson Valley, Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County (a.k.a. Delaware County, Miss.) and the magical realism of Latin America. J.R.R. Tolkien's and C.S. Lewis' twentieth-century fantasy most directly and most famously carried on the Insular green world tradition by close

associations with geography. Tolkien's Middle-earth set in Europe before the Ice Age can be overlain

on a map of modern Europe. Likewise Lewis' Narnian mountains match up with those of his native

County Down and Narnia reveals itself by the end of the series to be geographically contiguous with

England and the Earth. By contrast, Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials series, analogous to the

New Atheism of Richard Dawkins, presents multiple worlds not clearly linked to earth, departing

from the green-world tradition. Stephen Hawking is a spokesman for this new anti-green world

approach, in advocating a disposable earth view. We have messed up the planet so badly, he says, we

must colonize others to replicate ourselves now elsewhere.

Slide. Yet what physics today suggesting of multiple worlds in a multiverse can inform

ecocritciism, in the same way that deconstruction as an approach to reading can do so, if the

emphasis of bothon fluid process of meaning with engages with the physical environment and

embodied experience. I'll conclude by suggesting how ecosemiotics can help do that, and in the

process also suggest an environmental function of literature.

Ecosemiotics and Relevance Today

Slide. Ecosemiotics is the study of the relation between culture and nature that emerged

from biosemiotics. Biosemiotics is the study of the making of meaning between species in biological

terms, such as a bee and a flower. Both fields emerged in the late 20th century in the Baltic region of

Europe, based on earlier Baltic biological work, particularly by Jakob von Uexküll, **[Slide]** who

pioneered a view of the meaningful environment of an organism, and of a species, and of ecological

communities. His terms are known under different labels in the West today often. They grew out of

a certain Eastern European skepticism of Darwinian theory as a socially influenced paradigm of

Western individualism and antropocentrism, which was paralleled in America by the work of

Gregory Bateson and Lynn Margulis among others. Ecosemiotics extended this to examine the

environmental function of narrative, poetry and human symbolism and meaning-making generally.

One reason that the Baltic was a fertile field for these studies was the existence in Denmark and

Estonia in particular of small longstanding human folk cultures in close symbiotic relationships with ecosystems such as Estonian wooded meadows.

Yet the development of ecosemiotics owed much to a rediscovery by Baltic scholars of an American philosopher who is regarded by many European academics as America's greatest philospher, although he is almost unknown today among Americans at large, namely Charles Sanders Peirce. **Slide.** Peirce was the godfather of American Pragmatism, and combined in his work aspects of Romanticism, Judaeo-Christian influence, and according to philosopher Scott Pratt aspects of early American philosophy influenced by some key values of Northeastern American Indian culture. Peirce also was a semiotician, who unlike De Saussure developed a triadic rather than a dyadic model for the making of meaning.

For Peirce, it was not the arbitrary and internalized Saussurean binary of signified and signifier that was important, but a triad of Sign, Object, and Interpretant that extended the engagement of the making of meaning in a sign to the exernal world potentially. In Peirce's triad, Sign could be text, Object could be environment, and Interpretant could be a landscape tradition encompassing author and reader. Thus we might have a text like the *Mabinogi*, an object-environment like the physical geography of Wales, and an interpretant as the green world or otherworld landscape tradition of Wales. **Slide.** The present-day Estonian ecosemiotician Timo Maran has expanded on this by describing the idea of a nature-text, a text that bleeds off the page between environment or context and text. He describes the elements of a nature-text as text, environment, author and reader, the last two encompassing Peirce's notion of the Intepretant. The Estonian scholar Juri Lotman earlier coined the term semiosphere to refer to the bubble of meaning of each organism, species and ecological community, bubbles of meaning which often overlap in regional ecosystems to form what I have called an ecosemiosphere.

Ecopoesis as advanced recently by some writers involves a linking through creative endeavor of physical and cultural worlds of meanings. Jonathan Bate has defined it as that "which may effect an imaginative reunification of [the worlds of] mind and nature." It is also a term used in technical

sciences to describe the physical process of reshaping an ecosystem, as in ecological restoration of wetlands for example. Ecopoetics following this can be described as that which shapes and gives meaning to the physical world and our experience of time. It reflects Coleridge's notion of the imagination as emanating from God, the role of the human subcreator in the image of the Creator following Tolkien's model of fantasy. Yet it also can be described in phenomenological terms, following Martin Heidegger's description of the poetics of place as event. **Slide.** Heidegger, whose work was formative for modern environmental philosophy, described a place-event as a fourfold of earth, sky, mortals, and immortals. Heidegger's metaphoric fourfold can be paralleled to Maran's nature-text. The earth is the environment, the sky as that which articulates the earth can be seen as text, immortals as the authors of the text, and mortals as the readers. For Heidegger, the fourfold articulated phusis, the experience of nature as simultaneously hidden and revealing, that which cannot be possessed, conceptualized or objectified, which in short is exemplified by the Insular overlay landscape tradition. The parallels between both modern deep ecology and traditional notions in many cultures of earth as Creation thus become apparent.

Understanding ecopoesis and ecosemiotics helps us today to appreciate the environmental function of narrative and poetics, and the key role of these in ecological restoration. **Slide.** In the Chicago area, for example, the re-imagination and re-articulation of oak savannah prairie has resulted in large-scale restoration projects. Scientists and volunteers have researched and adapted accounts of Indian fire management, and early pioneer and settler accounts of native plant ecosystems. Such efforts have become the center of new narratives of community involving thousands of volunteers. Walking into restored oak groves one also senses the link between biosemiotics and ecosemiotics seen by Estonian scholars in their wooded meadows. Areas that had become dominated by less diverse alien species now flourish in restored Chicago-area savannas with a much richer diversity of wildflowers, birds, and wildlife than before, in landscapes more integrated with human community. **Slide.** Likewise the overlay landscape of the Romantic poets in the Lake District and of James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales at the headwaters of the Susquehanna River have helped

inspire conservation and restoration projects by giving cultural meaning to landscape and place. The entire main corridor of the Susquehanna River is under consideration as a national historic river corridor by the National Park Service as a result of research into Native American and early American literary history of the river that has been led by a team at my university, inspired by this model of overlay landscape.

The historian Lynn White famously argued that the biblical Genesis was the source of the West's environmental problems. Study of medieval overlay landscapes, inspired by Genesis, indicates that this is a mistake. In putting together the proposal for the Susquehanna national corridor, a group of us met with the Tadadaho or leader of the Iroquois Confederacy, Sid Hill. He said surprisingly to us that the source of America's environmental problems was the separation of church and state. By which he explained that he meant the lack of traditional stories of the land, of overlay landscapes, a geography of desire that is relational rather than possessive, a geography of the imagination. **Slide.** I'll end with this quote from the Narnia series, a classic example of overlay landscape in literature, again based partly on C.S. Lewis' imaginative geography of Ireland and England. The quote is from Aslan, who serves as a Christ symbol in the book as a religious myth, but also on a level of fairy tale as a symbol of nature as not objectifiable as phusis, and sums up the environmental function of the literary otherworld as a generator of empathy for other beings. "This was the very reason that you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me [*phusis*] here a little [on Narnia] you may know me [*phusis*] better there [in your world]."
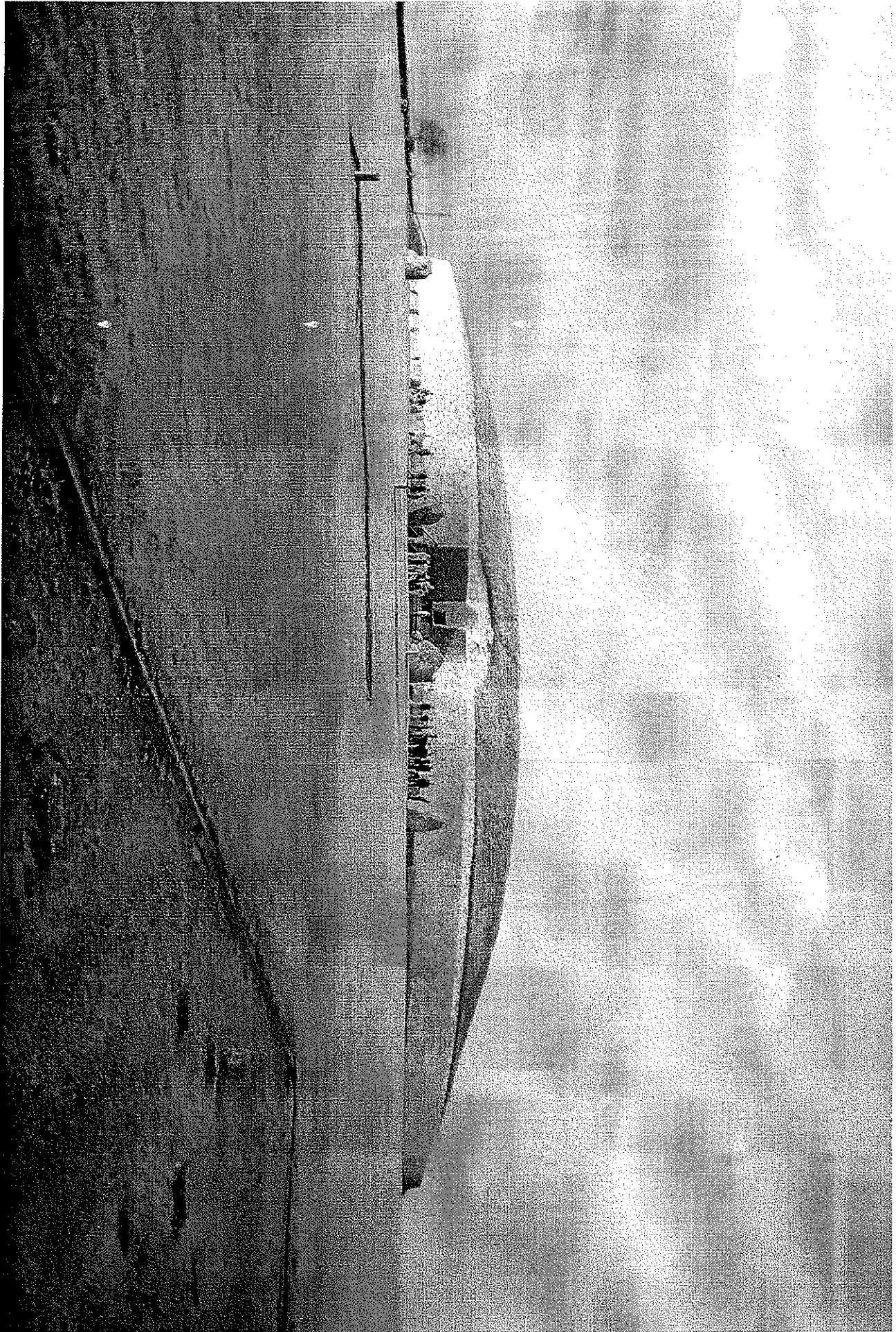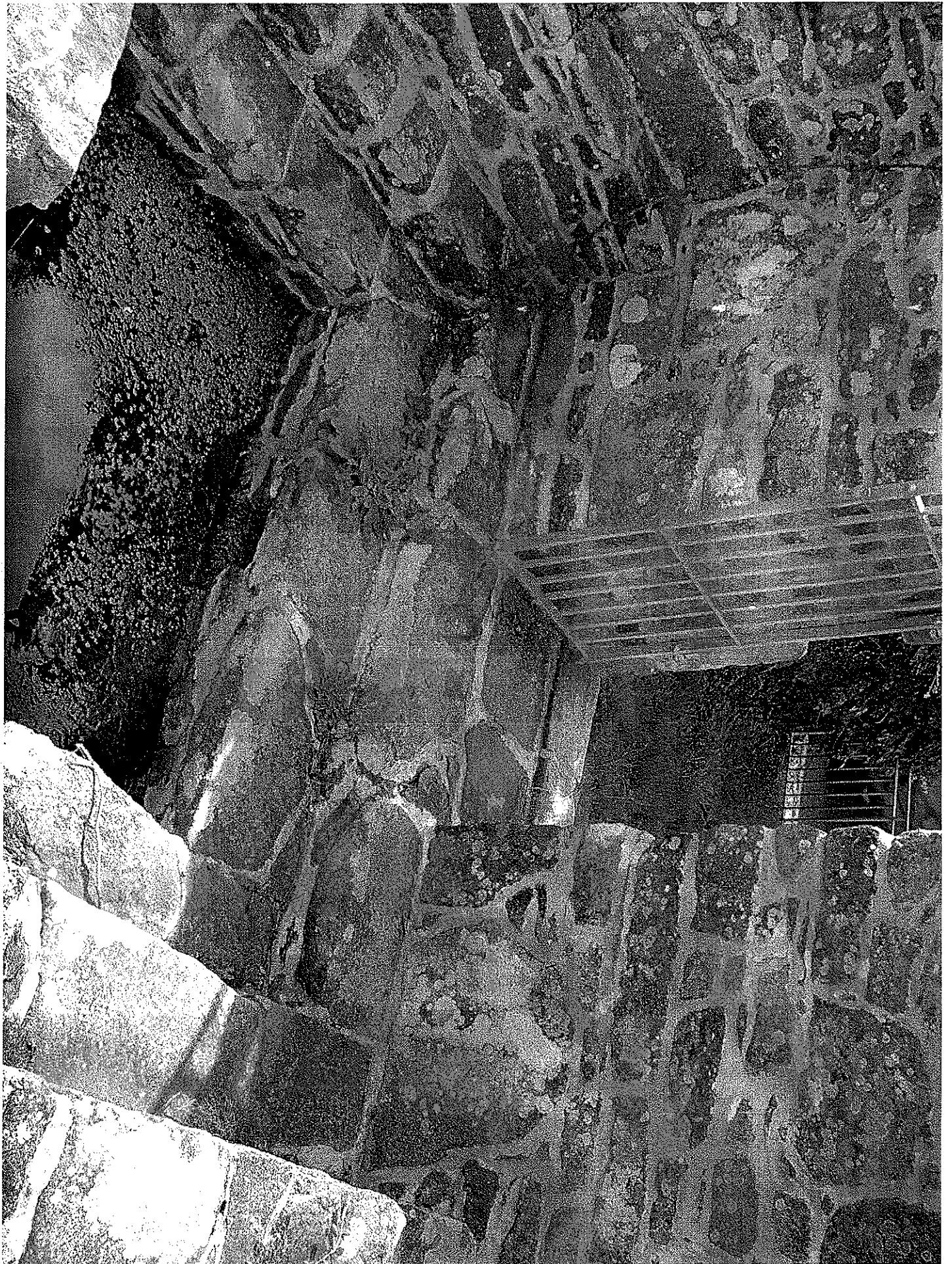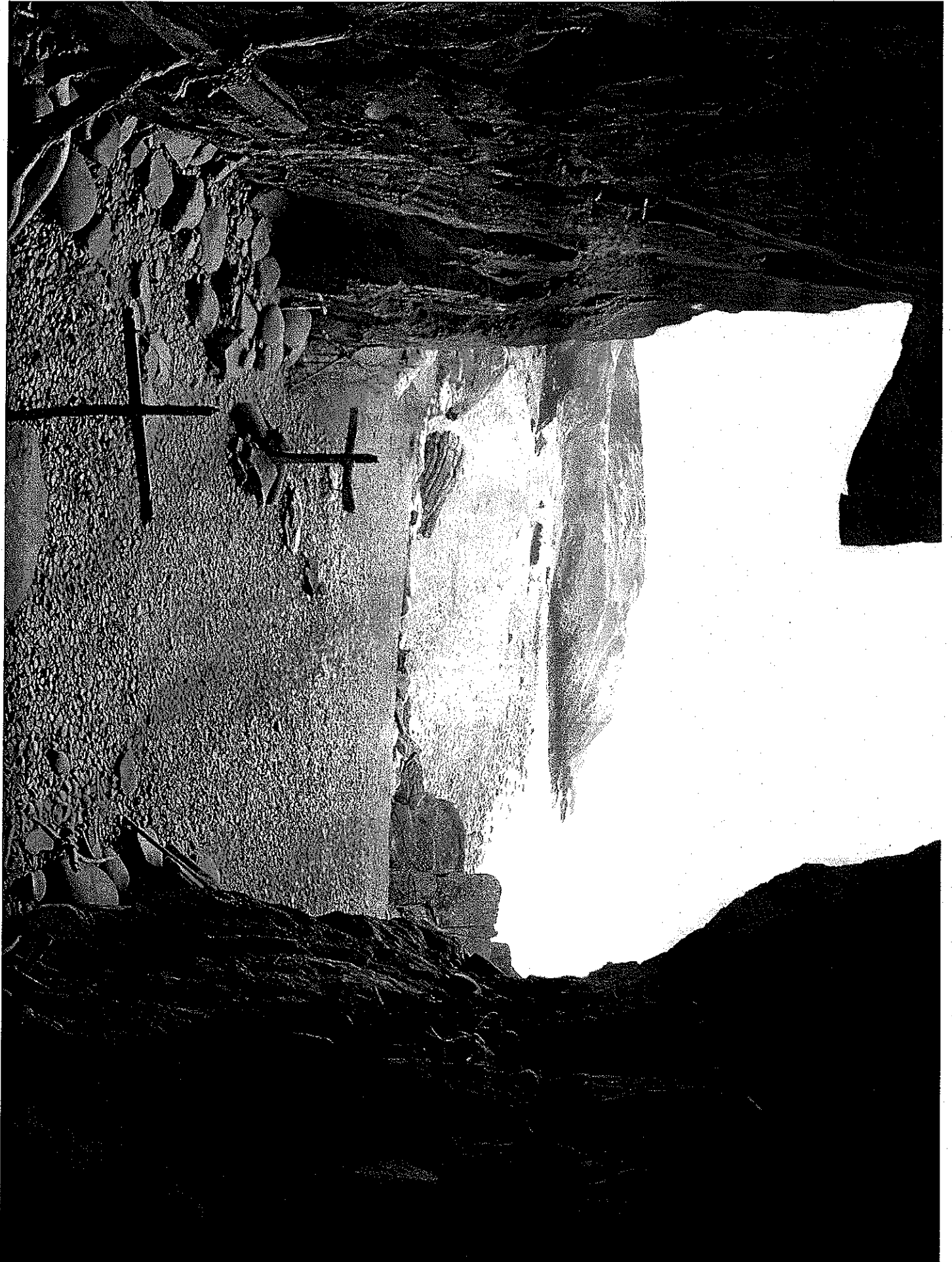
Immram Brain, c. 800

An extraordinary beauty it is for Bran in his coracle across the clear sea: but to me in my chariot from a distance it is a flowery plain on which he rides about. What is clear sea for the prowed skiff in which Bran is, that is a delightful plain full of flowers to me in a chariot of two wheels....The sparkle of the expanses that you go over, the brightness of the sea, on which you row about, yellow and blue-grey-green are spread out, it is earth that is great. Speckled salmon leap from the womb of the shining sea, on which you look; they are calves, beautifully colored lambs at peace without strife . . . The expanse of the plain, the number of the host, beauties shining with bright quality....A pleasant game, most delightful, they play in fair contention, men and gentle women under a bush, without sin, without crime. Along the top of a wood has floated your coracle across ridges, there is a beautiful wood with fruit under the prow of your little boat. A wood with blossom and fruit, on which is the vine's true fragrance...We are from the beginning of creation without age, without decay of earth-freshness. we do not expect weakness from decline. The sin has not come to us.

Tochmarc Étaíne, c. 800

Bé Find will you go with me
to a strange land where there is harmony?
Hair there like primrose,
color of snow on a smooth body;

neither mine nor yours there;
white tooth, dark brow;
the troop of our hosts gladdens the eye—
color of foxglove on each cheek.

As flowers of the plain, pink each neck,
blackbird's eggs, joy of eye;
though Mag Fáil be fair to see,
it is desolate after experiencing Mag Már;

though fair be the ale of Inis Fáil,
more confounding that of Tír Már.
Miraculous of lands, the land of which I tell:
youth not leading to ancientness there.

Warm, sweet currents over the land,
choicest of mead and wine;
outstanding human beings, not disfigured,
procreation without sin or illegality.

We see each one on every side,
And no one sees us;
the shadow of Adam's sin
prevents our being reckoned right.

Táin Bo Cuailnge (extant versions 12th century; literary origins c. 800?)
Overlay landscape, Ireland

The Four Branches of the Mabinogi, c. early 12th century:
Overlay landscape, Wales
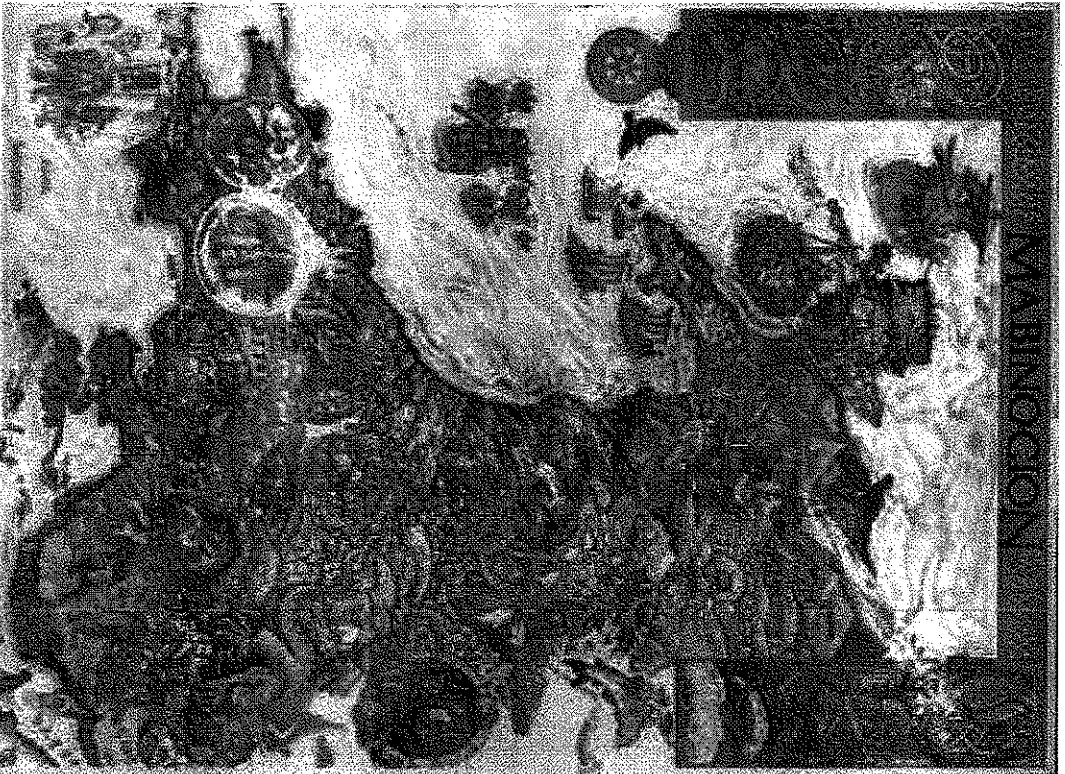
Inverse/"stereographic" perspective of early medieval Logos-icons
(Mount Sinai, c. 6th century/Iona, Scotland (?), c. 800)
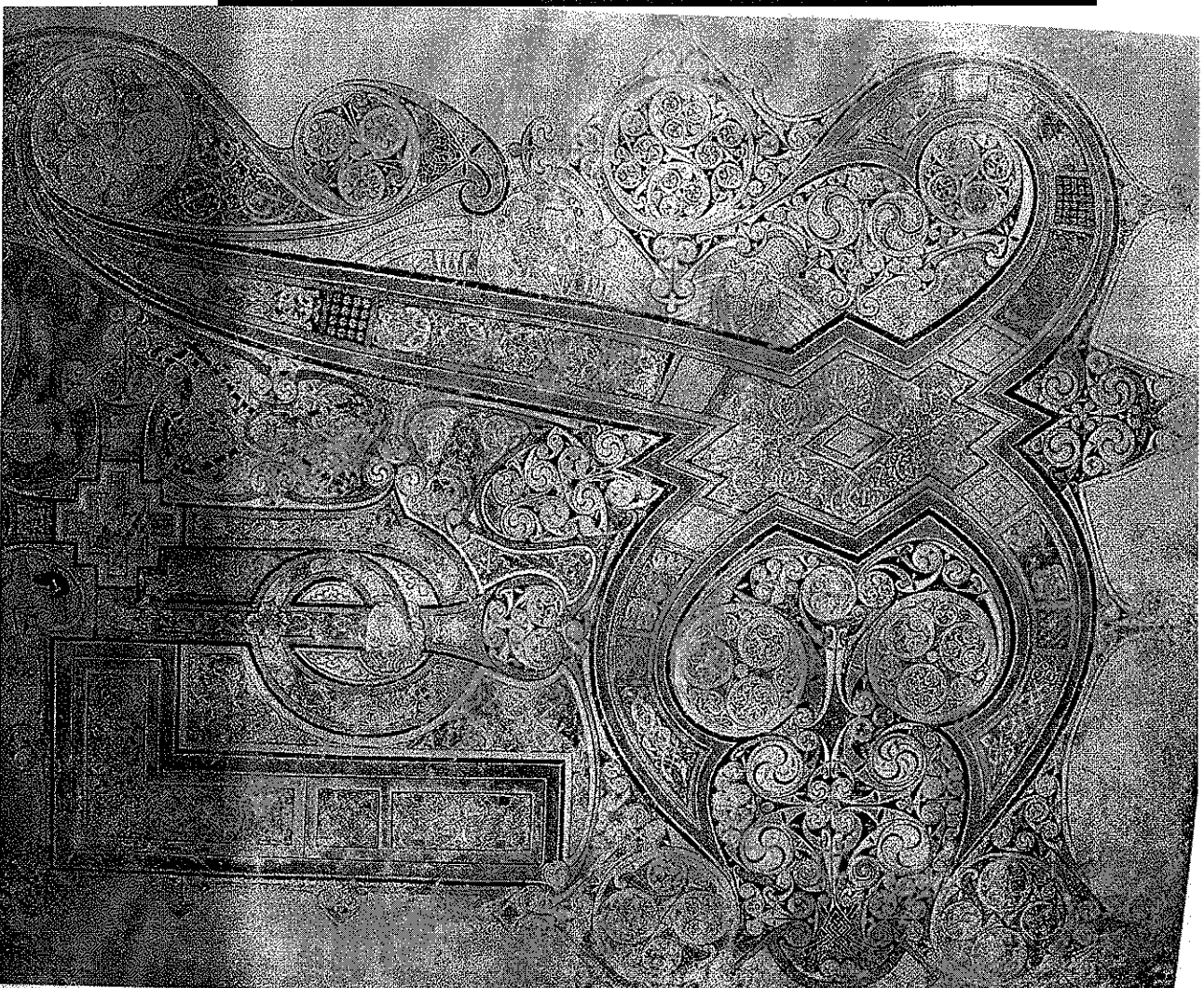
Irish Colors of the Winds (Saltair Na Rann c. 9th cent.)

NORTH

grey

jet

black

dark

piebald

WEST dun

green

glas (sea)

white — red

purple EAST

yellow

(Otherworld)

SOUTH

(Colors of Martyrdom)
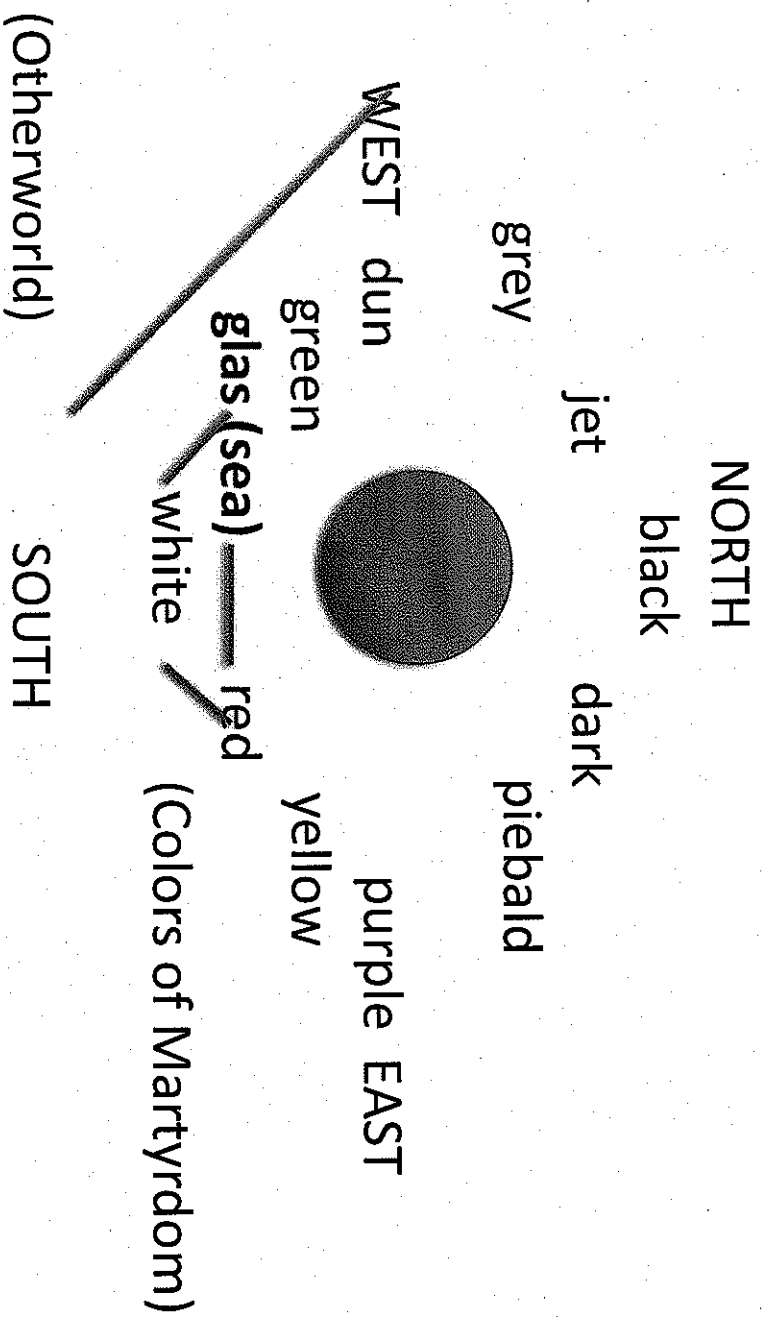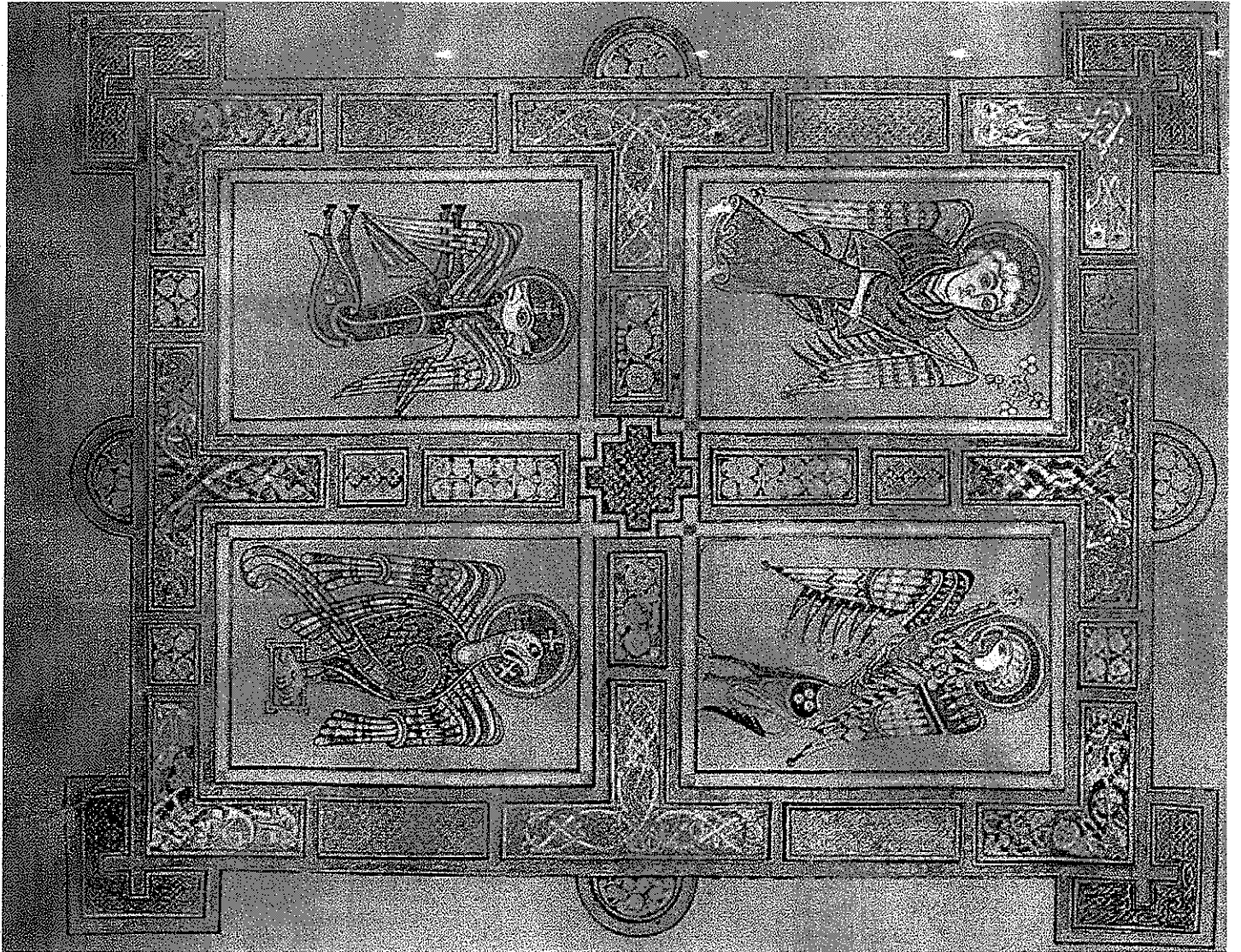
The Four Branches:

Pwyll. South. Birth of Pryderi. "care," to title character Pwyll, "common sense"

Branwen. North. Sacrificial death of Bran.

Manawydan. South. Resurrection of the land. Fortitude of Manawydan.

Math. North and "up" (unifying Wales from the north?). Ascension of Lleu.

Tetrych of Evangelists/Ezekiel's Creatures (Gregory the Great):

Man. "Right hand" (South). Incarnation. Prudence.

Ox. "Left hand" (North). Crucifixion. Sacrifice.

Lion. "Right hand" (South). Resurrection. Fortitude with Composure.

Eagle. "Up." Ascension. Contemplation.
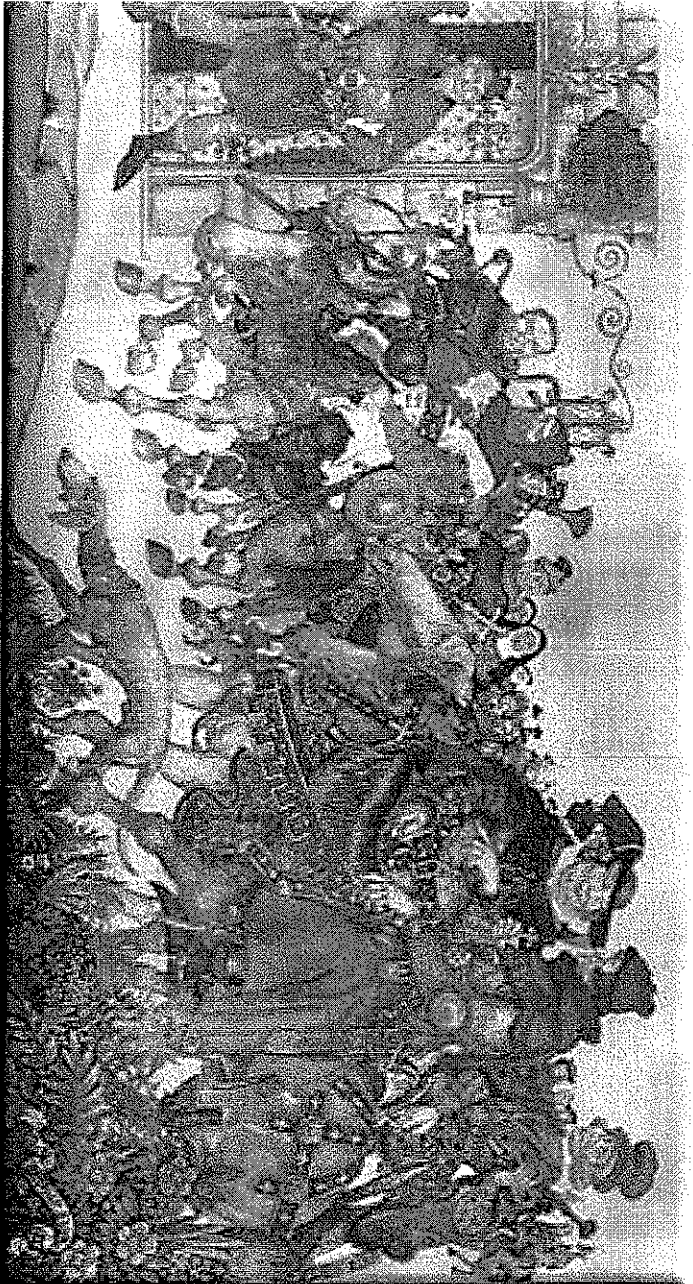
Chaucer and Dante's pilgrimage tales
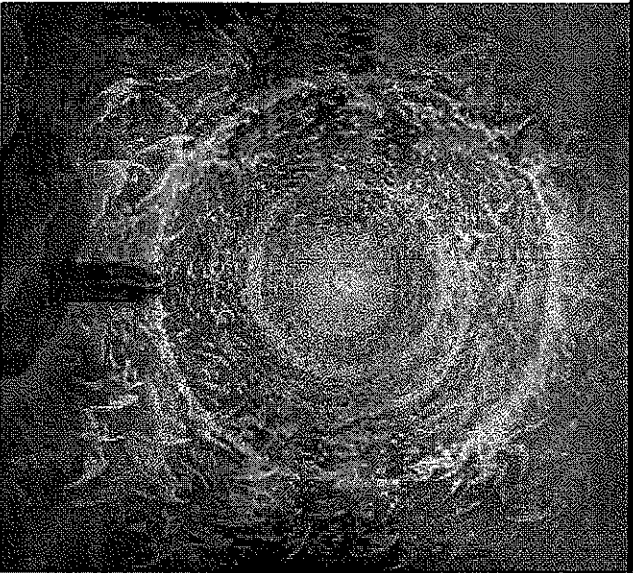
Patristic Christian "Pansemiotics"

apophatic theology/cosmology= essence is unknowable, we know/experience energies

Maximus the Confessor and texts attributed to **Dionysius the Areopagite:**

Nature as the *logoi* (plural) of the *Logos*

logos=word, purpose, reason, harmony, discourse, story, relationship, ratio, ground, idea, thought, argument, account, narrative; phusis?

(Maximus identified the *logoi* of creation with uncreated divine energies;
Dionysius described as "willings")
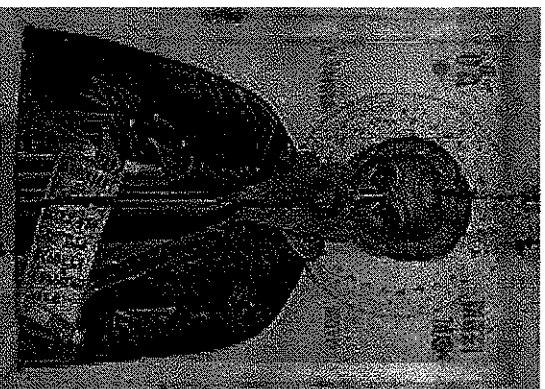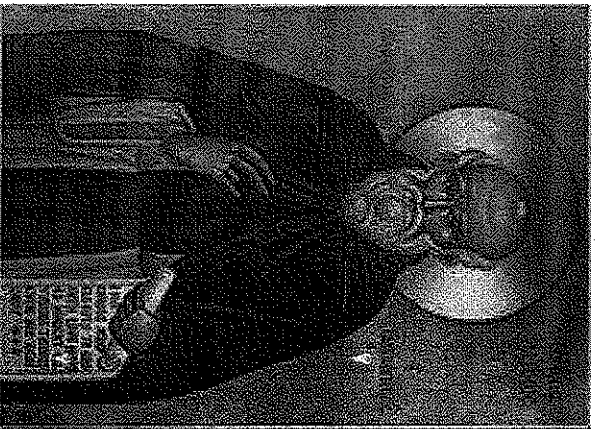
Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of the "desert fathers," Eriugena, original Irish Stowe Missal)

Father
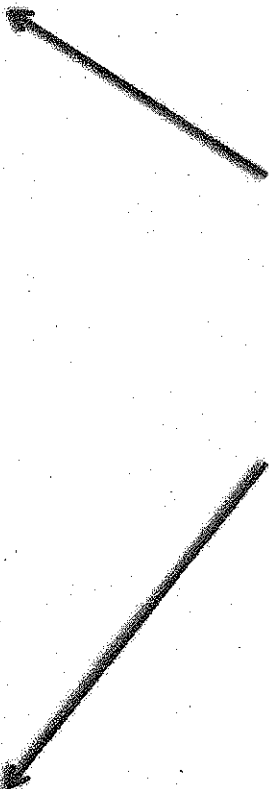
Holy Spirit (proceeding) ←→ Son (begotten)

Logoi as uncreated energies (grace) of the divine

Filoque ("Augustinian") Trinitarian Formula (emphasized in developing medieval Christianity in the West)

[Father   Son]

←

Holy Spirit

Logoi as archetypal ideas in God's mind, centered in the Father-Son, with created grace.
More emphasized dialectic of grace vs. nature.

LONDON

And forth we riden a litel moore than paas
Unto the Wateryng of Seint Thomas.

Southwark

St. Thomas Watering

Deptford

Greenwich
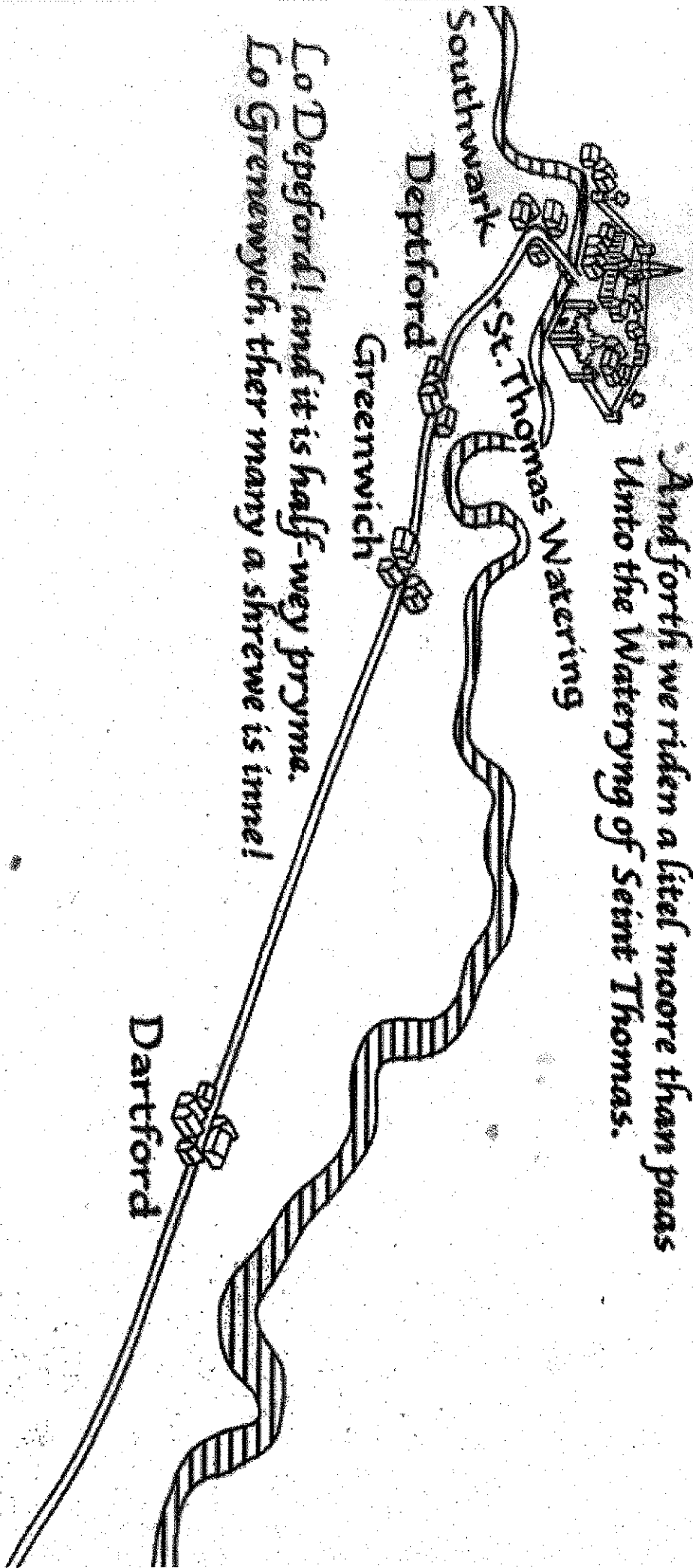
Lo Depford! and it is half-wey pryme.
Lo Grenewych, ther many a shrewe is inne!

Dartford

Lo, Rouchestre stant heer]

K E N T

R. Medway
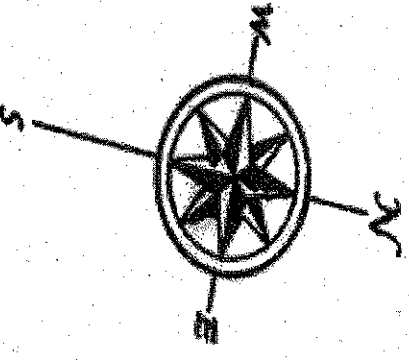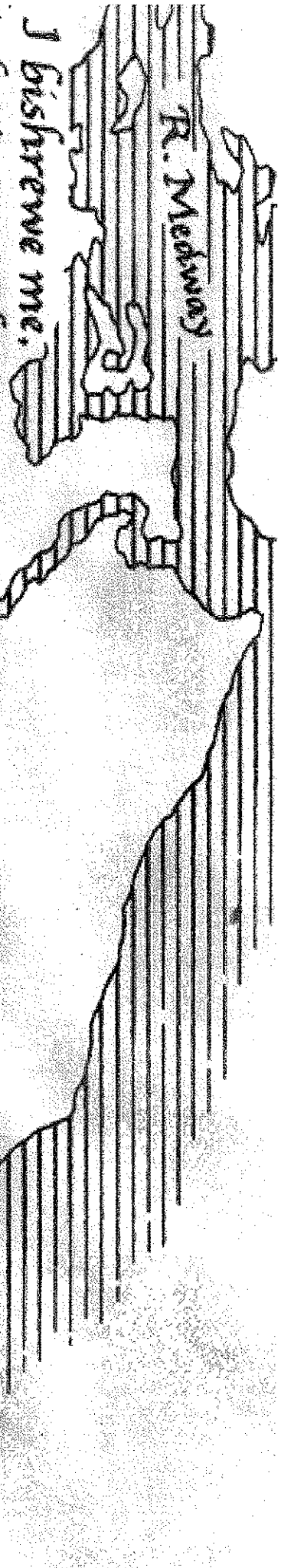
I bishrewe me,
tales two or thre
come to Sidyngborne.

doon;
almoost at towne.

Sires, now in the morwe-tyde
[youre hostelrie] saugh yow ryde.

At Boghton under Blee us gan atake
A man that clothed was in clothes blake.

Woot ye nat where ther stant a litel town
Which that ycleped is Bobbe-up-and-doun,
Under the Blee, in Caunterbury Weye?

Sittingbourne

Ospringe

Boughton-under-Blee

Harbledown

CANTERBURY

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veine in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour,
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tender croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halve course yronne,
And smale foweles maken melodye,
That slepen al the night with open eye,
So priketh hem nature in hir corages,
Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
To ferne halwes, kouthe in sundry londes;
And specially from every shires ende
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,
The holy blissful martyr for to seke
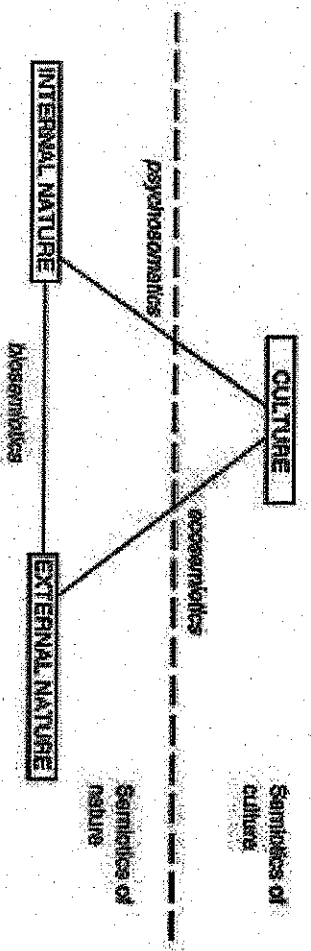That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.
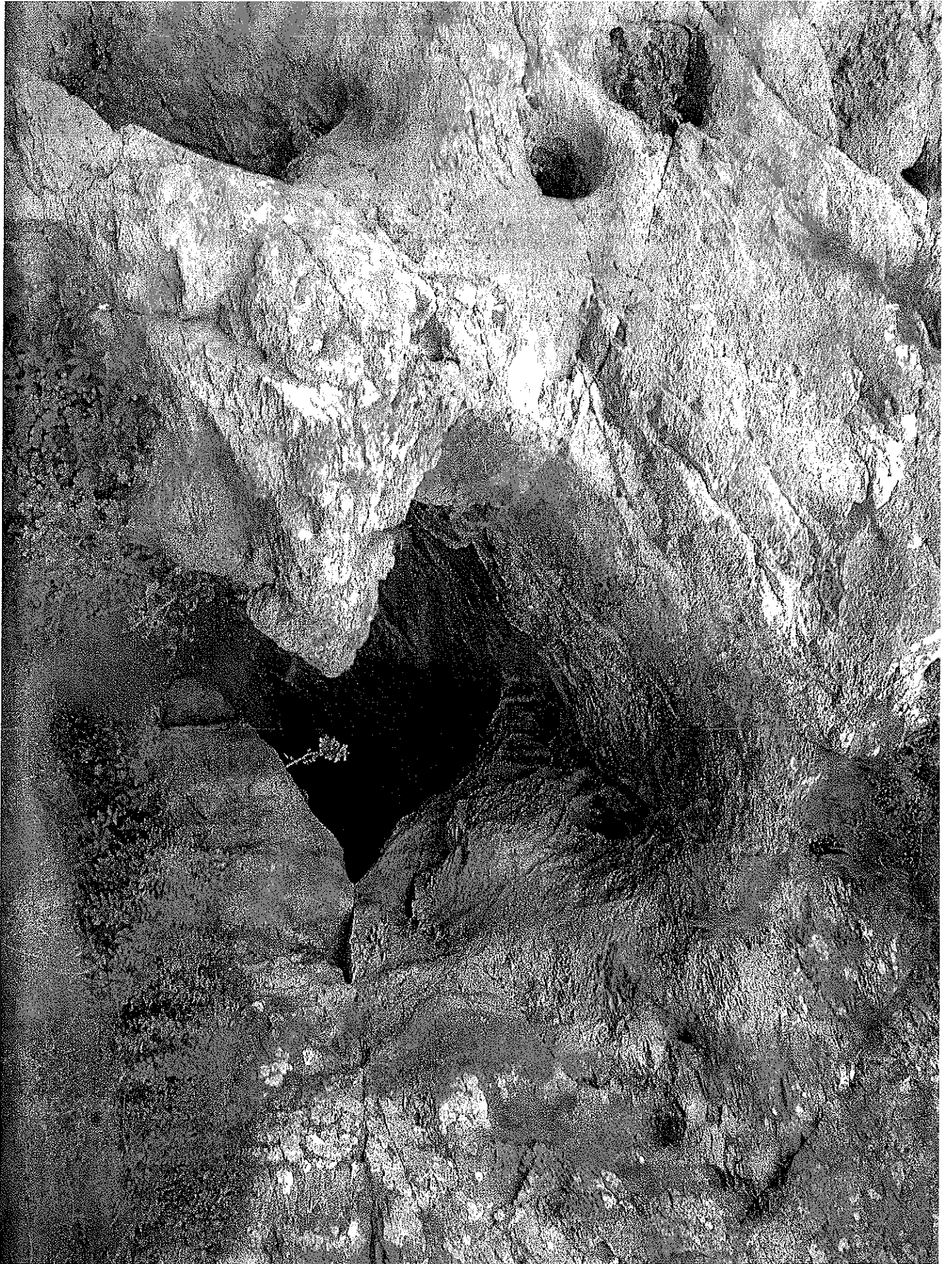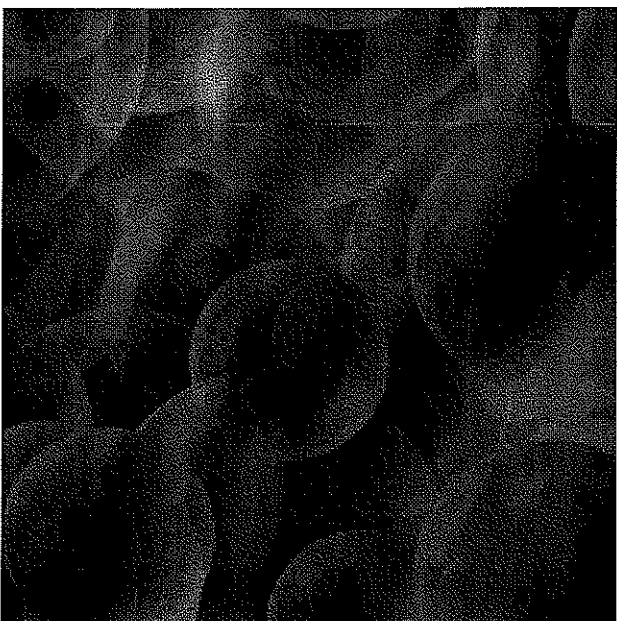
Physicist Brian Greene and "multiverse"/ "many worlds" theories of physics (*The Hidden Reality: Parallel Universes and the Deep Laws of the Cosmos*, 2011)

Ecosemiotics—cultural side of biosemiotics, relation of nature and culture

(chart from Kalevi Kull)

"...all living organisms interpret many of the signs about them [but] the experimental, speculative technique made available by speech would seem to single out the human species as the only one possessing an equipment for going beyond the criticism of experience to a criticism of criticism."

--Kenneth Burke, "All Living Things are Critics"

Innenwelt and Umwelt→
(Jakob von Uexküll c. 1910)
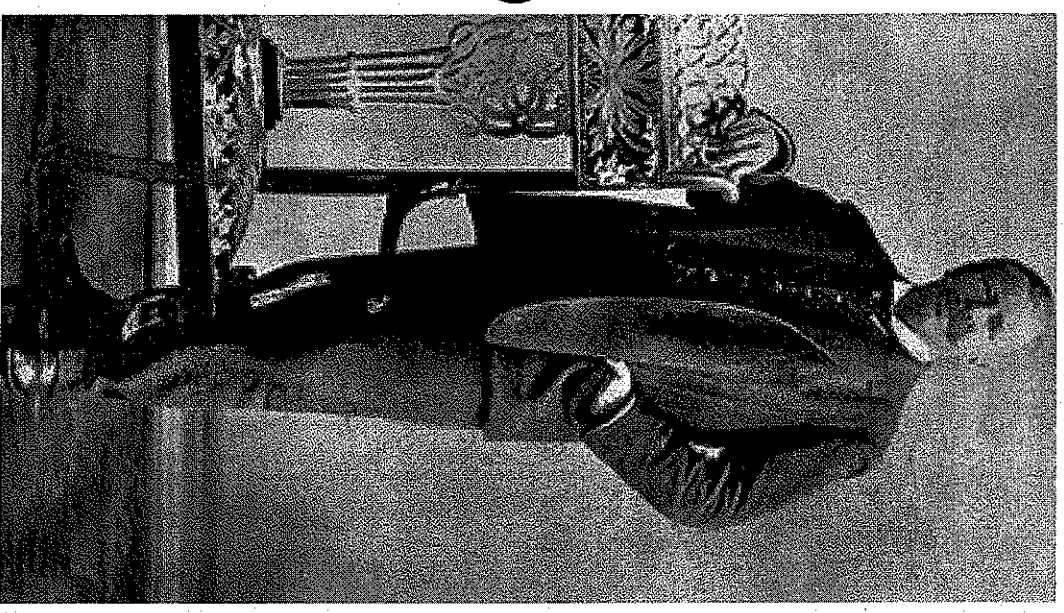
←autopoiesis and ecopoiesis/ecopoesis
(Evan Thompson, 2010)

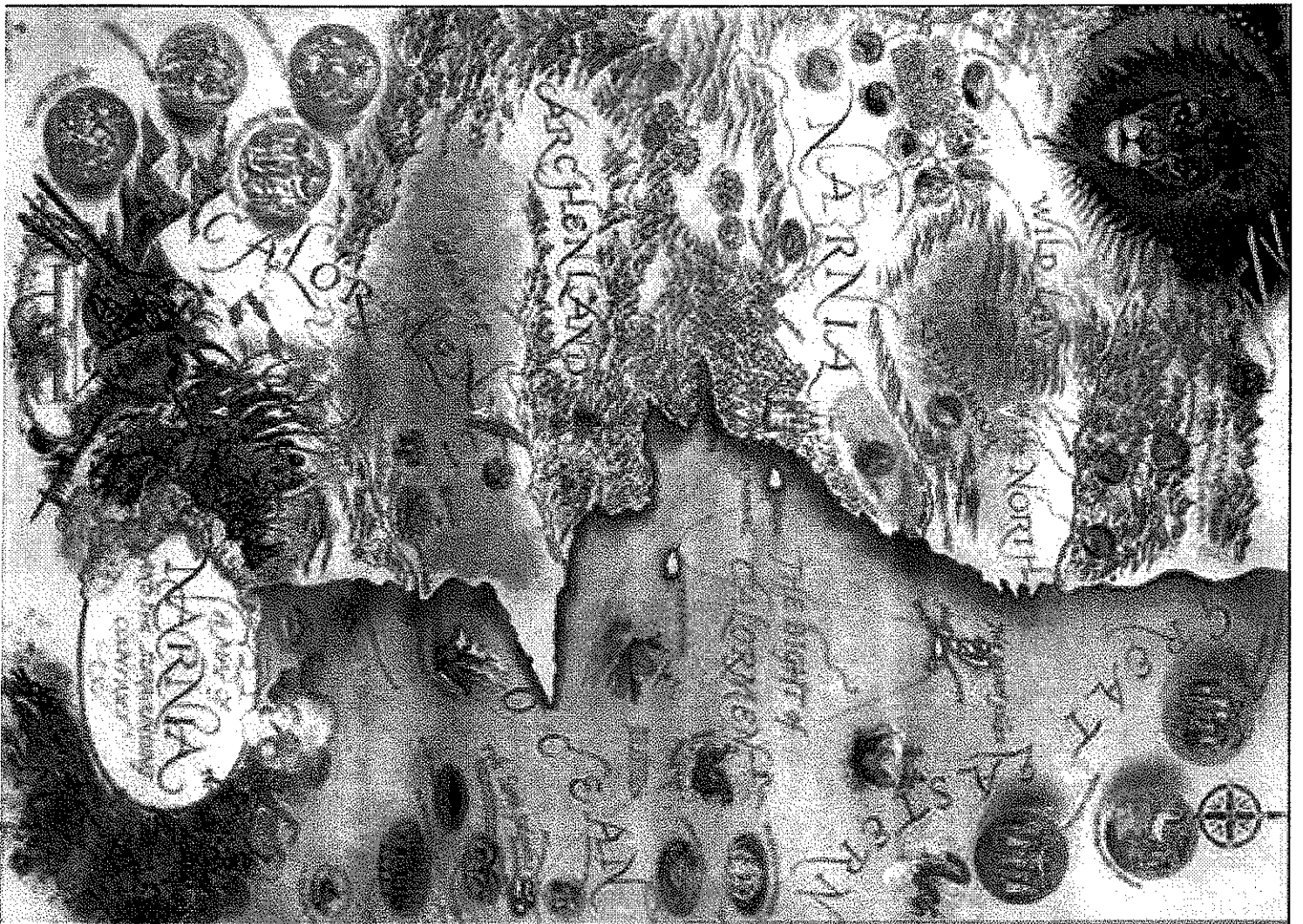MIND LIFE

C.S. Peirce:

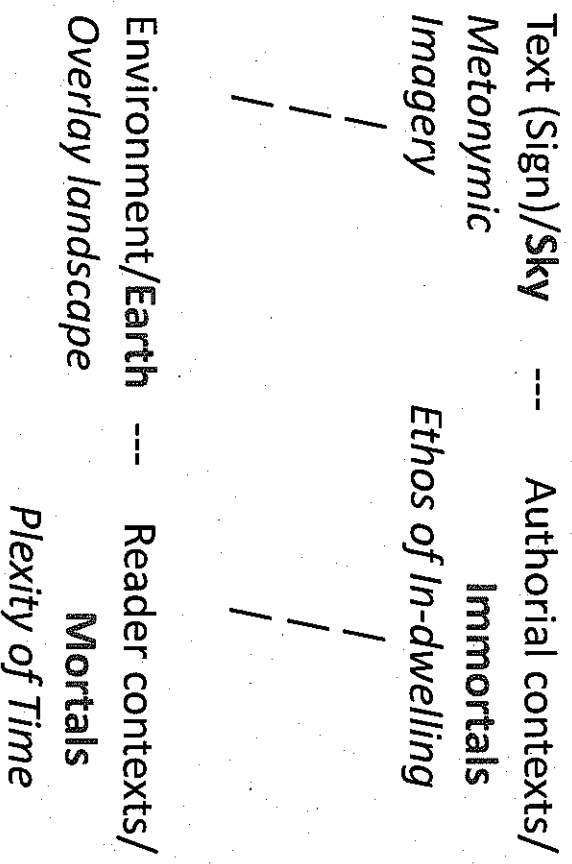Sign ---- Object
    \   /
  Interpretant

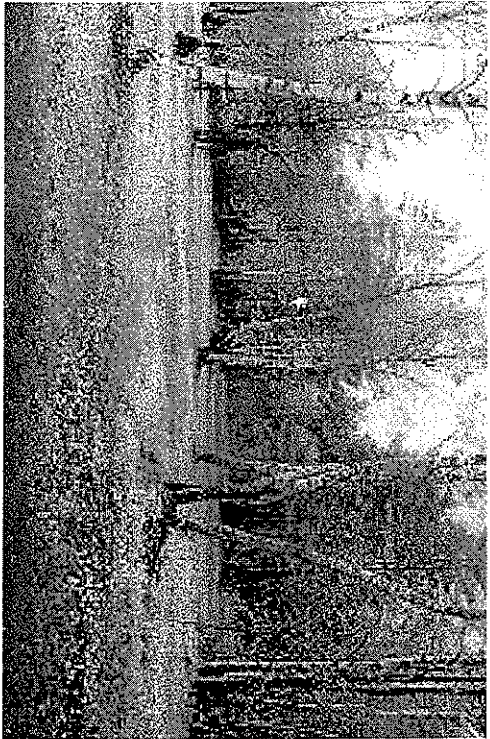Timo Maran (Tartu U.):

Nature-Text (glossed by Peirce's terms)

Text (Sign) --   Author
\   \-- (Interpretant)
Environment (Object)-- Reader

Overlay landscape as place-event

Combining Maran's nature-text with Heidegger's fourfold of the Thing or place-event

Text (Sign)/Sky --- Authorial contexts/
Metonymic Immortals
Imagery Ethos of In-dwelling

Environment/Earth --- Reader contexts/
Overlay landscape Mortals
Plexity of Time

Ecosemiosphere—community of meaning expressed in practice/experience of landscape

(derived from Juri Lotman's semiosphere, to highlight a community of overlapping worlds of meaning, such as an eco-region)

Examples:
Wooded meadows in rural Estonian culture
Oak savanna and prairie in Upper Midwest native American cultures
"Otherworld" landscapes in the British islands

Susquehanna National
Historic Trail project

"You know, in the native way of thinking, something that has movement is alive, and if it's alive then it is a spiritual being. That includes not just animals and birds and things, but also the river. I grew up along the Susquehanna River. My grandmother, who taught me most of what I know about being native, always used to say to me, 'That river is you. Without that river, our people would not be who they are.' So it is important to care for the river for the Seven Generations to come."

Respondent with Susquehannock ancestry from Lycoming County, 2009

Aslan as figure of dark ecology? A phenomenological gloss

"This was the very reason that you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me [*phusis*] here a little [on Narnia] you may know me [*phusis*] better there [in your world]."