

LITERARY LANDSCAPES IN THE CASTILIAN MIDDLE AGES

ALLEGORICAL CONSTRUCTION AS A FEATURE OF TEXTUAL LANDSCAPES

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The study of landscapes in literature is hardly an innovation; countless monographs and articles analyse this notion from its widely accepted birth in the sixteenth century to today. Despite its abundant bibliography, the notion of landscape in literature before the Renaissance is still considered impossible by several scholars, especially those working in French and Spanish historiography. The Middle Ages is a particularly delicate point of dissension, due to the theological relationship between human beings and nature. The purpose of this article is to tackle the assertion that landscape is a Renaissance invention and to argue for an acknowledgement of landscape in medieval texts. It will challenge the reluctance to acknowledge medieval landscapes by focusing on the particular case of Castilian literature in the thirteenth century, using texts from the same period but across different genres, to show the numerous possibilities of landscape creation in the Middle Ages.

INTRODUCTION

For centuries, the study of landscape was the territory of artists and art historians. In his monograph *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*, the German philologist Ernst Robert Curtius opened up the study of landscape to literary disciplines.¹ Curtius' classical study was innovative for yet another reason: by analysing the greatest landscapes of ancient times, such as the Virgilian

1 For this article, an early Swiss re-edition was consulted. Ernst Robert Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Bern: A Francke, 1948), 189–207.

locus amoenus, and their echoes in later texts, he challenges the scholarly consensus, which asserts that the birth of landscape as a literary motif occurred during the early Renaissance and was fully developed in the seventeenth century. However, Curtius reduced medieval settings to mere erudite repetitions of ancient *topoi*: “After Curtius, it was impossible to assume that a landscape or background description in medieval literature was drawn from life. It was more likely to be an imitation or allusion to a previous literary work or tradition”.² One obstacle to the recognition of a medieval landscape would therefore be its lack of originality, despite the fact that the notion only emerged as a distinct concept in the Renaissance.

Recent scholars, such as Emilio Orozco Díaz, Augustin Berque, and Paul Zumthor,³ deny the existence of a medieval landscape for another reason: the symbolic perception and interpretation of the world in the Middle Ages is seen as an obstacle between human beings and nature, since it impedes the purely aesthetical observation that, in their opinion, substantiates landscape construction. This signifies that the posture of man should be exclusively contemplative and that any other anthropological or intellectual projection, such as allegory, should be left out. Nevertheless, landscape does not follow a fixed set of rules; it is a concept in a constant state of flux. Over time, it can be perceived and expressed differently. Thus, the first challenge that awaits the scholar interested in the subject, and which constitutes the core of the initial section of the present paper, is to provide a general definition of landscape and determine if texts from the Middle Ages show such constructions. Only then can the question of the allegorical interpretation of the world and its influence on the perception of nature be addressed. The second and third parts of this article focus on this aspect, analysing the relationship between human beings and nature in medieval texts and determining whether allegory is a real impediment for the creation of literary landscapes.

Choosing a Castilian corpus from the thirteenth century to support this argumen-

² John M. Ganim, “Landscape and Late Medieval Literature. A Critical Geography,” in *Place, Space and Landscape in Medieval Narrative*, ed. Laura Howes (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 2007), xvii.

³ Emilio Orozco Díaz, *Paisaje y sentimiento de la naturaleza en la poesía española* (Madrid: Prensa Española, 1968); Augustin Berque, “De paysage en outre-pays,” in *Théorie du paysage en France (1974–1994)*, ed. Alain Roger (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1995), 346–59; and Paul Zumthor, *La mesure du monde. Représentation de l'espace au Moyen Age* (Paris: Seuil, 1993).

4 This study is indebted to previous innovative articles on the existence of a medieval landscape in Spanish literature, such as Javier Huidobro Pérez-Villamil, "Conceptos de naturaleza y paisaje," *Espacio, tiempo y forma* 2 (1989), 63–71; Claudio Guillén, "Paisaje y literatura, o los fantasmas de la otredad," in *Actas del X Congreso de la Asociación Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas: Barcelona, 21–26 de agosto de 1989*, vol. 1, ed. Antonio Vilanova (Barcelona: Promociones y Publicaciones Universitarias, 1992), 77–102; María Teresa Rodríguez Bote, "La visión estética del paisaje en la Baja Edad Media," *Medievalismo* 24 (2014), 371–94.

5 Roger Brunet, "Analyse des paysages et sémiologie. Éléments pour un débat," in *La théorie du paysage en France (1974–1994)*, ed. Alain Roger (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1995), 8. A distinction repeated in Aline Durand, "Paysage," in *Dictionnaire du Moyen Age*, ed. Claude Gauvard, Alain de Libera and Michel Zink (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2012), 1057

6 On landscape as a human construction, see, for example, Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace* (Paris: Anthropos, 1986), vi; Paul Zumthor, *La mesure du monde. Représentation de l'espace au Moyen Age* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), 88; Claudio Guillén, "Paisaje y literatura, o los fantasmas de la otredad," in *Actas del X Congreso de la Asociación Asociación Internacional*

tation is based on methodology. The texts selected to substantiate the present paper are from different contexts and literary genres — epic and religious poetry — and therefore demonstrate the various possibilities of spatial treatment in a relatively short period of time and in a limited geographical area. Moreover, as stated above, landscape evolves through time, as do allegory and symbolism.⁴

LITERARY LANDSCAPE: A PROBLEMATIC DEFINITION

The literary landscape is difficult to define. What does it represent and what are the factors that determine its production? In literature, landscape can represent an existing space — the author's surroundings, for example — or a completely fictional one.⁵ In both cases, however, the scenery is not transmitted directly to the reader, but undergoes a process of narration as it is transcribed into words. Thus, textual landscape is an artistic construction that evokes an image in the reader's mind, using description and enumeration as its main expressive resources.⁶ As the French geographer Armand Frémont states, a fundamental characteristic of the definition of landscape is its subjective conception:

Landscape is not just a simple "object", nor the eye that observes it, a cold lens, an "objective". It is also an oeuvre and a universe of symbols. Modelled by mankind, felt as much as observed, a collective poem engraved on earth as much as a functional network of fields and paths, it evokes so much more.⁷

Consequently, what we call landscape implies human intervention. It is the reproduction of a real or fictional space presented through mankind's filter. As such, it requires an emotional as well as an intellectual interpretation.⁸ Then what is the nature of the images that authors aim to convey? According to Tim Cresswell, a specialist in the study of the concept of place, "landscape refers to the shape — the material topography — of a piece of land [...] We do not

live in landscapes — we look at them”.⁹ Thus, landscape confines a portion of representational space, be it wild or urbanized, and distinguishes itself by its fundamentally visual nature.¹⁰ Cresswell provides a definition that is primarily intended for geographers yet is applicable to literature, for it integrates the beholder’s gaze into the perception and construction of landscape, be it geographical or literary. Similarly, the Spanish scholar Claudio Guillén had previously offered another definition, saying that “landscape means man’s glance at open spaces”, which are relatively extended. In those open spaces, it “is possible to describe the value of realities [...] not predominantly human”.¹¹ With this proposition, Guillén affirms the possibility of considering the same conception — that is, landscape — across various settings as long as the observer positions himself outside of the frame he creates. In other words, although landscape is a human creation, its visual nature implies that the source of the description — that is, the narrator — must remain outside of the depicted composition.

To conclude this reflection, it is crucial to provide a working definition for the present study. One might suggest that literary landscape is a subjective and artistic construction that evokes in the reader’s mind a visual space, which the observer is partially or completely absent from, in a state of aesthetic contemplation. Indeed, words have the same power as paint brushes in representing real or imagined settings, and it is through the author’s (or the copyist’s) construction that the reader gains access to the representation of space. Moreover, it is compelling that the description focuses (primarily, yet not solely) on the aesthetic facets of the scenery, thus marginalizing the beholder.

The anonymous *Poema de Mío Cid* (c. 1207), considered to be the first text written completely in Castilian Spanish, offers an opportunity to apply this suggested definition to a medieval text. Indeed, as Don Rodrigo receives his wife and daughters in the newly conquered city of Valencia and leads them to the citadel’s highest tower to celebrate his triumph, the poet gives the following panoramic description:

de Hispanistas: Barcelona, 21–26 de agosto de 1989. Vol. 1. Coord. Antonio Vilanova (Barcelona: Promociones y Publicaciones Universitarias, 1992), 77; María Teresa Rodríguez Bote, “La visión estética del paisaje en la Baja Edad Media,” *Medievalismo* 24 (2014), 375.

7 Armand Frémont, “*Les profondeurs des paysages géographiques*,” in *La théorie du paysage en France (1974–1994)*, ed. Alain Roger (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1995), 21–22. Originally: “Le paysage n’est pas qu’un simple ‘objet’, ni l’œil qui l’observe, une lentille froide, un ‘objectif’. Il est aussi œuvre et univers de signes. Modelé par les hommes, ressenti autant qu’observé, poème collectif gravé sur la terre autant que réseau fonctionnel de champs et chemins, il évoque autant et plus que ce qu’il est”. Trans. Natacha Crocoll.

8 Peter Dunn, “Don Juan Manuel: The World as Text,” *Modern Language Notes* 106.2 (1991), 223–40.

9 Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 11.

10 Ibid., 10.

11 Claudio Guillén, “Paisaje y literatura, o los fantasmas de la otredad,” in *Actas del X Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas: Barcelona, 21–26 de agosto de 1989*. Vol. 1. Coord. Antonio Vilanova (Bar-

celona: Promociones y Publicaciones Universitarias, 1992), 77. Originally: "[...] el paisaje supone la mirada del hombre a espacios abiertos [...], relativamente extensos [...] en que puede descubrirse el valor de realidades [...] no predominantemente humanas". Trans. Natacha Crocoll.

12 *Poema de Mío Cid*, ed. Colin Smith (Madrid: Cátedra, 2005), 104. Originally: "Adeliñó mio Cid con ellas al alcácer, / allá las subí en el más alto logar. / Ojos vellidos catan a todas partes, / miran Valencia, cómo yaze la cibdad, / e del otra parte a ojo han el mar, / miran la huerta, espessa e grand; / alçan las manos por a Dios rogar / d'esta ganacia, cómo es buena e grand". Trans. Natacha Crocoll.

13 Juan Manuel Cacho Blecua, "El espacio en el *Poema de Mío Cid*," *Revista de Historia Jerónimo Zurita* 55 (1987), 33. Originally: "La visión de Valencia adquiere un valor que trasciende una contemplación del paisaje. El Cid les está enseñando su principal conquista, en definitiva cómo ha pasado de ser un desterrado a ocupar una de las principales ciudades del mundo medieval. Por ello, el foco desde donde se contempla el paraje está situado estratégicamente: desde lo alto de la ciudad, simbólicamente desde su dominio, les puede mostrar estas nuevas posesiones". Trans. Natacha Crocoll.

v.1610 [After] the Cid led them to the citadel,

where they climbed to the highest point.

Their beautiful eyes observe everything,

v. 1615 they look at Valencia, how the city extends over [one side],

and they look at the sea on the other side,

they look at the garden, thick and exuberant;

they raise their hands to thank God

for this conquest, as it is good and extraordinary.¹²

This extract holds symbolic meaning, in the sense that these lines, unlike any other in the epic poem, celebrate the peak of the Cid's regained honour. As the Hispanicist Juan Manuel Cacho Blecua explains:

The view of Valencia acquires a value that transcends any contemplation of the landscape. The Cid is showing them [his family] his foremost conquest, that is how he went from being a banished lord to occupying one of the main cities of the medieval world. To do so, the viewpoint from where the surroundings are observed is strategically situated: from the city's highest point, symbolically meaning his power, he can show them his new possessions.¹³

Despite the obvious intention to demonstrate the superiority of the Cid in this fragment, the description of Valencia and its surroundings also corresponds with all above-mentioned aspects of literary landscape. Firstly, the subjec-

tive construction is respected: space is evoked through the perspective of the beholder and is organized within a narrative frame. Then, the lines evoke an image in the reader's mind as a result of the construction of space: on one side is the city, on the other the sea (there is also a garden, described by two epithets that characterize it, which serves to emphasize the wealth of the city). Finally, in addition to this careful spatial distribution, the observers—in this case the Cid and the women—are abstracted from the picture, since they are not part of the description, but rather its point of departure. Therefore, this fragment suits all the requirements of being considered a landscape.

THE DELICATE SUBJECT OF ALLEGORICAL LANDSCAPES

Despite evidence to the contrary, some scholars are reluctant to recognize the existence of medieval literary landscapes, and would rather situate the notion's inception in the Renaissance or Baroque period. Indeed, one of the most quoted Spanish scholars for the study of textual space, Emilio Orozco Díaz, claims that landscape only appears fully incorporated in texts during the Renaissance.¹⁴ Orozco Díaz, who specializes in the history of Spanish Golden Age literature, concedes, however, that it is possible to appreciate the development of a "feeling of nature" between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, even though this minor shift of perception does not compensate for the absence of a purely aesthetic contemplation of nature in this era.¹⁵

Díaz's objection is one commonly shared by scholars far and wide. For example, French geographer and philosopher Augustin Berque was one of the leading scholars in the study of landscape in the 1990s. Invited to participate in a 1994 congress on the evolution of landscape theory in France, he stated that the lack of a purely aesthetic vision of nature impedes the apparition of landscape until the Renaissance. In his work, Berque does not focus on literature, however, but on artistic representations such as paintings and manuscript illuminations.¹⁶ Swiss philologist Paul Zumthor also follows this line of thought in *La Mesure du*

14 Emilio Orozco Díaz, *Paisaje y sentimiento de la naturaleza en la poesía española* (Madrid: Prensa Española, 1968), 107. Díaz's diachronic approach to landscape, from which the Middle Ages are usually absent, or only briefly exposed, has inspired younger scholars: see Ramón Pérez Parejo, "Simbolismo, ideología y desvío ficcional en los escenarios y paisajes literarios: el caso especial del Renacimiento," *Anuario de Estudios Filológicos* 27 (2004), 259–74; Javier Huidobro Pérez-Villamil, "Conceptos de naturaleza y paisaje," *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma* 7.2, 1989, 68; José Antonio Hernández Guerrero, "Los paisajes literarios," *Castilla: Estudios de literatura* 27 (2002), 73–84.

15 Emilio Orozco Díaz, *Paisaje y sentimiento de la naturaleza en la poesía española* (Madrid: Prensa Española, 1968), 26.

16 Augustin Berque, "De paysage en outre-pays," in *Théorie du paysage en France (1974–1994)*, ed. Alain Roger (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1995), 346.

Monde. Représentation de l'Espace au Moyen Age. In his book about spatial perception in the Middle Ages, Zumthor writes that the medieval author is ignorant of the notion of landscape, since the belief in God's omnipresence invites humankind to bypass this state of aesthetic contemplation in favour of the addition of interpretative values to described surroundings: "Landscape would be the representation of a natural beauty in which man basks, without looking for further signification. If we hold to this definition, then we must say quite simply that the Middle Ages are unaware of landscape."¹⁷

If a conclusion is to be drawn from these three scholars, Zumthor's quote would be its core: a frequent objection to the recognition of a medieval (literary) landscape is the allegorical interpretation of nature. Indeed, if their line of thought is to be followed, the medieval man tended to look for a theological interpretation of his surroundings, which then is an obvious impediment to the evolution of landscape.¹⁸ However, was there ever a completely disinterested consideration of landscape? Are there romantic landscapes, in which nature mirrors the protagonists' tormented emotions? Are there pastoral landscapes, where pasturelands are only depicted to show the author's skilfulness? The answer is no, and this might be because, as Armant Frémont proposes, landscape is a human construction and, as such, cannot be separated from the historical and cultural perception of nature and of God as its designer.¹⁹ Maybe the real question is not whether nature was objectively observed in the Middle Ages, but rather whether allegory was an insurmountable obstacle to its contemplation and its representation at that time.

17 Paul Zumthor, *La mesure du monde. Représentation de l'espace au Moyen Age* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), 88. Originally: "Le paysage serait la représentation d'une beauté naturelle dans laquelle l'homme se complait sans lui chercher d'autre signification. Si l'on tient à cette définition, il faut dire tout net que le Moyen Age ignore le paysage". Trans. Natacha Crocoll.

18 This requirement is also present in Raffaele Milani, *El arte del paisaje*, trans. Javier Maderuelo (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2007), 61.

19 Armant Frémont, "Les profondeurs des paysages géographiques," in *La théorie du paysage en France (1974–1994)*, ed. Alain Roger (Seysel: Champ Vallon, 1995), 21–22.

To consider allegory as an obstacle between humans and the observation of nature is an oversimplification of the complex relationship that united humans to their surroundings in the Middle Ages. In the medieval mind, the visual world was seen as a meeting point between the sensible world and an ideal world created by God. Henceforth, all the elements of divine creation were to be celebrated: "God created the world and he made it perfect. Nature, as God's work,

is perfect; and this perfection is fully valued through its affective contemplation”, as José Antonio Hernández Guerrero argues.²⁰ While the beauty of a rose could, for instance, symbolize Mary’s perfection as a holy figure, the natural beauty of the rose was equally celebrated. Famous in Spain for its re-elaboration of Marian miracles in the typical Castilian form of the *Mester de Clerecía*, the thirteenth-century text *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* (attributed to Gonzalo de Berceo), opens with a detailed description of forty-four stanzas about an orchard in which the speaker, a tired pilgrim, can find some rest:

e. 3 The perfumed flowers gave off a magnificent scent,

 refreshing the [flesh] and mind of men;

 from each corner ran clear streams,

 in summer quite cold, in winter warm.

e. 4 There was a great abundance of generous trees,

 pomegranates and figs, pears and apples,

 and many other fruits of various kinds,

 but none was rotten [nor] sour.

 [...]

e. 7 Lying in the shade, all my cares left me,

 I heard the sound of birds, sweet and modulated:

 men had never heard organs so finely serene,

 nor any that could make sounds better tuned.²¹

20 José Antonio Hernández Guerrero, “Los paisajes literarios,” *Castilla: Estudios de Literatura* 27 (2002), 78. “Dios creó el mundo y lo hizo perfecto. La naturaleza, como obra de Dios, es perfecta; y esta perfección se aprecia plenamente en su contemplación afectiva”. Trans. Natacha Crocoll. This is echoed in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, *NRSV*, Cor 1:20.

21 Gonzalo de Berceo, *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, ed. Michael Gerli (Madrid: Cátedra, 2006), 69–70. Originally: “Davan olor sovejo las flores bien olientes, / refrescavan en omne las [carnes] e las mientes; / manavan cada canto fuentes claras corrientes, / en verano bien frías, / en invierno calientes. / Avién y grand abondo de buenas arboledas / milgranos e figueras, peros e manzanedas, / e muchas otras fructas de diversas monedas, / mas non avié ningunas podridas [nin] azedas. [...] Yaziendo a la sombra perdí todos cuidados, / odí sonos de aves, dulces e modulados: / nunca udieron omnes órganos más temprados, / nin que formar pudiesen sonos más acordados”. Trans. Natacha Crocoll.

In the first fourteen stanzas, the poet describes the garden as a *locus amoenus*, which is a traditional *topos* involving a pleasant or idealized place of safety or comfort: the orchard is characterized by its soothing shade and breeze, the abundance of fruit, and the agreeable sounds of streams and birds described with a musical vocabulary. In the passage quoted above, an eye for detail stands out, for example, in the copious use of epithets to describe different elements in order to create a scenery filled with synaesthesia. The list of fruits and the comparison between bird songs and instruments show the attention given by the poet to nature, even though the text is steeped in a long tradition that extends back to ancient times.

The thirty-two other stanzas comprising the prologue have a unique goal: explaining the allegory of the orchard. Berceo decodes the natural elements as religious symbols, given that the wider reality of the divine world was unreachable for humankind save through an intellectualization of the tangible one. Here, the garden represents the Virgin; the four streams are the Gospels; the shade is Mary's prayers protecting humankind; the trees are the miracles, and the birds are the voices that spread the Holy Word. Therefore, all the details underlined in the previous paragraph aim for the praise of the Virgin, who welcomes men and shields them from harm. Berceo's extract is thus an excellent example of how allegorical descriptions were constructed in the late Middle Ages, following an intellectual practice already present in the Bible and in Augustinian tradition.²² Nevertheless, it also demonstrates that even if sceneries were created — or interpreted — through an allegorical prism, they could be sophisticated thanks to the same process that determines the sensitive apprehension of nature: a close attention to detail and the will to recreate the most precise image possible in the reader's mind. As a consequence, the lack of laicism, or allegorical reading of sceneries, is not an obstacle to the existence of a literary landscape in the Middle Ages, but rather a sign of a double reading of space: the observation or imagination and, on another level entirely, the interpretation of the created surroundings. As the American medievalist

22 For example, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, XLV, 7 and *De libero arbitrio*, II, 16.43. See respectively Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos I-L*, eds. Eloi Dekkers and Jean Fraipont (Turnholt: Brepols, CCSL 38, 1956), p. 522 and Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, ed. William MacAllen Green, (Turnholt: Brepols, CCSL 29, 1970), pp. 266–67. For more details on the correspondences between the tangible and the ideal world, see Vincent Giraud, "Signum et vestigium dans la pensée de Saint Augustin," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 95.2 (2011), 251–74.

John Ganim writes:

The medieval way of seeing landscape, place and space has become newly important as a result, not because of its mimetic accuracy, but because of its explicit signage, because it asks us to respond intellectually as well as emotionally, conceptually as well as naturally.²³

Does Berceo's introduction respect the definition of landscape presented in this article? Space is well constructed with careful emphasis on different senses, which helps readers mentally recreate a visual scene. Moreover, the observer, just as in the *Poema de Mio Cid*, is the description's point of departure, and yet does not form part of it. In essence, the allegorical interpretation does not seem to impede the consideration of this extract as a landscape, even though the second part of the introduction, where Berceo explains the correspondences between natural elements and the Virgin, would not fall into the same category.

WHEN ALLEGORY BECOMES A LITERARY TRICK

Not all landscapes that resort to allegory in Spain's medieval literature do so with a theological perspective. As a matter of fact, already in the *Poema de Mio Cid*, written at least fifty years prior to Berceo's prologue, the author plays with the *topos* of the *locus amoenus* to mislead the public, forcing the wrong interpretation of events to come. After having recovered his lost position at court, the Cid offers his daughters in marriage to the Carrión 'infantes' whose foulness lead them to abandon their young spouses after having robbed them of their virginity:

The *Infantes* have entered the oak grove at Corpes²⁴,
[where] the mountains are high, the branches [on the

²³ John Ganim, "Landscape and Late Medieval Literature. A Critical Geography," in *Place, Space and Landscape in Medieval Narrative*, ed. Laura Howes (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), xvi.

²⁴ Although there is a municipality called Robledo de Corpes in Castilla-La Mancha, the author refers here to a natural environment that answers the classical *topos* of the *locus horribilis*.

trees] reach to the clouds,

and the beasts that wander [there] about are wild.

v. 2700

They found an orchard with a clean fountain,

[and there] they ordered [the soldiers] to set up their tents,

and at night lay there with all that accompanied them,

with their wives in their arms, showing them love.

They did not act accordingly when the sun came up!²⁵

25 *Poema de Mío Cid*, ed. Colin Smith (Madrid: Cátedra, 2005), 165. Originally “Entrados son los ifantes al robredo de Corpes, / los montes son altos, las ramas puján con las nubes, / e las bestias fieras que andan aderredor. / Fallaron un vergel con una linpia fuent, / mandan fincar la tienda infantes de Carrión, / con quantos que ellos traen y yazen essa noch, / con sus mugieres en braços, demuéstranles amor / ¡mal ge lo cunplieron cuando salí el sol!”. Trans. Natacha Crocoll.

26 The debate is centred on the question of whether the topography was inspired by a real place or was a purely literary construction. For the first hypothesis, the leading study is that of Ramón Menéndez Pidal, *Los godos y la epopeya española: “Chansons de geste” y baladas nórdicas* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1956), 251–55, whereas a good argumentation for the second hypothesis is made by Colin Smith, the editor of the consulted edition of *Poema de Mío Cid* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2005), 309.

This fragment has been considered ambiguous by scholars because of the opposition of two *topoi*: the *locus horribilis* — the high mountains, the threatening trees, the clouds, and the wild beasts— and the *locus amoenus*, only insinuated in verse 2700 when the orchard and the fountain are mentioned.²⁶

Considering this example in light of the present discussion, it offers a new element to the argumentation, as neither allegory refers to a transcendental reality, but instead present a setting that sustains the narrative action. Indeed, the vileness and dishonesty of the ‘infantes’ are both foreshadowed by the unwelcoming forest where they decide to stay — a conventional medieval omen of misfortune — and compounded by the fact that they do not respect the code of the orchard. The public of the thirteenth century, certainly used to amorous encounters in orchards, did not expect the princes to break their marriage vows in such an environment.

This fragment shows that neither allegorical interpretation nor resorting to traditional literary motifs are obstacles between humans and nature. Here, the relationship is more subtle, as description and narration are tightly entangled to produce a rhetorical effect, foreign to a theological interpretation of nature.

Even if the *locus amoenus* is only hinted at, the orchard grove is without a doubt a landscape, observed by the narrator and constructed to create an oppressive atmosphere in the public's mind.

TOWARDS THE RECOGNITION OF A MEDIEVAL LITERARY LANDSCAPE

Towards the end of this analysis, the inexistence of a sensibility of nature in the Castilian Middle Ages has become hard to sustain. While it is true that around the thirteenth century there are sceneries that could be considered as exclusively mental images — for example, the texts by the clerk Gonzalo de Berceo where theological allegory prevails over a purely aesthetical motivation — the observational link between humans and nature is still present, as is the care given to the artistic construction depicting the scene.

In other texts, such as the epic poem the *Poema de Mio Cid*, symbolic spatial expression is not meant to be read with a religious interpretation, but rather as part of a medieval literary tradition of *topoi*. In some cases, surroundings even appear deprived of any allegorical touch, as in the example of the panoramic view from atop the Valencian citadel.

Each of the examples discussed here effectively demonstrate that literary elements generally considered to be part of landscape in the Renaissance and thereafter were already present in the Middle Ages. Yet, while the medieval landscape shares characteristics with Early Modern and modern ones, it is also distinct in terms of a deep — though not omnipresent — symbolism, frequent religious interpretation, and traditional constructions that rely on literary *topoi*. None of these characteristics serve as an obstacle between humankind and nature, but are instead the fruit of another interpretation, where transcendence adds meaning to the beauty of the world.

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