

**Book Review: Reinventing Eden: the fate of nature in Western culture. By Carolyn Merchant. New York: Routledge 2003. ISBN 0-41593-164-9**

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Postprint / Postprint

Rezension / review

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**Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:**

Davidson, R. A. (2005). Book Review: Reinventing Eden: the fate of nature in Western culture. By Carolyn Merchant. New York: Routledge 2003. ISBN 0-41593-164-9. *Cultural Geographies*, 12(1), 115-115. <https://doi.org/10.1177/147447400501200109>

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courses on economy–culture relationships. At the research level, it will be equally invaluable. I dare you not to buy it.

Manchester University

NOEL CASTREE

**Reinventing Eden: the fate of nature in Western culture.** By Carolyn Merchant. New York: Routledge. 2003. 308 pp. \$25.00 paper. ISBN: 0 41593 164 9.

Was Eve of the Bible the first scientist? After all, as Carolyn Merchant remarks in *Reinventing Eden*, Eve's consumption of the forbidden fruit illustrated her 'independent and curious' (p. 23) nature and her preference for knowing the world through empirical observation rather than through God's word alone. The question, inspired by Mark Twain's *The diaries of Adam and Eve*, illustrates the sort of insightful gems that Merchant produces in her ambitious and richly illustrated eco-feminist rethinking of Western culture. She aims to show how Western culture has long conformed to variants of a master narrative of recovery – Eden is lost, – but since the seventeenth century secular society has embarked on the project of 'reinventing' it on a global scale. Shopping malls, theme parks, genetically engineered agricultural products and the Internet are contemporary fruits of this dream. Merchant devotes much of her book to critique: the 'Recovery narrative' has legitimated the dominance of nature, women, the poor and non-white peoples. She concludes by proposing a new narrative for the new century. Her postmodern-influenced 'partnership ethic' rejects the linear logic of traditional narrative while promoting equality between men, women and the natural world.

*Reinventing Eden* offers fresh insights into Western culture and, boldly and constructively, it offers a new master narrative (or set of narratives). However, I doubt that feminist geographers and environmentalists already versed in the white male anthropocentrism of Western culture will find the bulk of Merchant's book – the eco-feminist critique – to be fundamentally surprising or new. Students interested in the technical subject of geography and narrative will not find much here either: Merchant writes only a few simplistic paragraphs on the structure of narrative, defining it as 'an ideal form into which particular bits of content are poured. The form is the organizing principle; the content is the matter' (p. 37). For the purpose of introducing alternative environmental histories to undergraduate and graduate students, however, the book would be an excellent resource.

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**Putting science in its place: geographies of scientific knowledge.** By David Livingstone. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2003. 234 pp. \$27.50 cloth. ISBN: 0 22648 722 9.

Scholars have long recognized the importance of history in understanding the social dimensions of science. Biographies of prominent figures and institutional histories of leading disciplines have established historical context as a central supporting theme