

German Ecopoetry: From *Naturlyrik* (Nature Poetry) and *Ökolyrik* (Environmental Poetry) to *Lyrik im Anthropozän* (Poetry in the Anthropocene)

Axel Goodbody (University of Bath, England)

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Poetry has played a subsidiary, but nevertheless significant role as a medium for articulation of the proto-ecological understandings of nature which emerged in Germany from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, and in encouraging readers and listeners to reflect on and respond to them. It is not normally thought of as a source of factual knowledge, or as a vehicle for sustained intellectual argument. However, both 'natural history' (the precursor of biology and zoology) and 'natural philosophy' were still sometimes formulated in the medium of verse in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The poems of Barthold Heinrich Brockes' *Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott* (Earthly Pleasure in God, 1721-48) are well-known examples of the former: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's "Metamorphose der Pflanzen" (1790) exemplifies the latter. One of a number of works of the time which anticipated the theory of evolution, the "Metamorphosis of Plants" depicts nature as in constant flux, but nonetheless governed by an underlying order, and presents human life as an integral part of the physiological cycles of nature. Philosopher of nature and natural scientist as well as poet and novelist, Goethe wrote at a time when nature was increasingly conceived as mechanical, passive, and fundamentally different from the active, moral and meaningful world of human beings – in short, as an exploitable resource. His counter-conception of nature as a living, ensouled entity, and of human beings as a part of it, and his phenomenological conception of scientific practice as "delicate empiricism", involving a "participatory relationship between the knower and nature that is mutually transformative" (Nasser/Fischer 2015, 10), provided a model for recognition of human embodiment and ethical responsibility towards the more-than-human world which remains relevant today. Germany possesses an influential tradition of speculative nature philosophy, located midway between poetry and science. Philosophers of German Idealism such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling exercised a profound influence on their poetic

contemporaries, and these in turn were read by and a source of inspiration for nineteenth-century philosophers and scientists.

Important as this strand of poetic philosophising is, it is by no means the only contribution which German poets have made to ecological thought and environmental discourse. First, there is the special function which nature poems perform in combining vivid descriptions of natural phenomena and experiences of nature with implicit symbolic reflection. They render abstract relations in concrete terms, and condense meaning in metaphors which resonate with individuals' personal experiences, while at the same time echoing cultural tropes and recalling familiar patterns of thought. Operating on more than one level of meaning is a general characteristic of poetic language, and in nature poetry the depiction of a plant or tree often implies a conception of how nature is ordered, society is structured, and human life should be lived. There is also the force of poetic affect. Poems speak to the whole person, appealing to the senses and emotions as well as reason, and stir the public imagination by articulating subjective feelings. And poetry gives greater intensity to the expression of ideas and feelings through distinctive use of diction, sound and rhythm. Nature poems please and persuade readers and listeners through linguistic skill and invention as much as any other form of poetry. Through originality of thought and creative departures from the linguistic norm, they de-automatise our accustomed perception of the natural environment, offer new insights into our relationship with nature, and redefine human subjectivity. These qualities give poetry a special place in writing on nature. Hence the paradox that although poetry is read by few, it is frequently cited, and influences our perception of ourselves and the world around us (cf. Bryson 2002; Gilcrest 2015; Felstiner 2010).

The most obvious way in which poetry promotes ecological thinking is by arousing popular awareness of and interest in nature. Poets foster emotional identification with nature by drawing attention to its aesthetic qualities, and describing or imagining their loss as a consequence of 'dominological' human behavior. Long before the founding of the science of ecology by Ernst Haeckel in the 1860s, poems gave expression to a sense of the unity of nature and the inter-relatedness of humans with all animals, plants and inanimate things. Poetry has generated a sense of accountability to the environment by implying kinship, and built emotional bridges, for instance via sense of place. Among the dimensions of ecological thinking which poets have played a part in developing are recognition that the human subject does not stand

outside or transcend nature, and that nature is not static and unchanging, that life processes rather interact in constant adaptation. Ecopoetry (I use the term here in the wider sense encountered in English, rather than for the more limited category of verse expressing overt environmentalist critique which the German term 'Ökolyrik' designates)¹ shows human life as co-constituted by material conditions, and gives voice to the more-than-human.

Distant roots of such poetic thinking can be found in the first half of the eighteenth century, in the detailed descriptions of the beauty and intricacy of nature of Brockes' *Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott*, and in the praise of simple country life and critique of urban decadence in Albrecht von Haller's paean to the glories of the Swiss Alps and their inhabitants, "Die Alpen" (The Alps, 1729). However, the crucial turning point came with the breakthrough of emotion around 1750 in the odes of Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock. Influenced by the outpourings of religious emotion in Pietism, Klopstock created a new poetic diction with his unaffected language of the heart, of which others soon took advantage, including the young Goethe. A new genre of lyric poetry emerged, seemingly based on personal experience, which depicted events and feelings with unparalleled immediacy. Using nature as a vehicle for expression of the frame of mind, emotional state and temperament of the lyrical subject, this *Erlebnislyrik* (poetry associated with the *Sturm und Drang* [Storm and Stress] movement conveying the immediate sensual experience of the subject) simultaneously conveyed a new attunement to and empathy with the natural environment. For all the differences between them, German Classicism and the Early Romantic movement together developed a further strand of verse towards the end of the century which anticipated ecological thinking, by conceiving nature as a structured whole whose integrity possessed intrinsic value. Inspired by Spinoza, Goethe expressed reverence for nature in a form of Pantheism, while Novalis and the Schlegels formulated a Romantic world view which, drawing on Neoplatonism and the early modern mystic Jacob Böhme, posited hidden connections between the spheres of plants, animals, minerals and humans. This holistic perspective was to remain present in poetic iterations of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century monism (Wilhelm Bölsche, Julius Hart, Oskar Loerke), and to resurface periodically in religiously infused nature poetry. Meanwhile, a new dimension of ecological thinking had come to the fore in poems written in the wake of the environmental movement, which denounced the destruction of landscapes

and the endangering of species, and expressed dismay over human alienation from nature.

In the following, the historical origins and development of contemporary German ecopoetry are examined in greater detail. A progression is traced from evocations of ecstatic union with nature and laments over its loss in the nineteenth century, via denunciation of the defilement of the natural environment and the impoverishment of human life in the twentieth, to recognition of the global impact of the human use of natural resources, and our responsibility for maintaining planetary conditions enabling human and non-human flourishing in the twenty-first. At the risk of oversimplifying what was in reality a complex process of gradual change, I argue that 'nature poetry' conjured up images of timeless nature and the integration of humans in a harmonious whole, whereas 'environmental poetry' located humanity outside the sphere of the natural, castigating the damage wrought in the course of technological development, economic growth and the emergence of the consumer society in the decades after the Second World War. 'Poetry in the Anthropocene' (the term 'Anthropocene' signifies a new geological era in which humans are impacting on the planet in ways leaving traces that will be visible in rock formations millions of years hence)² differs from both its predecessors. It recognizes on the one hand that nature is constantly changing, has a history and is subject to human influence on a global scale. On the other, it undermines the traditional dualistic understanding of nature and culture and redefines the human subject, not as an autonomous entity, but as co-constituted through its intra-actions with the vibrant matter of the non-human.³

Naturlyrik: Classical, Romantic, and Twentieth-Century Nature Poetry

Friedrich Schiller's "Die Götter Griechenlandes" (The Gods of Greece, 1788 [cf. Conrady 310-311])⁴ occupies a central place in the poetry of the age as a statement of the 'de-deification' of nature at a time when the lingering traces of animism were eradicated by modern science, and of the obligation of poetry to re-ensoul it.⁵ Gerhard Kaiser has argued that the poetic project of re-ensouling nature found quintessential form in the literary myth of 'Mother Nature,' and that this trope owed its popularity towards the end of the eighteenth century to serving as a response to the invention of the steam engine and the Industrial Revolution (Kaiser 1991). Its rise to prominence already began in 1750: "Schön ist, Mutter Natur, Deiner Erfindung Pracht" (Beautiful is, Mother Nature, the splendour of your invention), Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock wrote

in “Der Zürchersee” (Lake Zurich, 1750, [cf. Conrady 230-231]). The beauty and diversity of natural phenomena are here no longer presented as proof of the existence of a Creator, as in Brockes’ poetry: nature is celebrated as itself the divine, eternal source of all life. Mother Nature became a key image in the Pre-Romantic poetry of *Empfindsamkeit* (sensitivity). “Natur, du ewig Keimende”, as Goethe wrote in his epic verse fragment “Der Wanderer” (The Wanderer), “Schaffst jeden zum Genuß des Lebens;/ Deine Kinder all/ Hast mütterlich mit einem/ Erbteil ausgestattet,/ Einer Hütte“ (Nature, thou ever germinating force, thou createst every being to enjoy life, and hast equipped all thy children in motherly fashion with a portion of inheritance, a shelter [Goethe 1998, 41]).

A cult of “nature feeling” arose, an intuitively sensed affinity of the individual with the whole of nature, which provided release from the frustrating restrictions of everyday social and political life. The idea of the poetic subject attaining harmonious union with nature found its most famous expression in Goethe’s “Wandrer’s Nachtlied 2” (Wanderer’s Night Song): “Über allen Gipfeln/ Ist Ruh [...]” (Over all the mountain peaks/ Is calm [cf. von Bormann 1984, 147]). Personification of nature, the semblance of communication with it, and the notion that the meaning of nature’s mysterious ‘language’ could be conveyed in the evocative poetic word were hallmarks not only of Classical, but also of Romantic German nature poetry (Novalis, Brentano, Eichendorff). This treatment of nature as an active subject rather than a passive object anticipated twenty-first-century notions of the agency of matter.

Romantic nature feeling soon became clichéd: already in the 1820s Heinrich Heine adopted a stance of ironic detachment from sentimental outpourings in the presence of nature in his North Sea poems. In the later nineteenth century, more thoughtful nature poetry was either characterised by a sense of the precariousness of the subject’s integration in nature as a sphere of harmony, stability and security, or expressed alienation from it. Nietzsche’s poem “Vereinsamt” (Lone, 1884) depicted nature as cold and indifferent to an existentially exposed humanity. The lasting attraction of the genre, especially in times of political uncertainty and upheaval, was demonstrated by its revival towards the end of the 1920s in the Magic Realist school of nature poetry. Oskar Loerke, Wilhelm Lehmann and Elisabeth Langgässer invested plants and landscapes with mythical and symbolic significance, interpreting trees and birds in flight as mystical figurations of the life force. They understood nature as structured by timeless laws which revealed themselves in cyclically repeated patterns

and geometric forms, in comparison with which human ambitions paled into insignificance. Modern nature poetry in the Magic Realist mode was proto-ecological inasmuch as it attributed intrinsic value to nature, sought to attune readers to its beauty, promoted the ethos of the simple life, and represented humanity as embedded in and ultimately dependent on natural processes. But it understood nature as static and permanent. A rare example addressing the social and political dimension of the human/nature relationship and acknowledging the fragility of nature is Loerke's poem "Die Laubwolke" (The Leaf Cloud, 1934). Adopting a stance of passive resistance rather than the political abstention which typified the poetry of 'Inner Emigration' during the Third Reich, Loerke echoed the words of the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tse, founder of Taoism (who, according to legend, retreated from a corrupt court to live the life of a hermit, and whose thinking has been repeatedly embraced by anti-authoritarian movements): "Zwischen Grund und Höhe,/ Von der Säge des Gärtners unzerrissen,/ Von der Axt des Fällers nicht getroffen,/ Bleibt das Gesetz:/ Beständig ist das leicht Verletzliche" (Between the earth and the sky, neither torn by the gardener's saw, nor struck by the woodsman's axe, the law remains: what is easily harmed is nevertheless resilient [cf. von Bormann 1984, 382]).

Ökolyrik: Environmental Poetry

Magic Realism modernised traditional nature poetry by secularising it and introducing precision of detail and a knowledge of botany and ornithology. With its tensions between realism and symbolism, empathetic nature observation and reflection on what it means to be human, it influenced much of the poetry of nature in the second half of the twentieth century (Günter Eich, Johannes Bobrowski, Peter Huchel, Karl Krolow, Sarah Kirsch, Wulf Kirsten). However, the decisive shift to awareness of nature's impermanence, the finitude of natural resources and environmental degradation came with environmental poetry. This was heralded in the work of the most important figure in the renewal of poetic writing on nature in the twentieth century, Bertolt Brecht. A major achievement of Brecht's lay in overcoming the problematic detachment from political and social reality of many of his contemporaries. Writing in Danish exile in the 1930s, the Marxist Brecht appeared to deny the legitimacy of taking time to appreciate nature's beauty:

„Was sind das für Zeiten, wo
ein Gespräch über Bäume fast ein Verbrechen ist,

weil es ein Schweigen über so viele Untaten einschließt!“
 (What times are these, in which a conversation about trees is practically a crime, because it involves being silent about so many misdeeds! [cf. Gnüg 2013, 17-19])

However, read in the context of the poem as a whole and of his other work, these much-cited lines from “An die Nachgeborenen” (To Posterity, 1939) actually express the poet’s regret at the necessity to subordinate, however temporarily, his desire to live a good life in harmony with nature to the need to speak out against Hitler. Brecht continued to reflect, in similarly unsentimental terms and challenging ways, on the value of aesthetic pleasure in nature in his *Bukow Elegies* (written in the 1950s). While his importance as a political poet (and dramatist) is well known, Brecht’s contribution to ecopoetry is less widely recognised. He subscribed to the utopian vision of a harmonious union of man and nature in communist society which Marx famously formulated in his early *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, arguing that humankind comes into its own through a ‘metabolism’ with nature, and that capitalist profit-driven production and consumption will one day be replaced by “the perfected unity in essence of man with nature, the true resurrection of nature, the realized naturalism of man and the realized humanism of nature” (Marx 1992, 349-350). On the other, as early as the 1940s Brecht wrote a handful of short poems on pollution and damage to the environment (see “Was für ein Geschlecht sind wir?” [What Kind of Lineage Are We?]; “Über das Frühjahr” [Spring, cf. von Bormann 1984, 415]).

These themes were to gain importance in German poetry after Brecht’s death in 1956, as a body of environmental poetry emerged in response to the “great acceleration” of technological progress and economic growth. Nuclear contamination, pollution with toxic chemicals, and the prospect of resource depletion gradually brought home the vulnerability and finiteness of the natural world. Günter Eich, Marie Luise Kaschnitz and Hans Magnus Enzensberger were among the first to formulate poetic critiques of West Germany’s postwar industrial development, counting the material and spiritual cost of Ludwig Erhard’s economic miracle. At the same time, this ‘political’ nature poetry recalled the suppressed past, often hinting at a connection between denial of responsibility for the environment and suppression of the legacy of guilt over complicity in crimes against humanity in the Third Reich. This link between environmentalism and antifascist commitment, one of the distinctive features of German environmentalism, makes it difficult to decide whether damaged nature in

many poems of the fifties and early sixties should be read literally or metaphorically. Images of pollution and the sacrifice of nature to industrial and urban development served in any case as metaphors for the social and psychological impact of materialism and commercialisation. Anticapitalism, antimilitarism and rejection of the atomic bomb (exemplifying destructive technologies in general) merged with ecological concerns. Ingeborg Bachmann's poem "Freies Geleit (Aria II)" (Safe Conduct, 1957) inserts a vehement 'no' to the atom bomb in an ode to the beauty of nature echoing St Francis of Assisi and Joseph von Eichendorff: „Die Erde will keinen Rauchpilz tragen,/ Kein Geschöpf ausspeien vorm Himmel,/ Mit Regen und Zornesblitzen abschaffen/ Die unerhörten Stimmen des Verderbens.“ (The Earth does not wish to bear a mushroom cloud, to spit out any creature under the sky, and have to abolish the outrageous voices of ruin with rain and angry lightning [cf. von Bormann 1984, 417].) The Earth demands of humanity, Bachmann continues, a pledge that it will be permitted to survive – implying that we must otherwise be prepared for it to take humankind down with it.

Ever at the forefront of socio-political concerns, Hans Magnus Enzensberger anticipated key themes of the environmental movement in his poem "fremder garten" (Strange Garden, 1957): „das gift kocht in den tomaten [...],/ das schiff speit öl in den hafen/ und wendet. ruß, ein fettes, rieselndes tuch/ deckt den garten. mittag, und keine grille.“ (The poison boils in the tomatoes, the ship spits out oil into the harbour and turns. Soot, a fat, trickling blanket, coats the garden. Midday, and not a cricket [cf. von Bormann 1984, 295-296].) In the early 1960s, he went on to address the themes of nuclear fallout and the loss of species more directly, for instance in "das ende der eulen" (The End of Owls [ibid., 422-423]). In the 1960s environmental damage again appeared in association with antimilitarism in Erich Fried's poetic denunciation of the destruction of the Vietnamese jungle with napalm as a manifestation of imperialistic exploitation of the Third World, in the volume *und Vietnam und* (1966). Trees became a central theme in the environmental verse of the seventies and eighties, which often referred explicitly to Brecht's dictum, countering that "conversations about trees" had become highly political (see the opening section of Gnüg's anthology). A different form of intertextual dialogue was to become a characteristic feature of poetic writing on nature in the GDR in the 1970s and 1980s. Volker Braun quoted ironically from Goethe's nature poetry, contrasting images of plenitude and harmony with grim scenes of contemporary reality ("Im Ilmtal" [In the Valley of the Ilm, cf. von Bormann

1984, 332-333]; “Material 1: Wie herrlich leuchtet mir die Natur” [Material 1: How Splendidly Nature Glows for Me, cf. Gnüg 2013, 119-122]), while Thomas Rosenlöcher rewrote Brockes’ “Kirsch-Blüte bey der Nacht” (Cherry Blossom by Night [cf. von Bormann 1984, 42-43]) in his poem “Das Schreckensbild” (Horrorifying Image, Rosenlöcher 1988, 31-32).

Much of the environmentally oriented poetry of the 1970s and 1980s consisted of short ‘warning poems,’ on topics ranging from the dangers of nuclear contamination to acid rain and urban sprawl, which frequently operated with apocalyptic images. However, longer and more complex forms incorporating personal memories and landscapes were also used to express the consternation and disorientation of the lyrical subject. The influence of American models is visible in Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s long poems excoriating consumer society, for instance “landessprache” (Language of the Nation), “schaum” (Foam) and “gewimmer und firmament” (Whimpering and the Firmament) in the volume *Landessprache* (1960), and in Rolf Dieter Brinkmann’s inventories of neglect and decay in the landscape of the urban periphery, whose disorder matched the fragmented subjectivity of the poet’s generation. Jürgen Becker, Nicolas Born, Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, Günter Herburger and Christoph Meckel also took poetic stock of the changes which the West German landscape was undergoing, warned of the dangers of radioactivity, and wrote odes to endangered species.

In the GDR, where the “scientific-technological revolution” was official state policy in the 1960s, Günter Kunert wrote short, aphoristic poems warning against the hubris of seeking total control over nature. A loose grouping of poets from the state of Saxony emerged, dubbed ‘Sächsische Dichterschule’ (Saxon School of Poets) by their mentor Adolf Endler, whose work focused on landscape as a product of human interaction with nature. “Durchgearbeitete Landschaft” (the title of a poem by Volker Braun [cf. von Bormann 1984, 428]) provided the focal concept of this type of poetry, seeming for a period in the 1960s and early 1970s to afford the promise of a dialectical relationship between practical use of nature and empathetic connection with it. In reality, of course, this conception of “landscape worked by human hands,” which was underpinned by Ernst Bloch’s utopian vision of an alternative, ‘alliance’ technology, was sacrificed by the state to short-term economic priorities. Braun, Heinz Czechowski, Elke Erb, Wulf Kirsten and others depicted the destructive practices of the agricultural collectives in rural East Germany, the neglect and disregard for

traditional landscapes and cultural heritage, and the dispersion of communities and loss of farming land in the path of the vast open cast brown coal mines south of Leipzig and Cottbus, in ever bleaker images.

In West Germany, the Munich political scientist Peter Cornelius Mayer-Tasch (1981) published an influential anthology of environmental poetry. This contained a significant proportion of simple, one-dimensional texts lacking aesthetic value. Here and in the volume *Grüne Lieder: Umwelt-Liederbuch* (Green Songs: Environmental Song Book, 1985), edited by the songwriter and environmental activist Manfred Bonson, protest against the threat to nature from the prioritisation of technical rationality sometimes verged on technophobia and irrational green ideology. Alongside such politically activist verse, there was a second strand of 'green' poetry in the 1970s and 1980s, which presented images of a simple life in harmony with nature. This verse, which was often suffused with a syncretist religiosity reflecting the New Age world view of Germany's Alternative Movement, found a platform in the magazine *Falk*, which devoted issues to Ethnopoetry, Zen and Bioregionalism. Alexander von Bormann's five hundred-page anthology *Die Erde will ein freies Geleit* (The Earth Desires Safe Conduct, 1984) showed, however, through its distribution of old and new texts across traditional themes (the seasons, times of day, transience, gardens, flowers, trees, and walking, bookended with sections on 'Humans and Nature', 'Nature and Society', and 'Nature Poetry'), that environmentally-focused poetry in German embraced conceptual and aesthetic strategies going beyond the know-it-all censoriousness of didactic verse and Neoromantic escapism, and could claim to be part of a longer tradition of poetic writing on nature.

Lyrik im Anthropozän: Poetry in the Anthropocene

The wave of politically committed environmental poetry which began in the 1950s had receded by the time climate change penetrated public consciousness in the second half of the 1980s. Poetry since German Reunification bears the mark of key political, social and technological developments: the end of the Cold War, globalisation, increased mobility, acceleration of the pace of life, and the revolution in information and communication technology associated with the internet. However, nature continues to play a central role in it. As well as continuing to critique a short-sighted, exploitative relationship with the natural environment, often explicitly referencing climatic change, it has more recently also engaged with the concept of the

Anthropocene. Twenty-first-century ecopoetry has sought to address fundamental questions raised by the Anthropocene about what ethical responsibility we bear for the wellbeing of future generations and fellow species, how we want to live, work and organise our economy in the future, and what role technology should play in it. Arrival in the Anthropocene is for some a cause for satisfaction, even celebration: Helmuth Trischler writes of the notion of a “good Anthropocene” (2016, 284-285), and Bonneuil/Fressoz (2016) review the arguments of influential proponents of geoengineering. The poetic response ranges from acceptance of the inevitability of technological interventions to mitigate environmental change through ambivalence to concern, and (more rarely) calls for action. Strident environmentalism has shifted to a more contemplative form of ecological engagement. In the work of Richard Pietraß, for instance, the apocalyptic imagery and mode of prophetic witness of warning poems published in the 1970s and 1980s such as “Der Ringende” (Wrestling to Survive [cf. von Bormann 1984, 324]) has given way in a recent collection (tellingly subtitled “Naturgedichte” [Nature Poems, Pietraß 2012]) to more reflective and humorous poems, conveying the delicate beauty of life on earth and of animals threatened with extinction. Recognising human beings as part of a global network of ecological relationships, ecopoetry has redefined human subjectivity in a posthumanist mode, substituting for the modern individual, free to pursue self-realisation, a sense of the porousness of the borders between humans and the natural environment. Man-made nature is frequently portrayed as occupying a more important place in everyday life than nature itself, and our experience of the latter is presented as heavily mediated. However, sorrow and anger over human destruction of the natural environment remain the driving forces behind most ecopoetry. Pleasurable experiences in natural surroundings, either imagined or recalled from childhood, continue to serve as utopian place-holders for a better future.

The Anthropocene also raises aesthetic questions: What forms are appropriate for fostering an eco-cosmopolitan consciousness, recognising the agency of nature, and relating the deep time and global reach of the Anthropocene to human scales of time and place? The 1990s saw a move towards a ‘biopoetics’ in the publications of Durs Grünbein and Ulrike Draesner. Both wrote in dialogue with the natural sciences, especially medical, genetic and neuroscience, engaging with controversial new technologies and exploring their political and ethical dimensions. Central themes in Draesner’s work are the body and reproduction: their openness to manipulation blurs

the borders between nature and culture, dissolving their dichotomy into a hybrid 'natureculture' (Haraway). At the same time, Draesner deconstructed the anthropocentric perspective by underlining humanity's dependence on nature. Both Draesner and Franz Josef Czernin have published cycles of poems about the elements in the early 2000s, developing an elemental poetics which possesses affinities with the theories of material agency which have recently been expounded by Karen Barad and Jane Bennett (see Zemanek in this volume). As quasi-divine elemental beings, Fire, Water, Earth and Air become vehicles for a conception of nature as vital and possessing an agency which humans ignore at their peril (cf. Zemanek 2014).

The publications of a younger generation of German poets (i.e. born since 1970) writing "after nature" are the subject of a short review by Peter Geist (2009). Geist distinguishes between three main approaches: "Natur als Zeichenreservoir" (poems using natural symbols to address social concerns), "Naturzeichen als Bausteine der Deskription" (realistic, descriptive nature poetry seeking to rekindle interest in and empathy with nature), and "Bildspender für Erhabenheit" (poems idealising nature in the sublime mode, aiming to instil awe and respect). His general tone is ironically disparaging, and his acknowledgement of the merits of contemporary German poetry grudging, yet he provides useful pointers to an understanding of recent ecopoetic production. Most recently published nature poetry, he argues, belongs in the first category. These poems juxtapose terms relating to nature with others from the fields of civilisation, technology, advertising and the economy, and are often written in a mode of detachment and even acquiescence. As noteworthy examples he cites Marion Poschmann's sophisticated use of intertextual allusion to poetic tradition and her polished interplay of evocation of nature with lament at its demise; Monika Rink's thoughtful reflections on her distance from nature; Ron Winkler's "nature poem updates", in which the second nature of modern civilisation outweighs the images of nature, reflecting the extremity of our alienation from and instrumental exploitation of the natural environment, and Daniel Falb's playful, cool, even cynical verbal performances, in which nature is juxtaposed with culture. Among the poets in the second category, who seek to sensitize readers by means of detailed description of natural phenomena, Geist singles out Jan Wagner and Nico Bleutge, as poets carefully distilling new metaphors from their observation of the natural environment. Wagner in particular has shown that the genre of nature poetry retains its relevance

today, enriching it with new facets. Finally, Geist discerns a return to nature pathos and the sublime in the representatives of the third category. Lines in the poetry of Steffen Popp, for instance, recall Klopstock in tone and gesture, and continue the tradition of lyrical discovery of the natural world and praise of life which he inaugurated.

The recently published anthology of “poetry in the Anthropocene” (Bayer/Seel 2016), which originated in an event accompanying the exhibition “Willkommen im Anthropozän: Unsere Verantwortung für die Erde” (Welcome to the Anthropocene. The Earth in Our Hands) mounted at the Deutsches Museum in Munich in March 2015,⁶ provides the basis for concluding comments on the themes, strategies, and poetic techniques of contemporary ecopoets. Most of the thematic sections into which the anthology is divided have a familiar focus: the geological record of human modification of the biosphere (‘Sediments – Sentiments’); ‘Territories’ (poems on national borders, migration flows and property relations); consumption; climate; nature; extinction; city and country; science and technology. Others, however, are less clearly defined and less directly connected with Anthropocene debates: ‘dauern – lieben – alpen – bergen’ (Lasting Loving Alps Mountains – consisting mainly of poems on mountains); and ‘aus dem Inneren des Anthropozäns’ (From the Interior of the Anthropocene).

The opening poem, Asmus Trautsch’s ‘Die Urwälder Europas’ (The Primeval Forests of Europe), sets the tone in making the public conscious of the pervasive human colonisation and consumption of nature by describing how burning coal consumes the product of hundreds of millions of years in an afternoon, ending: “Täglich/ werden wir chronischer fließen brennen schneiden/ immer weiter tilgen die Spuren in unsere ewige Spur.” (Daily we become more chronic, flowing, burning, cutting and deleting the traces [of other creatures and things] with our own trace [cf. Bayer/Seel 9].) Lutz Seiler writes on the impact of uranium mining on the people and landscape of Thuringia; Nico Bleutge and Steffen Popp on the legacy of heavy industry. Some poets reference the Anthropocene, global warming and even the Paris Climate Summit directly. Thorsten Krämer formulates bluntly: “Hier, wo Natur/ verwandelt wird, entsteht Hybrides, als Restprodukt/ einer an Blödheit grenzenden Geschäftigkeit” [Here, where nature is transformed, hybrid material results, as byproduct of a busyness bordering on stupidity, *ibid.*, 70]; see also Marion Poschmann’s and Asmus Trautsch’s poems, *ibid.*, 89 and 103-5). Others approach the theme more diffidently (Lydia Daher, “Und alle drei Sekunden” [And Every 3

Seconds, *ibid.*, 41]; Titus Meyer, “Der Mensch ist die neue Erde” [Mankind is the New Earth, *ibid.*, 115]), or more obliquely (Karen Fellner, „Eine Zeitfalte weiter“ [A Fold in Time Further, *ibid.*, 220]), in line with the ironic ambivalence of the title of the anthology („All dies hier, Majestät, ist deins“ [All Before You, Your Majesty, is Yours]).

Anthropocene poetry of the kind described by Tom Bristow in his study of John Burnside, John Kinsella and Alice Oswald, *The Anthropocene Lyric* (2015) as seeking to combat alienation from nature by training readers in seeing, sensitising them to environmental change, and fostering place-based personhood in order to promote empathetic interaction with the local environment appears to be largely absent from the work of this generation. This younger generation of German poets aims rather to record and deconstruct anthropocentric thought patterns, and to decentre the human subject. Human and natural history are superimposed, and at times nature is permitted to speak for itself, as when we are invited to immerse ourselves in the consciousness of an animal or plant (*ibid.* 22, 109, 166). Alternatively, the materiality of the human subject is foregrounded.

These strategies are pursued through a variety of forms. There are many prose poems, and the texts are in general loosely structured, without rhyme or regular metre. They resemble inventories of observed objects: the title of one poem is “Große ungeordnete Aufzählung“ (Long Orderless Enumeration, Bayer/Seel, 68-69); another begins: „Dieses Gedicht ist eine einzige/ Ansammlung von Müll“ (This poem is no more than an accumulation of rubbish, *ibid.*, 77). Collage-like juxtapositions of natural phenomena with the vocabulary of the media and other elements of modern civilisation appear in some poems to serve to break down the dualism of nature and culture. In others, the seeming absence of semantic coherence suggests the discontinuities of contemporary life, while the fragmentation and recombination of particles and sounds resemble the utterances of an exhausted planet. Poets such as Liesl Ujvary practise “ein totales Poesie-Recycling”, “welches sich querfeldein am dichterischen Material der abendländischen Tradition bedient” (a poetics of total recycling, going off the beaten track and using poetic material from all of Western culture), as she comments in a note explaining the term „zugaben“ (encores) in the title of one of her poems (*ibid.* 126). Hannes Bajohr evokes an existential threat by manipulating a corpus of phrases taken from the Annual Climate Protection Reports of the German Environment Ministry and the Austrian Environment Office, in his poem “der winter der jahre” (The Winter of the Years, *ibid.* 93). Other poets experiment with the arrangement of words on the

page, presenting phrases in parallel columns. Helwig Brunner's poem "verwerfung" (Fault [ibid., 19]) reproduces the subject iconically, by means of a break descending diagonally through the lines of the poem. In many poems, English words, phrases and entire sentences are incorporated, perhaps signalling the global reach of the Anthropocene.

Anthropocenic thinking has a history extending back into the eighteenth century (see Bonneuil/Fressoz 2016; Horn 2016), so it is not surprising if key issues and debates in contemporary German ecopoetry have already been addressed in individual works of earlier nature and environmental poetry. Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, for instance, anticipated the backward look of the Anthropocene perspective on the present from a future world without mankind in her curiously modern-sounding poem, "Die Mergelgrube" (The Clay Pit, 1842 [cf. von Bormann, 1984 409]). One day, the amateur geologist imagines, all that remains of humans may be fossils like those of the ancient creatures around her. In her daydream, she sees humans, animals and stones blending into each other, and describes herself as a *Findling* (the German word means both 'erratic block' and 'foundling'), abandoned in a desolate, burnt-out world. It would of course be fanciful to read Droste's poem as an anticipation of anthropogenic climate change. But she locates the history of the human species in the timespan of the geological eras which were replacing the biblical stories of Creation and the Flood in the 1840s by a scientific understanding of the history of the planet supported by paleo-ontological evidence. "Die Mergelgrube" was written at a time when ideas about the past, present and future were changing, challenging traditional perceptions of the place of humans in the world, as in our own day. It shows that poetic reflection on the beginning and end of the world, the inconstancy of climatic circumstances, and the place of humanity in the history of the Earth is not restricted to the twenty-first century. It also suggests that poetry's ability to communicate moments of emotional intensity and insight, building bridges between abstract scientific knowledge and individuals' subjective feelings, is a powerful addition to ecological facts and discursive arguments.

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¹ The American poet Marcella Durand, for instance, defines ecological poetry as “much like ecological living”, in that it “recycles materials, functions with an intense awareness of space, seeks an equality of value between all living and unliving things, explores multiple perspectives as an attempt to subvert the dominant paradigms of mono-perception, consumption and hierarchy, and utilizes powers of concentration to increase lucidity and maintain a more transparent, less anthropocentric mode of existence” (Durand 2002, 59). The term ‘ecopoetry’ is understood similarly in the essays in Bryson 2002, and the Editors’ Preface in Fisher-Wirth/ Street 2013. For ‘Ökolyrik’, see Mayer-Tasch 1981, Kim 1991, Jarka 1994, Krüger 2001.

² The term was introduced by the atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and the ecologist Eugene Stoermer in 2000. Crutzen and Stoermer chose the Industrial Revolution as the starting point of the Anthropocene, on the basis of the altered concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, but others have argued for the decade after the Second World War, which saw nuclear testing and the Great Acceleration of industrial production and resource consumption (see McNeill 2014). It is by no means certain that the ‘Anthropocene’ proposition will gain official recognition from the International Union of Geological Sciences. However, it has already proved fruitful for cultural debates, prompting new thinking in the humanities because of its political, social, ethical and cultural implications. The Anthropocene undermines the traditional separation of natural science from the ‘human’ sciences, and makes us responsible for managing the state of the planet. For concise accounts of the Anthropocene as both a geological and a cultural concept, with references to the relevant literature (Crutzen, Steffen, Latour, Chakrabarty, Bonneuil/ Fressoz), see Trischler 2016 and Dürbeck 2015.

³ For the concept of ‘intra-action’ see Barad 2007; for ‘vibrant matter’ see Bennett 2010. Timothy Clark has explored the implications of the Anthropocene for literature, including poetry, in Clark 2015.

⁴ In the following, poems are cited where possible from one of the two principal anthologies of German ecopoetry, von Bormann 1984 and Gnüg 2013. Poems not included in these collections are cited from Conrady 2003, or barring this, from editions of the poets’ works. All translations are my own.

⁵ For this historical overview, I have drawn on my article “Naturlyrik – Umweltlyrik – Lyrik im Anthropozän: (Goodbody 2016, 287-305). This in turn owed key insights to Detering 2015 and Hiltrud Gnüg’s “Nachwort” (Gnüg 2013, 175-211), and incorporated material from Goodbody 1991.

⁶ See <http://www.deutsches-museum.de/ausstellungen/sonderausstellungen/rueckblick/2015/anthropozaen/lyrik-im-anthropozaen/> for an audio recording of the reading.