Nature in German Culture: The role of writers in environmental debate

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"Educated people make nature their friend", reads a large sign on the picturesque remains of the old town wall in Marbach.[1] The cobbled streets and crooked, half-timbered houses of Schiller's birth-place nestle on the slopes above the Romantic river Neckar, and though the panorama from the Schiller Museum and National Literary Archive, is dominated to the South by a power station, and the wooded slopes downriver towards Ludwigsburg and its Baroque palace are dotted by pylons and criss-crossed by power cables, upstream the scene remains one of vineyards, orchards and open countryside. The whine of traffic along the river valley can be heard day and night in this populous area on the edge of the Stuttgart urban industrial region. Yet it still gives the appearance of being a place where people live in harmony with the natural surroundings. To the visitor, the inhabitants seem to lead comfortable, orderly lives, observing local customs, growing regional varieties of fruit, drinking the area's distinctive wine made from the Trollinger grape, and cultivating their Swabian dialect. The environs of Marbach epitomise the idea of 'Kulturlandschaft', which was first formulated by the mid-nineteenth-century folklorist and social theorist Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl. Taken up by the German *Naturschutz* and *Heimatschutz* (Nature Conservation and Homeland Protection) movements, this ideal of an anthropogenic terrain blending the natural, cultivated and built environments in an aesthetically harmonious whole continues to inform German land use planning today.

The image which such localities present to the outside world of a nature-loving people is borne out by Germany's history: among the founding fathers of ecological thinking have been Germans such as the distinguished Prussian geographer Alexander von Humboldt, and Ernst Haeckel, the nineteenth-century marine biologist and vociferous supporter of evolutionary theory, who is remembered, despite the discrediting of his more fanciful

speculations by subsequent scientists, and reminders of his imperialist and racist politics, for having given the new discipline its name in the eighteen-sixties.[2] Above all it was Goethe who acted, as much through his scientific writings as in his poems, plays and novels, as an important mediator of respect for nature, not least through his formative influence on the writing and practical activities of Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Anthroposophy. Steiner introduced holist principles to disciplines ranging from educational theory to medicine, which have found application in the internationally successful Waldorf Schools, biodynamic farming and the Demeter health food chain.

Germany's recent national record in institutional commitment to the environment is perhaps a more significant indicator of contemporaries' attitudes and values. The country has, after all, taken a lead in drafting European Union legislation on clean production and recycling, and in international conferences and agreements since Rio on sustainable development and global warming. Between 1998 and 2005, Germany was governed by a national coalition including its Green Party. The strength and duration of popular environmental concern today is explained not least by a cultural tradition exemplified by a literature celebrating intimacy with nature extending from Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus*, via Goethe's *Werther*, the poetry of Hölderlin and the Romantics, the nineteenth-century Poetic Realists Stifter, Keller, Fontane and Storm, to the twentieth-century novels and short stories of Hermann Hesse and Hermann Löns, Max Frisch and Uwe Johnson, Günter Grass, Christa Wolf and Peter Handke, and the poetry of Bertolt Brecht and Johannes Bobrowski, Günter Kunert and Sarah Kirsch. This tradition is paralleled in German art from the sixteenth-century German landscape painter Albrecht Altdorfer and the Romantic Caspar David Friedrich's *Chasseur im Walde* (1814) to Emil Nolde and Anselm Kiefer's *Varus* (1976), and in German film from Arnold Fanck's *Der heilige Berg* (1926) to Werner Herzog's *Grizzly Man* (2006).

In his *De Germania*, the second-century Roman historian Tacitus idealised the barbarian Germanic tribes (contrasting them with his degenerate Roman countrymen) as a fierce freedom-loving people who derived their vigour from their forest home (see Schama 1995: 75-81). The link he forged between the Germanic people and untamed nature was echoed in the

eighteenth century by Johann Gottfried Herder, who extolled nature as a divine presence and a source of Germanic character, in the nineteenth in Riehl's monumental *Naturgeschichte des Volkes als Grundlage einer deutschen Social-Politik* (1851-4), and in the first half of the twentieth in *völkisch* (i.e. conservative nationalist) writing. America may regard itself as 'nature's nation' (Nash 1967), but nature also unmistakably possesses central importance in the formulation of German self-understanding and national identity (see Weyergraf 1987, Apel 1998: 15-27, Lekan and Zeller 2005: 1-14 and 17-32). Germany's comparatively late and rapid industrialisation and urbanisation gave rise to highly contradictory perceptions and transformations of a landscape which had already been saturated with symbolic meanings by the Romantics. Given that nature has been a site of such fierce ideological debate and social contestation (see Lekan and Zeller 2005: 4-6), it is not surprising that representations of it in twentieth-century German culture constitute a richly rewarding field of study. Their understanding may inform debates about the future and be of more than merely national significance. Paradoxically, though, as we shall see, the term 'ecocriticism' has no direct German equivalent, and the approach it denotes has yet to develop beyond the status of a marginal phenomenon in German literary and cultural studies.

1. The ecocritical approach

If the looming threat of our eventual exhaustion of the accessible reserves of natural resources, and particularly of primary energy sources such as fossil fuels, arouses less public anxiety today than thirty years ago, climate change and economic growth in developing countries are nevertheless slowly beginning to change perceptions of the conditions of human and non-human life on the planet. The environmental consequences of global warming may be unevenly distributed, but they seem set to pose one of the most serious challenges to governments, societies and individuals across the world in the twenty-first century. Environmental issues are, however, as Lawrence Buell notes in *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, not merely the property of the biological and environmental scientists, engineers and public policy experts around whose disciplines university programmes in Environmental Studies are generally built: they are also cultural concerns. Environmental crisis is at

bottom an epistemological problem, a consequence of false premises and inappropriate thought patterns. The disentangling of such thought patterns might be considered to be, in the first instance, the subject of philosophy. But the humanities – history, cultural studies in the wider sense, literature, film, the history of art, education and media studies, sociology and cultural geography, religion and psychology – all have a part to play in meeting the challenge (Buell 2005: vi). Conceptualisation and discursive argument are in practice inseparable from vision, imagination and cultural tradition. Technological breakthroughs and legislative reforms are generated by and take effect on the back of transformations of environmental values, perception and will – and story, image and artistic performance are crucial factors in this process of transformation (ibid.). The description, critical analysis and evaluation of these last, drawing on the resources of aesthetics, ethics and cultural theory, is the domain of environmental criticism.[3]

In America, 'ecocriticism' has become a widely accepted umbrella term for the environmentally oriented study of literature and the arts, and for the theories that underlie such critical practice. However, the environmental 'turn' in cultural studies has been no unitary event, and ecocriticism neither constitutes a single coherent theory of literature or culture, nor possesses a special methodology. Employing the normal tools of the trade and augmenting them with others eclectically derived from a range of disciplines, it has nevertheless arrived at significant new insights: ecocriticism has foregrounded neglected subgenres from nature writing to ecological science fiction, explored environmental subtexts in canonical works, and identified or reinterpreted significant thematic configurations such as pastoral and eco-apocalypticism.

The ecocritical approach is not necessarily rooted in a perception of crisis in the sense of impending global environmental collapse, but it is driven by concern about the unviability of our current treatment of the natural environment in the longer term, and by conviction of the need for an ongoing reexamination of our underlying attitudes towards nature. Above all, it participates in the forces of resistance to the prevailing dualism of nature and culture. In the early modern period, Francis Bacon and René Descartes severed the human from the non-human, and determined their relationship as

one of possession and mastery, thus laying the groundwork for attitudes responsible for environmental damage and reckless resource consumption today.

As a post-Marxist issue-driven approach, ecocriticism parallels Feminism, Gay Studies and Postcolonialism. Its special preoccupation with nature and environment complements and vies for precedence with their concern with the cultural transmission of inequalities of gender, sexuality and race. It differs from them, of course, in that while literature can speak *for* nature, as it can on behalf of silenced or disempowered social groups, writers cannot speak *as* nature or non-human animals. They can, however, in Buell's words, speak "in cognisance of human being as ecologically or environmentally embedded" (ibid. 8). Ecocritics then typically share a common ethical commitment (whether or not this is accompanied by political engagement), tend to subscribe to a holist approach, and are united in their special concern with how artistic representation envisages human and non-human webs of interrelation.

The ecocritical readers edited by Cheryl Glotfelty and Laurence Coupe (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996, Coupe 2000) were landmark publications establishing the genealogy of the new research field. Garrard's recent introduction in the Routledge 'Critical Idiom' series (2004) and Buell's Blackwell volume on the 'Future of Environmental Criticism' (2005) suggest that a phase of consolidation has now been reached, which is further marked by the inclusion of chapters on ecocriticism in a number of introductions to literary and cultural theory (Barry 2002 and Rigby 2002). The emergence of ecocritism has been traced in a number of recent publications which not only review its first decade of achievements (Buell 1999 and Estok 2001), but also offer a critique of its shortcomings (Cohen 2004).

As early as the nineteen-thirties the American critic Kenneth Burke had begun exploring the significance of ecology for literary criticism. The roots of ecocriticism are, however, usually located in the late sixties and early seventies, when the environmental movement in the United States was at its height. Major historical surveys of literary representations of the nature-culture relationship such as Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), Roderick Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967) and Clarence Glacken's

Traces on the Rhodian Shore (1967) provided the basis on which later work built, such as Annette Kolodny's exposure of the ideological significance of gendering in (male) nature representation in *The Lay of the Land* (1975). Meanwhile Joseph Meeker pursued a different line of approach, examining comedy as a genre uniquely suited to serve the contemporary need for an environmental aesthetic, in *The Comedy of Survival* (1972).

In the late nineteen-eighties Cheryll Glotfelty, a PhD student whose work on American women writers had led her to focus her attention on research into literature about the relationship between humankind and the natural environment, began a networking exercise which meant that, for the first time, scholars researching local writers in Western America and the tradition of non-fictional nature writing became aware of their common interests with literary historians re-examining canonical writers such as the Transcendentalists, Thoreau and nineteenth- and twentieth-century nature poetry from an ecological perspective. Her *Ecocriticism Reader* (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996) was to reprint articles reflecting on the mutual relevance of literature and ecology which had appeared in journals since the sixties, together with a range of recent studies of American nature writing and an annotated bibliography.

Meanwhile the foundation of ASLE (the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment) at a meeting of the Western Literature Association in 1992 marked the start of the new phase of ecocritical activity. ASLE's mission is "to promote the exchange of ideas and information about literature and other cultural representations that consider human relationships with the natural world". It seeks not only to facilitate traditional and innovative approaches to all cultural representations of nature, including collaboration with "environmental historians, economists, journalists, philosophers, psychologists, art historians and scientists", but also to encourage new nature writing by fostering contact between scholars and environmentally engaged writers, photographers, painters, musicians and film makers. Last but not least, it aims to promote the incorporation of environmental concerns and awareness into pedagogical theory and practice.[4] The Association, which has over a thousand members, organises biennial conferences which are attended by a broad cross-section of people interested professionally or

personally in literary and cultural representations of nature, and publishes the six-monthly journal ISLE (*Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*).

In the US, nature writing has played a central role in literary tradition, and national identity has been decisively shaped by the combination of two distinct, almost diametrically opposed outlooks on nature: the heroic narrative of conquest and civilisation of the continent's west, and idealisation of the New World's pristine landscapes as the sublime site of moral purity, contrasting with European corruption. Ecocriticism in Britain has a lower profile. However, the Marxist critic Raymond Williams's book *The Country and the City* (1973) was a significant source of inspiration for environmentally oriented study of the English literary tradition. Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology. Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991) was the first full-length study to adopt an explicitly ecocritical approach. Announcing a move from red to green, Bate challenged the assumption among critics since the sixties that the Romantics' preoccupation with nature could be dismissed as political escapism, and argued that Wordsworth's supreme achievement lay in his insight into the human condition as being at once a part of nature and set apart from it. He drew attention to the poet's envisionings of a rural community living in harmony with the natural environment, and to those parts of his work which reflect an intimate knowledge of the topography and people of the Lake District. Finally, he indicated Wordsworth's significance as a precursor of modern environmental thinkers by demonstrating the influence of his ideas on Ruskin, William Morris, and the founding fathers of the National Trust and the nation's national parks.

Bate's book marked a turning point, since when ecophilosophy and ecological aesthetics have prompted a reinterpretation of Romantic conceptions of nature, and a reevaluation of its resistance to Enlightenment dualism, rationalism and secularisation of the more-than-human world. English Romanticism and Victorian ecology have been key fields for enquiry alongside accounts of contemporary writing informed by explicit environmental concern (see Gifford 1995 and 1999, Kerridge and Sammells 1998, Parham 2002). The most significant British ecocritical study, Bate's *Song of the Earth* (2000), which asks what capacity English writers from Jane

Austen to Philip Larkin have to reunite us with the earth, is discussed further in Chapter 4.

Differences in approach characterised ecocriticism from the start: Buell has described the movement as a "concourse of interlocking but semi-autonomous projects" (1999: 706). However, a pattern can be recognised in its development. Early work was mainly concerned with countering the marginalisation of environmental issues in literary criticism prevailing in the nineteen-eighties. The first ecocritics sought to reconnect critical practice with environmental experience and to fuse it with practical commitment. Lawrence Buell's monumental study *The Environmental Imagination. Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture* went beyond such writing in sophistication, range and lucidity. Focused on a nature writer whose position in American cultural tradition is undisputedly pivotal and whose influence has been international, it opened up a range of new thematic perspectives, while exploring intertextual and genre dimensions of his and other work.

Buell wrote of a 'dual accountability' of environmental writing to matter (biology, zoology, geology) as well as discursive mentation. He suggested that if environmental writing shows itself ignorant of the known facts of nature, it does so at its peril. It may not be the poet's or essayist's highest calling to teach ornithology, for instance. But it is a legitimate aim of the environmental text to reanimate and redirect the reader's interaction with nature. The mimetic function of literature is as important, according to Buell, as its intra- and the intertextual dimensions, and he defends a symbiosis of object-responsiveness and imaginative shaping against the charges of epistemological naivety (ibid. 91-103). Buell's checklist of the ingredients comprising 'environmentally oriented' texts (1995: 7f.) provided a pragmatic basis for subsequent discussion of the reflection of environmental consciousness in literary texts. The first *desideratum* he identifies is a presentation of the non-human environment "not merely as a framing device but as *a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history*" (my emphasis). The novels of Thomas Hardy and many travel books conform to this criterion. Secondly, *human interest should not be* "understood to be the *only legitimate interest*". The empathy with nature in Walt Whitman's long poem 'Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking' (1860)

contrasts favourably with the comparative self-absorbtion of much Romantic poetry on this account. Whitman is concerned with the composition of a specific place, and he endows a symbolic bird with a habitat, a history and a story of its own. The third aspect identified by Buell is *human accountability to the environment* as part of the text's ethical orientation. In Wordsworth's poem 'Nutting' (1800), for instance, reminiscence prompts the poet to retell a self-incriminating tale of youthful violation of a hazel grove. Finally, a *sense of the environment as a process* rather than a constant must be implicit. James Fenimore Cooper's *Pioneers* (1823) is more of an environmentally orientated text than his other, later *Leatherstocking Tales*, inasmuch as it records the shifts in the relationship of the people with nature associated with the development of the community from small settlement to large town. Only in the rarest cases are all four main ingredients likely to be present unequivocally and consistently, he cautions, and the works in which they are most explicitly incorporated are actually more likely to be non-fictional than fictional ones. These criteria, which reflect an alignment of the author, if not with biocentrism, then at least with a weak form of anthropocentrism, and identify the environment as an ethical issue, but avoid simplistic notions of the necessity to preserve nature as a static status quo against all forms of change, have been useful guidelines in my consideration of German literature.

Jonathan Bate's essay 'Living with the Weather' (1996) similarly exemplifies what can be described as a 'literalist', but non-reductive approach to texts. Bate reinterprets Byron's poem 'Darkness' and Keats's ode 'To Autumn' in the context of the volcanic eruption on the Pacific island of Tambora in 1816, and its consequences for the European climate. 'Darkness', hitherto interpreted as an apocalyptic political vision, reveals a surprisingly literal dimension of meaning in the knowledge of the miserable summers of 1816 and 1817, which were blighted by volcanic ash in the atmosphere. Keats's vision of the "season of mists and mellow fruitfulness", written in 1819, can equally plausibly be read as an expression of joy and physical well-being by the asthmatic poet at the first good harvest and the first clear autumn weather in years. Bate showed that Romantic poetry reflects on the climatic co-determinants of the human condition. Though scope for such rereadings of canonical literature is probably limited, he was manifestly justified in taking

issue with both formalist critics, who had regarded Romantic descriptions of nature as apolitical escapism, and the New Historicists, who read them either as ‘displacements’ of unconscious political motives, or as a disguise for covert ideological polemics.

Karl Kroeber’s *Ecological Literary Criticism. Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind* (1994) concurred with Bate’s reassessment of Romantic poetry as an anticipation of ecological thinking, finding a ‘biological materialism’ of relevance to us today in the Romantics’ (in particular Shelley’s) visions of a harmonious interanimation of the cultural and the natural. Bate’s argument that the best Romantic writing on nature is the expression of an intense, original and enduring exploration of humanity’s place in the natural world has recently been further developed by Rigby, whose account of European Romanticism draws comparisons between the English Romantics and their German contemporaries, Goethe, Schelling, Novalis, Tieck and Eichendorff (Rigby 2004).

While some ‘first wave’ ecocriticism in the first half of the nineteen-nineties was characterised by avoidance of rather than engagement with cultural theory, Buell, Bate and Kroeber thus demonstrated that ecocritical literalism could provide new insights without going back on theory’s recognition that even the most intentionally ‘realistic’ of texts are heavily mediated refractions of the palpable world. The new “Global Warming criticism”, disclosing the inextricability of culture and nature by the agency of the weather, which Bate called for in place of the old Cold War criticism (a term coined by Kroeber for the concerns which dominated critical discourse from the nineteen-sixties to the nineteen-eighties), which had been primarily concerned with human language, agency and social relations, did not necessarily mean ignoring Structuralism, Poststructuralism and other developments in theory since the nineteen-sixties. By the middle of the nineties, the hagiographical tendency of certain American critics discussing texts and genres that seemed to provide dense, accurate representations of actual, natural environments was being subjected to criticism by Patrick Murphy and others seeking not only to theorise, but also to politicise the movement. Murphy’s ecofeminist essays published under the title *Literature, Nature and Other* (1995) introduced three important new dimensions to

ecocriticism. On the one hand they marked the beginning of a more thorough exploration of the relevance of Poststructuralism and other developments in critical theory since the nineteen-seventies for an ecological critique. On the other, his development of the link between ecologism and feminism and the attention he paid to Native American writers liberated ecocriticism from what had begun to attract criticism as a ghetto of predominantly masculinist, elitist and tendentially xenophobic sentimentality. In deconstructing the gendering of nature in texts, and in using Bakhtin's dialogics as a theoretical framework embracing feminism and ecology, Murphy took a decisive step towards overcoming the "defensiveness towards theory" identified by Simon Estok in ecocritical writing, and towards avoiding the trap of indulging in a nostalgic pastoralist evasion of the complexities of twentieth-century life (Estok 2001: 224).[5]

White middle-class male ecocriticism now faced a dual challenge from ecofeminists and environmental justice activists. Ecofeminism is based on the premise of a correlation between the history of institutionalised patriarchy and human domination of the non-human. Its principal literary aim has been to resist androcentric traditions of literary interpretation (see Kolodny 1975 and Westling 1996): it has drawn on revisions of the history of science (Carolyn Merchant, Donna Haraway), feminist ecotheology (Mary Daly) and environmental philosophy (Val Plumwood and Karen Warren). Two broad camps of ecofeminists are divided by their different attitudes towards the association of women with nature (i.e. the concept of 'natural' femininity as well as that of a 'feminine' nature). On the one hand, the social ecofeminists, who stress the cultural construction of gender, have argued that the symbolic coding of nature as female which pervades western culture has reinforced the domination of both women and nature. On the other, cultural ecofeminists, who are less wary of essentialism, have proposed that there is an inherent, not merely historically contingent, caring relationship between women and nature. The recuperation of maternal images of a pagan earth deity, they suggest, may be of positive strategic value. While cultural ecofeminism played an important role in the feminist and environmental movements in the US, social ecofeminists have contributed more to ecocritical theory.

At the same time as patriarchal assumptions were being challenged, the middle-class bias of first-wave ecocriticism was increasingly being replaced by a more class- and race-conscious social ecocriticism. Estok in particular has taken issue with his colleagues' blindness to environmental racism. The result has been a shift of focus from wilderness to metropolitan and toxified landscapes, with attention being directed towards constructed as well as natural environments. The inclusion of urban, ethnic and national perspectives has given a new impetus to the examination of historical and ideological (mis-)appropriations of nature as a justification for systems of cultural and social oppression. Concern for displaced peoples and environmental racism has infused place studies with new life.

This brief outline inevitably oversimplifies the development of ecocriticism. Further directions taken have included the exploration of contingencies between environmentalism and French poststructuralist theory (Cronon 1995, Conley 1997, Phillips 2003) and the phenomenological strand of theory engaging with Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty (Abram 1996, Westling 1996, Scigaj 1999, Bate 2000, Rigby 2004). There have also been efforts to ground literary criticism in neurophysiology (Kroeber 1994), evolutionary biology (Glen Love and John Elder) and scientific ecology. The call to model ecocriticism on ecology is, it should be noted, not unproblematic when used to justify pleas for cultural diversity. The early twentieth-century idea of the 'climax community' seemed to provide a model for visions of unity, balance and moral integrity. This steady state, in which everything was supposedly cooperatively and interdependently linked, constituted a sort of idyllic *status ante quem*, threatened by human intervention. Today's ecologists are more likely to stress the pervasive presence of change, probability and interspecies competition (see Potthast 2004 and Grewe-Volpp 2006).

The attempt to bridge the gap between cultural theory and the natural sciences has so far been only a relatively minor field of enquiry in American ecocriticism. Ecocritics, even more than environmental historians and historians of ideas, have been more interested in analysing normative claims than scientific issues (i.e. ideas how things *should be* rather than how they *are*), and have consequently tended to focus on the rhetorical strategy and mode of articulation rather than the validity of arguments in terms of scientific

proof. Theories applying the ecological principle of interconnectedness to the question of the role of literature and the arts in human society (Meeker 1977, Bateson 1979, Rueckert in Glotfelty and Fromm 1996) have, however, been more fruitful: Peter Finke's and Hubert Zapf's conception of 'cultural ecology' is discussed further at the end of this chapter.

The diversification of critical method in ecocriticism has been accompanied by a broadening of focus from the original concentration on non-fictional nature writing, nature poetry and wilderness fiction, towards other genres (science fiction, the thriller), media (film and art) and landscapes and constructed environments (parks, zoos and shopping malls) (see Cosgrove and Daniels 1988, Wilson 1992, Hochman 1998). Studies of the ecology of language itself (Haugen 1972, Halliday 1990, Fill 1993, Harré, Brockmeier and Mühlhäusler 1999, Fill and Mühlhäusler 2001) have been accompanied by explorations of the rhetoric, narratology and iconography of environmental discourse (Bennett and Chaloupka 1993, Herndl and Brown 1996, Kerridge 1999). Greg Garrard has recently defined the task of ecocriticism as one of the analysis of *tropes*, i.e. extended rhetorical and narrative strategies adapting existing genres, narratives, metaphors and images. Garrard identifies 'pollution', 'pastoral', 'wilderness', 'apocalypse', 'dwelling', 'animals', and 'the earth' as thematic structures constituting "pre-existing ways of imagining the place of humans in nature", around which conventions shaping environmental discourse have crystallised (2004: 10). He sketches out an exciting perspective of the critical analysis of the ways in which writers and artists transform and negotiate between nature and culture, and real and imagined nature, by elaborating and inflecting such tropes.

The development of ecocriticism on the international stage is a relatively recent phenomenon. Since the publication of Patrick Murphy's international handbook on *The Literature of Nature* (1998), American ecocritics have shown a cautious interest in comparative and general literary studies. Organisations affiliated with the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment have sprung up in Japan, Korea, the UK, Australia/New Zealand, Europe, India and Canada, bringing researchers and teachers of American Studies together with scholars keen to explore this aspect of their own national literary and cultural traditions. In the case of the German-

speaking world, this development is exemplified by the essay volumes *Natur – Kultur – Text. Beiträge zu Ökologie und Literaturwissenschaft* (Gersdorf and Mayer 2005a) and *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies. Transatlantic Conversations on Ecocriticism* (Gersdorf and Mayer 2006).

2. Environmental concern and cultural pessimism: ecologically oriented literary and cultural studies in Germany

Environmental concerns may feature less prominently in private and public life in Germany today than prior to reunification, but, as I have noted above, environmental awareness and green politics had a strong presence in twentieth-century Germany, and a long and rich history. Germany's political culture is the product of a tradition in which not only idealisations of nature, but also critiques of modernity and the technocratic society have played a major part. The Green (Environmental and Alternative) Movement in the nineteen-seventies has been described by political sociologists as a third wave of cultural criticism following in the footsteps of Bourgeois Romanticism and Utopian Socialism in the early nineteenth century, and Agrarian Romanticism and the Lifestyle Reform Movement/Youth Movement at the end of the nineteenth and the turn of the twentieth century (Rucht 1989: 63f.). Revolting against the constraints of modern urban, industrial civilisation, many of the more extreme proponents of these movements interpreted alienation from the natural environment and loss of community in the mass society as forces inevitably leading to decay and decline. Environmental arguments in modern Germany are rooted in a discourse which was dominated by cultural pessimism from the late nineteenth century up to the middle of the twentieth, and in which Friedrich Nietzsche, Ludwig Klages and Oswald Spengler were central figures. This is the darker side to German intellectuals' special relationship with nature.

Herder and the Romantics had valorised their national difference from, on the one hand, French rationalism and enlightenment, and on the other, British materialism and mercantilism through a national affinity with the organic. The essays by Joachim Radkau and Michael Imort in Lekan and Zeller 2005 are salutary correctives to the myth that Germans are racially or even culturally closer to nature than other nations, or have a special inborn

affinity with the non-human. Radkau and Imort identify the decentralised decision-making on natural resources which resulted from the premodern pattern of petty states and free cities, the lack of German colonies (except for a brief period at the end of the nineteenth century), which benefited sustainable resource management, and the construction of 'forest' as a symbol of Germandom, uniting the nation against Napoleonic occupation, as principal factors determining the German traditions of environmental consciousness and empathy with animals. In the late nineteenth century, this association of the German nation and people with nature was used to excuse relative backwardness in terms of economic development and to condone the absence of political emancipation. In the *Heimatschutz* (Homeland Protection) movement, nature conservation, the preservation of historical monuments and the fostering of traditional art, architecture, customs, costumes and festivals were closely allied with conservative, nationalist, and, in the case of some proponents, racist political agendas. Though the *Reformbewegung* (Lifestyle Reform Movement) embraced a number of socialist organisations, and many of the initiatives it was composed of in housing reform, communal living, education, youth hostelling, vegetarianism, abstinence from alcohol, natural healing, nudism, etc. were driven by emancipatory and egalitarian principles, the conservative critique of social, economic and technological modernisation dominated public debate at the turn of the century.

Developments after the First World War and the polarisation of German politics in the nineteen-twenties resulted in the appropriation of the idealism of many of the idealistic groups in the *Wandervogelbewegung* (the German Youth Movement founded in 1901) seeking to return to nature, and their incorporation in the fascist movement (see Dominick 1992 and Lekan 2004). The myth of a simple, natural way of life became a tool for militarist expansion in the ideology of Blood and Soil. The Nazis' understanding of nature was, in keeping with their practice of 'reactionary modernism' (Jeffrey Herf), a schizophrenic one of sentimental idealisation on the one hand and ruthless exploitation on the other. Since the eighteenth century, traditional conceptions of nature as static harmony had been increasingly replaced by dynamic understandings of change through organic processes. Historical events and social formations were now seen in analogy with the lives of natural

organisms. In the world view of Social Darwinism, social forces were described as powers of nature, and wars interpreted as natural phenomena. The Nazis' poisonous ideological loading of 'Naturgefühl', the aesthetic relationship with nature championed by the Romantics, played its part, as Jörg Zimmermann has commented, in the holocaust: "Höhepunkt mystifizierender Verkehrung von Gesellschaft in Natur war sicherlich die Blut-und-Boden-Ideologie des Faschismus, die ein angeblich urdeutsches Naturgefühl schließlich sogar mit der Forderung nach Ausrottung 'minderwertiger' und das meinte auch: 'unschöner' Rassen vereinbaren konnte" (1982: 144). Efforts to protect forests and promote organic farming, and seemingly exemplary legislation on vivisection, nature conservation and hunting existed in practice within an ideological framework oriented towards thoroughgoing mastery of the natural world, necessitating warfare, eugenics and elimination or enslavement of undesirable races.[6]

Though defeat in 1945 led to the comprehensive disqualification of the Nazis' 'ideology of nature', critiques of modernity did not cease: F.G. Jünger published a sophisticated critique of technology, *Die Perfektion der Technik*, in 1946, Karl Jaspers spoke out against the atom bomb, and Günther Anders wrote an influential analysis of the unrecognised implications of the nuclear age, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen* (1956). New causes for environmental concern emerged in the nineteen-fifties, with international nuclear testing and, at home, sweeping change to the countryside resulting from the introduction of industrialised farming methods. Individual writers such as Günter Eich, Arno Schmidt and Hans Magnus Enzensberger blended elements of technological scepticism with traces of Romantic idealisation of nature, in apocalyptic scenarios and satirical works which were sharply critical of the materialism and restorational politics of the Adenauer era. However, these were outsiders in a society generally characterised by economic optimism and enthusiasm for technology.

When the environmental movement took shape in Germany in the early nineteen-seventies, it was in response to international developments rather than as a revival of the native tradition of empathy with and concern for nature. The model environmental legislation of the Brandt-Scheel Social Democrat/Liberal coalition between 1969 and 1973 was crucially concerned

with ‘environment’ rather than ‘nature’, and focused on concrete issues of pollution, resource depletion and public health. (This development was initially matched in the GDR, whose environmental laws in the early nineteen-seventies were hardly less progressive. However, their non-implementation, out of economic necessity and bureaucratic neglect, led to the sharp deterioration of environmental conditions in East Germany which finally became apparent at reunification.) The wave of popular environmental protest in West Germany organised in *Bürgerinitiativen* (grass-roots Citizens’ Initiatives) from 1972 onwards initially embraced liberal and conservative forces and even individuals from the far right, but these last were excluded when the Green Party was founded in 1980. Environmentalism was effectively fused, for the first time, with traditional left-wing concerns in a programme of participative democratic activism.

Carl Amery’s *Das Ende der Vorsehung* (1972) and *Natur als Politik* (1976), Herbert Gruhl’s bestselling study *Ein Planet wird geplündert* (1975), Robert Jungk’s *Der Atomstaat* (1977), Rudolf Bahro’s *Die Alternative* (1977), Klaus Michael Meyer-Abich’s *Frieden mit der Natur* (1979), Eugen Drewermann’s *Der tödliche Fortschritt* (1981), Hoimar von Ditfurth’s *So laßt uns denn ein Apfelbäumchen pflanzen* (1985) and Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker’s *Bewußtseinswandel* (1988) are among the many influential non-fiction publications which drew attention to the environment and played a part in forming public opinion, alongside TV progammes and articles in the press. The discovery of *Waldsterben* (forest dieback) in 1982 and the nuclear accident in Chernobyl in 1986 sustained a continuing high level of interest up to reunification and beyond. The German branch of Greenpeace, the organisation founded in Canada in 1971 to fight French nuclear testing in the Pacific, rapidly advanced after its founding in 1980 to become the wealthiest and possibly the most influential environmental organisation in the world.

Yet environment-oriented studies in Germany have remained largely a matter for the natural sciences, and been slow to establish themselves in the humanities. Academic interest has been strongest among philosophers working in environmental ethics and nature aesthetics (Jonas 1979, Birnbacher 1980, Gernot Böhme 1989 and 1992, Meyer-Abich 1990, Seel 1991, Ott 1993, Schäfer 1993, Vietta 1995, Krebs 1997 and 1999) and

historians (Wey 1982, Sieferle 1984, 1988 and 1997, Kluge 1985, Linse 1986, Brüggemeier and Rommelspacher 1987, Ruth and Dieter Groh 1991 and 1996, Hermand 1993, Rohkrämer 1999, Sieferle and Breuninger 1999, Radkau 2000, Radkau and Uekötter 2003).[7] Collections of essays edited by Rapp (1981), Weber (1989) and Wilke (1993) have re-examined conceptions of nature in the light of the environmental movement. Further work on the archaeology of ecological thinking and the pathology of deleterious conceptions of nature in the history of ideas and cultural studies includes Zimmermann 1982, Großklaus and Oldemeyer 1983, Riedel 1988, Mayer-Tasch 1991, Hermand 1991a, Heiland 1992, and Böhme, Matussek and Müller 2000.

Following the pattern of developments in the United States (since Nash 1967, Glacken 1967, Worster 1977, Bramwell 1989 and Evernden 1992), literary texts were discussed alongside discursive writing in historical accounts of shifts in the understanding of nature and the emergence of environmental awareness in Germany before literature became a common focus of major studies in its own right (see Barthelmeß 1972 and 1988, Großklaus and Oldemeyer 1983, Sieferle 1984).[8] At the same time, ground-breaking literary research into the cultural meanings vested in nature was being carried out in fields ranging from Baroque emblems to eighteenth-century physico-theology and landscape aesthetics, and tensions between Romantic pantheism and nihilism in the nineteenth-century. Literary studies from the nineteen-sixties and seventies such as Friedrich Sengle's seminal article on 'Wunschbild Land und Schreckbild Stadt' in eighteenth and nineteenth-century prose writing (1963), Joachim Ritter's landmark analysis of the function of landscape (1963), Renate Böschenstein's work on the genre of the idyll (Böschenstein-Schäfer 1967), Ernst Ulrich Grosse's historical review of 'Sympathie der Natur' (1968), Alexander von Bormann's revelation of the complexity of the Romantic Eichendorff's nature imagery, *Natura Loquitur* (1968), Rolf Christian Zimmermann's reconstruction of Goethe's studies of alchemy and nature mysticism and his analysis of their significance for his conception of nature in *Das Weltbild des jungen Goethe* (1969), Klaus Garber's explication of Baroque nature imagery, *Der locus amoenus und der locus terribilis* (1974)

and Uwe Ketelsen's account of the nature poetry of the early Enlightenment (1974) all opened up new perspectives on literary representations of nature.

It was not, however, until the late nineteen-seventies that research into cultural representations of nature began to be guided by environmental concern. Contemporary research in German studies is indebted above all to two pioneers: the Wisconsin research professor Jost Hermand and Hartmut Böhme, Professor for Cultural Theory at the Humboldt University, Berlin. Hermand has written two ground-breaking volumes providing overviews of green thinking and environmental literature in the German-speaking world (1991a and b), initiated a series of collaborative projects and published edited volumes on associated themes (Grimm and Hermand 1981 and 1989, Hermand and Müller 1989, Hermand 1993, Hermand and Steakley 1996), and encouraged a generation of younger scholars to work in the field. In Germany, Hartmut Böhme has meanwhile been the most significant contributor: his volume of essays *Natur und Subjekt* (1988) complemented Hermand's leftist environmental commitment and concern with the history of ideas by focusing on the adaptation of traditional nature metaphors and the reconfiguring of narratives, and engaging in more sophisticated theorisation. (Böhme's ecological aesthetics are discussed below, and Chapter 8 builds on his conception of nature as a cultural project.) Both Hermand and Böhme have called repeatedly for the vigorous pursuit of ecologically-oriented literary and cultural studies in Germany (see Hermand and Müller 1989, Böhme 1994, Hermand 1997, and Böhme, Matussek and Müller 2000).

Further significant German practitioners of environment-oriented criticism have been Norbert Mecklenburg, Ursula Heukenkamp, Harro Segeberg and Gerhard Kaiser. The strong tradition of German nature poetry meant that this genre provided the initial focus for publications (see especially Mecklenburg 1977, Ertl 1982, Haupt 1982, Heukenkamp 1982 – also the anthologies edited by Mayer-Tasch [1981] and von Bormann [1984], and more recent publications such as Fietz, Hoffman and Ludwig 1992 and Heukenkamp 1999). A second area of activity has been the work of Goethe and the *Goethezeit* from seventeen-seventy to eighteen-thirty (see Kreutzer 1978, Niedermeier 1988/9 and 1992, Kaiser 1991 and 1994, Matussek 1992, Barkhoff 1996 and 1997b, Wyder 1998). Research into nineteenth-century

prose writing has included Denkler 1980, Obermaier 1985, Seeber and Klussmann 1986, Frühwald 1989, Cella 1990, Großklaus 1990, Kaiser 1991, Stahlova 1991, Detering 1992, the contributions by Christian Begemann and Arthur Brande in Duhamel 1994, and Wanning 2005. The twentieth-century novel has naturally attracted attention (Herles 1982, Gsteiger 1989, Hunt 1992, Jucker 1995a, Schumacher 1998, Jambon 1999, and Barkhoff 2000 and 2003), as also GDR writing, with its strong socio-political orientation (Knabe 1985, Mallinckrodt 1987, Emmerich 1990 and 2000, Schlenstedt 1993, Grauert 1995 and 2004, Jucker 1995b, and Schenkel 1995).

Popular themes have been critiques of technology (Ott 1987, Segeberg 1987a, 1987b and 1997, Schütz 1988, Großklaus and Lämmert 1989, Hädecke 1993, Platen 1997, Korber 1998, Midgley 2000, Wege 2000), apocalyptic scenarios reflecting cultural pessimism (Schatz 1985, Grimm, Faulstich and Kuon 1986, Vondung 1988, Kaiser 1991, Lilienthal 1996, Bullivant 2002), landscape (Lobsien 1981, Theile 1992, Raymond 1993, Wunderlich 1995, Riedel 1996, Apel 1998) and *Heimat* (Pott 1986, Mecklenburg 1987, Seliger 1987, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 1990, Blickle 1992, Hermand and Steakley 1996, Ecker 1997, Haberl and Strohmeier 1999, Boa and Palfreyman 2000). Lindenpütz (1999) is perhaps the most significant contribution to research into children's literature and the teenage novel, which genres are of special importance to educators. Nature-oriented studies of individual authors such as Karl Philipp Moritz (Grams 1992), Schiller (Riedel 1989), Hermann Löns (Dupke 1993), Elfriede Jelinek (Doll 1994) and Christoph Ransmayr (e.g. Mosebach 2003) have been accompanied by collections of essays (Riordan 1997, Goodbody 1998, Morris-Keitel 2000, Gersdorf and Mayer 2005a and 2006) and special numbers of journals such as *Der Deutschunterricht* ('Naturerfahrung in der Literatur' = 38, no. 1 [1986] and 'Technik in Sprache und Literatur' = 41, no. 5 [1989]; *Diskussion Deutsch* ('Deutschunterricht und Ökologie' = 135 [1994]) and *Literatur für Leser* ('Literatur und Technik' = 21, no. 2 [1998]).[9]

However, it is no accident that *Auslandsgermanisten* working in the English-speaking countries have played a significant part in the initial exploration of this aspect of German writing.[10] Though the wider concerns with place and identity which have accompanied ecocriticism over the past

decade and a half in Britain and America have their equivalents in German literary and cultural studies, the core ecocritical project of reassessing the cultural heritage in the light of contemporary environmental crisis and the values we need to promote today has yet to become a part of mainstream academic discourse in Germany. The principal reason for this state of affairs is doubtless the reluctance of German academics to engage in a subject tainted by association with racist nationalism, eugenics and the holocaust. Ernst Haeckel, whose influence on intellectual life in late nineteenth-century Germany was considerable, was a social Darwinist who subscribed to the orthogenic view that evolution was progressive, held that there were superior and inferior species, and supported imperialist expansion with pseudo-scientific arguments. The historian Daniel Gasman has described Haeckelianism as a necessary, if not in itself sufficient precondition for the development of Nazi ideology and the rise of fascism (1998: 3-9). “The story of the protection of the natural environment in Germany can never be told as a success story as it is in the United States”, notes Christoph Mauch. “The extermination of native plants in Eastern Europe by Nazi conservationists who wished to ‘germanise’ the landscape was carried out simultaneously with the extermination of millions of lives. The term ‘German space’ therefore has sinister connotations.” (2004: 4) The link between critical environmental consciousness and patriotism which exists in America is not there in Germany today, and there persists a distrust of green arguments as fundamentally irrational and intrinsically undemocratic among many German intellectuals.[11] Ruth and Dieter Groh’s dismissal of the ecological nature aesthetic developed from Adorno and Hermann Schmitz by the philosopher Gernot Böhme and his brother, the cultural historian Hartmut Böhme, illustrates the accusations of political naivety which tend to be levelled at green perspectives in literary and cultural studies:

> Die projektierte Naturästhetik will […] *Argumente* durch *Gefühle* ersetzen. In diesem Anspruch bekundet sich eine eklatante Vernunftfeindschaft, eine Absage an rationale Diskurse, ein antizivilisatorischer Affekt, dem prinzipiell zu mißtrauen uns historische Erfahrungen lehren. (Ruth and Dieter Groh 1996: 126)

The charge of cultural pessimism reflects an intensity of feeling and a readiness to associate opponents with right-wing extremism which betray sensitivities still characteristic of the nature discourse in Germany today.

Secondly, there is widespread scepticism among German literary scholars regarding an approach understood as naively mimetic and primarily concerned with one-dimensional, polemic texts of little aesthetic value. The well-meaning *Gesinnungsästhetik*, or prioritising of content over form, and of political message over aesthetic considerations, which underlies most descriptions of polluted and damaged landscapes instrumentalises literature, and constitutes an 'ecological realism' which smacks of Russian or East German Socialist Realism between the nineteen-thirties and the fifties. The nineteen-eighties saw a swing of public taste away from the ethos of political responsibility which had characterised so much post-war literature, and of which 'environmental' writing has been seen as the last manifestation, towards postmodern detachment and aesthetic play. The ugly term 'Ökolyrik' reinforced the view that green literature was necessarily didactic and crudely simplistic, that it sacrificed art to propaganda or politically correct rhetoric. In the nineteen-nineties, when ecological politics were belatedly gaining recognition in Britain, and ecocriticism was establishing itself in the United States, ecological issues were in any case displaced from their position near the top of the German political agenda by other political and economic concerns in the wake of reunification.

The absence in Germany of the tradition of Nature Writing, which was of central importance for first wave ecocritics in the United States, is a further reason. Defined by Scott Slovic as "literary nonfiction that offers scientific scrutiny of the world (as in the older tradition of literary natural history), explores the private experience of the individual human observer of the world, or reflects upon the political and philosophical implications of the relationships among human beings and the larger planet",[12] this includes essayistic and autobiographical accounts of (largely wilderness) landscapes by Henry David Thoreau, Mary Austin, Aldo Leopold, Edward Abbey, Annie Dillard, Rick Bass and Barry Lopez.[13] Anthologies of German landscape writing (Schneider 1981, Sieferle 1991, Schäfer and Storch 1993) contain some comparable texts, and there is an (as yet largely unexplored) body of German travel

writing concerned with environmental issues. Nevertheless, German publications in the nature writing genre such as Wilhelm Lehmann's *Bukolisches Tagebuch* (1948) are marginal phenomena which only underline the difference from the centrality of nature writing in American cultural tradition. For these and doubtless also other reasons, events, institutions and publication outlets acting as identifiable fora for ecocritical discussion have only begun to emerge in Germany.[14]

Over the past two decades, however, German environmental historians and historians of technology have, like their colleagues in Britain and the US, reached a new understanding of science, technology and the environment as a continuum conditioned by cultural and social negotiation. This has led to a reassessment of the German tradition of nature protection. Whereas Fritz Stern (1961), George Mosse (1964), Klaus Bergmann (1970) and even Rolf Peter Sieferle (1984) portrayed Romantic landscape ideals and the discourse of *Heimat* as harbingers of anti-Enlightenment, pro-fascist tendencies, Ulrich Linse (1986), Celia Applegate (1990), Alon Confino (1997) and William Rollins (1997) have shown that *Heimat* appreciation and regionalism can be agents of cultural and political modernisation rather than mere atavistic nostalgia.

Thomas Rohkrämer has demonstrated that key thinkers between the eighteen-eighties and the nineteen-thirties were less antimodern in their approach than seekers of an alternative form of modernity. In *Eine andere Moderne? Zivilisationskritik, Natur und Technik in Deutschland 1880-1933* (1999), he reassesses the principal solutions offered by Germans to the problems arising from their rapid industrialisation. 'Civilisation criticism' was a precursor of the analyses of the modern predicament and tentative visions of reconciliation between man and nature, technology and the environment formulated by Adorno/Horkheimer, Bloch, Anders and Marcuse since the Second World War. The anxieties about industrial development in the late nineteenth century, their radicalisation through the trauma of the First World War, and the phase of renewed modernisation which followed in the mid to late twenties led to three distinct strategies, which sought to overcome the negative aspects of modernity by means of ethics, nature and technology. 'Technology in the service of traditional cultural values' sums up Walther Rathenau's optimistic conception of containment of the 'mechanisation' of

modern society within an ethical framework. It was superseded by the pessimism of the philosopher of ‘life’ and radical opponent of modernisation Ludwig Klages. Klages drew attention to environmental degradation and the physical and emotional consequences of technological and social change in fundamentally flawed but fascinating prophetic works. Despite his esoteric mysticism, the implausibilities and contradictions inherent in his philosophy, and his lack of provision for practical counter-measures, Rohkrämer argues that Klages’s vision of ‘technology in the service of a “natural” way of life’ is worthy of serious attention. His championing of emotional and aesthetic experience of nature as an alternative to a purely instrumental relationship is conducive to sensitivity towards environmental damage and capable of motivating resistance to it.

Ernst Jünger, Rohkrämer’s third main subject, came from an outspoken critique of technology in the aftermath of the First World War to seek salvation in perfecting it. The society in which man was fused with technology in a ‘heroic construction’ in Jünger’s *Der Arbeiter* (1932) reflected a technocratic standpoint attempting to “solve the problems of modernity through technology”. This variant of civilisation criticism, which sacrificed the freedom of the individual to organisation and efficiency, creating an organic community by force, came close to subsequent political policy and practice in the Third Reich. Civilisation criticism as a whole was nevertheless a creative response to the deepening class divisions, the decline of traditional forms of culture, the mechanisation of human life and the environmental damage which characterised the period.

Rohkrämer’s suggestion that lessons may be learned from analysing the merits and shortcomings of the various diagnoses of society’s ills which he examines, and the political implications of the different proposals for action, corresponds to my own perspective in the following chapters, where I examine the green visions of writers with sympathy but also with critical detachment from elements of Romantic escapism, fatalism and leanings towards the political far right in their work. German ecocriticism has the potential to form a distinctive project, engaging in an archaeology of contemporary green literary and cultural thinking and feeling, in Goethe and the Romantics, and nineteenth- and early twentieth-century prose fiction,

poetry, drama and essay, and reviewing reflections on our relationship with the non-human and technological scepticism since the nineteen-seventies. The following pages are concerned with the theoretical position from which texts are examined in the subsequent chapters. First I discuss an issue with important implications for textual analysis: the dispute over whether nature is 'out there' (i.e. that which is given and not the product of human hands, that which comes into being and changes its form independently of us), or rather a product of human mentation, a linguistic construct. The final section of the chapter takes a closer look at two of the most significant German contributions to ecotheory to date: Gernot and Hartmut Böhme's ecological aesthetics, and Peter Finke and Hubert Zapf's concept of cultural ecology.

3. The challenge of Poststructuralism

Within the broad framework of ecocritical enquiry in the United States, Lawrence Buell noted in 1999 that adherents of the Deep Ecology model, perceiving the bond between nature and the human self in terms of a shared spiritual identity, were clashing with the proponents of poststructuralist theory, who are inherently sceptical of myths of naturalness and authenticity, and focus on the social and cultural construction of conceptions of nature. This fundamental debate has been pursued not least through investigations of landscapes and animals in literary texts, conceiving these in turn as natural entities and as imagined descriptive and symbolic structures (1999: 706).

Kate Soper writes similarly in her admirably lucid book *What is Nature?* of the underlying tension "between those who would invoke a mystical or 'theological' version of nature as a caution against Prometheanism [for instance Heidegger], and those who would expose the reactionary function of all forms of nature 'idolatry' in perpetuating social divisions and hierarchies [e.g. Foucault]" (1995: 98). Her central argument is that both currently influential perspectives have a part to play in the debate on nature. The first, which may be described as the ecological perspective, is a response to the environmental crisis. It is critical of plunder and destruction, and seeks to correct abuse. The second, the perspective of theory and cultural criticism, focuses on the semiotics of 'nature' as a concept, and its role in mediating access to reality. Its justification lies in the necessity to halt the oppressive

use of the idea of ‘nature’ to legitimate social and sexual hierarchies and discriminatory cultural norms. While the two perspectives can roughly be equated with the ‘green’ and the ‘postmodern’, they are, in Soper’s view, more accurately characterised as ‘nature-endorsing’ and ‘nature-sceptical’ (p. 4).[15]

Soper writes of “abrasion” between the valorisation of nature at the heart of ecological politics and the nature-sceptical critiques of a progressive gender politics. She insists, nevertheless, on the possibility of achieving a reconciliation of the two perspectives, whereby each becomes conscious of what their respective discourse on nature is ignoring or politically repressing: “It would be no more appropriate for those whose primary interest is in sexuality to pit their ‘nature’ deconstructions against the ecological cause, than for ecologists to ignore the slidings of a signifier so central to their concerns” (p. 120).

Soper’s aim, “to admit – and hold in productive tension – the wisdom both of those who insist on the ‘culturality’ or ‘constructed’ nature of ‘nature’, and of those who would insist on the independent existence and specific determinations of that which is referred to through the concept of ‘nature’” (p. 249), provides a model for an approach in literary criticism cognisant of the validity of the claims of both ecologists and postmodern cultural theorists. The nature-endorsing and the nature-sceptical share, after all, broad affinities in their critique of current models of ‘progress’ and their exposure of oppressive dimensions of faith in scientific rationality. As forms of resistance to aspects of Western modernity, they complement each other. The nature-endorsing approach adopted, for instance, in Hermand 1991a and 1991b takes as its point of departure ecologically oriented critiques of modern society, and of the consequences of the dialectic of enlightenment, and visions of alternative relationships with the natural environment. Though these are formulated explicitly in non-fictional texts, and more often conveyed through symbolic representation in literature, Hermand does not in practice distinguish greatly between the two. His approach is mindful of the fact that literature has served traditionally as an advocate of nature, and championed the suppressed, non-rational aspects of the subject against utilitarian rationalism. Essentially nature-sceptical studies such as Thomas Dupke’s account of the ‘myth’ of Hermann Löns (Dupke 1993), which examines ‘Heimat’, ‘Volk’ and ‘nature’ in

his writing, are, on the other hand, grounded in the premise that ‘nature’ is a social, cultural, linguistic and literary construction. They subject concepts, metaphors, myths and representations of nature to ideological critique and psychoanalytical deconstruction.

Peter Matussek’s *Naturbild und Diskursgeschichte* (1992), which takes Goethe’s *Faust* as a paradigm for the contribution of imaginative writing to the nature discourse, is also principally concerned with constructions of nature rather than its mimetic representation. After the accident in the Chernobyl nuclear reactor in 1986, a German theatre director was asked by a journalist whether it was still possible to stage Goethe’s great poetic celebration of restless human striving. *Faust* is, Matussek argues, a work of great complexity and sophistication which continues to elicit new responses and interpretations in changing circumstances. Its images and formal structures encapsulate insights for which discursive concepts had yet to be found in the early nineteenth century, and which justify its reading and performance today.

Recasting Adorno’s nature aesthetics in a postmodern linguistic turn, Matussek applies the terms and concepts he has arrived at in an account of Goethe’s changing construction of nature over the half century in which *Faust* was written. He distinguishes between four principal ‘Naturbilder’ or nature conceptions (these are discussed further in Chapter 2 below) and traces their reception and interpretation by critics, academics and other readers from Goethe’s death up to the present. Matussek’s perspective is that of an aesthetic theorist and literary historian rather than an ecologist. He maintains critical distance from Green interpretations of Goethe’s *Faust* (for instance by the ethical philosopher Hans Jonas, the zoologist and ethologist Konrad Lorenz, and the author and critic Adolf Muschg), arguing these represent a one-sided understanding of the play.[16] However, his study is nevertheless motivated by conviction that aesthetic engagement with nature has an emancipatory role to play, in anticipating liberation from the (essentially repressive) discursive practices through which, according to Michel Foucault, the mental set or ideology enclosing the thinking of all members of a given society is conveyed (p. 13).

Gerhard Kaiser’s *Mutter Natur und die Dampfmaschine* (1991), a study of shifting conceptions of nature in nineteenth-century German literature,

again combines elements of the 'nature-endorsing' and 'nature-sceptical' approaches, but this time leans more towards the former, inasmuch as it is more mindful of ecological concerns. Kaiser analyses themes, forms and genre conventions, and discusses the complex relationship between ecological consciousness, the history of taste, and aesthetic reflection in the nineteenth century. His central texts, Goethe's idyll *Der Wanderer*, his *Märchen* and *Faust II*, Keller's *Grüner Heinrich* and Raabe's *Pfisters Mühle*, have in common an interweaving of contemporary *realia* with biblical and classical references. Kaiser's central argument is that in the late eighteenth century 'nature' became a literary construct standing as the opposite pole to a depraved and threatening present. Images of the supposedly lost paradise, in reality projections of utopian yearning into a mythical past, fulfilled a collective psychic need. The invasion of a childhood world by cold paternal rationalism precipitated a longing for security in the embrace of 'mother nature'. However, the substitution of 'mother nature' for the biblical creator, a characteristic of creative writing in the period, was no mere naive wish-fulfilment, since literature simultaneously served as a vehicle of critical reflection on the metaphysical conception. Thanks to this element of self-reflexivity, its real achievement was ultimately to facilitate coming to terms with the experience of loss.[17]

Heinrich Detering has similarly balanced empathy with the author's ecological concern against critical awareness of literary and textual structures in a brief overview of Wilhelm Raabe's novels, deconstructing elisions, breaks and ambivalences as tell-tale signs of underlying uncertainties (1992). Despite the superficially 'happy' ending of *Pfisters Mühle*, siding with the forces of industry, Raabe's narrative is an indictment of the seemingly inexorable march of 'progress' in the name of what is lost and destroyed in its wake: culture, conviviality and the rural life. Raabe emerges as a thoroughly 'modern' German author, on account of both the anguish with which he registers the impact of industrialisation, and his ultimate inability to find answers to the questions posed by modernisation.

Such studies suggest how an ecocriticism attentive to the concerns of both the 'nature-endorsing' and the 'nature-sceptical' can throw light on cultural artefacts and the role they have played in filtering the vision of readers

and users. It can and should engage in a range of practices – on the one hand exploring themes in writing about nature, investigating questions of history and philosophy, and highlighting alternative imaginings of the relationship between humankind and nature through empathetic close reading and explication. On the other, it must draw attention to ideological subtexts, psychological displacements and unconscious dimensions, expose the layers of mediation by literary conventions in genres and individual texts, and elucidate the use of intertextual reference to 'supercharge' landscapes with cultural values.

While resisting the totalising implications of the linguistic turn, which can decouple literary discourse from the material world, and reduce it to linguistic play or ideological formation, ecologically oriented criticism then must and can incorporate the critical insights of poststructuralist theory. Ecocriticism shares a common cause with postmodern and poststructuralist theory in challenging androcentrism, anthropocentrism and logocentrism, and deprivileging the human subject. Like them, it dismisses technocracy, and insists on the situatedness and subjectivity of perception. It is the business of literature and other forms of culture to register, image and conceptualise the tensions between sustainability, social justice and the quest of individuals for a rewarding life. And it is the task of criticism to examine their role in reflecting and shaping our attitudes, and in informing our decisions, including those governing interventions in nature. Such examination must, however, be mindful of the relativity and ethnocentric quality of conceptions of nature, and its configuration as 'other' in narratives of human self-projection. The potential of literature and other cultural media to contribute to the formation of a new understanding of nature and our relationship with it, one appropriate to the conditions of human existence in the twenty-first century, is the subject of the final section of this chapter

4. Nature and ecology in German cultural theory

While ecocritical theory was emerging in the United States and Britain, a parallel but quite separate debate on the social-ecological function of literature has been pursued in Germany. This focused initially on ecological aesthetics. In his account of the emergence of an aesthetic relationship with nature in the

eighteenth century, Joachim Ritter identified the function of art and literature as presenting nature in its relationship to the feeling subject, at a time when contemporaries were exploiting it as an object with unprecedented logic and success. Aesthetic representations of nature fulfilled a compensatory function, restoring the alienated urban public's lost closeness with it. Odo Marquard developed this Compensation Theory in the nineteen-seventies and eighties. It was the task of the humanities, he argued, to *compensate* for the deficits of our scientific and technological age by mediating traditional cultural values, to make good the reified and fragmented experience of reality by invoking holistic visions of the landscape. Ruth and Dieter Groh have summarised Marquard's views as follows:

> Sie [the humanities] kompensieren 'Entgeschichtlichungen', die durch beschleunigten Fortschritt im wissenschaftlich-technisch-industriellen Sektor hervorgerufen werden, indem sie Geschichten von gestern erzählen: Sensibilisierungs-, Bewahrungs- und Orientierungsgeschichten, die unaushaltbare lebensweltliche Verluste ausgleichen und den Menschen helfen, 'in einer farbigen, vertrauten und sinnvollen Welt' zu leben.[18]

Marquard denies that the humanities possess the ability to give us genuine new insights, or exert any actual influence over the technological-industrial sector, but he assigns them a function of social stabilisation. Ruth and Dieter Groh argue, however, that the relationship between the humanities and the sciences is more accurately described as one of *complementarity* rather than compensation.

To what extent, then, we are prompted to ask, can aesthetic appreciation of nature be freed from the various (often conservative and reactionary) functions it has served in the past, and reconfigured in the service of ecology? Can literary and artistic representations of natural beauty, by mobilising feelings for nature, actually overcome the 'split consciousness' which has led us to distinguish between aspects of nature to which we are sentimentally attached, and others which we ruthlessly exploit? To what extent can writing, film, art and life practices further a caring, consistently sustainable relationship with the natural environment as a whole?

Jörg Zimmermann was one of the first to write about the potential contribution of aesthetic phenomena and media to contemporary ecological

debate, in *Das Naturbild des Menschen* (1982). Under the heading ‘Zur Geschichte des ästhetischen Naturbegriffs’ (pp. 118-54), he called for the adoption of a modification of eighteenth-century theories of art in response to contemporary environmental problems. The task of the artist must be defined in such a way as to make clear his or her responsibility towards nature as an end in itself (“als Zweck in sich selbst”). This involved returning to the mimetic representation of nature which had been abandoned in the Modernist era, but in a non-trivial, critically reflected form. The late eighteenth-century conception of the artistically shaped landscape (the English Garden) as a sphere of naturalness, in which nature was given the freedom to express itself to the full, and exemplified diversity and individuality, provided a model for the utopian visions of mediation between nature and human society required of the new nature aesthetic today:

> Die wahrhaft utopische Perspektive einer neuen Ästhetik der Natur aber ist die *reale Vermittlung von Kunst und Natur* in Gestalt einer Poiesis, die verallgemeinert, was in der Ästhetik des Landschaftsgartens gegen Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts projektiert worden ist: “künstlerische Gestaltung der Landschaft, ein Kunstwerk, dessen Kunstmittel seine natürlichen Gebilde in ihren natürlichen Formen wären”. Kriterien der Realisierung wären Mannigfaltigkeit, Individualität, physignomische Expressivität, – Gegenbilder zu jener Armut und Uniformität, die aus einer bloß technologisch motivierten Bearbeitung von Natur resultieren. Das Leben der Natur zu vervielfältigen, hatte Hölderlin emphatisch als eigentliche Bestimmung des Menschen deklariert. (p. 147)[19]

Zimmermann’s ideas were taken up by Gernot and Hartmut Böhme, whose groundbreaking study *Das Andere der Vernunft* (1983) had reexamined the implications of Kant’s epistemological revolution in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* for our conception of nature. The Enlightenment had brought about the end of the Aristotelian conception of nature as an active subject, replacing it by the modern conception of a mechanism governed by immutable laws, an object to be understood and exploited to the end of liberating the rational subject. No longer an organism, familiar to us, but regarded with fear and respect, it was now separate from us and our only link with it was by means of feelings. Gernot Böhme’s *Für eine ökologische Naturästhetik* (1989) and Hartmut Böhme’s *Natur und Subjekt* (1988) discuss at length those pre-modern nature conceptions which were discredited in the Enlightenment, but revived and adapted to the spheres of literature and art by Goethe and the

Romantics. These, they argue, are relevant again today as harbingers of an alternative relationship with nature.

The Böhmes are particularly concerned with the understanding of nature as a communicating subject, and with the 'language of nature'. This last idea, which has traditionally exercised a powerful fascination over German thinkers (see von Bormann 1968, Rothacker 1979, Blumenberg 1981, and Goodbody 1984: 9-47), arose out of a view of natural phenomena as manifestations of the life force. Paracelsus' programme of natural science and medicine was based on it in the sixteenth century, and it played a central role in the theosophy of the seventeenth-century mystic Jacob Böhme. By the late eighteenth century, the language of nature ceased to be regarded as a scientific or metaphysical reality, but it is retained in Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* as an aesthetic order constituting a model for human morality. It performs a comparable function in Goethe's scientific writings. Goethe's insistence on an attitude of respect, even reverence, as a prerequisite for scientific research constitutes in the Böhmes' eyes more than a mere rearguard action against the advance of an avowedly utilitarian science. His philosophy of science is interpreted as recognising our unique human position: we may stand outside nature by virtue of our reasoning faculty, but are equally a part of it as embodied beings. Novalis's and Eichendorff's conception of poetry as a translation of the 'dumb' speech of nature into a language intelligible to humans similarly derives from their Romantic understanding of nature as, in Kate Rigby's words, "dynamic, self-generative, and animate unity-in-diversity, of which humans too are integrally a part" (2004: 12). Whereas the language of nature for Paracelsus and Jacob Böhme had been a static series of correspondences encoding a divine symbolism, it now became the voice of an individual landscape, whose physiognomy speaks to us psychosomatically (ibid. 77f.).

Aesthetics, defined by the Böhmes as the general theory of sensual cognition, provides in their view the key to changing people's attitudes towards the environment, and combating the alienation and destruction of modern society. They are able to enlist a powerful ally free of suspicion of right-wing cultural pessimism in the person of the Frankfurt School sociologist and philosopher, Theodor W. Adorno. They also cite passages in support of

their argument from the writings of Bloch, Marcuse and Benjamin. Bloch's confident vision of an 'alliance technology', one working together with rather than against nature, is, however, of limited use, because of his blindness to the full extent and nature of the destructive forces immanent in nuclear and other modern technology. Adorno, whose hopes are tenuous by comparison, and whose formulations are characteristically couched in the hypothetical, provides a more fruitful point of reference. The fascinatingly suggestive section on 'Das Naturschöne' in his *Ästhetische Theorie* (1970: 97-121) reinstates the primacy of natural beauty over works of art, a position which had been weakened by Kant, and undermined by Schiller and Hegel. Adorno reminds us that the freedom, autonomy and dignity of the subject established in Kant's philosophy were achieved at the expense of nature, animals and women. His understanding of natural beauty is complex: it is described as the appearance of immediacy and freedom ("the trace of non-identity in things in the ban of universal identity", p. 114), and associated with truth and harmonious coexistence (p. 115).

While rejecting the 'vulgar antithesis' of nature and society, and the concomitant idea that it is possible to 'go back to' nature, Adorno sees the work of art as concerned with 'reconciliation' with nature. He is therefore less interested in untouched landscapes which may have survived into the present than in the European 'culturescape', or cultivated landscape, a product of the humanisation of nature. Direct representation of the reconciliation of nature and human culture is admittedly so problematic as to be impossible. Contemporary art, he argues, must reflect the traces of the 'wounds' of nature in the landscape, of the damage inflicted on it, otherwise it becomes a 'deceiving phantasm', and an alibi for further reification. The cultural landscape provides an important model for contemporary art, in that, while bearing the marks of exploitation and denaturalisation, it nevertheless harbours a utopian potential. This ideal potential in art outweighs the dangers inherent in its deceptions and reactionary tendencies.

In Hartmut Böhme's paraphrase of Adorno, landscape adapted to human dwelling can be the "experience of a past which never existed, but which nature, if it could wish, would bear in itself as a promise for the future".[20] Art, which is conceived of as a 'translation' of the 'non-conceptual language'

of nature,[21] is witness to the possibility of a harmonious relationship with the natural environment:

> Wohl […] führt das Eingedenken der Natur in der Kunst zu Bestimmungen, die diese aus dem Bannkreis des Produktionsfetischismus lösen. So etwa, wenn die nicht gemachte, sondern gewordene Kulturlandschaft gerechtfertigt wird als Erfahrung eines Vergangenen, das nie war, was aber Natur, wenn sie hätte wollen können, als Versprechen trug. Natur als Schönes ist kein 'Aktionsobjekt'; sie steht jenseits der Zwecke der Selbsterhaltung; sie weckt im Bild scheinbarer Unmittelbarkeit das Bild des gänzlich mit sich selbst Vermittelten; sie spricht nach dem "Modell einer nicht begrifflichen, nicht dingfest signifikativen Sprache"; sie enthält Chiffren eines Geschichtlichen und verweist auf die Möglichkeit einer Technik, die "unter veränderten Produktionsverhältnissen [...] fähig [wäre], ihr [der Natur] beizustehen und auf der armen Erde ihr zu dem zu helfen, wohin sie vielleicht möchte".[22]

The attitude of 'Schonung', or sparing of nature, which the Böhmes regard as crucial today (see Hartmut Böhme 1988: 33 and 115), can, they suggest, be encouraged by the fostering of a sensual culture, developing people's awareness of the physical impact of landscapes on them. This is a task in which art, literature and literary criticism all have a part to play. Ecotheorists must build on the idea of nature as communication, Gernot Böhme argues. It is their purpose to investigate and systematise knowledge of our physical responses to environments, with the aim of reintegrating corporeality into our consciousness, and sensitising the public to the consequences for us as well as nature of industrialisation and modern social organisation:

> Die Entfaltung des Sinnenbewußtseins des Menschen, zu dem die Kunst beitragen kann, ist zugleich die notwendige Wiedereingliederung seiner Natürlichkeit in sein Selbstverständnis, wie sie das Umweltproblem dem Menschen heute abverlangt. (Gernot Böhme 1989: 15)

Goethe's work, Hartmut Böhme argues, provided his contemporaries with a non-manipulative counter-model to the economic appropriation of nature, in a discourse of preserving by actively recalling ("bewahrende Erinnerung"), taking leave in sorrow ("trauernde Verabschiedung") and holding open the possibility of better alternatives ("utopisches Offenhalten") (Hartmut Böhme 1988: 147). Modern art, if it is to avoid stabilising the status quo through its alibi function, or even actively encouraging reactionary tendencies, must avoid idyllic scenes of reconciliation, but it can keep alive, through images of grief

and negativity, the idea nature speaks to us, and thus contribute, alongside moral education and political legislation, to the shifts in consciousness and behaviour which are imperative for our future:

> In Bildern der Trauer oder Negativität hält die Kunst in Erinnerung, was aus der Wissenschaft verdrängt und im heruntergekommenen Freizeit-Naturgenuß als Konsumgut wieder aufbereitet wurde [….] Diese unverzichtbare Erinnerungsarbeit der Kunst […] [ist] Wahrung eines Zusammenhangs mit einer Ästhetik der Natur, die es allerdings normativ und politisch zu vertreten gilt. (ibid. 44)

Gernot Böhme's prime concern in *Für eine ökologische Naturästhetik* is with establishing a theoretical basis in aesthetics and nature philosophy for a nature aesthetic in the service of environmental awareness. His arguments are further developed in *Atmosphäre* (1995), where he explores the ecological potential of Hermann Schmitz's phenomenological philosophy of corporeality (*Leiblichkeit*). 'Atmosphere' is constituted in the self-unfolding of things in time and space. As embodied beings, we too, he argues, are affected by the atmosphere created by the things around us. Specific landscapes actively call forth feelings and ideas. The affective impact of landscape and climate on inhabitants helps generate a sense of place and ecological empathy.

Hartmut Böhme has applied these ideas in ecocritical practice in *Natur und Subjekt*, examining attitudes towards nature and technology in the early modern period from the point of view of a cultural historian, and discussing individual authors and works since the eighteenth century. The passages and chapters on Novalis, E.T.A. Hoffmann and Goethe, on the Russian film director Tarkovsky's melancholy allegories of modern civilisation, and on contemporary apocalyptic narratives combine textual analysis with psychoanalytical insights in a suggestive account of the artistic reservoirs of alternative images of our relationship with nature, illustrating the practical potential of the Böhmes' approach for ecocritical analysis.

The Böhmes insist repeatedly on the impossibility of any return to a position preceding Kant's location of epistemology in the rational subject. They stress the non-literal, metaphorical status of the 'language of nature', and the general need to subject proto-ecological, pre-modern conceptions of nature to the same radical critical reflection as Enlightenment rationalism. (See Gernot Böhme 1992 in particular, where the author expands on the

“aporias of our relationship with nature”, pp.9-25.) Their efforts to develop an ecologically oriented aesthetic of nature have nonetheless, as indicated above, not been universally welcomed. In particular, they have been dismissed as illusory by Ruth and Dieter Groh. In the first volume of their ‘Cultural History of Nature’ (1991) the Grohs argue that twentieth-century confidence in historical progression towards liberation from the constraints of nature, and in an optimal use of resources for the general benefit of humankind, owed more than met the eye to traditional metaphysical assumptions. Like the Böhmes, they express belief in the ability of the humanities to provide “outlines of ways of repairing and preventing damage” (p. 10), and write of the importance of preserving awareness of the values and cultural achievements of the past, in order to counter the abstraction and ahistoricism of modern society. They stress the humanities should not confine themselves to a merely compensatory function, but must challenge the status quo, through “rational analysis, tenacious enlightenment and active resistance” (p. 168). However, in their second volume (1996), the Grohs’ examination of the ways in which cultural predispositions and conscious and unconscious options for particular conceptions of nature have determined our perception and experience of the natural environment takes a direction sharply critical of mainstream ecological thinking and the Böhmes’ aesthetic project. They adopt a position opposed to ‘physiocentrism’ and the related ‘teleological’ understanding of nature which they discern in ecophilosophers of the seventies and eighties such as Hans Jonas, Klaus Michael Meyer-Abich and the Böhmes.

The clearest formulation of their argument is found in the extended essay ‘Natur als Maßstab – eine Kopfgeburt’ (Nature as a Yardstick: a mental fiction), which draws on Norbert Elias’s reflections on the metaphorical origins and functions of conceptions of nature (Elias 1986). Since Darwin, Elias observes, the only appropriate conception of nature is one of the open process of evolution and the expanding universe. Critically reviewing the historical development of the conceptualisation of nature in the light of this, he distinguishes between a ‘distancing’ function of nature metaphors on the one hand, and an ‘engaging’ function on the other. The former facilitates description and scientific detachment, while the latter reflects longings and

fantasies, in particular the longing to be directed towards health and prosperity by a benevolent parental figure. In projecting a rational order into nature, in envisaging it as a meaningful whole or an acting subject, the engaging function tends to idealise nature as a model, and to play down both "the horrors of the food chain" and the violence and destruction inherent in *human* nature. Historically, the two functions have frequently overlapped in thinkers' and literary writers' conceptions of nature, leading them to arrive at false conclusions. The Greeks conceived of nature as a woman, on the basis of the analogy between its life-giving and the ability to give birth. They envisaged it as a sphere of order, harmony and peace, in analogy with their conceptions of the ideal organisation of society. And they pictured it as a craftsman, producing objects as potters and smiths did. These ideas subsequently took hold in the imagination and assumed a life of their own. A reversal then took place, by means of which nature ceased to be a reflection of society, becoming instead a paradigm for social organisation and human culture. It is this confusion which the Grohs accuse ecotheorists of (p. 93). They fail to recognise that the roots of their teleological concept of nature (calling for respect of the purposes and projects of nature, especially of all life which seeks to survive and reproduce, but also in a more general way of the earth's striving towards complexity, biodiversity, harmony and beauty, and for humanity to find its place in nature) lie in the symbols of the classical philosophers, and in the very metaphors with which men sought to understand nature by forming analogies with human life.

'Nature', the Grohs correctly observe, is epistemologically a chameleon, adopting the colour, i.e. the predispositions and ideology, of the viewer (p. 96). Historically speaking, they point out, the aesthetic experience of nature has followed shifting patterns of interpretation (p. 108). Over the centuries, it has been dictated by conceptual vocabulary, and influenced by the designs of individual creative writers and painters. The epoch-making achievement of Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* was his separation of aesthetics from religion and his founding of the criteria of natural beauty in the faculties of the perceiving subject, rather than in nature itself (p. 119). The Romantics' speculative revival of holism was a retrograde step inasmuch as it sought to restore the broken link between aesthetic judgement and a teleological

conception of nature. Their faith in the ability of “heile Natur” (unspoiled nature), experienced aesthetically, to redeem the individual and human history, can only be regarded with suspicion. The Romantics’ endowment of nature with the attributes of harmony, purpose, reason, organic unity and intactness, and their denial of the existence in it of purposelessness, waste, destruction, compulsive repetition, amorality or indifference to individual fate, were in fact a throwback to early Enlightenment optimism, which had seen nature as the quintessence of harmonious self-regulation (p. 121).

If ‘epistemic anthropocentrism’ (i.e. acknowledgement that our access to the world is necessarily mediated by human concepts, perceptions and methodology) has been recognised as inescapable since Kant, and nature can no longer seriously be conceived of as a unified whole or an intrinsic good, it follows that it cannot serve as an ethical norm or aesthetic paradigm. Natural beauty cannot logically, the Grohs claim, provide the foundation for an ethic of protection of nature which the Böhmes seek in it: this must rather be found in a progressive extension of modern ethics based on the autonomy of the subject, by means of which moral responsibility embraces not only the self and other human actors, but also non-human nature.[23] They dismiss as ‘sentimental self-deception’ Gernot Böhme’s argument that the recognition of our relatedness with nature which results from aesthetic experience will automatically lead to an attitude of sparing (p. 128). Physiocentric thinkers, the Grohs observe critically, tend to see the solution to environmental problems less in conscious, ethically motivated action than in a shift in behaviour resulting automatically from a feeling of corporeal union with the ‘whole of nature’. What is needed is, however, rather an enlightened, self-reflecting anthropocentrism, and a critical analysis of the reasons for our blindness to the destruction of the environment through technology. Even moderate physiocentrists like the Böhmes reduce humans to sentient and passive natural beings, ignoring the active interpretation of our feelings by reason and culture. In depriving them of autonomy, they also deprive them ultimately of responsibility for their actions (pp. 138f.).

The Romantic attempt to compensate for the loss of the holistic unity of knowledge which resulted from the freedom and autonomy gained by the subject in the Enlightenment, and its revival by ecocentric thinkers are thus no

more than a nostalgic quest for lost authenticity and wholeness in nature through subjective aesthetic experience. The response of most modern art since Baudelaire and Valéry, namely to turn away from nature, has been more appropriate. It is simply anachronistic to conceive of nature as an acting subject (p. 133). The Böhmes' eco-aesthetic is nothing more than "poor poesy" and "a lyrical concoction of metaphysical concepts" (p. 129).

The Grohs are of course right to challenge the notion of nature as stable and harmonious unity: the true nature of nature is change, as Thomas Potthast puts it in his critique of the conception of ecological balance and its use as a moral norm (2004). However, the Grohs' account of the Böhmes' arguments is revealed as a polemic misrepresentation, if examined with the help of Angelika Krebs' systematic breakdown and evaluation of the arguments and standpoints in environmental ethics (1997). Their black and white dichotomy of anthropocentrism and physiocentrism ignores crucial distinctions between variants of each. Physiocentrism includes the subsets of pathocentrism (which accords sentient beings moral status) and biocentrism (which extends the sphere of moral concern to all living beings, but not beyond the organic). Most physiocentrists also draw distinctions of degree between the moral claims of humans and those of other forms of life and natural objects. In fact, under the general heading of physiocentrism, the Grohs lump dubious *naturam sequi* and holistic arguments together with problematic but challenging teleological ones and incontrovertible pathocentric concerns. Gernot Böhme cannot, it follows, be meaningfully categorised as a physiocentrist. Krebs in fact argues that his 'Aisthesis' proposition extends the (anthropocentric!) basic needs argument, by presenting the aesthetic fulfilment we derive from contact with natural beauty as a significant (though not essential) component of the good life. "In our own interest and out of moral consideration for the good life of others, nature should be preserved and cultivated in such a way as to continue to afford the possibility of aesthetic fulfilment", she sums up his position (1997: 368). Krebs draws attention to a range of significant aesthetic arguments rooted in intuitive feelings that nature is more than just a resource, which are situated between the extremes of wholly uncontroversial basic needs anthropocentrism and the

popular but flawed arguments of many Deep Ecologists, Ecofeminists and New Age thinkers:

> Zwischen diesen beiden unattraktiven Extremen, dem instrumentell verkürzten Anthropozentrismus auf der einen Seite und dem zum Absoluten aufgeblähten Physiozentrismus auf der anderen Seite, liegt das wirklich interessante Terrain des unverkürzten, eudämonistisch reichen Anthropozentrismus und des epistemisch-anthropozentrischen Physiozentrismus. (p. 378)

Far from being invalidated by the Grohs' critique, the Böhmes' position lies comfortably within this terrain. It must also be asked whether the Grohs' strategy of rational enlightenment is sufficient to change deep-rooted public attitudes and behaviour without the backing of the Böhmes' enlistment of feelings and the physical impact of landscapes. As Krebs points out, quantitative, factual information (for instance statistics on the health risks and dangers of radioactivity) is not enough to motivate us to take the steps necessary to avoid them. We also need a qualitative knowledge, one which enables us to imagine the danger, and to be reminded of our dependence on nature as a species (p. 365). Krebs' suggestion that this is the remit of journalism, art and literature (pp. 367f.) is compatible not only with the Böhmes' ecological aesthetic, but also with the conception of literature as cultural ecology to which I now turn.

Neither the special quality of literature's contribution to culture in general nor its significance for the nature discourse in particular were questions of great importance in the theory of cultural ecology as originally formulated the American psychologist Gregory Bateson in the nineteen-seventies, or even in Peter Finke's 'evolutionary cultural ecology', which followed in the nineteen-nineties. They have, however, become a central concern in Hubert Zapf's recent theoretical reflections. As Gersdorf and Mayer note in their introduction to the essay volume *Natur – Kultur – Text* (2005b), Finke and Zapf have been central figures in introducing Bateson's ideas in Germany. Peter Finke, who leads a research group at the University of Bielefeld, has drawn on the early twentieth-century German-Scandinavian biologist and theorist of *Umwelten* and *Innenwelt*, Jakob von Uexküll, and a series of anthropologists as well as Bateson, in his efforts to recast cultural anthropology in terms of ecological concepts. What, Bateson had asked, is

the function of cultural artefacts in facilitating the survival of the human species? Finke's answer is couched in terms of systems theory (2003). Taking up John Tyler Bonner's definition of culture as the transfer of information by behaviour and communication (in analogy with nature, which transfers information genetically), and Richard Dawkins' theory of memes as cultural replicators, he suggests that human cultures may be regarded as non-material ecosystems. These are grounded in nature, and influence it in turn.

All concretisations of the mental information conveyed in cultural ecosystems (including art and literature) are, like organisms in biological ecosystems, subject to cycles of production, consumption and reduction. They are, however, only loosely determined by rules and conventions, in contrast with the laws of nature. In our daily lives we engage with a multiplicity of distinct but overlapping cultural ecosystems. Though governed by customs, conventions and bureaucracies, these are constantly in a state of flux. Every social act can trigger a process of intellectual or cultural evolution by producing new concepts, circumstances or values. Linguistic and imaginative creativity is equivalent to the flow of energy in a natural ecosystem, and cultures can and must be assessed on the basis of their sustainability. Finke's criteria for evaluating contemporary culture (including the spheres of ethics, knowledge, language, literature, art, the economy, technology and the understanding of nature) are creative potential, openness towards neighbouring systems, tolerance of error and diversity. The inclusion of conceptions of nature may seem surprising, but is central:

> Letztlich geht es um nichts anderes als um einen umfassenden, rational gesteuerten kulturellen Wandel hin zu neuen, zukunftsfähigen Lebensstilen, um Veränderungen in den Köpfen und im Alltagshandeln. *Damit wird Naturschutz zum Teil eine Aufgabe der Angewandten Kulturwissenschaft*. (2003: 276. Emphasis in original)

Though literature plays only a minor role in Finke's thinking, he sees it as a promising field for analysis, because, as "a sphere in which possible cultural forms may be tried out" (p. 272), it offers space for cultural imagination and trains the creative potential of language. In a phrase reminiscent of Adorno and Böhme, he accords literature and art the ability to serve as a "sanatorium of our general cultural existence and its self-inflicted damage" (p. 273).

The position of literature in this general cultural theory is further expanded on by Hubert Zapf in the first, theoretical part of his study of the American novel, *Literatur als kulturelle Ökologie* (2002: 3-68), and summed up concisely in his introduction to a recent collection of ecocritical essays (2006b). In addition to Finke, Zapf also draws on Wolfgang Iser's literary anthropology and incorporates ideas from Joseph Meeker, William Rueckert and Hartmut Böhme. Literature, art and other forms of cultural activity are necessary "to continually restore the richness, diversity, and complexity of those inner landscapes of the mind, the imagination, the psyche, and of interpersonal communication which make up the cultural ecosystems of modern humans, but are threatened with impoverishment by an increasingly overeconomised, standardised, and depersonalised contemporary culture" (ibid. 3). Literature is the classical medium of cultural ecology in that it has staged and explored, in ever new scenarios, the consequences of prevailing and alternative value systems and conceptions of human and non-human 'nature'. However, the cultural-ecological function of literature goes beyond this immediate thematic concern with the environment. It also embraces the special structures and functions of literary textuality, as it has developed in relation to other forms of textuality in the course of cultural evolution. For "imaginative literature transforms conceptual, logocentric processes into energetic processes, and thus acts like an ecological force within the larger system of cultural discourses" (ibid.).

Since its divergence from linear, progress-oriented technological and scientific discourse in the eighteenth century, literature, with its holistic world models, has then taken on two important ecological functions. First, in terms of content, it has become

> a sensorium and imaginative sounding board for hidden problems, deficits, and imbalances of the larger culture, as a form of textuality which critically reflects and symbolically articulates what is marginalised, neglected, repressed or excluded by dominant civilisatory power structures, but is nevertheless of vital importance for an adequately complex account of humanity's existence within the fundamental culture-nature-relationship. (p. 4)

And secondly, in terms of form, "by breaking up closed world views and exclusionary truth claims in favour of plural perspectives, multiple meanings, and dynamic interrelationships", literature has become the site of "a constant

creative renewal of language, perception, communication and imagination". The arts in general and literature in particular thus perform a crucial function in the totality of cultural discourse, and are indispensable for ensuring "the richness, diversity, and continuing evolutionary potential of the culture as a whole" (ibid.).

Possessing its own dynamic as a uniquely complex medium of reflection, representation and communication of cultural processes, literature brings together elements dispersed in our society between politics, economic activity, the legal system, ethics, ideology and science. Its ambiguity, irony and metaphorical language free concepts and ideas from their discursive simplification and instrumentalisation, destabilise ideologies and subvert one-dimensional identities. The aestheticisation inherent in linguistic engagement with the world liberates readers from conventional patterns of thought, and the fictionalisation and symbolic representation of experience helps them *imagine* in concrete form what they already *know* in the abstract. Literature thus goes beyond mere *compensation* for the negative effects of industrialisation, urbanisation, technological development, commercialisation, acceleration and mediatisation, to *change* society, by critically reviewing the consequences of modernity and reminding us of historically marginalised opportunities through a reservoir of imagined alternatives.

In the chapters which follow, my general aim has been to identify the conceptions of science and technology, nature and the wild which are explicit or implicit in texts, set them in the context of earlier literary and non-literary (philosophical and political) discourse, and weigh up their usefulness as responses to environmental crisis in terms of descriptive plausibility and conceptual coherence. Texts are examined which articulate critiques of the Enlightenment's legacy of instrumental rationalisation, scientism, technology and modernisation; propose a conception of dwelling as an alternative to the crude harnessing of natural forces and exploitation of its resources; reflect on the loss of wilderness and animality as a result of population growth, economic development and the taming of the wild; and communicate visions of an alternative to the alienation of modern urban life. These studies are framed by an initial chapter on Goethe's conception of nature (holism, embeddedness, 'delicate empiricism' and the attitude of respect and wonder

summed up in the term *Weltfrömmigkeit*) and its reclamation by modern authors, and a final chapter centred on Hartmut Böhme's conception of nature as a cultural project.

[1] The inscription, which reads: “Der gebildete Mensch macht die Natur zu seinem Freund – Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805)”, is taken from the poet’s Letters ‘Ueber die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen’ (1962: 318). The poet contrasts primitive man, who lived at the mercy of nature and of his inner nature, with the modern ‘barbarian’, who scorns and dishonours outer nature by ruthlessly imposing his rational will on it, only to suffer himself from its destruction. He recommends a middle way to his contemporaries, combining respect for nature’s freedom and multiplicity with control over its more dangerous vagaries, in short, actively forming it, but on a basis of empathy. Schiller’s thinking on nature finds most eloquent expression in his great elegy ‘Der Spaziergang’ (1795), whose narrative and poetic images explore the problem that the freedom from nature we gain through civilisation and modernity is won at the price of alienation from it. See Riedel 1989 and Rigby 2004, 94-101.

[2] The word ‘ecology’ did not at the time possess its current cultural, political and public policy meanings. It referred to a minor branch of botany and zoology concerned with the individual organism’s relationship with its environment, rather than interdependent relationships between species in symbiotic communities, let alone the study of the impact of pollution on public health and biotic diversity. Only since the Second World War has ‘ecologism’ come to designate the philosophy and political ideology promoting a non-anthropocentric view of nature with which it is perhaps primarily associated today.

[3] Greg Garrard writes similarly: in our age of “expropriation of the senses” (the phrase is taken from Ulrich Beck), we suffer from an alienation deriving from the disjunction between official estimates of risk and any conceivable lay assessment based on personal experience. Therefore ecocriticism has an important function to perform alongside science: revealing the cultural reasons why we think about environmental and technological risks in particular ways, and promoting educated critique in place of ignorant paranoia (2004: 11f.).

[4] See the Association’s homepage <http://www.asle.umn.edu/index.html>. This is a powerful resource which includes links to introductory articles on ecocriticism, bibliographies, syllabuses, the Association’s newsletter and handbook for prospective graduate students, details of a mentoring programme and an email discussion list.

[5] In a sharp critique of ecocriticism as the work of scholars who “would rather be hiking”, and who tended to use the traditional author-work approach, focusing on particular landscapes, periods or genres, Michael Cohen has similarly cautioned against the fashion for ‘narrative scholarship’ (the blending of criticism with creative writing, juxtaposing literary analysis with meditative reflection in a semi-autobiographical narrative framework), and ontological naivety (seeking hope and comfort in the texts examined, and subscribing to an implicit historical perspective of the development of ever finer environmental consciousness) – Cohen 2004: paragraphs 60-70.

[6] The degree of National Socialist commitment to environmental reform, which remains, in the words of Thomas Lekan, a highly contentious issue, has attracted considerable attention in

recent years: see Bramwell 1989, Dominick 1992, Radkau and Uekötter 2003, Lekan 2004, and Brüggemeier, Ciok and Zeller 2005. Lekan emphasises that for all their rhetoric, the Nazis "systematically subordinated environmental concern to economic recovery and war mobilisation, threatening decades of preservation efforts through Autobahn reconstruction, rearmament, land reclamation, and dam building." (Lekan 2004: 14)

[7] The environmental historians Thomas Lekan and Thomas Zeller nevertheless observe a gulf between German politics and scholarship in their field. Writing for an American readership, they note that there is "something odd" about the state of environmental history in Germany. When Americans think of a Western country with a strong environmental record, Germany will be among the top contenders. Yet it is relatively weak when it comes to scholarship in environmental history. While certain historians in Germany have been practising environmental history for years, their work has not entered the historiographical mainstream. The mere handful of designated professorships at Germany's universities contrasts with dozens of chairs in the United States, and a vigorous American society for environmental history, with lively annual meetings and its own journal. Despite, or perhaps because of, the "profligate consumption of natural resources, and reckless attitudes towards the environment" with which the country is commonly associated, there is widespread American interest in the field (Lekan and Zeller 2005: 1).

[8] Manon Maren-Grisebach also quotes a series of literary authorities in her *Philosophie der Grünen* (1982), and Walter Sauer writes in his reader of 'abandoned ways to nature': "Wenn nun Beiträge ausgewählt werden sollen, die von einem ganzheitlichen Naturverständnis zeugen, so ist vorrangig an dichterische Texte zu denken, die die sinnliche Erscheinungsform der Natur in Worte zu fassen vermögen, die über den Intellekt hinaus Dimensionen des Gefühls, der Phantasie, der Ästhetik, des Geistes erreichen und die zu einer tieferen Naturschau führen, das Empirische transzendierend." (Sauer 1992: 364)

[9] See also the following themed issues of socio-political journals: *Das Argument* ('Mutter-Natur' = 172 [1988], 'Öko-Kunst. Zur Ästhetik der Grünen' = 183 [1989] and 'Umweltfeminismus' = 205 [1994]); *Ästhetik und Kommunikation* ('Linker Konservatismus' = 36 [1979] and 'Zivilisationskritik' = 43 [1981]); *Kürbiskern* ('Wissenschaft und Literatur. Wie wird man durch Schaden klug?' = 86, no. 3 [1986]); *Kursbuch* ('Ökologie und Politik oder Die Zukunft der Industrialisierung' = 33 [1973], 'Utopien 1. Zweifel an der Zukunft' = 52 [1978] and 'Zumutungen an die Grünen' = 74 [1983].

[10] As well as the publications of Jost Hermand listed above, see for instance Grimm 1982, Mallinckrodt 1987, Hope 1992, Hunt 1992, Stapleton 1993, Jarka 1994, Morris-Keitel 1994, Jucker 1995, Atkins 1996, Riordan 1997, Goodbody 1997, 1998 and 2002, Barkhoff 1999, 2000 and 2003, Corkhill 2001, Rigby 2001 and 2004, Bullivant 2002, Meacher 2002, and Liston 2004.

[11] For an extreme statement of this position see von Uthmann 1986, and for the link between Neonazism and environmentalism see Geden 1999.

[12] Scott Slovic, 'Nature Writing', in *Encyclopedia of World Environmental History*, II, 888, quoted from Buell 2005: 144.

[13] The somewhat different English tradition of non-fiction writing about nature, countryside, landscape and natural history by naturalists, ramblers and autobiographers from Izaak Walton and Gilbert White to William Cobbett and Henry Williamson has, according to Terry Gifford, shaded over into rural fiction and acted on the whole as a form of pastoral escape, a 'therapy of retreat' for readers – Gifford 1999: 72-80.

[14] A 'European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and Environment' was founded during the conference 'Literatur, Kultur, Umwelt: Ecocriticism – eine Standortbestimmung' at the University of Münster in 2004, and the theme of the Deutscher Germanistentag 2007 is 'Natur – Kultur'. MA, doctoral and Habilitation theses such as Gülseven 2006, Jambon 1999, Seiderer 2006 and Wanning 2005 suggest that a new generation of German scholars is now engaging with ecology-oriented developments in cultural theory, and two academic publishers, the Weidler Buchverlag (Berlin) and Rodopi (Amsterdam) are publishing book series dedicated to ecocriticism.

[15] In political theory, there is a clear parallel in the debate between proponents of the view that nature is a domain of intrinsic value, truth and authenticity (e.g. Goodin 1992) and those arguing that it is a social construction subject to inherent instability (e.g. Evernden 1992).

[16] Like the Grohs, he also rejects the Böhmes' call for a rehabilitation of the idea of a 'language of nature': "Kann ein solcher Rückgriff auf vormodernes Denken die erhofften Resultate bringen? Ich bezweifle es. Denn die monierte Verlegenheit gegenüber der schönen Natur hat ihre guten Gründe, die aus der Theoriegeschichte hervorgehen." (Matussek 1992: 14)

[17] Götz Großklaus (1990) comes to a similar conclusion in a short but stimulating essay on the impact of early industrialisation and modernity on aesthetic perception in the first half of the nineteenth century.The general shift from the emancipatory nature discourse of the Enlightenment and early Romanticism to the regressive, compensatory representations of nature which predominate in nineteenth-century art and literature is reflected, but simultaneously subjected to ironic commentary in more complex texts such as Heine's *Harzreise* and Büchner's *Lenz*: "Die historische Zäsur, der Umbruch, die Material- und Mentalumwälzung wird schon bei Heine dialektisch erfahren: *emotional* fällt Schmerz an, nostalgische Trauer über das, was verloren geht, die Verluste und Defizite des Fortschritts werden benannt; *rational* jedoch steht Heine auf der Seite des notwendig historisch fortschreitenden Veränderungs- und Modernisierungsprozesses; rational ist seine Betonung der Unumkehrbarkeit des historischen Prozesses. Dasselbe dialektische Moment von Verlust/ Emanzipationsschmerz und Fortschrittsbewußtsein taucht bei Heine mehrfach auf (Paradigma der Zerrissenheit) – zum Teil ironisch gebrochen." (p. 193)

[18] Groh and Groh 1991: 151f. Marquard's 'Kompensationsthese' is to be found in the entry 'Kompensation', in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Vol. IV, Basel 1976, 912-18.

[19] The quotation is from Humphrey Repton's *Enquiry into the Changes of Taste in Landscape Gardening* (1806), and the allusion in the final sentence to the 'Brief vom Juni 1799', in Hölderlin 1943ff.: III, 400.

[20] Cf. Adorno: "Das Bild des Ältesten an der Natur ist umschlagend die Chiffre des noch nicht Seienden, Möglichen: als dessen Erscheinung ist sie mehr als Daseiendes; aber schon die Reflexion darauf frevelt fast." (1970: 115)

[21] The idea of the 'language of nature', which is discussed in treated detail in Chapter 5 below, is encountered in Adorno 1970: 105, 114f., and 120f.

[22] Hartmut Böhme 1988: 30f. The quotations in the passage are from Adorno 1970: 103, 105 and 107.

[23] The Grohs contrast the Böhmes' position with that of Martin Seel, citing the latter's *Ästhetik der Natur* (1991) as an example of the 'post-metaphysical' environmental aesthetic and ethics they call for.