

No Ecocriticism, Please, We're German!

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Ecocriticism, the authors of recent survey articles in two established journals of literary criticism conclude, is no longer a marginal pursuit, but can look back on a decade of work entitling it to an established place in literary study. Although critical readings of literary texts and movements in relation to the ideas of nature, wilderness, natural science and spatial environments of all sorts have been pursued for the better part of a century, the term 'ecocriticism' was, as Lawrence Buell notes in his account of the 'ecocritical insurgency',¹ only coined twenty years ago. 'The "Who's listening?" question that nagged me when I began such work in the late 1980s', he writes, 'has given way to "How can I keep up with all that's coming out?"' (p. 699) This burgeoning of literature and environment studies will almost certainly continue, for two reasons. The field of application for environment-valenced enquiry is immense in duration and range. And the environment reveals itself in our day as a more pressing, multifarious problem than ever before. Responsibility for addressing environmental problems will increasingly be seen as the responsibility of all the human sciences, not just ecology or law or public policy. Simon Estok's survey² is more critical in tone, taking the standpoint that an ecocriticism that does not embrace issues of gender, race and sexuality is not worthy of the name. But his citation of three major new publications in the intervening two years would seem to bear out Buell's up-beat assessment of the importance and future of the movement.

This status does not, however, appears to be extended to ecocriticism outside

¹ Lawrence Buell, 'The Ecocritical Insurgency', *New Literary History*, vol. 30 no. 3, Summer 1999 (special issue *Ecocriticism*), 699-712.

² Simon C. Estok, 'A Report Card on Ecocriticism', *AUMLA*, no. 96, November 2001 (special issue *Nature and the Environment*), 220-238.

the English-speaking world. As an approach to literature, it has not attracted comparable attention in Germany. Indeed, the very term does not exist in German. In our age of global scientific networking (and the increasing coordination of European research programmes), the continuing existence of such differences between national discourses in the humanities is curious. Indeed it is particularly strange that research into representations of nature and the environment should have a lower profile in literary study in Germany. After all, Germany has taken the lead in developing environmental policies in the EU over much of the last thirty years. And perhaps more pertinently, Germans have consistently conceived of themselves as a people with a special aesthetic and emotional relationship with the land for centuries. As Friedmar Apel has pointed out in his stimulating topography of landscape and the German mind,³ nature has been uniquely important in the formulation of German self-understanding. What differences in historical and cultural experience might then be responsible for the relative success of ecocriticism in the United States and Britain over the past decade, and its seeming neglect in the German-speaking countries?

Ecocriticism, which may be defined as the study of literature from a perspective of concern for the relationship between humans and the environment, has been practised and conceptualised variously as a field of literary study, a movement, a school, an approach and a theory. The 'eco-' prefix has laid practitioners open to the charge that this is no more than a focus, a fashionable trend embarked on for extra-literary reasons, or at best an attitude, a kind of 'applied' literary study, to however laudable an end. However, ecocriticism has paralleled and overlapped with other issue-driven movements such as feminism and postcolonialism, seeking from the first, like them, to go beyond the mere exploration of thematically relevant texts (in poetry, fiction and non-fiction nature writing), and reflect on the criteria used in their evaluation, refining the necessary conceptual tools, and evolving a distinctive theoretical framework. Ecocritics generally demonstrate an

³ Friedmar Apel, 'Einleitung: Die Lesbarkeit der Landschaft', in *Deutscher Geist und deutsche Landschaft. Eine Topographie*, Munich 1998, 15-27.

underlying commitment to changing attitudes towards the environment, or at least to showing how imaginative writing can contribute to what Jonathan Bate has called 'restor[ing] us to the earth which is our home'.⁴ However, they have on the whole been less concerned with the overt thematisation of environmental issues in prose or poetry than with asking how our paradoxical situation as human beings, a part of nature and yet apart from it, is reflected in literary texts. After briefly outlining the development of American and British ecocriticism in terms of organisations and publications, and suggesting its diversity in terms of themes and approaches, I will ask what comparable work has been published in Germany, given the absence of a recognisable equivalent movement in the humanities. Finally, I will speculate on the possible reasons for the limited impact of ecocriticism in Germany, and ask in particular whether historical sensitivities have not determined a more critical stance towards cultural traditions which have much in common.

The establishment of ecocriticism in Britain and the US in the 1990s – Jonathan Bate's book *Romantic Ecology*, which famously announced a move from red to green, rehabilitating Wordsworth from castigation as a political conservative by Marxists and New Historicists and tracing an environmental tradition through Ruskin and Morris, published in 1991, provides a convenient starting point – may be illustrated in three ways. First, in the growth and success of the (American) Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE). ASLE, which was founded at a meeting of the Western Literature Association in 1992, had dual roots in the study of the non-fiction Nature Writing tradition, which has been particularly important in Western America, and in research into New England nature poetry. In less than ten years it has acquired a world-wide membership, with semi-independent branches in Japan and the UK. ASLE has played a key role in fostering and coordinating ecocritical research, providing a framework for a range of activities and a network for the exchange of information in its newsletters and conferences, and offering guidance, support and access to

⁴ Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, London 2000, vii.

extensive resources through its website. Secondly, the development of ecocriticism may be traced in terms of the growing flood of articles published. The journal *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* was founded by Patrick Murphy in 1993, and has become, as the house journal of ASLE, the prime forum for ecocritical research.⁵ Cheryll Glotfelty's *Ecocriticism Reader*⁶ effectively put ecocriticism on the map by collecting and reprinting key (American) articles published prior to this in a wide range of journals in the seventies and eighties. More recently, Laurence Coupe has assembled and made accessible a different selection of texts in his *Green Studies Reader*.⁷ Coupe's volume focuses on the British tradition of ecocriticism, ranging from the writers Blake and Wordsworth to Edward Thomas and D.H. Lawrence, and includes critics such as Leavis and Soper. The publication of such readers implies the expectation of a market among students of ecocriticism, and indeed such courses have sprung up in the US and Britain at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Research in ecocriticism is concentrated in departments of Literature, Languages, Creative Writing, Cultural Studies and American Studies, but is also found in Environmental Ethics, History and Geography.

Thirdly and finally, the evolution of ecocriticism can be measured in terms of the publication of major critical studies and the elaboration of theoretical principles. One of the first significant books to appear in print, Karl Kroeber's *Ecological Literary Criticism* (1994) was, like Bate's study, a rereading of the Romantics (in this case Shelley in particular, whose reinterpretation is ambitiously linked with the findings of recent neurophysiological research). It was followed a year later by Lawrence Buell's magisterial contribution to research on Thoreau *The Environmental Imagination*, which explored the environmental dimensions of Thoreau's writing and demonstrated the part it has played in the shaping of American cultural imaginary, and Patrick Murphy's *Literature, Nature and Other*. Breaking

⁵ The UK branch of ASLE is in the process of transforming its newsletter *Green Letters* into a second refereed journal devoted specifically to ecocriticism.

⁶ Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (ed.): *The Ecocriticism Reader. Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, Athens, Georgia and London 1996.

with the hitherto dominant ecocritical preoccupation with the threatened wilderness, Murphy concentrated on links with class, gender and race issues. At the same time, he shifted attention away from the canonical figures of British and American literature to contemporary writing, from male to female authors, and from the work of white Anglo-Saxon Americans to the less familiar literatures of the Chicano and Native American peoples. These shifts coincided with growing awareness of a tension within the movement which had the potential to develop into a rift. Unease at the extent to which ASLE appeared to be focusing on wilderness writing as a celebration of the wild as sacred space, in contrast to the profane urban space of modernity, a literary concern accompanied by backpacking and canoeing trips, a group of protesters within the organisation founded a 'Caucus for Diversity' in 1999. This subgroup has sought to counter the dominant influence of white middle-class males and achieve greater inclusiveness, and to foreground issues of environmental and social justice.

Murphy also addressed the need to theorise ecocritical practice for the first time in depth, borrowing from Lacanian psychoanalysis, French feminism and Bakhtinian dialogics. This drew attention to a second faultline which had opened up between different camps of critics. Estok notes the existence of 'defensiveness towards theory' in early ecocritical writing (224), and points out that Buell's book, for all its immense erudition, avoids issues of theory almost entirely. One of the few exceptions is where Buell revives the concept of realism, in the context of an attempt to bridge the gap between texts and the world by means of an 'aesthetic of dual accountability' which will satisfy both the mind and biological matter (p. 92). There is a parallel here with Jonathan Bate's literalist readings of Romantic poetry.⁸ Though this is salutary in drawing attention to the natural phenomena described in texts and in redressing the imbalance after a generation of purely metaphorical interpretations, the approach ignores the hidden structures of oppression which deconstructionists have revealed.

⁷ Laurence Coupe, *The Green Studies Reader. From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, London 2000.

⁸ Jonathan Bate, 'Living with the Weather', *Studies in Romanticism*, Fall 1996, 431-447. See also Chapter 4 of *The Song of the Earth*.

In the overview of ecocriticism quoted from above, Buell stresses the positive aspects of the heterogeneity characterising the ecocritical movement today, describing it as a 'concourse of interlocking but semi-autonomous projects' (706). Within the broad framework of enquiry, he quite fairly points out, adherents of the Deep Ecology model, perceiving the bond between nature and the human self in terms of a shared spiritual identity, clash with the proponents of post-structuralist 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 through investigations of landscapes, regions and place in literary texts, conceiving these in turn as ecology, as social construction and as imagined descriptive and symbolic structures. A similar range of approaches has been fruitfully directed at the literary representation of animals and human relations with them. A particularly rich vein of ecocritical enquiry, Buell acknowledges, has been feminist study of how (mostly male) observers have imagined women as natural, and the implications of their gendering nature as female.

The string of major publications since 1995 includes David Abrams's phenomenological study *The Spell of the Sensuous*,⁹ Leonard Scigaj's study of American eco-poetry, *Sustainable Poetry*,¹⁰ and the ecofeminist studies of Patrick Murphy and Greta Gaard. To these may be added British contributions which have broadened and deepened ecocritical enquiry such as Terry Gifford's ecological reinterpretation of a neglected genre *The Pastoral*,¹¹ Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells' essay volume *Writing the Environment*¹² and Jonathan Bate's *The Song of the Earth*, to which I will return. These and other critics have built on the work of predecessors of the movement such as Leo Marx and Raymond

⁹ David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous. Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, New York 1996.

¹⁰ Leonard M. Scigaj, *Sustainable Poetry. Four American Ecopoets*, Lexington 1999.

¹¹ Terry Gifford, *Pastoral*, London and New York 1999.

¹² Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells (ed.), *Writing the Environment. Ecocriticism and Literature*, London and New York 1998.

Williams, extending the scope of their work in terms of subject matter and elaborating increasingly sophisticated models of ecocritical analysis. Other publications such as Jhan Hochman's *Green Cultural Studies*¹³ and studies of environmental rhetoric and green language¹⁴ have applied ecocritical principles in related disciplines.

German literature would seem to have played a very small part in the pursuit of this ecocritical project. True, a selection of German texts have been included in historical studies of the literary construction of nature in Western culture such as Robert Pogue Harrison's *Forests. The Shadow of Civilization*¹⁵ and Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory*.¹⁶ Patrick Murphy's pioneering international 'sourcebook' *The Literature of Nature*¹⁷ and essays in volumes such as *The Construction of Nature. A Discursive Strategy in Modern European Thought*,¹⁸ Colin Riordan's *Green Thought in German Culture*¹⁹ and the AUMLA special issue on *Nature and the Environment* are, however, among the few English-language publications on contemporary literature informed by this ecotheoretical debate to look beyond America and Britain. This is not, of course, to imply that there have been no parallel developments in the study of literature in Germany. But the low profile of environmentally oriented research in German *Germanistik* is reminiscent of the situation in the United States in the 1980s, when, in Cheryll Glotfelty's words:

individual literary and cultural scholars [developed] ecologically informed criticism and theory [...], however, [...] they did not organize themselves into an

¹³ Jhan Hochman, *Green Cultural Studies. Nature in Film, Novel and Theory*, Idaho 1998.

¹⁴ Carl G. Herndl and Stuart C. Brown (ed.), *Green Culture. Environmental Rhetoric in Contemporary America*, Wisconsin 1996; and Rom Harré, Jens Brockmeier and Peter Mühlhäusler, *Greenspeak. A Study of Environmental Discourse*, Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi 1999.

¹⁵ Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests. The Shadow of Civilization*, Chicago and London, 1992.

¹⁶ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, London 1995.

¹⁷ Patrick Murphy (ed.), *The Literature of Nature. An International Sourcebook*, Chicago and London 1998.

¹⁸ Stipe Grgas and Svend Erik Larsen (ed.), *The Construction of Nature. A Discursive Strategy in Modern European Thought*, Odense 1994.

¹⁹ Colin Riordan, *Green Thought in German Culture*, Cardiff 1997.

identifiable group; hence their various efforts were not recognized as belonging to a distinct critical school or movement. Individual studies appeared in a wide variety of places and were categorized under a miscellany of subject headings, such as American Studies, regionalism, pastoralism, the frontier, human ecology, science and literature, nature in literature, landscape in literature, or the names of the authors treated. One indication of the disunity of the early efforts is that these critics rarely cited one another's work; they didn't know that it existed. In a sense, each critic was inventing an environmental approach to literature in isolation.²⁰

Despite the absence of an equivalent label or concept in German (the nearest acceptable phrase being 'ökologisch orientierte Literaturkritik'), individual critics such as Leo Kreutzer, who read Goethe from an environmental standpoint in the 1970s,²¹ and Horst Denkler, who provided the Reclam edition of Raabe's story *Pfisters Mühle* with a spirited introduction,²² have in effect long been practising ecocriticism. Among the pioneers were Götz Großklaus and Ernst Oldemeyer, whose volume *Natur als Gegenwelt*²³ opened with an attempt to systematize conceptions of nature and contained a series of innovative cultural analyses. Jürgen Haupt mapped the conceptions of nature underlying twentieth-century German nature poetry in *Natur und Lyrik*,²⁴ Alexander von Bormann has written a series of articles and edited an anthology on nature poetry with an environmental slant, and Harro Segeberg has published various studies of the representation of technology in literature. One of the subtlest German ecocritical analyses has been Gerhard Kaiser's *Mutter Natur und die Dampfmaschine*,²⁵ which adapts Leo Marx's enquiry into the dialectic between technology and the pastoral in American cultural tradition to key nineteenth-century texts (Goethe, Keller,

²⁰ Glotfelty 1996, xvi-xvii

²¹ Leo Kreutzer, 'Wie herrlich leuchtet uns die Natur? Porträt eines Verlierers, daher aus erstaunlicher Nähe', *Akzente* 25, no. 4, 1978, 381-390.

²² Horst Denkler, 'Nachwort', in Wilhelm Raabe, *Pfisters Mühle. Ein Sommerferienheft*, Stuttgart 1980, 225-251.

²³ Götz Großklaus and Ernst Oldemeyer (ed.), *Natur als Gegenwelt. Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte der Natur*, Karlsruhe 1983.

²⁴ Jürgen Haupt, *Natur und Lyrik. Naturbeziehungen im 20. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart 1983.

²⁵ Kaiser, Gerhard: *Mutter Natur und die Dampfmaschine. Ein literarischer Mythos im Rückbezug auf Antike und Christentum*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1991.

Raabe). There have been sophisticated and powerful studies of individual authors from a standpoint of environmental commitment ranging from Karl Philipp Moritz to Hermann Löns.²⁶

Yet there are no German organisations or journals devoted to ecocriticism. The reasons may be rooted in such basic things as differences in geography and history. Let us first consider Germany's physical and literary topography. The wide open spaces of the American West have played a key role in the construction of the national identity, in a dichotomy between the purity of nature in the New World and the corrupt civilisation of the Old. Wilderness writing has been central to ecocriticism. The situation is rather different in Germany, where the interpenetration of the country and the city is so much greater. Concern has inevitably focused on landscapes which are largely the product of man, and nature writing and wilderness writing in particular have played a relatively insignificant role in German literary tradition.

Public anxiety about the environment has also emerged in different phases and taken different forms in the United States, Britain and Germany. The environmental movement arguably peaked as early as 1970 in the USA, when it was only beginning in Europe. The Green movement was broader and more radical in Germany in the seventies and early eighties than in Britain, where interest seemed to enter a new phase when Margaret Thatcher experienced a late conversion in 1987. The German sense of crisis, triggered originally by the oil shortage of 1973 and the ambitious government nuclear power programme, then revived by the rearmament debate and the discovery of forest dieback in the early 1980s, with their powerful cultural resonances, was never as strong in the UK. Since reunification, the tables have been turned. Germany has witnessed a marginalisation of public interest in the environment by other political and

²⁶ Wolfgang Grams, *Karl Philipp Moritz. Eine Untersuchung zum Naturbegriff zwischen Aufklärung und Romantik*, Opladen 1992; Thomas Dupke, *Mythos Löns. Heimat, Volk und Natur im Werk von Hermann Löns*, Wiesbaden 1993.

economic concerns. Paradoxically, the inclusion of the Green Party in government has been accompanied by a decline in their public support, at a time when green issues have received modest but growing media attention in Britain. It is not surprising, then, if German academics are reluctant to be associated with a movement felt to have passed its peak. German environmentalism has also been characterised not only by exaggeration, dramatisation and emotionalisation, but also, in the case of writers associated with the movement, often by pessimism.²⁷ The didacticism of the literature of political commitment in the early 1980s provoked a sharp swing away from literary concern with serious issues towards entertainment value and readability among both critics and 'ordinary' readers. Günter Grass's *Die Rättin*, perhaps the most important work of 'environmental' literature published in Germany in the last thirty years, was criticised above all for the author's moralising tone.

It has often been suggested the gap between the evaluation and recommendation of literature by critics in the media on the one hand and academic analysis on the other is more pronounced in Germany than in Britain or the States. This would isolate debate in the humanities from a possible basis in popular political activism. In America, ecocriticism has been committed, in Buell's words, to coordinating formal literary study 'with the life-practices of environmental immersion and education'. (701) The first forerunners and practitioners of ecocriticism shared an anti-institutional thrust and a desire to bring academic writing closer to creative nature writing, as well as an environment-friendly life style. These impulses have not been entirely lost. ASLE has a dual mission: not only to promote the exchange of ideas and information about environmental literature and to facilitate new approaches and interdisciplinary research, but also to encourage new nature writing. Its conferences are attended by writers and back-packers as well as environmental critics and historians, philosophers and biologists. Even in Britain, where ecocriticism has not caught the public

²⁷ See Michael Schneider's polemic against such writers as Günter Grass, Günter Kunert and Christa Wolf in *Nur Tote Fische schwimmen mit dem Strom*.

imagination in the same way, it is rooted in the stirring of deep forces in English cultural memory which have given rise to impassioned and imaginative forms of protest among animal rights activists and protesters against road building programmes.²⁸ In Germany, Horst Stern's magazine *Natur* attracted distinguished contributors such as Carl Amery for a while in the 1980s, and *Scheidewege*, the journal founded by Friedrich Georg Jünger, has served as a platform for ecological views on cultural issues. The *Wissenschaftsläden*, institutions bringing together professionals placing their expertise in the service of social and political change, and certain other organisations have concerned themselves with issues of environmental culture.²⁹ The Erwin-Strittmatter prize and the Umweltliteraturpreis Nordrhein-Westfalen show a degree of public recognition of the value of such writing. But there are few links between such activities and academic discourse.

One barrier in the way of the acceptance of ecocriticism in Germany is probably a popular association of the ecocritical movement with resistance to theory. Ecocriticism was born out of a dual opposition to existing trends in American and British literary criticism. First of all, it was a reaction against New Historicism. Where New Historicists claimed that writing about nature was a nostalgic, escapist activity that evaded the real issue of social politics, ecocritics retaliated by arguing writing about nature was important in its own right, and that nature could be considered political in a broader sense. Secondly, it was a reaction against poststructuralism, stressing the referentiality of texts, i.e. their need to refer to something, the otherness of the natural world. Bate's literalism an antidote to the study of nature as a purely textual construction. This setting of ecocriticism against continental poststructuralism plays into the hands of German academics with preconceptions that English criticism is undertheorised. Even sophisticated practitioners such as Buell might be regarded as typically Anglo-

²⁸ See Jennifer Wallace, 'Swampy's Smart Set', *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 4 July 1997, 15.

Saxon in their pragmatic approach. I have already mentioned aspects of eco-theory which suggest this perception of ecocriticism is no longer justified in general terms. Frameworks for enquiry adapted from philosophy and literary theory include the phenomenology of Heidegger (Garrard, Bate) and Merleau-Ponty (Adam, Scigaj), and the Bakhtinian and Foucaultian concepts of the Carnevalesque and Heterotopia (Murphy) as well as various feminisms. There is now a general awareness of the need for ecocriticism to combine traditional liberal humanist critical procedures with the insights provided by poststructuralist approaches such as psychoanalytic criticism and deconstruction. (Buell notes that Verena Conley has reread French poststructuralism, revealing underlying green concerns, and Christopher Hitt has reexamined the Romantic sublime, which had been famously deconstructed as a vehicle for linguistic and imperial dominance, arguing for its ecological recuperation.) There may nevertheless remain a perception in Germany that ecocriticism suffers from 'Theoriedefizit'. The reluctance of academics to identify with a position which has been the preserve of uncritical enthusiasts for several decades must limit the appeal of Ecocriticism in the German-speaking world.

A related reason for ecocriticism's unattractiveness as a rallying point for German critics may be, paradoxically, that the German perception of the aims, methodology and scope of ecological enquiry into literary texts has perhaps been shaped by the writing of its most vociferous Germanist practitioner, Jost Hermand. Hermand has campaigned tirelessly for an ecological literary criticism in Germany, not only through his prolific publications (three monographs and seven edited volumes published between 1980 and 1995), but also by organising conferences, supervising PhD theses and spreading the word on extended lecture tours. His popular survey of Green ideas in German intellectual tradition

²⁹ The *Wissenschaftsladen Bonn* has organised events and publications around environmental drama and art, and the *Förderverein für Öffentlichkeitsarbeit im Natur- und Umweltschutz* and *Ökomedien* have also done important work in promoting environmental writing and film.

Grüne Utopien in Deutschland, published in paperback in 1991,³⁰ is a stimulating guide and a treasure trove of information on neglected writers. But his comments on ideas and authors are coloured by a tendency towards rhetorical flourish and polemic exaggeration, and his remarks on more complex texts too brief to do them justice. If, as Patrick Murphy wrote in 1995, the problem with ecocriticism was that ‘too much of it remains theoretically unsophisticated. Too often there remains an anti-theoretical, naïve, realist attitude’ (p. 165), this criticism might be directed at Hermand. From a British point of view, his approach might be described as one of refreshingly old-fashioned Marxism. In fact, he represents the very hybrid of Marxism and ecology has lain at the heart of British ecocriticism since Raymond Williams. His contribution to a volume on perspectives for *Germanistik*, ‘Literaturwissenschaft und ökologisches Bewußtsein. Eine mühsame Verflechtung’³¹ is a powerful plea for a critical stance of environmental commitment. Reviewing his personal development through contact and collaboration with the anti-fascism of Richard Hamann in the GDR and the left-wing politics of German-Jewish emigres in Wisconsin in the late 1950s, with activists in the student movement in 1968, and finally with Wisconsin environmentalists and West German Greens in the 1970s, he writes of his recognition of the marginalisation of green discourse in the humanities at a time when feminism and minority interest-oriented approaches were being integrated into mainstream literary criticism and being theoretically developed: ‘Die meisten Vertreter und Vertreterinnen dieser Disziplinen [...] fanden diesen Diskurs, [...] lange Zeit als ausgesprochen “vulgär”, wie sie es nannten. Ja, viele sehen in ihm bis heute etwas eindeutig Populärwissenschaftliches, dem zwar im Bereich der Illustrierten und des Fernsehens der gebührende Platz eingeräumt werden sollte, das aber nicht in den Aufgabenbereich der hehren Literaturwissenschaft gehöre.’ (112) His principal explanations are the international apathy and ideological disillusionment of the postmodern age and the elitism of the German educational system. He

³⁰ Jost Hermand, *Grüne Utopien in Deutschland. Zur Geschichte des ökologischen Bewußtseins*, Frankfurt 1991.

goes on, however, to describe the emergence of a literary criticism of environmental commitment from the late 1970s on, in which Germans such as Wolfgang Hädecke, Michael Niedermeier and Jochen Vogt participated alongside the *Auslandsgermanisten* Egon Schwarz, William Rollins and Peter Morris-Keitel. Hermand ends by calling for a broad critique of mainstream literature conducted on a materialist basis.

Hermand's studies of popular and high culture in the socio-political context and his revelation of the buried tradition of green utopian thinking in two centuries of German novels, essays, speeches and political theory constitute a major contribution to the history of ideas. However, he has tended to treat literary texts as political pamphlets, and to show limited interest in the textual features of the books he examines.³²

There is, however, at least one major German ecocritic whose work stands out in terms of subtlety of analysis and sophistication of theoretical grounding. Hartmut Böhme, brother and co-author of the philosopher Gernot Böhme in *Das Andere der Vernunft* and *Feuer, Wasser, Erde, Luft*³³ has explored and illustrated the arguments developed by the latter in the volumes *Für eine ökologische Naturästhetik* and *Natürlich Natur* in a series of stimulating studies published under the title *Natur und Subjekt*.³⁴ *Natur und Subjekt*, which explores the proto-environmental dimensions of Paracelsian, Classical, Romantic and nineteenth-century writing, is a brilliant ecological reinterpretation of the literary topos of the language of nature. The Böhmes' suggestion that literature and art have a role to

³¹ Jost Hermand, 'Literaturwissenschaft und ökologisches Bewußtsein. Eine mühsame Verflechtung', in *Perspektiven der Germanistik. Neueste Ansichten zu einem alten Problem*, ed. Anne Bentfeld and Walter Delabar, Opladen 1997, 106-125.

³² *Grüne Utopien in Deutschland* builds on Hermand's earlier research into literary utopias. More recent articles elaborating a 'red-green' literary theory show a continuing distaste for psycho-analytical and deconstructive theories, and a lack of interest in ecotheoretical debate, though Hermand refers to the American journal *ISLE* and quotes Hartmut Böhme as a German proponent of a critical standpoint of environmental commitment.

³³ Hartmut Böhme and Gernot Böhme, *Das Andere der Vernunft*, Frankfurt am Main 1983; Gernot Böhme and Hartmut Böhme, *Feuer, Wasser, Erde, Luft. Eine Kulturgeschichte der Elemente*, Munich 1996.

³⁴ Hartmut Böhme, *Natur und Subjekt*, Frankfurt am Main 1988.

play in fostering environmental consciousness³⁵ builds on the arguments of Schiller, Kant and Adorno, and is perhaps most clearly formulated in his spirited appeal for a new direction for the discipline ‘im Blick auf die abzusehenden sozialen, ökologischen und technologischen Problemfelder des 21. Jahrhunderts’ at the Augsburg Germanistentag in 1992.³⁶ This cannot, however, simply be done by importing theories from other disciplines, and ignoring linguistic and textual concerns. He proposes a ‘literary anthropology’ concerned with literature as ‘gespeicherte Erfahrung’: ‘Denn demjenigen Ausdruck und Sprache zu verleihen, was kulturell ausgegrenzt, zum Schweigen gebracht wurde oder nur verzerrt, gleichsam stammelnd, Artikulation fand, ist eine wesentliche Dimension der Kunst und, in deren Verlängerung, eine zentrale Aufgabe der Kulturwissenschaften.’ (75) This explicitly includes alternatives to the anthropocentric world view. Böhme develops this perspective further in a sketch of the ‘cultural history of nature’ as a vital field of study in a recent introduction to the discipline of Cultural Studies³⁷ Böhme’s plea for an understanding of nature as a ‘cultural project’ opens up a field of enquiry comparable to that discussed by Kate Soper in her landmark study *What is Nature?*.³⁸

There is a further, final reason for the relative absence of an ecocritical movement in Germany: the desire of German academics to distance themselves from the problematic tradition of German cultural pessimism which underlies ecological concern in the writing of Grass, Enzensberger, Wolf and other contemporaries. Environmental arguments in Germany can often be shown to be rooted in the ‘romantic’ critique of modern civilisation which reemerged as a powerful, politically ambivalent force at the turn of the 20th century, and was so definitively compromised by its enlistment in Nazi ideology. Since the war, and particularly

³⁵ The potential role of literature in environmental education has incidentally been the subject of an excellent study of German children’s literature by Dagmar Lindenpütz.

³⁶ Hartmut Böhme, ‘Germanistik in der Herausforderung durch den technischen und ökologischen Wandel’, in *Germanistik in der Mediengesellschaft*, ed. Ludwig Jäger and Bernd Switalla, Munich 1994, 63-77, here p. 64.

³⁷ Hartmut Böhme, ‘Kulturgeschichte der Natur’, in Hartmut Böhme, Peter Matussek, Lothar Müller, *Orientierung Kulturwissenschaft. Was sie kann, was sie will*, Reinbek 2000, 118-131.

since the 1960s, German literary study has been understandably suspicious of this tainted tradition. Critics have been particularly cautious in the face of the myth of nature and the natural as 'authentic' existence which is present in certain environmentalist positions, and environmental variants on apocalyptic visions of the future. Such ideological distrust has not, however, prevented Jonathan Bate from revisiting civilisation critics like Heidegger and Klages in his recent exercise in ecopoetics, *The Song of the Earth*.

Bate's rich and wide-ranging study of (mainly English) literature since the mid-eighteenth century addresses a bundle of related questions about literature and life: Why do we value literary works with rural settings? How can we reconcile culture and nature? What do we mean by nature? How and why do we dream of living in unity with nature? How are poems influenced by climate? What part did aesthetics and the picturesque play in the development of environmental consciousness? Bate's book, which is, as mentioned above, 'about modern Western man's alienation from nature, and the capacity of the writer to restore us to the earth which is our home', draws on a series of theories, including Gaston Bachelard's poetics of space, to chart the decline in our sense of 'place'. But it gives the Heideggerian conception of 'dwelling' a central place. Bate believes it is the business of literature to work upon consciousness, to help us 'live deliberately', in the words of Thoreau, that is 'with thoughtfulness and with an attentiveness, an attunement to both words and the world, and so to acknowledge that, although we make sense of things by way of words, we do not live apart from the world'. (23) It is striking how largely German thinkers (Schiller, Adorno, and above all Heidegger) feature in Bate's conception of 'ecopoetics'. His title, the 'song of the earth', is taken from a phrase in Heidegger's *Holzwege*.

It is the task of ecocriticism, Bate argues, to ask what is the place of creative imagining and writing in the complex set of relationships between humankind and

³⁸ Kate Soper, *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-Human*, Oxford and Cambridge, Mass. 1995.

environment, mind and world, thinking, being and dwelling. (72f.) His argument is at its clearest in his final chapter, 'What are poets for?' This touches on Hölderlin, Rilke and Celan, and focuses on the conception of poetry in Heidegger's late essays in some detail. Heidegger's 'post-phenomenological inflection of high Romantic poetics' (262) sees poetic language as 'presencing', not representation, a form of being rather than mapping. Bate is fascinated by Heidegger's conception of poetry as dwelling, or authentic being, but this does not mean he misses the philosopher's complicity with the Nazis, or ignores the 'disturbing connections between ecologism and extreme right-wing politics'. (267) His solution is to separate ecopoetics completely from ecopolitics, arguing that conceptions of 'nature' are so various that no consistent political principles can be derived from it. This may not be felt entirely satisfying. The need to extricate environmental arguments from their instrumentalisation by the representatives of the extreme right in Germany has continued since reunification. This seems, in any case, to be the logic behind the attacks on contemporary writers concerned with alternatives to the domination and exploitation of nature by Richard Herzinger. Heiner Müller and Christa Wolf, Herzinger argues,³⁹ deployed a vitalist critique of modern western civilisation ultimately in order to shore up their alternative conception of socialism in the 1980s. Since reunification, anti-western feelings have been gaining ground, supported by eco-fundamentalism and the new right. Western values appear to many as abstractions and illusions in the face of political, social, economic and ecological decline. Conscious and unconscious use is being made of the old paradigm of German culture versus western civilisation. Grass's and Müller's attacks on the manifestations of cultural decline feed into the 'gemütliche apokalyptische Gewissheiten' of a contemporary civilisation criticism with distinct proto-fascist tendencies. In a chapter entitled 'Totalitarismus in Grun', Herzinger situates Hans Jonas, the key representative of German environmental ethics, and Jost Hermand, the best known ecocritic, in the tradition of the Nazi precursor Julius Langbehn, the anti-semitic

³⁹ Richard Herzinger and Hannes Stein, *Endzeit-Propheten oder Die Offensive der Antiwestler. Fundamentalismus, Antiamerikanismus und Neue Rechte*, Reinbek 1995.

Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, and the irrationalist Ludwig Klages, and he lumps them together not only with Rudolf Bahro, which one might understand, but also with Jörg Haider. (78-86) Hartmut Böhme has been the butt of similar, if less vituperative, attacks.⁴⁰

The political atmosphere is calmer in England. As Bate puts it in his sympathetic but critical commentary on Edward Thomas's lines 'One nationality/ We had, I and the birds that sang,/ One memory' in the poem 'Home': 'The quiet voice of Edward Thomas does not elicit political shivers of the order of those that may be inspired by Heidegger's Black Forest musing. But nagging doubts remain.' (276) His plea for a 'poetry of dwelling' is made in the knowledge that it 'may at first seem to lead naturally to Burkean conservatism', and that 'arguments which seek in the "pattern of nature" a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world have a way of neglecting those asymmetries whereby nature's order does not correspond to the political order to which the arguer owes allegiance'. (278) Yet he ends with the sonorous lines: 'If mortals dwell in that they save the earth and if poetry is the original omission of dwelling, then poetry is the place where we save the earth.' (283) Such a book would be more likely to be based on Adorno or Bloch, Marcuse or Merleau-Ponty in Germany, rather than Heidegger. Bate's *Song of the Earth* did not meet with unmitigated praise from British critics, and one (in the *Guardian*) was downright hostile to his ecocritical theorizing, which was described as: 'made for the politically correct, historically ignorant, second-generation flower children of the dumbed-down modern campus'.⁴¹ His affinity with Leavisite organicism was noted critically by several commentators, including Laurence Coupe.⁴² He rehabilitates myths like that of the organic community as 'necessary imaginings', which serve to make sense of our place in the world. 'We may regard', he writes elsewhere, 'the supposed

⁴⁰ Ruth Groh and Dieter Groh, 'Natur als Maßstab – Eine Kopfgeburt', in *Die Außenwelt der Innenwelt. Zur Kulturgeschichte der Natur 2*, Frankfurt am Main 1996, 83-146, here p.

⁴¹ Rissik, Andrew: 'In a Green Shade' [review of Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*], *The Guardian*, 20 May, 2000

⁴² Laurence Coupe, 'Bate & Leavis: An Ecocritical Connection?', *Green Letters 2*, Autumn 2000, 13-19.

naturalness of the Old Days as an allegory necessary to our psychological and social health'. (36) Bate's subscription to such ideas, to the Romantic yearning for union with nature and to poetic lament at the loss of authenticity, in however qualified a way, is troubling. Reading *The Song of the Earth*, one is struck by the many parallels between the English supporters of the organic community and German *Zivilisationskritik*, between Hardy and Raabe, Leavis and Klages, D.H. Lawrence and Hans Henny Jahnn. In both countries a traumatised generation sought solitude and healing in the pastoral after the First World War, in both nostalgia for a feudal past merged with fantasies of hunting and admiration of the amoral behaviour of wild animals in fascism (Henry Williamson, Hermann Löns and Otto Alscher). The association of nature writing with fascism has deterred British critics from reexamining the pastoral tradition until very recently, and it continues to do so in Germany. The Romantic poetic tradition of naming and dwelling which Bate examines in his final chapter is as central to the German tradition of nature poetry as in Britain, from Lehmann to Bobrowski and Kirsten, with emigres such as Michael Hamburger bridging the two cultures. But German critical analysis has of necessity been more wary, like Daniela Strigl's subtle teasing out of the elements of rootedness and Jewishness in the work of Theodor Kramer,⁴³ or Friedmar Apel's assessment of the ambivalent politics of German literary landscapes mentioned above.

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⁴³ Daniela Strigl, 'Wo niemand zuhaus ist, dort bin ich zuhaus'. *Theodor Kramer. Heimatdichter und Sozialdemokrat zwischen den Fronten*, Vienna, Cologne, Weimar 1993.

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