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Gabriele Dürbeck, Urte Stobbe, Hubert Zapf, Evi Zemanek (eds.): *Ecological Thought in German Literature and Culture* (London: Lexington Books, 2017), 449 pp.



The volume *Ecological Thought in German Literature and Culture* offers a survey of recent ecocritical research into German-speaking culture, thus telling the manifold history of the evolution of ecological thought. In their introduction, editors Gabriele Dürbeck, Urte Stobbe, Hubert Zapf and Evi Zemanek, all renowned scholars in ecocriticism, address two opposite but interrelated tendencies in the field of ecocritical studies: on the one hand, it is marked by increasing globalisation and transnationality of thought, and, on the other, by a growing awareness of the diversity of contributions by different and distinct cultural traditions to ecological knowledge. Understanding these tendencies as “equally valid and mutually complementary”, they base their study on the acknowledgement that the co-agency of both is fundamental for ecocultural scholarship, as “both the recognition of inevitable connectivity and of irreducible diversity is mandatory in assessing the relation between different ecological knowledge cultures.” (xiv) Focusing on one such knowledge culture, their aim is to present an overview of major developments and manifestations of the evolution of ecological thought in German-speaking culture.

The interdisciplinary contributions by the 26 authors are grouped into five sections: *Proto-Ecological Thought*, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, (part I), *Theoretical Approaches* (part II), an *Environmental History in Germany* from the late nineteenth century to the present (part III), several *Ecocritical Case Studies of German Literature* (part IV) and, enlarging the scope towards the end, *Ecological Visions in Painting, Music, Film and Land Art* (part V). This structure allows readers to draw illuminating connections between the individual fields in which ecological thought evolves or even to use the volume as a reference book. Opening part I, Anke Kramer sketches how the concept of the four elements, one of the earliest predecessors of ecological theory, found its way from Greek antiquity through Paracelsus during the German Renaissance to play “a decisive role in the emergence of romantic, and especially fantastic, literature” (Kramer 11). In the following chapters, some of the most important thinkers of the Goethezeit are presented in their ecological dimension: From Heather I. Sullivan’s exemplary readings of Goethe’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*, *Zur Farbenlehre* and *Faust I and II* emerges an understanding of Goethe’s conceptualisation of human–nature relationships as one marked by “inextricable *interdependence*” (Sullivan 17). Kate Rigby’s reading of Herder is an important contribution to the “prehistory of biosemiotics”, pointing out that the roots of this concept reach back to the eighteenth century (Rigby, 32). Berbeli Wanning reveals “astonishing parallels” between Novalis’ and Schelling’s conceptions of the complex nature–poetry and mind–matter

relationship so central to romantic thought and the ideas of contemporary New Materialism (Wanning 58). Part I closes with Caroline Schaumann's analysis of the environmental critique of Alexander von Humboldt, which elaborates on Humboldt's insights into men's destructive influence on a global scale—a critique which “pointed ahead to some key environmental challenges of the Anthropocene” (Schaumann 65).

Four of the essays in part II deal with thinkers who contributed to the evolution of ecological thought in the past hundred years. Silvio Vietta, for example, reads Heidegger's criticism of “Seinsvergessenheit” as a metaphysical ecological criticism directed at an occidental mode of thought; Timo Müller shows how the critical theory of the Frankfurt School left its mark on ecological aesthetics, environmental ethics and constructivist ecocriticism; and Benjamin Bühler compares the risk theories of Luhmann, Ewald and Beck and sketches their development towards a theory of global ecological risk. A contribution to a critique of ecology is made by Hannes Bergthaller, who, based on Luhmann's *Theory of Social Systems*, explains and criticizes some biases of ecological thought and points toward a rethinking of the idea of ‘ecological crisis’ “in terms of an ecological climacteric—that is to say, as signs of a permanent, irreversible change in the conditions of life” (Bergthaller 130). From these essays emerges the picture of a rich tradition of explicit ecological theory—which extends into present discourse, as can be seen in two essays, which develop theoretical approaches of their own: Angelika Krebs presents her threefold model of the “eudemonic intrinsic value of nature” as a contribution to the ethics and aesthetics of landscape (Krebs 103) and Hubert Zapf explains the deconstructive and reconstructive “function of literature as an ecological force within culture” in terms of his well-known triadic functional model of literature as cultural ecology (Zapf 153).

Part III demonstrates how far not only the philosophical and literary tradition of ecological thought, but also the political and scientific engagement with environmental issues reaches back in German history. Martin Bemann draws a picture of the scientific and social discourse on the damages of forests by industrial pollution in the Kaiserreich. Looking yet further back in history, François Walter provides an overview of the development of catastrophism and the research on risks and disasters. Richard Hölzl's essay on “Environmentalism in Germany since 1900” gives proof of an astonishing plurality of environmentalist movements, which he sees, however, as being reduced to an “environmental mainstreaming” since the turn of the millenium (Hölzl 224). The crucial role of “substance stories” (“Stoffgeschichten” in German) for environmental history is illuminated by Jens Soentgen, who also offers an approach to their poetics. Werner Konold's contribution stands out in this section, as it seeks to provide more concrete guidelines for environmental policy-making: drawing on an analysis of different forms of cultural landscapes and their histories, he develops a list of requirements for a “[w]ell understood homeland and cultural landscape stewardship”, that is, he uses insights in environmental history for the benefit of current ecological practice (Konold 209).

Part IV focuses on the emergence of a strand in Post-World-War II German literature which strongly engages with environmental issues and ecological theory.

Wolfgang Lückel explores the “bunker as the locus of the doomsday” in readings of Dürrenmatt’s *Der Winterkrieg in Tibet*, Horx’s *Es geht voran. Ein Ernstfall-Roman* and Grass’ *Die Rättin* (Lückel 315). Urte Stobbe analyses how Christa Wolf addresses environmental issues in her novel *Störfall* by setting it against the backdrop of several of Grimms’ fairy tales, thus also introducing into her narrative the Grimms’ texts’ specific view of nature. Evi Zemanek compares the elemental poetry of Franz Josef Czernin and Ulrike Draesner, concluding that in “contemporary elemental poetry, the dichotomy of mind and matter, and of nature and culture respectively, is deconstructed in acts of communication, in which the human subject is replaced by autonomous and indifferent elements” (Zemanek 292). Gabriele Dürbeck tells a brief history of climate change and disaster narration in German literature. In her readings of Trojanow’s *EisTau*, Frisch’s *Der Mensch erscheint im Holozän*, Schätzing’s *Der Schwarm* and Fleck’s *Das Tahiti-Projekt*, she shows how climate change and environmental disasters are translated into poetic form in very different ways, concluding, however, that despite all differences, these narratives “share an implicit conversation with contemporary environmental sciences and ecological thinking and interest in the ethical dilemmas posed by the ecological crisis” (Dürbeck 341). Jakob C. Heller and Axel Goodbody trace the thread of ecological thought further back in German literary history. Heller explores in his readings of bucolic poetry, especially from members of the *Pegenerischer Blumenorden*, a meta-poetical dimension which marks it as a “genre of utmost importance for cultural ecology” (Heller 252). With a more general approach, Goodbody tells the history of German ecopoetry from *Naturlyrik* to *Ökolyrik* and *Lyrik im Anthropozän*, thus mirroring the development of ecological thought sketched in this book within the history of ecopoetry. It is remarkable that the brief history of ecologically concerned German-speaking literature portrayed by these six case studies includes many aspects which could also be discussed as parts of an early anthropocenic literature.

In part V an interesting addition to this literary perspective is offered by Matthias Hurst in his survey of ecological thought in German film, in which he shows its presence in feature films as well as in small screen production throughout the twentieth century. The other chapters of part V give outlooks into the arts’ engagement with ecological issues: Nils Büttner broadly sketches the development of landscape painting from its origins in the fifteenth century to the present; the importance of immediate experience of nature for the work and life of Beethoven is portrayed by Aaron S. Allen; finally, Udo Weilacher shows how German landscape architecture earned its “renown of setting the highest standards in terms of ecology and environmental protection” by discovering American Land Art as a source of inspiration, thus finding a way out of the apparent incompatibility of art and ecology (Weilacher 407).

As a whole, the volume offers refreshingly new points of view on familiar subjects of German cultural history. It integrates them with less known aspects into a polyphonic history of ecological thought in German literature and culture—never losing sight of the theoretical field of international ecocriticism. The wide variety of the addressed issues might overwhelm readers, but it may also motivate them to further explore a field of research which still has many blank spots. One can read *Ecological Thought in German*

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*Literature and Culture* as a major contribution to the cultural history of the Anthropocene—a history which, for the most part, has yet to be written.

  
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