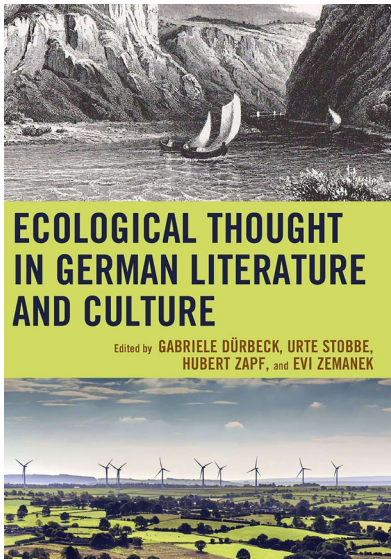


# Ecological Thought in German Literature and Culture

Editors: Gabriele Dürbeck, Urte Stobbe, Hubert Zapf, Evi Zemanek

Publisher: Lexington Books, Lanham, Maryland 2017



Can someone think of summarizing the *Ecological Thoughts* of the rich German cultural milieu within the confines of one book? It is a valiant effort and the book achieves its objectives with pensive writing on literature and culture. The topic is unique with a luring title that indicates the importance of *Nature* and *Ecology* in German society.

The editors and researchers Gabriele Dürbeck, Urte Stobbe, Hubert Zapf and Evi Zemanek are German and American literature faculty members from 3 different universities in Germany. They have put together essays by 26 scholars from diverse disciplines such as philosophy, geography, poetry, music, painting and landscape architecture. These essays result from elaborate studies on the influence of concurrent occidental knowledge on German ideas. The plot ranges from proto-ecological ideas of the four elements to the contemporary views on what is *Ecological*, taking reference from a number of epistemological fields. Grimm's fairy tales show the German conception of a wise nature having the ultimate control over human lives which draws a clear distinction from the French version of the same Sleeping Beauty story. Whether it is Goethe, Schelling and Novalis' romantic literature or the current practice in landscape architecture to recapture romanticism in an ecologically conscious scenario, the reader explores the ideological growth with relevant and resourceful images and quotes.

It is certainly a limitation of the book to depict German ideas in English. As mentioned by the editors, not just in literal terms, a cultural translation is also essential here, as language is deeply rooted in the cultural context of a society and bears its identity. There are a few chapters as *Cultural Ecology as a Transdisciplinary Paradigm of Literary Studies* by Hubert Zapf, where the same ideas could be conveyed with simpler wording. But the multiple citations and contemplative notes help to understand the ideas. Hence, the book does justice to the cultural translation. The reader gets the essence of the ideas even where literal translation was not done in some cases. It can also be seen as the permeation of German ideas into the English-speaking world. One may also raise the question of the necessity to illuminate the bridge between ecology and culture. The answer lies in the selection of the topic itself that reveals the significance of nature in this society. The editors do not claim to elaborate on every aspect of ecology and culture but the book successfully gives a holistic glimpse into the development of the subject.

The 486 pages book is a very good investment of time for any non-expert reader interested in history, ecology, environmental ethics, sustainability, literature, culture or landscape architecture. It can also be of interest to experts of both German and non-German backgrounds as it deals with multiple interrelated disciplines. It is an attempt that intrigues and keeps the options open for the reader for further exploration.