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Heimat and the Place of Humans in the World: Jenny Erpenbeck's *Heimsuchung* in Ecocritical Perspective

Axel Goodbody

It is no accident that the revival of interest in *Heimat* (the homeland) in the 1970s coincided with the environmental movement: defence of local identity, culture and ways of life against the pressures of national standardization and international homogenization went hand in hand with concern for the environment in initiatives to protect regional landscapes from the impact of the wave of modernization and industrialization which had begun in the 1950s and gathered pace in the 1960s. In the aftermath of World War II, the notion of individual and collective belonging to the homeland had appeared comprehensively discredited by its association with militant nationalism and its exclusion of racial others.[1] The subject was avoided by left-wing and liberal political thinkers, and the term excised from academic discourse. However, Heimat feeling continued to exercise a powerful emotional attraction. Millions either had experienced expulsion from their homes in Eastern Europe, or were directly affected by the need to integrate these displaced persons in German society, and their yearning to belong to stable communities was reflected in the Heimat films of the fifties and early sixties.[2] It was to take another decade, though, for local belonging to regain recognition as an issue of social importance. Peter Blickle has written of the noticeable increase in use of the term from the mid-1970s on.[3] Politicians began to refer to it in their speeches, articles appeared in the media, local Heimat museums sprang up all over Germany, Austria and Switzerland, and Heimat became a popular subject of novels and films (most famously Edgar Reitz's eleven-part TV series *Heimat* in 1984). In the academic sphere too, Heimat reemerged as a focus of historical, political, sociological and cultural analysis. The trend has continued since: Blickle noted (writing in in 2002) that since 1995 some 400 books had been published with "Heimat" in the title.[4] Hardly a month now goes by without the announcement of a new sociological study of Heimat, literary anthology, Heimat film or art project.

[1] Hermann Bausinger's essay, "Auf dem Wege zu einem neuen, aktiven Heimatverständnis" has yet to be superseded as a concise but informative overview of the development of the understanding of Heimat up to the 1980s.
[2] See von Moltke, *No Place Like Home*.
[3] Blickle, *Heimat*, 21; 142-4.
[4] Ibid., 154.

The modern notion of Heimat emerged around 1800.[5] In a context of political change and increased individual mobility, it came to denote a compensatory sphere of harmonious community relations and reassuring continuity with the past. The exclusion of the bourgeoisie from political participation by social hierarchies and authoritarian structures meant that Heimat acquired unique importance in nineteenth-century Germany as "a compensatory sphere in which the denials and uncertainties of individuals' lives were made good."[6] Imagined as a timeless, ordered rural world, it constituted a "means of diffusing political tensions," and "a medium of pacification, anticipating the reconciliation of social differences." In the Heimat Movement at the turn of the twentieth century, this idealized regional conception of Heimat served as a rallying point for anxious German citizens challenged by the political, social and technological transformation of the nation. At the same time, Heimat feeling was mobilized in the service of nationalist political ambitions. Already associated with xenophobia and aggressive nationalism by some proponents in the early 1900s, the emotional bond with the Heimat was fused with the racist ideology of Blood and Soil in the Third Reich.

Several factors have contributed to the resurgence of thinking about Heimat and local place-belonging in Germany since the 1970s. The growth of Heimat feeling was a response on the one hand to the transnational experience of deterritorialization, dislocation and alienation arising from processes of modernization and globalization, and on the other to the weakness of national identity in postwar Germany. The country had traditionally been a "nation of provincials" (Celia Applegate) with a decentralized political structure, and *Verfassungspatriotismus* (patriotic feeling grounded in the democratic values embodied in the constitution) was beginning to be felt to be "bloodless," lacking the emotional glue necessary for people to make personal sacrifices for the benefit of the community. While traditional forms of nationalism remained suspect, Heimat, understood as a belonging to locality or region rather than the nation, provided a way of filling the gap.

A complicating factor was the growing ethnic diversity in German society resulting from the settlement of immigrants since the 1960s. For the immigrants themselves, this raised questions of "Heimat in der Fremde," i.e. the ability to make oneself at home in a foreign country, and the possibility of multiple identities, loyalties and place-belongings, derived from participation in a plurality of linguistic, cultural and political communities. For their

[5] Ibid., 40-42; Gebhard, Geisler, and Schröter, *Heimat: Konturen und Konjunkturen*, 12-18.
[6] This and the following phrases are translated by me from Bausinger, "Auf dem Wege," 15-16.

German hosts, the multicultural society challenged traditional conceptions of Heimat based on historical continuity and exclusion of others, and in doing so raised awkward questions about self-definition through shared beliefs, customs and values, and openness to cultural change. Finally, reunification triggered a new series of Heimat debates, challenging Germans in West and East to adopt a common collective identity and reconsider the nation's historical legacy. In the New *Länder*, reunification facilitated a revival of regional identity which had been suppressed by socialist centralization, and led to the emergence of a new form of East German identity based on the shared experience of socialism, and the rapid replacement by global capitalism of a way of life in which community had played a greater role.

Heimat has traditionally been understood as: (1) the farm, town, or region in which an individual has either been born or has lived for an extended period of time; (2) the country of birth or of permanent residence; (3) the parental/ ancestral home. From earliest times, the term has also been used figuratively, designating the heavens to Christians. Here it acquired an aura of idealization and sacralization.[7] It is thought of as an environment with which individuals have "grown together" over time, forming an emotional bond through a process of socialization generating identification with the norms and values of the community. Heimat is therefore by definition a place where people and things are familiar, and relations seem "natural:" it is typically imagined as a small provincial town or village.[8]

Since the 1970s Heimat has been increasingly conceived of less as a physical space than as a sphere of security, identity and agency. Theorists have approached it as a socio-cultural construction, subject to constant redefinition in a discourse involving political and cultural actors. The lasting significance of Heimat in German public life is explained by its fundamental openness: Gunther Gebhard, Oliver Geisler and Steffen Schröter describe it as less a clearly defined concept than a "generator of associations,"[9] and Blickle as a "floating signifier" (p. 17 – the term, which is borrowed from Lévi-Strauss, indicates a word emptied of inherent meaning, and hence susceptible to investment with problematic ideological associations). Heimat's very adaptability has enabled it to answer universal psychological needs by responding to shifting political and social circumstances.

The necessary redefinition of attachment to the Heimat in a world that has become increasingly deterritorialized, diasporic, and transnational through migration and globalization has attracted extensive critical attention. However, while the part played by

[7] See for instance the entry in *Grimms Wörterbuch*.
[8] See Treinen, "Symbolische Ortsbezogenheit."
[9] Gebhard, Geisler, and Schröter, *Heimat: Konturen und Konjunkturen*, 9.

"Naturschutz" (nature conservation) and "Landschaftspflege" (landscape maintenance and enhancement) in Heimat-related activities at the turn of the twentieth century is widely recognized,[10] and the Nazis' interest in nature, including plans for landscaping Eastern Europe as German Heimat, are well known,[11] the role of environmental concern in the rehabilitation of Heimat in the 1970s and its significance in German understandings of place-belonging today have been less extensively researched. Similarly, while the part played by literary writers in German, Austrian and Swiss debates on Heimat, alongside historians, sociologists, anthropologists and philosophers, has been examined in a series of studies,[12] their role in recording and articulating emerging developments in the understanding of place-belonging which are relevant to sustainable living has so far attracted little attention.[13]

This essay therefore seeks to establish the extent to which the redefinition of Heimat has been accompanied by a new understanding of the human-nature relationship, and Heimat has come to serve as a focalizer for German debates on the place of humans in the world. Jenny Erpenbeck's short novel *Heimsuchung* (*Visitation*)[14] serves as a case study. This imaginative reconstruction of the history of a lakeside property in the hinterland of Berlin over the course of the last century conjures up utopian images of home making. Placing them in a historical context of violence and displacement, and ending in elegiac leave-taking, it lays down the challenge of accepting a new understanding of Heimat which embraces ethnic and gender justice, and a new relationship with the natural environment. Erpenbeck enriches historical reality with fictional elements, forming her characters in such a way as to represent different facets of historical experience, and exposing their failings, but at the same time depicting them with empathy. She pays unusual attention to material objects, investing them with symbolic value, and hinting at ways in which they co-exist with humans as participants in a continuum of interchange and mutual dependency. Realism is blended with myth in the person of the gardener, a timeless figure who serves as a place-making *genius loci*, a quasi-personification of the Heimat, bridging the dichotomy of nature and culture through his actions and his person. So as to contextualize what Erpenbeck is doing with Heimat, I will,

[10] See for instance Rollins, *A Greener Vision of Home*; Zelko, "From Heimat to *Umwelt*."
[11] See Radkau and Uekötter, *Naturschutz und Nationalsozialismus*; Brüggemeier, Ciok, and Zeller, *How Green Were the Nazis?*
[12] For instance Mecklenburg, *Die grünen Inseln*; Pott, *Literatur und Provinz*; Seliger, *Der Begriff Heimat*; Kunne, *Heimat im Roman*; Görner, *Heimat im Wort*; Ecker, *Kein Land in Sicht*; Boa and Palfreyman, *Heimat. A German Dream*; Lobensommer, *Die Suche nach Heimat*.
[13] Efforts to fill this gap include my own book chapter, "Heimat als Identität und ökologisches Bewusstsein stiftender Faktor."
[14] Erpenbeck, *Heimsuchung*. Citations in the following are taken from *Visitation*, tr. Susan Bernofsky, and referenced as V with page number in brackets in the running text.

however, first demonstrate Heimat's environmental turn, by tracing the emergence of the contemporary understanding of Heimat as a site of sustainable living in harmony with the non-human environment, as well as one of local belonging and place-based identity.

Heimat's Environmental Turn

In the 1950s Heimat discourse had focused on the loss of home in Eastern Europe, and in the 1960s on the alienation and threat to identity arising from urbanization, the industrial society and mobility. The 1970s were characterized by two new developments: the threat to the environment and the shift to a conception of Heimat belonging as an active process of appropriation and shaping of the Heimat, with an emancipatory effect on the individual.[15] Leading thinkers among the cultural anthropologists, ethologists and sociologists who engaged with Heimat at the time were Ina-Maria Greverus and Hermann Bausinger. Greverus's 470-page *Habilitationsschrift*, *Der territoriale Mensch* (*Territorial Man*) explored attitudes towards Heimat and place in the 19th century through the medium of literature and popular song. It described how the *Heimatkunde* (Regional Studies) taught in schools in the nineteenth and early twentieth century used allegiance to place and local community to promote subordination of individuals to the collective, and loyalty to political leaders. However, at the same time, Greverus argued that Heimat was a German cultural variant of a universal human desire for territoriality – one whose preconditions and diverse forms across a range of societies had already been studied for some time by American anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists. Adopting the term "territorial imperative" from the behavioral scientist Robert Ardrey,[16] Greverus invested it with a new dual meaning.

First, it denoted a universal behavioral characteristic of the human species. Drawing on the concept of animal environments as individual species-specific *Umwelten*, each defined by the sensory perception mechanisms of the species, which Jacob von Uexküll had formulated in the 1930s,[17] Greverus redefined Heimat as a sphere of need satisfaction, affording identification, protection and an ability to act.[18] Attachment to the Heimat was completely understandable if it was conceived as a sphere of maximum behavioral security, in which a functioning relationship between self and environment could be relied on. Heimat

[15] Gebhart, Geisler, and Schröter, *Heimat. Konturen und Konjunkturen*, 42-3.
[16] Ardrey, *The Territorial Imperative*.
[17] von Uexküll and Kriszat, *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen*. Recently republished in a new translation, in von Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*.
[18] See *Der territoriale Mensch*, 23-5.

was a place in which individuals acquired a close, symbiotic relationship with the (social and natural) environment over time. But any place could become Heimat. The implications of this understanding of place-relatedness led Greverus to formulate a second meaning of "territorial imperative:" she used the term to signify an obligation on the state and political leaders to enable citizens to satisfy their spatially-related need.

Greverus developed this second argument further in a later book directed at a wider readership, *Auf der Suche nach Heimat* (*Looking for the Homeland*),[19] integrating ideas from the utopian Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch, whose invocation of Heimat in *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (*The Principle of Hope*, 1959) as a sphere of humanity and democracy, enabling individuals to realize their creative potential, anticipated much subsequent thinking about place, place-belonging and the role of place in identity formation. However, *Auf der Suche nach Heimat* was also a response to the reclamation of the concept by the environmental movement in the course of the 1970s. "Heimat is in again, it has even become a new protest slogan," Greverus noted.[20] The association of concern over the erosion of Heimat resulting from industrialization and urban growth with environmental protest action decoupled Heimat from the nation and freed emotional bonds with place from their ideological baggage.[21]

Echoing the conception of participative, grass-roots democracy which was developed by Green political thinkers at the time, Greverus described Heimat not as something which existed, but as a political goal and a challenge:

> Creating the conditions for Heimat is a political goal which goes beyond the purely quantitative improvement of environmental protection, social justice and equal opportunities, however important these may be. It means supporting people in their individual and personal self-establishment in a territory which they wish to appropriate actively and shape as their Heimat. The quality of life associated with Heimat is not inherited at birth, nor can it be prescribed. It is rather an achievement of active subjects appropriating their environment. Giving people a real opportunity to take self-determining action of this nature, that is the "political challenge of Heimat."[22]

[19] See especially Chapter 2, "Heimat – wieder aktuell," 19-34.
[20] Ibid., 20.
[21] On the Green Heimat movement, see "Heimat unter grüner Flagge;" Liebing, *Heimat deine Heimat*.
[22] Greverus, *Auf der Suche nach Heimat*, 17; my translation.

The environmental dimension of 1970s Heimat activism was similarly acknowledged by the cultural anthropologist Hermann Bausinger, who described the shift to a conception of Heimat as something actively generated, in urban contexts as much as in rural communities, whether by means of environmental protest, groups researching local history, or initiatives building bridges with immigrants and seeking to create better living conditions.[23] Elsewhere, Bausinger wrote of Heimat in terms practically synonymous with identity. Defining identity as the opposite of "Fremdheit" (estrangement) and "Entfremdung" (alienation), namely "congruence with oneself and one's surroundings," he wrote that place was indispensable as an anchor for identity.[24]

The link between Heimat feeling, environmental concern and identity at the end of the 1970s resonated with a cultural and philosophical tradition associating Heimat with the notion of a reconciliation of nature and the human subject, as Peter Blickle notes in his *Critical Theory* of Heimat. Blickle writes of a widespread belief that the enjoyment of landscapes was a specifically German way of making oneself home in the world, citing Rudolf Borchardt's anthology of eighteenth and nineteenth-century landscape writing, *Der Deutsche in der Landschaft* (*The German in the Landscape*, 1927). He locates the origins of the association of Heimat with appreciation of natural beauty, and the idea of nature and the natural as fundamental to Heimat, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century mythification of nature, and more specifically in the philosophical journey of the I towards a perceived potential for unity with nature, from Kant through Fichte and Schelling to Hölderlin: "It is no coincidence that the modern idea of Heimat appears for the first time parallel to the longings expressed in philosophy and poetry for reunion with that nature from which the I feels it has become distant." Blickle notes a striking convergence of the ideas of Heimat and the beauty of nature (*das Naturschöne*): "The modern idea of Heimat […] is a ground whereon *Entzweiung* [the experience of alienation] is reconciled, a mental place where landscape and identity, nature and self, reason and space become fused."[25]

The environmental dimension of Heimat thus goes deeper than its mere association with premodern socio-economic structures and its conception as rural rather than urban. Heimat is a site of harmonious relationships with the natural environment both through its definition as human *Umwelt*, a sphere of functioning communication and interaction with other organisms and inorganic objects, and through the Romantic philosophical tradition

[23] Bausinger, "Auf dem Wege," 23.
[24] Bausinger, "Heimat und Identität," 19-20.
[25] Blickle, *Heimat*, 115; 119.

seeking human identity through reconciliation with nature. That the new, active and environmental turn in German Heimat thinking in the 1970s is not, however, a mere *Sonderweg* (special path taken without equivalent in the wider world), can be seen by the parallels with developments in spatial theory and ecocriticism.

Heimat thinking in the context of spatial theory and ecocritical conceptions of place attachment

Friederike Eigler has written in a recent article that the term "Heimat" has become a "fashionable abject of theoretical discourses on space,"[26] i.e. a shorthand for regressive, narrow, nostalgic notions of place. Seeking to rehabilitate it as a critical concept, Eigler demonstrates close parallels between the shift to a more active and open understanding described above and a more general move to "de-essentialize" the notion of place in writing on space and place by American, British, French and other anthropologists, geographers and social theorists.

Yi-Fu Tuan, Henri Lefebvre, Doreen Massey and others have examined local places increasingly in their interaction with and inflection by national and global spaces, exploring their significance for social relations, and their construction in visual and textual media. The humanist ethnographer and phenomenologist Tuan has studied how places emerge and change over time, and how social relations and affective attachment transform abstract space into place. The Marxist philosopher Lefebvre describes place as neither static nor natural, but constantly open to change and produced through social practice. The feminist geographer Massey sees space and place as a continuum along which local and global forces interact, and argues for a relational conception of place, defined by its links with what lies beyond it, rather than bounded by the counterposition of one identity against another. Problematic association of places with notions of an 'authentic' home to a particular population can be avoided through recognition of their multi-layering and openness to others. Massey also looks at relationships between notions of place and gendered identity involving spatial control.[27] A knowledge of such international discourses on space and place can, Eigler argues, help to contextualize German Heimat writing and thinking.

[26] Eigler, "Critical Approaches to Heimat and the 'Spatial Turn'," 34.
[27] Although Eigler does not discuss them, postmodern and postcolonial spatial theories of nomadism and hybridity have provided further perspectives adapting traditional conceptions of locatedness to an age of globalization and migratory flows. Notions of nomadism developed by Gilles Deleuze and Rosi Braidotti

In her book *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet*, Ursula Heise has undertaken a comparable task for ecocritical understandings of place attachment, locating them in the context of international theories of spatiality and globalization. The thrust of her argument is, however, different. Rather than seeking to rehabilitate a discredited conception of the importance of place belonging for environmental awareness, she writes to redress the undue preponderance of the local in ecocritics' thinking about place. First wave ecocritics in the 1990s tended to assume that intimate knowledge of and emotional attachment to a place make us more sensitive towards environmental changes in it, and more willing to take action to protect it. Of those who sought to ground their ethic of spatial proximity in philosophy, some have drawn on Heidegger's conception of dwelling as a form of inhabitation safeguarding and preserving nature, which was based on hereditary attachment to a place, region or landscape. Others have cited arguments by environmental philosophers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Hans Jonas, Arne Naess and Freya Mathews for physical immersion as a way for individuals to reintegrate in the biotic community.

Heise challenged the assumption that sustainable behavior can be fostered by simply reconnecting individuals with place. Celebrating locality should, she argued, be subordinated to efforts to foster a sense of global belonging and responsibility. Examining thinkers in a wide range of disciplines who have observed and analysed aspects of a general erosion of the importance of place and situatedness in contemporary society, as a result of postmodernity, globalization and the risk society, she concluded that traditional place-attachment had become an anachronism, and proposed "eco-cosmopolitanism" as a more appropriate social and educational goal today.

Heise's claim that environmentalist and ecocritical discourse in the United States had been "constrained in its conceptual scope by an at least partially essentialist rhetoric of place as well as by its lack of engagement with some of the insights of cultural theories of globalization"[28] is undoubtedly justified. However, embodiedness and locatedness are universals of the human condition, and cultivation of awareness of them remains a desirable social and cultural goal. Place, and practices of inhabitation, will continue to play a role in both identity construction and the nurturing of environmental consciousness. (Heise therefore argues not for wholesale abandonment of traditional conceptions of place-belonging, but for their adaptation to present-day circumstances.) The ecocritics Jonathan Bate and Kate Rigby

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foreground flux, and embrace the shifting, multilocal belonging and polyethnic places typical of contemporary life.

[28] Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, 51.

have taken important steps towards adapting them, reviewing post-Heideggerian developments in phenomenological thinking on place, and seeking to make them fruitful for literary criticism. In his book, *The Song of the Earth* Bate has argued that Heidegger's association of dwelling with the ethnically or politically defined *Volk* or nation must be replaced by one with the inhabitants of a locality, province or region; that it is essential to distinguish between ownership and belonging; and that ecopoetic vision must be "inclusive, not exclusionary," i.e. open to outsiders and newcomers.[29] In *Topographies of the Sacred*, Kate Rigby has further modified Heideggerian dwelling: we should conceive of dwelling as "an achievement, something which we have to learn again and again, something which involves conscious commitment, not something that is in any sense 'in the blood'."[30]

Despite the thrust of Heise's argument in *Sense of Place, Sense of Planet*, there is then a clear parallel between developments in spatial theory and ecocriticism, and these both relate in essentials to the reconfiguring of Heimat. How, though, is this new conception of place attachment reflected in literary representations of Heimat, and what role might literature play in encouraging readers to reconsider the place of humans in the world?

Literature as a medium for recording, reconfiguring and mediating understandings of Heimat and the human-nature relationship

Literature's potential to promote a sense of local belonging is the subject of an essay by Karl Trost in a two-volume, multi-disciplinary publication edited by Will Cremer and Ansgar Klein for the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung in 1990.[31] Drawing on an earlier article by the educationalist Jürgen Hein calling for "recovery of literature's relations with Heimat and place", albeit with respect for others and mindfulness of global responsibilities,[32] Trost writes of literature as a prime medium of interrogation of self and world, and of reflection on the process. It can enhance awareness and empower readers to act by depicting ways of dealing with basic human problems, and it is capable of bringing home the psychological loss associated with absence of place identity and belonging, and giving new impulses to people's thinking. Trost identifies the late 1970s as a turning point when a series of writers began to depict Heimat in their work, prompted by the rise of the citizens' initiatives, the

[29] Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 280.
[30] Rigby, *Topographies of the Sacred*, 11.
[31] Trost, "Heimat in der Literatur."
[32] Hein, "Literaturdidaktische Überlegungen zu Sinn und Bild der 'Heimat'." Cited by Trost, p. 874.

current of regionalism, and the return to everyday experience as a literary subject. He cites Max Frisch, Siegfried Lenz and Martin Walser as having contributed significantly to the rehabilitation of Heimat and regional belonging in public debate.

Friederike Eigler goes further in examining the potential of literature (and literary criticism) to contribute to socio-cultural debates on the value of place-belonging. Contemporary narrative renderings of Heimat can, she argues, serve as case studies for the multidimensional textures of place theorized in cultural geography, and help rethink issues of spatiality. Writing about Heimat is typically a way of preserving the memory of a lost or disappearing childhood home, which is associated with the experiences and values which have made the author who they are. It seeks to lay the trauma of loss to rest in a process of mourning work. This transformation of the author's raw nostalgic emotion can help others to come to terms with their experiences of the effects of modernization. At the same time, literature can make us aware of the ambivalent implications of certain forms of emotional attachment to place. Working against the colonising and naturalising of places, by restoring their cut-off histories and contexts, it allows us to inhabit rather than merely know and control space. In three brief concluding case studies Eigler examines Elfriede Jelinek's parody of the essentialist discourse of Heimat in *Wolken.Heim* (*Clouds. Home*); Peter Handke's deterritorialization and aestheticization of Heimat in the *Langsame Heimkehr* cycle (*Slow Homecoming*); and Jenny Erpenbeck's model of a dynamic notion of place in *Heimsuchung*, in which the search for Heimat is presented as a universal human characteristic, but readers are constantly reminded of the factors preventing its realization.

Critiques of environmental destruction may be found in a good deal of Heimat writing since the 1970s. They appear mainly in works in the anti-Heimat genre exposing oppressive and authoritarian structures in everyday life, particularly in the rural context.[33] Ecological issues are also, however, present in texts idealising Heimat, presenting it as a harmonious interaction of humans and the non-human, such as Peter Handke's diaries and novels.[34] Fiction with a local or regional setting, travel writing, nature writing, autobiographies and landscape poetry have all played a role in fostering a sense of place, and thereby contributed to the promotion of a sense of being in the world. In *The Song of the Earth*, Jonathan Bate has attempted to theorize this part played by literature and poetry in promoting inhabitation.

[33] See, for instance, the later plays of Franz Xaver Kroetz, the Swiss writing of E.Y. Meyer and Beat Sterchi, and the Austrian novels of Gerhard Roth and Peter Rosei.
[34] On Heimat as a theme in Handke's writing see Luckscheiter, "Formen des Beheimatens;" on Handke's concern with ecology and being in the world see the contributions by Stefan Hofer and Sieglinde Klettenhammer in Gersdorf and Mayer, *Natur – Kultur – Text*, 125-73.

Citing Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1958), Bate argues that textual imaginings and rememberings of places of intimacy enable the reader to experience oneness with the world directly, rather than yearning for it "elegiacally in nostalgia for the *temps perdu* of childhood or the imagined good life of primitivism."[35] Among the poetic images which resonate with readers most powerfully are those of spaces which afford protection, such as secret rooms and wardrobes. In the following, I propose that the representation of Heimat in Erpenbeck's novel (in which the house and a walk-in wardrobe in the master bedroom serve as central symbols) contributes to re-envisioning our relationship with the natural environment, while illustrating the contemporary understanding of Heimat outlined above.

Studies of *Heimsuchung* initially examined it as a "generation novel," focusing on issues of memory and gender.[36] Mary Cosgrove has stressed the negative aspect of Erpenbeck's representation of Heimat, reading it as an unbounded, inhospitable space, reflecting the uncertainty and provisionality of post-reunification German identity.[37] Sven Kramer has also examined *Heimsuchung* as an interrogation of Heimat in the post-reunification context from the position of an ex-GDR citizen. The places where she has lived have changed beyond recognition, rendering former paradigms of attachment invalid: "The novel reassesses notions of German national identity in dialogue with the concept of Heimat, asking what modes of identification are still possible, and still practicable in the light of historical experience."[38] Heimat is presented by Erpenbeck as a precious state which can only ever be achieved temporarily, and whose enjoyment has all too often been accompanied by disregard for the suffering of excluded others. She depicts it in melancholic retrospect as the lost place and time when one could live a good life, attuned to the local environment through pleasurable physical interaction.

Although *Heimsuchung* has been recognized as conveying the need for new forms of place-belonging, its depiction of Heimat as a potential reconciliation of humans and nature and its call for revision of the nature-culture dualism have not been analysed so far. On the one hand, Erpenbeck focuses on building and garden design as instances of the human attempt to make oneself at home in the world. I read this as exemplifying a new humanist philosophy approximating to Gernot Böhme's ecological nature aesthetic. On the other hand, a striking feature of the novel is Erpenbeck's empathetic attention to the material detail of

[35] Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, 154.
[36] Gerstenberger, "Fictionalizations;" Probst, "Auf märkischem Sand gebaut."
[37] Cosgrove, "Heimat as Nonplace and *Terrain Vague*."
[38] Kramer, "Reconsidering 'Heimat'," 200.

everyday things. Building on insights into this aspect of the work which Gillian Pye has presented in a recent article,[39] I also read passages from the book through the lens of material ecocriticism, as a deliberate blurring of the human-nature distinction. Evidence that Erpenbeck has adopted a position consonant with posthumanist theory is also found in the gardener, who is interpreted as a figure calling on readers to acknowledge the agentic forces of non-human nature.

Heimat in *Heimsuchung* 1: Heimat as making oneself at home in the world

Heimsuchung is divided into eleven principal chapters, each of which, while written in the third person, adopts the perspective of an owner or occupier, and tells what the place meant to them. These chapters alternate with shorter ones headed "The Gardener," which link the individual narratives. Key passages conveying the notion that Heimat is something to be actively created, in a process of making oneself at home in the world, are to be found in the second of the "Gardener" chapters, and the chapter "The Architect" (V 21-30), which describe how the house is planned and built, and a garden is made out of the woodland around it. The architect describes his profession as one of "planning homes, planning a homeland" (V 24), by anchoring our everyday actions in a fixed location: "Setting out courses for lives, flooring beneath feet for corridors, vistas for eyes, doors for silence." (V 25) The house is conceived as an intermediary between its occupants and the natural environment. On the one hand, it is to be an extension of the human body, a "third skin," after the skin made of flesh and clothing (V 24). On the other, it is to be a part of the landscape: built from local stone, mortar and reeds, it is to appear as if it had grown there like a "living thing" (V 28).

In the garden, trees and shrubs are planted to convey an impression of naturalness, creating a gradual transition from flowerbeds near the building to the surrounding woodland. Native planting is complemented by selected exotic species, and a flight of stone steps is laid, leading down to the lake. Erpenbeck's unusually detailed account of the layout of the garden corresponds in significant respects to Gernot Böhme's ecological nature aesthetic and his conception of nature as a "cultural project." Böhme calls for an aesthetic shaping of nature, drawing on Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's eighteenth-century aesthetic principles. For Böhme, aesthetics, in the wider meaning of sensual cognition, provides a way of overcoming

[39] Pye, "Jenny Erpenbeck and the Life of Things."

the conceptual rift between nature and culture, changing people's perception of and attitudes towards the environment, and thereby combatting the alienation and destruction of modern society.[40] Alongside scientific knowledge of nature, he argues, we need a kind of recognition of it whereby we come to understand the other through the relationality which is given by our shared physical existence. Böhme's aesthetic project therefore calls for cultivation of a corporeal sense of self, and a fostering of sensual culture, including a development of people's awareness of the physical impact of landscapes and places on them.

Practical applications of this ecological aesthetic include landscape architecture, urban planning, architecture, interior decorating, and fashion. In these and other areas, Böhme calls for the production by design of the "atmospheres" through which things manifest themselves to human perception. He developed this conception of nature as a cultural project in response to what he saw as the shortcomings, in an age when there is no longer such a thing as nature untouched by human hand, of an environmentalism which sought to preserve, repair and compensate for the damage to selected parts of nature, rather than accepting responsibility for a shaping of nature as a whole to our needs in ecologically sensitive ways.[41] Drawing on Adorno's conception of the "Kulturlandschaft" (cultural landscape, or "culturescape") as a product of the humanization of nature, he advocates reshaping our environment "with a view to enhancing our collective well-being as bodily beings among others, human and otherwise."[42]

The landscaping in Erpenbeck's novel corresponds broadly to Böhme's conception of nature as a cultural project. However, the architect's place attachment and place-making is depicted as highly problematic. It is not merely that he is, as an architect, inflexibly wedded to the notion of stasis ("Someone who builds something is affixing his life to the earth. Embodying the act of staying put is his profession," V 28). His stress on the need for a "healthy" balance between the vertical and the horizontal hints at Nazi eugenics, and his repeated insistence on calling the place his "Scholle" (native soil) implies acceptance of the notion of racial ties. At the same time, formulations of the purpose of landscape architecture like "To tame the wilderness and then make it intersect with culture – that's what art is, the householder says" (V 18), and "To avail oneself of beauty regardless of where one finds it, the owner says" (ibid.) imply a stance seeking to exercise dominion over nature. Violent

[40] Böhme, *Für eine ökologische Naturästhetik*. See Rigby, "Gernot Böhme's Ecological Aesthetics;" and Chandler, "Reading Atmospheres."
[41] See Chapter 7, "Nature as a Cultural Project" of Goodbody, *Nature, Technology and Cultural Change*, especially 257-9 and 270-72. See also 30-32.
[42] Rigby, "Gernot Böhme's Ecological Aesthetics," 146.

appropriation of nature also speaks from his conception of building as "wresting a block of air from amid all that burgeoning, billowing matter with claws of stone, pinning it down" (V 24).

The design of his garden in fact reflects the fundamental ambivalence of Nazi landscape architecture, which drew on the conception of the 'nature garden' formulated by Willy Lange in the early years of the twentieth century. In *Der Garten und seine Bepflanzung* (*The Garden and Garden Planting*, 1913), Lange had written that gardens exist not just to serve human purposes, but also to assert the rights of nature. Native plants were to be preferred to exotic species, but foreign plants could be planted alongside those found in the local landscape, as long as they resembled the local ones physiognomically. The garden was to appear part of the surrounding landscape. Leaves were to remain on the ground to provide habitats for plants and animals, and pruning trees and shrubs was rejected as too human-centered. Lange's nature garden was thus a predecessor of the eco-gardens of the 1970s and 1980s. However, his later writings promoted the idea of Germans' superiority over other peoples increasingly stridently. By the 1930s, landscape design had come to pursue a "biological" aesthetic, assuming a special relationship between the German people and the landscape.[43]

Plagued by anxiety over, among other things, the fact that one of his great-grandmothers was Jewish, the architect develops an obsession with ownership and control over a piece of real estate as a guarantee of security and shelter. He blots out consciousness of the fate of his former Jewish neighbors, whose plot with boathouse and jetty he acquires at half price when they are forced to sell. He survives the Second World War, but in the early 1950s his past catches up with him. Facing a five-year prison sentence if he doesn't flee to the West, leaving everything behind, he is forced to recognize the transience of human attachment to place and the danger of investing a particular place with such personal value. His house will soon be lived in by others, and is already in fact home to a marten, which holds his gaze for a long moment through a window in the roof (V 23). The animal inhabitation outlasts the human: the martens are still there at the end of the book.

A range of different relationships with the place as Heimat are depicted through the eyes of its other occupants. For the architect's wife it is a gilded cage. Initially, her loss of freedom is the price to be paid for marriage to the man she loves. Later, when the house is

[43] See Wolschke-Bulmahn, "All of Germany a Garden?;" "The Nationalization of Nature and the Naturalization of the German Nation."

occupied briefly by Soviet troops in 1945, it proves an unreliable refuge, failing to protect her from rape. For the Jewish owners of the next door plot, the lakeside meadow is a promise of belonging in Germany. It becomes a trap, leading to expropriation and eventually the gas chamber. For the returned émigré writer at whose disposal it is placed after the architect has fled to the West in the 1950s, it is compensation for years of exile, and subsequently an outwardly idyllic substitute for the continuing absence of a just and democratic society. For others, it is a substitute for a lost former home, but one to which they never really belong; a site of shameful complicity in abuse; and finally a childhood paradise from which they are expelled after reunification.

The fundamental ambivalence of Heimat, both familiar and uncanny, a place where one is at home and a site of deterritorialization, is flagged up in the title: while *Heim* and *suchen* connote the universal quest for home, *Heimsuchung* denotes "affliction" by disease or natural disaster (or figuratively, being plagued or haunted by doubts). Erpenbeck's Heimat is then a model for dwelling in harmony with society and nature. But at the same time it is a dangerous mirage, when approached in the wrong spirit, because its seeming permanence and ability to serve as a refuge from historical and social change are illusory. The opening chapter, "The Wealthy Farmer and his Four Daughters," introduces the negative qualities of rural Heimat tradition, drawing attention to the gender dimension of deprivation of belonging and self-realization. Its litany of superstition-driven obligations and prohibitions, circumscribing women's behavior and stipulating their tasks, anchors Heimat feeling in deeply problematic patterns of social behavior. The subjugation, dispossession and abuse of women in patriarchal society are, it is implied, at least partially responsible for the chain of loss and suffering over the course of the twentieth century.

Multiple displacements over time alluded to in the course of the narrative indicate the always only temporary nature of Heimat. An elderly Polish-German expellee articulates this in its most extreme form: life is a constant flight, she muses, with a chain of refugees sleeping in each other's beds, using their predecessors' cooking utensils and eating food they had to leave behind (V 101-2). The sentiment is already implied in the three mottos prefacing the text of *Heimsuchung*, which suggest the non-exclusive nature of place-belonging, the uncertainty of Heimat's promise of security, and the incompatibility of completion and stasis with human life. These are then the provisos which Erpenbeck stipulates for those seeking a Heimat in the twenty-first century. Seeking to inhabit the earth is a universal human trait, but the dream of finding shelter must not presume permanence or be bought at the price of the suffering of others. It remains to show how the novel depicts Heimat as a sphere in which the

chasm separating humans from the non-human environment is at least partially overcome through acceptance of the agency of the non-human and the materiality of the human self.

Heimat in *Heimsuchung* 2: Undermining the human-nature dualism

Gillian Pye has drawn attention to Erpenbeck's unusually detailed descriptions of the material qualities of things of everyday life. Drawing on Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's study, *The Meaning of Things*, Pye notes that objects crop up as leitmotifs throughout the narrative, and perform a range of functions. Above all, they symbolize relationships and values, customs and ways of life, with disappearance of things marking wider losses. Acquiring and keeping things can therefore signify a wish to make provision for security and continuity. At the center of the novel stand house and garden, holding out the promise of shelter from transience. In the absence of such a Heimat, the émigré writer's typewriter, which has accompanied her from Berlin into exile and back again, and the books she has written on it serve as a spiritual home: "This typewriter was her wall when the corner of a blanket on a floor was her home, with this typewriter she had typed all the words that were to transform the German barbarians back into human beings and her homeland back into a homeland." (V 88)

Things can at the same time make concrete the connections between self and unknown others, and underscore ethical responsibility to fellow men and women. As traces of the past, after their owners' departure and death, they transport memories, which figures in the narrative may be blind to, but which link their experience with that of others. Among the objects which Erpenbeck invests with such symbolic value are towels in the boathouse (V 28-30), products of the Jewish owner's textile factory, which, long after his death, serve as reminders of the architect's unfulfilled responsibility towards his neighbor, stones in the ground marking the old border of the neighboring property, whose presence is revealed when it is fenced off by a new tenant in the 1970s (V 109), and the valuables hidden from the Russians in 1945 and buried again when the architect leaves for the West.

Pye also writes that *Heimsuchung* represents things as "partners in human experiences of continuity and rupture," which "determine, as much as they are determined by, human activities and behaviors," noting that "humans exist in relational dependencies with non-humans."[44] However, she does not go into the ecological implications of Erpenbeck's

[44] Pye, "Jenny Erpenbeck and the Life of Things," 113; 118; 119.

attentiveness to materiality in detail. Theorists of material ecocriticism such as Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann have explored the ethical and political implications of contacts between human corporeality and more-than-human nature,[45] and asked how on the one hand sensory perception of nature, and on the other matter's (or nature's) nonhuman agentic capacities are represented in narrative texts. They argue that by presenting human beings and bodies in terms of their "intra-actions" with their surroundings, rather than as separate subjects and objects, literature helps us to appreciate the true scale of anthropogenic environmental change.

The following passage in *Heimsuchung* describing the garden in terms of sights, sounds, smells and feeling suggests that Erpenbeck is consciously drawing attention to human immersion in the material world:

> In the morning the sunlight grazed the tops of the pine trees before the house […]. [S]unlight spotted the path as it descended amid oak leaves, conifers and hazelnut bushes down to the paved steps […]; down beside the lake the sunlight pierced the alder foliage only at intervals to reach the black earth of the shoreline, which was still moist, and the closer you came to the glistening surface of the lake, the louder the leaves rustled […] but all of this only to blind him, a summer visitor taking his first step onto the dock […]. Here the sun unleashed its force, falling upon both him and the lake, and the lake threw its reflection right back up at the sun, and he, who was now sitting or lying at the end of the dock, observed this exchange, casually extracting from his hand a splinter he'd gotten when he sat or lay down, smelled the pine tar used to impregnate the wood, heard the boat plashing in the boathouse, the chain it was bound with faintly clinking, he saw fish suspended in the bright water, crabs crawling, felt the warm boards under his feet, his legs, his belly, smelled his own skin, lay or sat there, and since the sun was so bright he closed his eyes. And even through the blood behind his closed eyelids he saw the flickering orb. (V 26-7)

The Heimat is here evoked as a summer idyll, a sphere of physical pleasure in natural surroundings adapted to human comfort. The summer visitor is both active and passive, entering the scene and experiencing the agency of the sunlight, whose impact is described with active verbs, culminating in "falling upon him:" it literally penetrates his closed eyelids.

[45] Iovino and Oppermann, "Material Ecocriticism."

This foregrounding of the agency of nature in the relationship between humans and the natural environment, reinforced by the reference to the splinter of wood driven into his hand when settling down on the dock, is consonant with the conceptions of dynamic/ 'agentic' matter, and of the porosity of our selves and bodies, expounded by the new materialists Jane Bennett and Karen Barad.

Erpenbeck undermines the boundaries between the human self and agents in the natural environment in her depiction of other sensory encounters with nature yielding a sense of being at home in the world (however fleetingly). She describes, for instance, the Polish grandmother's swimming and skating on the lakes of her Masurian Heimat as a young person: "In summer, when she was young, she swam and dove her way through the Masurian lakes, fished in them too, and in winter she went ice-skating, the blades would be screwed into the soles of her boots. She reached out her hands to touch the waters of these lakes, washed herself in them, drank from them, ate their fish and scratched up their ice [….]" (V 103-4) The interaction has left permanent traces on her body: "To this day her shins are blue and purple from the lace-up boots, which had to be laced especially tight for ice-skating." (V 104)

In the chapter "The Wealthy Farmer and His Four Daughters," Erpenbeck refers to a series of superstitions investing the chance behavior of material objects at important moments with significance as indicators of what the future holds in store. These can be read as intuitions of the "mosaic" of agency all around us of which Jane Bennett writes, arguing that we need "to devise new procedures, technologies, and regimes of perception that enable us to consult nonhumans more closely, or to listen and respond more carefully to their outbreaks, objections, testimonies and propositions."[46] There are also many reminders of the limits of human control over nature in *Heimsuchung*. At the outset, the Heimat itself is depicted as agentic, in a "Prologue," which describes the geological changes in the area since the last Ice Age. Far from being a sphere of stability and constancy, the landscape is depicted in constant flux and as shaped by vast natural forces. The limits to human control are later foregrounded through allusions to a plague of cockchafers in 1937, the Colorado Potato Beetle, which spreads eastwards across Europe during the 1930s and forties, and a canker which befalls the fruit trees in the orchard after the war. Time also takes its toll on the human body: much of the second half of the book is devoted to persons experiencing the impact of ageing (the émigré writer, the Polish visitor, the gardener, V 94, 96-7).

[46] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 108.

Nature's agentic force is personified by the strange figure of the gardener. Iovino and Oppermann have noted that such anthropomorphism is commonly encountered in textual representations of materiality, and argued that it plays a key role in the conceptual framework of material ecocriticism, revealing "similarities and symmetries between the human and the nonhuman," and functioning as a way of thinking non-determined materiality, and a heuristic strategy to disclose the kinships and connections between the two worlds.[47] Erpenbeck's gardener is characterized by intimate knowledge of nature and harmonious interaction with it. While taciturn in company, he is seen speaking to the plants he tends (V 16). His life possesses a mythical, timeless quality: no one in the village knows where he comes from, we are told. Perhaps he was always there (V 3). Much of his shadowy existence is conveyed through third-party information: rumours about him, some possibly true but others patently impossible, are introduced with the phrase "in the village, they say" (V 109, 122, 134). Although not immune to ageing, he lives up to reunification in 1990 (by which time he would be over a hundred years old!), when he disappears, leaving behind nothing but a few clothes and a pair of rubber boots.

The gardener has been interpreted variously as a romantic allegory of the GDR's demise, an idealized East German peasant, and a model of human self-realization through productive metabolic interaction with nature in the Marxist sense.[48] However, his disappearance seems above all to mark the triumph of self-interest, hectic and alienation from nature over a slow, harmonious, fulfilled way of life. He combines qualities of the *genius loci*, or spirit of the place (and time) with echoes of the Green Man, traditionally a borderline creature identified as both tree and man, straddling the boundary between humankind and nature.[49] Exemplifying a mode of being in the world giving primacy to integration, cooperation, and mutuality rather than alienation, dominion, and antagonism,[50] he leads us to reflect on the history of humanity's relationship with nature, and our place in the natural world.

The gardener also references the pastoral genre, and the Georgic in particular. When we are initially introduced to him, he is an agricultural laborer, employed by the local farmers

[47] Iovino and Oppermann, "Material Ecocriticism," 80-81.
[48] Cosgrove, "Heimat as Nonplace and *Terrain Vague*."
[49] The Green Man, represented in medieval sculpture as a head entwined with vegetation, with leaves sprouting from his mouth which suggest his words are consonant with the laws of nature, although he is retreating shyly behind plant life, is associated with an animistic conception of nature. However, he has also been referenced in recent books and films (John Fowles's novel *Daniel Martin* and Peter Greenaway's film *The Draughtsman's Contract*), as a figure embodying an alternative to the modern scientific, industrial treatment of the natural world as a resource.
[50] See Anderson, *Green Man*.

on a casual basis for jobs such as grafting fruit trees, harvesting, draining the wetland at the edge of the lake, cutting reeds for thatch, repairing agricultural implements and felling trees for firewood. He is hired as a gardener after assisting the local thatcher in covering the roof of the architect's house, and plays a key role in laying out the garden in the early thirties. His duties include planting, watering, pruning, weeding, manuring, mowing, picking fruit, raking and burning leaves in autumn. When bees are kept to produce honey during the war, he reveals a surprising expertise in beekeeping. He thus commands a somewhat improbable range of rural skills. Erpenbeck's repeated reference to his daily and seasonal tasks, and the emphasis she gives to grafting and apiculture in particular echo the genre of poetry blending idealization of country life with realistic depiction of agricultural practices which derives its name from Virgil's *Georgics*.[51]

A final feature of the gardener which aligns him with models of inhabitation for the twenty-first century is that he is not owner, merely occupier of the place. In the opening pages of *Heimsuchung*, we learn that he lives in an abandoned hunting hut at the edge of the wood (V 3). Later, during the Second World War, when his duties include looking after bees, he is given leave to put up a camp bed in the shed built to extract the honey. In his old age he is permitted to use a ground floor guest room in the house with its own entrance. For all his rootedness, he thus exemplifies the nomadic subject, earning his attachment to place through service to it, and treading lightly on the earth.[52] In *Heimsuchung,* Erpenbeck can also be said to advocate a 'relational' conception of place, and a form of attachment which embraces awareness of connections with and interdependence on other places. The house on the lake is the leisure-time other of Berlin; as a part of the GDR it is the restrictive other of West Berlin and West Germany; it is linked with a whole series of other places through the origins of the people who live there (Berlin, Moscow, Poland), and the places they are forced to leave for (Melbourne, Cape Town, Auschwitz). Her understanding of Heimat is thus fully contemporary in being dynamic, active, open and plural, embracing both the de-essentialization and deterritorialization of place observed in spatial theory, and the modification of sense of place through complementation with sense of planet called for in ecocriticism.

[51] See Chapter 2, 'Constructions of Arcadia,' in Gifford, *Pastoral*.
[52] See Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*.

Conclusion

If this essay has sought to show how the notion of Heimat has become a focalizer for German debates on the place of humans in the world since the 1970s, it has also aimed to illustrate the potential of literary texts and literary criticism to play a part in re-envisioning our relationship with place, and with nature. We have seen how Jenny Erpenbeck's *Heimsuchung* warns against the dangers associated with emotional attachment to place, and in particular against illusions of ownership and permanence and practices of exclusion and dispossession, but nevertheless ultimately endorses Heimat feeling, albeit in a mode anticipating and accepting the inevitability of loss. At the same time it has become clear that Erpenbeck's account of the experiences of the successive occupiers of the house on the Scharmützelsee where she spent her childhood summers addresses the wider, anthropological question of our human position in the biosphere.

There is no direct reference to environmental concern in Erpenbeck's novel: her principal aims are to locate her mourning of the passing of the GDR in historical context, and to reflect on what a conception of Heimat appropriate under the political and social conditions of the twenty-first century might look like. However, in the process *Heimsuchung* explores Heimat's ecological dimension. Although Erpenbeck foregrounds the problematic aspects of the German conception of the nature garden, she does so without invalidating humanist ecological aesthetics: she seeks rather to integrate in this approach to dwelling elements of posthumanism, highlighting embodiedness and locatedness as universals shared by humans and other animals. The position advocated by her novel thus corresponds closely to Gernot Böhme's new humanist thinking, which, far from endorsing human supremacy, sees nature as autopoietic, interdependent and communicative, and promotes an ethos of respect for earth others, and regard for the network of interrelationships that facilitate our collective flourishing. At the same time, passages in her book exemplify literature's capacity to model and promote an ecological form of posthumanism opposed to traditional notions of human exceptionalism and concomitant practices of domination and exploitation, by presenting human beings in intra-actions with their surroundings, and by foregrounding the kinship between the two worlds through personification of the Heimat in the figure of the gardener.

It is the ambition of ecocriticism to demonstrate the ability of works such as *Heimsuchung*, alongside theory, to stimulate and inform the re-thinking of the ethical implications of our human presence on the planet which has become increasingly necessary in the era of the anthropocene. Its aim is to show how, through representations of experience

blending historical facticity with imaginative reconstruction, and observation with critical reflection, they can foster a modified sense of place and promote being in the world. By articulating in conceptual terms the intuitive insights of literary writing, without losing sight of its openness to ambivalence and complexity, and by drawing attention to the ability of the stories we tell about our place in the world to critique current practices and imagine alternatives, ecocritics seek to play a part in enhancing environmental literacy and inspiring the public to face the environmental challenges of the future.

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