ALFRED HORNUNG
ZHAO BAISHENG
Editors

Ecology and Life Writing

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Table of Contents

Trees and Animals

Environment and Ethical Ends

ALFRED HORNUNG

Ecology and Life Writing: Preface

In spite of an increasing public awareness of ecological concerns since the cultural reorientation of the 1960s and notwithstanding the manifold efforts of political activists, the ecological movement has only gradually and partially been transformed into a global endeavor. The slogan "think globally, act locally," while still a feasible maxim for a more sustainable and environmentally friendly day-to-day existence, fails to acknowledge and address the immensity of the problems. As the journalist Bill McKibben explained in his landmark environmental apocalypse, *The End of Nature* (1989), climate change will indiscriminately affect human populations in both the northern and southern hemispheres.

Ecological discourse, which emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century and intensified in the 1960s in the United States, has been concerned primarily with the dangers arising from nuclear power and global climate change with all its political, social, and economic implications; more recently in the 1990s, literary and cultural critics have recognized the urgency of this area of research and advanced the "greening of the humanities" (Parini), developed the field of ecocriticism, formed the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), and established the journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. The emergence of this new field of research built on the efforts of the ecological movement as well as the prominence of nature writing and contemporary ecocritical authors in American literature. The ecocritical approach lent itself to the discussion of new forms of regional and postcolonial writing in the U.S. Southwest (Edward Abbey, Rodolfo Anaya, Leslie Marmon Silko, Terry Tempest Williams) and for a re-assessment of American romanticism. The often autobiographical dimension of the relationship between nature and the self and the implication of gender generated such new genres and criticism as eco-biography and ecofeminism (cf. Diamond/Orenstein),

and medical humanities as emergent field in which life writing is investigated from a "life sciences" perspective (Damasio). American Studies scholars outside of the United States have taken up the ecocritical practice of their American colleagues and developed it further. Extending Cheryll Glotfelty's rather general definition of "ecological literary criticism [as] the study of the relationship between literature and the physical world" (xviii), the British critic Greg Garrard theorizes the field of ecocriticsm, and the German Americanist Hubert Zapf advances his concept of literature as a cultural ecology. Literature as an aesthetic transformation of reality, Zapf argues, possesses a specific potential for the symbolic representation of the culture–nature paradigm (2002, 2008). The pragmatic basis of autobiographical accounts, which rely on the correlation of an empirical and a textual self, provides a fertile ground for the examination of culture–nature relations; for nature writing equals life writing, the widely accepted umbrella term for all forms of autobiographical practice (cf. Smith/Watson). Hence it is not surprising that the autobiographical work of Henry David Thoreau has served as the starting point for a new theoretical engagement with environmental writing. Thoreau's classic rendition of his experience in nature, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854), not only gives rise to Lawrence Buell's idea of the "environmental imagination," but also allows the critic to extend the Romantic image to a transnational frame (Buell 1995).

As one of the most influential texts in the American canon of environmental writing, Thoreau's *Walden* is not only concerned with the environmental changes in mid-nineteenth-century New England, but also with ecological and cultural relationality on a global scale. Indeed, *Walden* is the product of transnational relations in general and of a transatlantic cross-cultural fertilization process in particular, as Thoreau was strongly influenced by English Romanticism, a movement whose members were, in turn, inspired by the American naturalist William Bartram and his *Travels* (1791). Thoreau draws on Asian philosophies as well as European sources. The status of *Walden* as truly world literature is emphasized by its translation and favorable reception not only in Western but also in Asian contexts (see Harding 9).

The traditionally different attitudes to life in Asia have inspired Western writers and influenced Western thought from early on. In *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972), the social scientist and cyberneticist

Gregory Bateson contrasts the "schizogenesis" underlying the organization of life in European societies with Asian societies' intention of creating a "dynamic equilibrium" (64-71). New ecological approaches promise to overcome such contrastive or comparative patterns, emphasizing a transatlantic perspective (Gersdorf/Mayer 2006; Zapf 2008) and recognizing the potential of environmental literary criticism to advance an ecoglobalist discourse in the humanities (Buell 2007; Garrard). The combination of ecological concerns and postcolonial studies has successfully extended the frame of reference from the geography of the North to the Global South (Huggan/Tiffin) by pointing to the "ecological imperialism" which governed the exploitation of nature in the colonies of European empires (Crosby; DeLoughrey/Handley). While Africa, Australia, and South Asia have been included in the ecocritical assessment of mostly English-language authors, a proportionate cooperation on ecocriticism between Euro-American and Asian scholars is still rare.

Based on the equation of nature writing with life writing, autobiographical relations between nature and life represent a fertile ground for joint investigations of ecoglobalist scholars. The re-assessment of Thoreau's *Walden* in the light of current ecocritical discussions connects with recent autobiographical works which foreground the importance of the preservation of nature for the survival of the residents on planet Earth. Practitioners of life writing in the U.S. Southwest and Pacific America offer new representations of the self, which are ideally aligned with the cycles of nature and a healthy environment. These writers link up with Native American and First Nations projects of life writing and with autobiographical works of Asian North Americans, which often reflect traditional Asian concepts of nature worship. This transcultural and transnational perspective on the interrelation of ecology and life writing underlies the contributions to this volume.

The articles assembled in *Ecology and Life Writing* form part of an ecoglobalist engagement in current concerns about the future of the biosphere and the position of the humanities. They were first given as papers at the Second World Ecoculture Organization (WEO) International Conference in Mainz in 2010, which was the continuation of the First WEO International Conference on "Ecological Literature and Environmental Education: Asian Forum for Cross-cultural Dialogues," held at Peking University in 2009. The jointly organized venues

in Beijing and Mainz created a cooperative link between ecocritical discourses in Western and Asian, especially Chinese, regions. China has been facing costly environmental problems resulting from exponential economic growth in the past three decades. While the Chinese government has begun to address some of these problems partly in conjunction with the Olympic Games in Beijing, environmentalism still seems to be a minority discourse, especially outside the rapidly growing urban centers. Chinese ecologists, eco-activists, and ecocritics, such as Xu Ming (Chinese Academy of Sciences), Gao Zhanyi (China Institute of Water Resources and Hydropower Research), Wang Canfa (China University of Political Science and Law), and Xu Gang (writer, Beijing) have greatly contributed to the emergence and establishment of this discourse, and they are making great strides in disseminating environmental ideas. Ecocritical practice in the humanities is often guided by the reception of American publications on environmental criticism, which, however, has led to a rediscovery of ancient Chinese sources of nature writing (see Yang's contribution in this volume).

Over and above the stock-taking of ecological conditions in different parts of the world, most of the participants of the Mainz WEO conference focused on ecological issues and life writing projects, some of which reflect transformations of traditional Asian concepts of nature worship in North America by Asian diasporic persons in past and present. From the ecological aspect of life writing (Allister) emerges the concept of a "planetary consciousness," first evident in the European Enlightenment (Pratt), now further developed by critics like Paul Gilroy from the position of race, Gayatri C. Spivak from a post-Marxist perspective and Ursula K. Heise from an environmentalist point of view. It includes an important ethical dimension and the idea of alterity (Spivak) or conviviality (Gilroy) and is intent on realizing an "ideal of eco-cosmopolitanism or environmental world citizenship" (Heise 10). In this sense, all contributions explore the potential of the humanities to enhance ecological goals and to contribute to a transnational cooperation in the common effort to preserve a livable habitat (Suzuki).

The contributions in this volume are arranged in four sections, ranging from theoretical approaches to literature as cultural ecology and surveys of ecocritical practices via interpretations of the nature/civilization divide to the biosphere of non-human and human lives. The first section, "Ecology and Life Writing," begins with Hubert

Zapf's application of his concept of literature as cultural ecology to life writing. This extension of the traditional self-oriented idea of life writing implies the abolition of an autonomous subject in favor of living interrelationships with nature and non-human lives. Such a re-conceptualization of life writing allows Zapf to read classic American authors like Thoreau and Melville, who thematize the relationship between human beings and nature, autobiographically and ecocritically. In a similar move to extend the possibilities of ecocritical practice, Cathrin Gersdorf links Thoreau's idea of walking in nature to Walter Benjamin's concept of *flânerie* in the city and relates the natural experience of "absolute freedom and wildness" to the urban activities of an "asphalt botanizer." Her interesting trajectory from American romanticism to urban modernism also includes a political and cultural critique of capitalism and—with reference to Catriona Sandilands' essay on the function of national parks in the twenty-first century—a critique of the ecocritical romance with nature. Kay Schaffer's analysis of Chen Danyan's trilogy *Shanghai Princess* shifts the scene to the urban environment of the Chinese metropolis and to the contemporary feminist agenda in China which—at the beginning of the new century—recuperates exemplary lives of prominent women of the early twentieth century in Shanghai for the formulation of a specifically Chinese feminism, distinct from Western models. The move from the Anglo-American domain of ecocriticism to Chinese efforts to establish an ecocritical discourse in China is the topic of Yang Jincai's and Xu Dejin's contributions. Yang gives a very detailed account of the proliferation of Buell's ecoglobalist ideas in mainland China, which initiated new approaches based partly on ancient Chinese texts. Xu follows his survey of Chinese ecocritical practices with an analysis of Qiuyu Yu's "econarrative" *Lend Me a Life* (2004).

The contributions in the second section "Nature and Civilization" depart from Thoreau's eminent example and treat variations of "wild nature" in American and Chinese literature. Birgit Capelle investigates Thoreau's application of East Asian concepts of time in *Walden* and *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* to show that the American transcendentalist envisioned time not as an abstract category or separate phenomenon but as an intrinsic quality of Being. Genie Giaimo retraces the Puritan construction of wilderness as an ideological counterpart to civilization for her analysis of John Marrant's and Jarena Lee's African American spiritual autobiographies. While these autobiographers adopt

the means of the Puritan jeremiad, they reverse the Puritan value judgments about nature and culture, since they often take refuge in wilderness from (white) civilization. The European construction of wilderness, used to justify the exploitation of the American continent and its indigenous inhabitants, figures prominently in contemporary Native American literature. Deborah L. Madsen's reading of Gerald Vizenor's autobiography *Interior Landscapes* focuses on the author's critique of ecologocentrism, which privileges human exceptionalism at the expense of other forms of life in nature. Vizenor's ecobiographical project, Madsen argues, explores the parallel between the gratuitous assumption of human rights over nature and of European rights over Natives whose planetary consciousness also includes non-human species. Sabine N. Meyer offers a postcolonial ecocritical interpretation of Sherman Alexie's poetry. According to her analysis, Alexie extends the familiar correlation of colonial imperialism and ecological injustice to the fate of the Native Americans, seeing a parallel between ecocide and genocide. A different kind of death resulting from an ill-conceived recuperation of Thoreau's experience in wild nature is found in Manfred Siebald's interpretation of three rewritings of *Walden.* While he sees B. F. Skinner's and Anne Dillard's versions as extensions of their scientific and religious ideas, he classifies Jon Krakauer's recuperation of a failed experiment of life in the Alaskan wilderness as an aberration. Nature as a retreat from oppressive political realities is the subject of Chen Guangchen's interpretation of two Chinese autobiographies, which are situated in the South of China. Both authors, the modernist Shen Congwen and the exiled Nobel Prize winner Gao Xingjian, contrast the Confucian-based ideology of the Han civilization in the North with the Taoist-inspired individual freedom in the natural environment of ethnic minorities South of the Yangtse River. In their ecological message, Chen argues, both writers are influenced by the nature poet Tao Yuanming's novella "Peach Blossom Fountainhead," in which the poet presents an early example of Ernest Callenbach's ecotopia as an alternative to the conflicts and battles in the Jin dynasty.

The contributions to the third section "Trees and Animals" shift the focus from the human to the non-human world with an emphasis on the way in which plants and animals mirror human lives. Katja Kurz evaluates the representation of environmental activism in Nobel Peace Prize laureate Wangari Maathai's autobiography. The political efficacy

of this work for the environment and peace is based on Maathai's project of planting trees in Kenya to undo the repercussions of British colonialism and to reinstall through the communal work of reforestation the rootedness of her people in the land. A similar idea guides Nirmal Selvamony's application of ecocriticism and life writing to the relationship between trees and people in Tamil culture. He traces the linguistic and cultural roots of the word *tinai*, which stands for the cohabitation of plants, animals, human communities and the ancestral spirit as a primal family. Selvamony's investigation of family and clan names, Tamil customs and poetry reveals the important position of trees as symbolic ancestors and totems. The metaphorical usage of trees in the poetry of the Chinese Canadian Fred Wah is the subject of Eric Redling's article. The particular focus of his interpretation is the proprioceptive dimension in Wah's poems in which he incorporates the paratextual components of book covers and bindings. Sabine Kim's essay analyzes the human–critter relationship in the work of the Canadian poet Don McKay. The poetic rendition of the experience of bird watching, which she calls a zooëtic performance, recognizes the animal world as part of an environment shared by all creatures and points to the ethical responsibility for the preservation of life. Mark Berninger's investigation of human–animal encounters from Dante's Christian literature to the Shamanic tradition in Japanese popular culture, Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider*, traces the importance of animal allegories and the animals' double position as physical beings and symbolic representations of "the ultimate Other." Another kind of animal story, critiqued in Tim Lanzendörfer's essay, is the transposition of biological research about ants and ant colonies into fiction by the Harvard myrmecologist E. O. Wilson. Evoking similar attempts in popular movies, Lanzendörfer points to the deficiencies of these anthropomorphic descriptions of animal life which fall short of the conventions of life writing and always require the human perspective.

The contributions to the final section "Environment and Ethical Ends" address some of the dangers facing the environment and ecocritical as well as life writing practices which impinge on the desired harmonious interrelation of all creatures on earth and call for an ethical perspective. The Chinese Garden Culture created by retired administrators in the Ming dynasty resembles, in Alfred Hornung's analysis, an ecological project of life writing. The careful coordination

of natural and human structures and the correlation of physical beauty and spiritual activities were seen as the basis of harmonious living, which prefigure the deep ecological life writing projects of the Japanese Canadian environmental activist David Suzuki. Greg Garrard cautions against such easy equations of well-functioning ecosystems and the health of human beings in life writing with reference to Richard Mabey's autobiographical *Nature Cure* and Catriona Sandilands' "Eco Homo." The belief in the healing power of nature must include—in his mind—a scientific basis and an ethical position vis-à-vis all life. For Simon Estok, ecocriticism has the potential to ethically resituate literary texts in which nature often appears marginalized. With reference to examples from Canada, Korea, and Japan he tries to counteract such attitudes of ecophobia and opts for an extension of ecocritical theory and practice from life writing to fictional writings. The final contributions offer such ecocritical-cum-ethical readings of contemporary fiction. Axel Goodbody reads W. S. Sebald's novel *Rings of Saturn* as nature writing and as an example of relational autobiography in which human suffering is linked to natural catastrophes. Serpil Oppermann turns to Raymond Federman's postmodern surfiction in which she detects an ecomimetic relation between life and text. For her, Federman's reconstructions of concrete environments of his life are inherently connected to ecology and the creation of a surfictional ecological self. Bilge Mutluay Cetintas interprets Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Fifth Book of Peace* from an ecofeminist perspective. In rewriting her manuscript destroyed by fire, the Chinese American author arranged her book according to the elements of life and evokes, Cetintas argues, Western, Buddhist and Taoist cosmologies to depict the forces of nature. The female counter model to the disasters of war and fire, associated with men, is the act of writing. The volume concludes with an interview by Scott Slovic with the American photographer Chris Jordan about forms of environmental damage caused by human-made and natural disaster assembled in images of plastic bottles, representing "landscapes of consumption."

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cooperation and ecocritical practice. I would like to thank in particular the members of the trinational doctoral college on life writing, Katja Kurz, Pascale Cicolelli, Anita Wohlmann, Pan Shan, and especially Yvonne Gutenberger for taking charge of the website and conference folder. Silvia Appeltrath served as the "invisible hand" and head behind all of the operations to maintain the good vibes in and out of sessions.

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Ecology and Literature

HUBERT ZAPF

Cultural Ecology, Literature, and Life Writing

1. Preliminary Remarks

The discourses of ecology and of literary studies have been brought into a fruitful dialogue for some time now, and the question about the relationship between Ecology and Life Writing specifies this transdisciplinary dialogue in a new and productive way. If ecology focuses on anything above all else, it focuses on "life" in its various forms and manifestations. So the connection with literary life writing seems to offer itself as a promising point of convergence or, as Edward O. Wilson would have it, of "consilience" between areas of knowledge that have long been kept separate in established academic and cultural practices (Wilson, *Consilience*). Nevertheless, there are also some points of difference that such a dialogue must face, at least if we are dealing with a traditional concept of literary life writing. Life Writing as a concept and field of study has been closely associated with the genres of biography and autobiography, of memoirs, journals, diaries, and letters, even though it has been extended in recent years, according to Meg Jensen, to include writing "in every format of every media and in every academic discipline" in which "self-reflection, life writing, writing the self, offering one's life story within travel books, scholarly articles, broadcasts, political web sites or newspaper blogs has become a standard tool of communication and the dissemination of information in our time" (Jensen). Life writing has thus become a transmedial phenomenon in an age where, more than ever before, the personal has merged with the political, and where the intimacies of private lives have become a preferred site of public interest and communication.

Nevertheless, what most of these forms of life writing seem to have in common, is three premises: the *realist* premise that they are related,

through their biographical status, in some immediate way to "*real life*" by which they are authenticated; the *individualist* premise that the *individual subject* is the reliable source, agent and narrator of such stories from real life, and the *anthropocentric* premise that the "life" that typically becomes the subject matter of such life writing is exclusively defined as the life of human beings in their psychological and sociocultural existence.

I would like to suggest in my paper that the concept of literary life writing can be usefully extended if it is considered from the perspective of a cultural ecology of literature. Any ecological approach would first of all have to reconsider the anthropocentric premise of traditional life writing and open up the text and the self to a broader meaning of human life in its vital interrelatedness with nature and nonhuman life. An ecological approach would furthermore have to reconsider the individualist premise of traditional life writing by acknowledging the "nonautonomy" of the individual subject, as Peter Finke calls it, i.e., the assumption that all individuality always only exists as a relational phenomenon, as individuality-within-contexts and living interrelationships. Ecocriticism has looked for this ecological dimension of literary life writing primarily in nonfictional texts, because in them, in the words of Lawrence Buell, the "closeness of felt interdependence between the literary expression and the natural environment" is greatest. (Buell, *Environmental Imagination* 16) In the perspective of a cultural ecology of literature, however, such a broader concept of life writing is not necessarily or primarily tied to realist and nonfictional genres of texts. Instead, it draws special attention to the ways in which literature, in the sense of aesthetic and imaginative literature, can be conceived as a culturally relevant and particularly powerful form of life writing in its own right.

In my contribution, I will comment on this broader concept of life writing in the following three steps, (1) some introductory remarks on the approach of cultural ecology within ecocriticism and literary studies, (2) a comparison of two well-known literary texts as examples of literary life writing, and (3) a few general suggestions about possible directions and fields of research in literary life writing from a cultural-ecological perspective.

2. Cultural Ecology and Literary Studies

Any discussion of life writing within the transdisciplinary context of a dialogue between cultural ecology and literary studies has to make at least a passing reference to concepts of life as they are used in other disciplines and cultural forms of knowledge, most visibly and conspicuously in the contemporary Life Sciences, which are not only drawing a lot of public attention and money to their disciplines, but are also often credited with discursive supremacy in the definition of what is currently seen as constituting "life." Yet while the life sciences have increasingly expanded their research into areas which are of special relevance to the humanities and to literary studies—e.g., in the debates about mind, consciousness, and ethics in the neurosciences—it nevertheless would involve, as Ottmar Ette convincingly argues, a severe conceptual and epistemological reductionism to assume that the natural life sciences could cover the whole spectrum of what constitutes "life" in a sufficiently complex sense, or that they could claim a superior authority of truth over the phenomena which they are taking as their objects of research within the framework of their quantifying, causal-empirical, and objectifying methodology. Instead, both the openness to these disciplines, and yet also the awareness of different forms of knowledge of life which have evolved in cultural history, are necessary for transdisciplinary literary studies.

In this sense, it is not only legitimate but mandatory for literary studies to raise the question of how literary and textual knowledge can contribute in distinct and unique ways to contemporary knowledge and writing about "life" in a broader sense. In various disciplines and branches of knowledge, life means different things. In biology, life is the genetic structure and evolutionary process of living systems; in medicine, it is the physical and biochemical life of the human organism in the ever-precarious balance between sickness and health; in psychology it is the emotional, intellectual and communicational life energies that help maintain or restore the vitality of a person in the face of crisis, alienation, or traumatization; in sociology and political science, it means the right to life as a form of personal and social self-determination as well as the various forms and problems of "living together" between individuals and cultures; in philosophical ethics, the doctrine of the "good life," however it may be defined in detail, becomes a guiding principle, which,

again, relates not only to the individual self but includes respect for the life of other people and living beings. Now one way of looking at literature from the perspective of cultural ecology would be to consider it as a holistic, self-reflexive and interdiscursive form of life writing that potentially encompasses and participates in all of these different meanings and manifestations of life.

Cultural Ecology is a relatively recent development within the field of ecological knowledge. One of its pioneers was Gregory Bateson, who in his project of an "Ecology of Mind" (1973) considers culture and the human mind not as closed entities but as open, dynamic systems based on living interrelationships between the mind and the world and within the mind itself. The "mind" is conceived here neither as an autonomous metaphysical force nor as a mere neurological function of the brain but as a "dehierarchized concept of a mutual dependency between the (human) organism and its (natural) environment, subject and object, culture and nature," and thus as "a synonym for a cybernetic system of information circuits that are relevant for the survival of the species" (Gersdorf and Mayer, *Natur—Kultur—Text* 9). While causal deterministic laws are therefore not applicable in the sphere of culture, there are nevertheless productive analogies which can be drawn between ecological and cultural processes.

In Peter Finke's 'Evolutionary Cultural Ecology,' Bateson's ideas are fused with concepts from biological ecology, systems theory, and linguistics. The various sections and subsystems of society that have evolved especially in the modernization process since the eighteenth century are described as "cultural ecosystems" with their own processes of production, consumption, and reduction of energy—involving physical as well as psychic energy. This also applies to the cultural ecosystems of art and literature, which follow their own internal forces of selection and self-renewal, but also fulfill an important function within the cultural system as a whole. From the perspective of this kind of cultural ecology, the internal landscapes produced by modern culture and consciousness are equally important for human beings as their external environments. Literature and other forms of cultural imagination and cultural creativity are necessary in this view to continually restore the richness, diversity, and complexity of those inner landscapes of the mind, of language, the imagination, the emotions, and interpersonal communication which make up the cultural ecosystems of modern hu-

mans, but are threatened by impoverishment by an increasingly over-economized, standardized, and depersonalized contemporary world.

Taking up such cues, literature can itself be described as the symbolic medium of a particularly powerful form of "cultural ecology" in the sense that it has staged and explored the complex interactions of culture and nature in ever new scenarios, and has derived its specific power of innovation and cultural self-renewal from the creative exploration of this boundary. The aesthetic mode of textuality involves an overcoming of the mind-body-dualism by bringing together conceptual and perceptual dimensions, ideas and sensory experiences, reflective consciousness and the performative staging of complex dynamical life processes. In this view, imaginative literature acts like an ecological force within language and the larger system of cultural discourses, transforming logocentric structures into energetic processes, and opening the logical space of conceptual systemic thought into what Peter Finke calls the ecological space of dynamic interactions and feedback relationships. If important features of ecology are living interrelatedness, unity in diversity, holistic pluralism, complex feedback relations, nonlinear processes, and fundamental culture-nature-interaction, these are also characteristic criteria of the ways in which literary texts organize and interpret human life in the medium of language and textuality. Literature draws its cognitive and creative potential from a threefold functional relationship to the larger cultural system—as a cultural-critical metadiscourse, an imaginative counterdiscourse, and a reintegrative interdiscourse. It is a textual form which, in its aestheticizing transformation of experience, breaks up ossified structures of thought and communication, symbolically empowers the marginalized, and reconnects what is culturally separated. That way, literature counteracts reductionist economic, political, ideological, or pragmatic forms of interpreting and instrumentalizing life, and opens up one-dimensional views of the world and the self towards their unrepresented or excluded other. Literature as cultural ecology is thus, on the one hand, a sensorium for civilizational pathologies, for the hidden contradictions, conflicts and traumatizing implications of dominant forms of discourse and cultural practice, and on the other hand, a medium of constant cultural self-renewal, in which neglected biophilic energies can find a symbolic space of expression and of (re-)integration into the larger ecology of cultural discourses.

The difference between such a more specific theory of literature as cultural ecology and the general theories of Bateson and Finke is that it combines concepts of general cultural ecology with concepts of cultural and literary studies, especially with poststructuralist theories of textuality and discourse, and with literary theories such as functional history, literary anthropology, and reception aesthetics. I cannot go into the detail here that would perhaps be necessary, but just mention two contexts in which this transdisciplinary dialogue between cultural ecology and literary studies can be productively situated. One is the functional-historical theory of Wolfgang Iser's literary anthropology. Iser conceives of literary fictions as cultural forms of mediating between the Real and the Imaginary, in which imaginative literature functions as a balancing force and a counterdiscourse to the deficits and exclusions of the cultural system. This functional-historical dynamics of literature can be reconsidered from an ecological view, if the deficits and exclusions of the cultural system are related not only to the interior worlds of individual subjects, as in Iser's literary anthropology, but to the transindividual culture-nature-relationship and to a more ecosystemic conception of literary communication. Another one is the ecological turn in later poststructuralist theory, as exemplified in Lyotard's conception of ecology as "discourse of the secluded," of the unarticulated life which manifests itself in writing and literature (Lyotard), or in Derrida's differentiation between philosophical and literary writing, e.g., in his essay "The Animal that therefore I am," in which the classical epistemological stance of the knowing human subject *cogito ergo sum* ("*I think* therefore I am") is reformulated into the syntactically and referentially indeterminate and open-ended construction "*The animal that* therefore I am," establishing the living interdependence with the nonhuman world as a basic relation of human existence and (self-)knowledge—a relation which, according to Derrida, requires an imaginative, literary mode of writing that opens up the text for the other of living nonhuman nature while being aware of its incommensurability. "That is the difference between philosophical knowledge and poetic thinking."(Derrida 367-77)

This function of literature as cultural ecology varies, of course, according to period, genre, author, and the historical conditions of production and reception. And it has gained heightened significance through the process of modernization since the eighteenth century, in which the tension between linear, progress-oriented economic, technological and

scientific developments and the nonlinear holistic world models of literary art has become one of the characteristic shaping forces of the literary evolution.

3. A Cultural Ecology of Literary Life Writing: Two Examples (Thoreau, *Walden* and Melville, "Bartleby")

Let me illustrate this function in two examples from classical American literature, one of them a central text of the ecocritical canon, Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, the other a rather unlikely candidate in this context, but nevertheless, as I think, equally relevant to a cultural ecology of literary life writing, Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener." *Walden* is clearly an experiment at exploring "life" both at the experiential and the textual level—"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived" (Thoreau 97). As ecocriticism has pointed out, *Walden* is transfused by an ecocentric attitude to life as a continuum of human and nonhuman life, which the text describes in all its phenomenal and perceptual diversity, and in which human life is taken seriously in its instinctual and evolutionary aspects. Yet life in *Walden,* as the passage just quoted shows, is also a project of discovery and self-discovery, a quest for knowledge, intensity, and creativity, which includes but also goes beyond the biological level. It is the personal life of Henry David Thoreau in his activities of observation and reflection, of self-cultivation and self-enhancement. It is furthermore the life of a modern individual in a society by which many people are traumatized—"most men lead lives of quiet desperation," Thoreau states near the beginning of the text—, and from whose imprisoning conventions he is trying to free himself through his affirmation of life in nature. The therapeutic function of nature for alienated humans of modern civilization, which the new branch of ecopsychology is currently exploring, seems to be already observable in Thoreau's book. The life that Thoreau writes about in *Walden* is moreover also the life of an American citizen in the political and social context of the mid-nineteenth century, for whom slavery in the South, but also the working conditions of industrial capitalism of the North as well as the war against Mexico represent severe violations of