

Research Project

A Farewell to Anthropocentrism in American Postbellum Prose from 1850-1970

Project funded by own resources

Project title A Farewell to Anthropocentrism in American Postbellum Prose from 1850-1970

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In the age of the Anthropocene, the inseparability of nature and culture has become an undeniable fact. According to Dipesh Chakrabarty, the Anthropocene denotes “a new geological era”, in which “humans [...] have become a geological agent on the planet” (209). Thus, it is inevitable that we reassess our understanding of the world and our relation to the non-human. It is crucial, especially in this time and age, that we promote the kind of thought that allows us to reevaluate how we relate to the world around us, no longer seeing ourselves as “the pinnacle of creation” (Shaviro 1) but as one type of actor or agent in a larger network. I propose a move away from anthropological difference towards a more, yet not completely naturalist stance.

Among the various media and fields of study that reflect and reevaluate the relationship between human beings and nature in this way are literature and literary studies. Bringing the discussion of this relationship into the focus of literary criticism is the main focus of the literary-critical school of Ecocriticism. In my dissertation project, the focus will lie on six postbellum novels from three different postbellum periods that will function as the fundamental base of a reassessment and reevaluation of the man-nature-relationship. The novels chosen for this purpose are *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) by Ernest Hemingway and *Company K* (1933) by William March, two decidedly different modernist depictions, and *The Naked and the Dead* (1948) by Norman Mailer and *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) by Kurt Vonnegut as examples of postmodernist postbellum literature and *Going After Cacciato* by Tim O'Brien as well as one more text from the post-Vietnam War era that is to be determined.

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