

Non-Anthropocentric Narratives

Stories by Animals, Machines, and Objects in Contemporary Polish Prose

SUMMARY

Increasing destabilisation of the natural environment in the Anthropocene epoch translates into collapse of evident dichotomies: human–animal, culture–nature, artificial–natural, and organic–inorganic. According to reflections of Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour, Rosi Braidotti, Jane Bennett, and Timothy Morton, the profound interdependence of human and non-human elements of the world leads nowadays to questioning of the anthropocentric paradigm that separates humans and products of their imagination, from non-human factors. Thus, an alternative heterarchical system emerges in which an animal, a plant, a virus, a climate, a technology, and objects are no longer the stagnant setting of the story but dynamically shape the course of the narration.

This doctoral dissertation aims to examine selected exemplifications from the latest Polish prose, which presents a non-anthropocentric perspective in the author's concept and at various levels of the narrative text structure. The next aim of the work is to expand and complement Polish literary studies on non-human poetics. In the analysed fiction, environmental, biological, and inanimate actors demonstrate their agency as protagonists, relational spaces, and narrators, thus actively co-creating literary stories.

I identify the dissertation's analysis in the emerging subdiscipline of econarratology, also known as non-anthropocentric narrative theory. Thus, I am searching for answers to two fundamental questions on more-than-human narrations. Firstly, I consider the possibility of participating in a non-human experience created by literature. Secondly, in case studies, I investigate how different diegetic elements (narrator, perspective, characters, events, place, narrative time, etc.) dynamically adapt to the specific essence of individual non-human entities.

Chapter one, titled *In Search of Other(s) Stories [W poszukiwaniu Innych (w) opowieści]*, outlines the theoretical foundation of the work. Beginning from the problems of the Anthropocene and mutual propelling of the crisis of imagination and ecological catastrophe, the role and form of the stories emerging today are illustrated — this specific

feedback is shown in reference to ecocriticism and the findings of the pioneer of this theory, Lawrence Buell, who problematised it. Based on the works of David Herman, Marco Caracciolo and Erin James, I present a new econarratological subdiscipline, which emerges at the intersection of postclassical narrative theory and environmental criticism, posthumanism, and animal studies. The approach is compared with the corresponding theories, along with a characterisation of the analytical and interpretive potential of the chosen methodology.

In the second chapter, *Non-Human Forms* [*Formy nie-ludzkie*], as the title implies, the attention is focused on integrating elements of the poetics of non-anthropocentric texts with precise representatives: animals, plants, and soil. I am exploring threads of displacements between the narrator's grammatical persons in Andrzej Zaniewski's *Szczur*, the plants' eventfulness in Olga Tokarczuk's *Zielone Dzieci*, and the geological extension of the spatiotemporal perspective in Szczepan Twardoch's *Drach*.

In the third chapter, *Poetics of Environmental Crisis* [*Poetyki kryzysu środowiskowego*], I reconstruct strategies for narrating the ecological catastrophe based on Timothy Morton's theory of hyperobjects and the literary exemplifications of *Extensa* and *The Old Axolotl* by Jacek Dukaj. Two diegetic paths are distinguished: multiscalar mapping and environmental enumeration. Each, in a different way, determines experience of more-than-human interdependencies and the planetary scale of ongoing climate changes.

Chapter four, *Technologies: Turn to The Past, Turn to Assemblages* [*Technologie. Zwrot ku przeszłości, zwrot ku asamblażom*], as the title implies, examines new technologies in non-anthropocentric fiction and their impact on the exceeding human perspective of the recipient. Referring to literary examples by Łukasz Zawada and Stanisław Lem, I explain anthropomorphic and retrotopian languages of self-conscious algorithms. Finally, I go beyond the Polish prose and analyse characteristic factors constructed in various narrative media, allowing the process of becoming-other defined in Gilles Deleuze's philosophy and come into being of assemblage organisation.

KEYWORDS:

contemporary literature; environmental humanities; econarratology; non-human; Anthropocene