



LUDWIG-
MAXIMILIANS-
UNIVERSITÄT
MÜNCHEN

FACULTY OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURES
GRADUATE SCHOOL LANGUAGE & LITERATURE MUNICH
CLASS OF LITERATURE



(Anti-)Hybridity and Narration: Human/Non-Human Relations in Fiction and Literary Theory

Interdisciplinary Conference, March 21–23, 2024
Graduate School Language and Literature, Class of Literature
Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich

Recent technological and scientific advances as well as the climate crisis urge us to reconsider the fraught relation between humans and non-humans. Conventional notions about the ontological boundaries between machines, humans, animals, and nature appear to be increasingly insufficient in our complex world. This awareness has gained traction in diverse disciplines such as philosophy, science, sociology, and communication studies.

The modern malaise about strict generic demarcations can be situated in a long literary tradition of hybridization. Since antiquity, hybrid creatures and generic metamorphoses have been popular literary topoi, interrogating the seemingly fixed boundaries between the human and the non-human. Cyborgs, monsters, and hybrid fairy tale creatures are exemplary for this boundary-pushing tendency.

On a meta-level, literature has grappled with the anxiety and exhilaration accompanying processes of hybridization. While baroque scholars such as Martin Opitz denounced hybrid literary genres as impure “chimeras,” romantic poets actively pursued the fusion of diverse literary and non-literary genres. The transcendence of traditional genre categories was further radicalized in the Modernist and avant-garde period. Rilke’s “Dinggedichte,” Dadaist collages, sound poetry, and Surrealist automatic writing, as well as other innovative literary techniques contributed to a reconfiguration of human/non-human relations. Moreover, non-human narrators have been a popular formal device in literary history.

The scholarly debate on hybridity has been characterized by a tension between subjectivist and objectivist stances, which recent theories have tried to deconstruct. While Bhabha’s (1994) impactful theory of hybridity refers to the “in-betweenness” of cultural actors, our conference focuses on the human/non-human relation as theorized by Latour (1993). His famous claim, “we have never been modern,” has played a key role in challenging categories such as ‘nature’ and ‘culture.’ Latour’s notion of a flat ontology of intertwined relations between human/non-human ‘actors’ has recently been employed in literary studies (cf. Felski 2015). Similarly, Haraway’s (2003) concept of “natureculture” is based on the idea of an inseparable co-history and co-evolution between humans and non-humans.

While theories of hybridity tend to devalue the distinction between human and non-human dimensions, anti-hybrid approaches (cf. Soper 1995; Malm 2018) argue for the methodological necessity of generic categories. One influential intervention in the debate has been undertaken by ecological Marxists. Studies by Burkett (1999), Foster (2000), and Saito (2022) put Marx’s metabolism theory center stage and argue that humans, like other organic species, are part of a metabolic totality, but nevertheless differentiated from other species by their particular form of agency. Anti-hybrid

approaches caution against an indiscriminate attribution of agency to non-human actors since the causes of ecological, technological, scientific, and other crises can only be tackled by humans. An uncritical embrace of hybridism may thus inhibit an adequate (political) response to humanity's most devastating effects.

This interdisciplinary conference seeks to inquire how human/non-human relations are negotiated in fictional representations: What role does historical context play in fictional narrations which deal with (anti-)hybridization and human/non-human relations? Which literary strategies are employed in representing human/non-human relations? In what way is (anti-)hybridity contested or celebrated in literary fiction? How do rhetorical tropes (prosopopoeia, metaphors, metonymy, personification, and objectification) contribute to strategies of (anti-)hybridization? Might literary genres reflect the anxiety and exhilaration associated with (im)purity?

The conference will take place in person at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich; participation is free of charge. Unfortunately, virtual participation is not possible, and we cannot offer speakers any financial support for travel or accommodation costs. We welcome junior scholars (doctoral candidates, postdocs, early career researchers) to explore (anti-)hybridity within literary and media studies as well as from theoretical perspectives. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Agency
- Genre
- Rhetorical tropes
- Narrative devices
- (Anti-)hybridity throughout literary history

Please send abstracts for 25-minute papers in English (~250 words) along with a short bio note to hybridity-conference@lrz.uni-muenchen.de by **October 1, 2023**.

References

- Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Burkett, Paul. 1999. *Marx and Nature: A Red and Green Perspective*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Felski, Rita. 2015. "Latour and Literary Studies". *PMLA* 130(3): 737–742.
- Foster, John Bellamy. 2000. *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Haraway, Donna. 2003. *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Chicago (IL): Prickly Paradigm Press.
- Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.
- Malm, Andreas. 2018. *The Progress of this Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World*. London/New York: Verso.
- Saito, Kohei. 2022. *Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the Idea of Degrowth Communism*. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press.
- Soper, Kate. 1995. *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-Human*. Oxford/Cambridge (MA): Blackwell.

Organizing Team: Steph Berens, Jorge Ernesto Centeno Vilca, Mohamed Gouffe-Dedji, Simone Guidetti, Michael Lorper, Marlene Reich, Tina Werner