

Description, Relation, and Rhetoric in Contemporary American Climate Fiction (WT)

Description plays an essential function in fiction, making the storyworld accessible to the reader. It represents materials and subjects, enhances the reality effect. Yet description is often neglected in ecocritical literary studies. Indeed, most ecocritical work follows Gérard Genette, who considers description the ‘handmaid’ of narrative: “Narrative cannot exist without description, but this dependence does not prevent it from constantly playing the primary role” (1982, 134). Although much research exists on narrative and climate change or narratives of resilience, as well as the ethical utility of narrative(s), description continues to play a subsidiary role within econarratology.

This dissertation examines how texts respond to the ecological crisis: It examines descriptions, including eco-ekphrases (Rippl 2019), through the lens of Adriana Cavarero’s geometrical and relational ethics (*Inclinations* 2016). Texts seek to persuade, effect, or affect readers. A key component of the ‘oration’ is description, understood as formal compositions of words, sentences, or passages, which ‘incline’ the text vis-à-vis the reader; texts use description to manipulate proximity. Some ecological texts endeavor to draw readers proximate, seek to make them see the non-textual world anew – to enliven the complex entanglement(s) of subjects and objects and the unsustainable lifestyles that result from contemporary assemblages. Others ‘decline’ the reader, or lean away, and are more circumspect in their ecological exhortation, may have alternate aims that complicate or undermine *teloi* that enjoin radical epistemo- or ontologies.