

Abstract

The doctoral thesis addresses the so far underexplored subject of early literary depictions of railway, investigating the cultural impact of the new, mechanized means of transport, as reflected in fiction. The introduction explains the reasons to focus geographically on Europe (as opposed to the different social context of American and colonial railways), to limit the time span to the 1830–1914 period (after which railway gradually loses its leading role in transport) and the topic to the “look from the outside” (i.e. not the act of travelling itself or the interiors of railway stations and trains). Following up to Wolfgang Schivelbusch and Wojciech Tomaszak, railway is seen as the paramount agent of industrialization and modernization. Further, spatial relations and the phenomenon of infrastructure are accentuated. The following four chapters each study two interconnected issues: the construction of railway lines and their linearity; the images of the ruining of the idyll in connection to railway noises; the signal box topos in connection to fatefulness; and the fully developed railway system, acquiring the function of a peculiar environment in the short story collection *Mugby Junction* by Charles Dickens and even more notably in *La Bête humaine*, a novel by Émile Zola. It turns out that the railway imagery gradually enters into various literary genres, beginning with occasional poetry and then short stories and novels. The fifth chapter interconnects the studied railway imagery with the cultural history of iron. The conclusion emphasizes the role of railway in the complex and often traumatizing modernization process. The whole thesis employs a transnational perspective and the textual material comprises works from the Slavic, Germanic and Romance language areas.