

Caricatures of Man-Made Nature: Reflections on Environmental Change in German Magazines from the Era of Industrialization

Evi Zemanek

My book focuses on a selection of long-forgotten caricatures that appeared in literary and satirical magazines during the era of industrialization. These caricatures depict man-made environmental transformations and address their consequences in the humorous manner typical of the genre. Usually neglected as mere illustrations in literary and cultural studies, their potential as a pictorial form of satire is greatly underestimated. However, as a unique medium of cultural criticism that inventively reveals problematic developments and imagines alternatives by combining text and image, it deserves more attention and a specific approach informed by intermedia studies. Samples from nineteenth-century journals indicate that the relationship between humans and nature is changing. They expose a utilization of resources that is highly questionable and they implicitly demand environmental protection (and, thus, a proto-ecological ethics). I contextualize such caricatures with reference to environmental history, sociopolitical background, and media history, and I offer iconographic interpretations. The aim is to decode and distinguish different modes of the artistic representation of environmental transformations and to assess their sociopolitical influence at a time when our world was less flooded with images than today.