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ADAPTATION AND INNOVATION: AN INTRODUCTION

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"Adapt or perish, now as ever, is nature's inexorable imperative."
H.G. Wells *Mind at the End of Its Tether*

It is our great pleasure to deliver the eleventh issue of *CURRENTS. A Journal of Young English Philology Thought and Review*. The central themes addressed in this year's volume are adaptation and innovation and their conceptualisations, representations and manifestations in Anglophone literature and culture as a response to a changing world.

Change can be a natural process, or a human-inflicted one; in either case, it requires a response. Many recent theoretical approaches have emerged as inevitable reactions to sudden changes or gradual transformations of natural and social conditions. For instance, posthumanism developed as a response to the growing need of redefining a human. Departing from the 17th century humanist model, rapid technological advancement and discoveries in animal studies became the root of posthuman thought, leading to "fundamental changes in the human species and its relationship with the world" (Badmington 2011: 1212). Just as posthumanism can be positioned as a response to certain

changing realities, the same can be done with postcolonialism, feminism, and environmental criticism, among others.

The articles gathered in this volume examine various aspects of adaptation and innovation. Each article presents different approaches and theories, analyzes cultural works belonging to different genres, and shares many insightful observations, proving how ubiquitous the themes of adaptation and innovation are. The majority of the articles submitted thematize dystopia (given that even *Firestarter* shares certain features of the genre); however, poetry and romantasy likewise prove relevant to the discussion.

Articles: adaptation and innovation in literary and cultural studies

The part of the volume dedicated to adaptation and innovation, featuring six articles, opens with “Yōko Tawada’s Post-Apocalyptic Playground: Memory, Mutations, and Multispecies Futures in *The Emissary*” by **Anuska Saha**. The author discusses the novel’s posthuman aspects, dystopian features and notions of hope. Through them, Saha explores Tawada’s re-imagined, post-apocalyptic world with endless possibilities for humanity and beyond.

In the next article, “The Machine Must Be Stopped: E. M. Forster’s ‘The Machine Stops’ as a Looking Glass into Modern Technological World,” **Chrysoula Titi** uses a classic text of dystopian fiction to contemplate the way in which adjusting to technology may become counter-adaptive, leading to humans’ overreliance and even worship of “the Machine” and limiting innovation and resilience. Titi’s article demonstrates that Forster’s text remains particularly relevant in today’s world, where de-skilling is already becoming a looming danger.

This techno-dystopian theme is likewise explored in “‘Maybe love transcends severance’: Control of Emotions and Rebellion against Developing Technology in the Dystopian TV Series *Severance*.” **Zuzanna Sanecka** considers late stage or post-capitalist commodification of emotions, and how this process is conceptualised in the analyzed text through characters whose selves are

divided into work and non-work personas through a futuristic medical procedure, in order to better serve a system that abuses and exploits them. The essay notes that 21st century dystopia need not be associated with authoritarian state power, but may reflect the influence of technologies and corporations instead, demonstrating the dark side of innovation and adaptation.

In “Posthumanist Reading of Stephen King’s *Firestarter*: Surveillance, Experiments and the Ethics of Alterity,” **Julia Borkowska** applies a posthumanist framework to the 1980 science-fiction novel and, through the story of its protagonist, explores the themes of dehumanization and identity seeking. Through application of posthumanist concepts, Borkowska examines how the novel challenges the traditional notions of being human.

“Inverting the Male Gaze in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney and Medbh McGuckian” by **Marta Struglińska** comments on the significance of the aisling tradition in Irish poetry. In her article the author adopts a feminist perspective to discuss how the aisling tradition has contributed to presenting Irish women as passive and victimised. Juxtaposing two poems by Medbh McGuckian with Heaney’s poetry, Struglińska points to an important difference in approaching this tradition, which involves changing the perspective that shifts power and agency from the male to the female figure and also inverts, as the title suggests, the male gaze in women’s poetry.

In the final article of this volume, “Romantasy as an Intertextual Genre: Responses of and to Sarah J. Maas’ *A Court of Thorns and Roses*,” **Gabriela Iwanowska** proposes to look at this relatively recent genre in terms of an intertextual chain reaction. Drawing on theories of intertextuality (Kristeva, Barthes, Barth and Lyotard), the author traces references of *ACOTAR* to earlier texts and genres and, more importantly, points to how it has been instrumental in the development of the romantasy genre and its fandom across various media.

Conference reports

This section contains two reports on the international conferences organized at the Faculty of Humanities, Nicolaus Copernicus University. The first report, written by **Aleś Makkaveyev**, presents the conference devoted to the problems of “Adaptation and Innovation: Linguistic, Cultural and Literary Responses to a Changing World” organized by the Academic Association for Doctoral Students and Students of English on May 22, 2025 (online). With Dr Alice Haylett Bryan from King’s College London as a keynote speaker, the conference gathered eighteen participants from Poland, China, Ireland, Greece, India and the United States. In the second report, **Katarzyna Przygońska** presents a general outline of the main themes and research areas addressed during the international hybrid conference on “Feeling Cultures/Culturing Feelings: Emotions and Affects in Cultural Practices” organized by the Department of Anglophone Literature, Culture and Comparative Studies on April 9-11, 2025. Over seventy participants from Poland, the United Kingdom, Norway, the United States, Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Ireland, Slovakia, Lithuania, Albania and India attended the conference either in Toruń or online, including Dr Xavier Aldana Reyes (Manchester Metropolitan University) and Dr Nicole Falkenhayner (Norwegian University of Science and Technology) as keynote speakers.

Students’ corner

The students’ corner in this issue of *Currents* features artistic projects by NCU students, devised for the courses in: “Intertextuality and Adaptation” and “Detective Fiction” taught by **Edyta Lorek-Jezińska** as well as “Introduction to Literary Theory” and “Ecological Explorations in Literature, Film and Art” taught by **Katarzyna Więckowska** (both part of English Studies, BA programme, 2nd year and MA programme, 1st year). The intertextuality projects (a film script, a board game, paintings, collages and photographs) are the effect of the students’ creative engagement with the circulation of Shakespeare’s

Hamlet in contemporary culture. Four detective stories written for the course on detective fiction present the students' creative re-imagining of the genre in our local setting. The literary theory project is a collection of haiku written in English by the course participants. It is followed by creative works addressing the problems of climate crisis and consumerism: a solarpunk painting and three short stories exploring environmental issues and ways of responding to them.

References

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