

Towards an ecocritical adaptation studies

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Towards an Ecocritical Adaptation Studies

ABSTRACT

Arguments that 'it is time for adaptation studies to take an x turn' have proliferated in the inevitably methodologically eclectic field of adaptation studies. However, there are still methodologies with which adaptation studies has not yet engaged in detail, and which could be enriched by certain existing adaptation studies conventions. One such approach is ecocriticism: analyses of how various cultural practices reflect and inform human attitudes and behaviours towards the nonhuman world around us. This article outlines how the study of adaptation has thus far engaged with ecocritical issues, and indicates how existing adaptation studies protocols offer useful tools to extend the ecocritical project in a diachronic and intercultural manner.

KEYWORDS

ecocriticism; adaptation studies; Anthropocene; ecophobia; memes

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MAIN TEXT

Adaptation studies scholars are divided about the merits of the field's methodological eclecticism. On the one hand, Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan have expressed 'the excitement of encountering in every site of adaptation an entirely new set of relations which allows us to draw promiscuously on theoretical tendencies in film and literary studies and to observe how, in that process of adaptation, something unique is produced' (22). On the other hand, Thomas Leitch has asked whether adaptation studies has become 'a victim of its own success [...] because it is getting too big for its current supply of centripetal energy to prevent it from exploding in a shower of brilliant sparks' ("Adaptation and/as/or Postmodernism" 244). Furthermore, the field has not only gotten (too?) big, but threatens to get bigger, with repeated echoes of Dudley Andrew's influential call that '[i]t is time for adaptation studies to take a sociological turn' (104), like Leitch's own 'it is time for adaptation studies to take a generic turn' ("History as Adaptation" 18). At the risk of adding to the explosive eclecticism, this essay outlines and evaluates how one more methodology with which the field has not yet engaged in detail can both contribute to the study of adaptations of various kinds, and can itself be enriched by certain adaptation studies protocols.

That methodology is ecocriticism – analyses of how various cultural practices reflect and inform human attitudes and behaviours towards the nonhuman world around us. At this proto-cataclysmic stage of the Anthropocene (or what Donna Haraway calls the Capitalocene, given how capitalism has been so central to the negative anthropogenic impact on the environment), it is far beyond necessary to inform the reader about the pressing nature of the global ecological disaster. Responding to this unfolding crisis, ecocriticism is the analysis

of how various kinds of cultural practices influence and are influenced by our attitudes towards the nonhuman world. In addition, the ecocritical project seeks to make useful interventions in that which it studies, as exemplified in Lawrence Buell's definition of ecocriticism as the 'study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis' (430). Although ecocriticism has now moved beyond Buell's somewhat narrow focus on the relationship between literature and the environment to address diverse forms of cultural texts, activist intentions remain the central component of an intellectual project which attempts to meaningfully change our culture's negative attitudes (and thereby behaviour) towards the environment.

I won't go so far to say that it is time for adaptation studies to take an ecocritical turn, both because there is already some interesting work which indicates useful ways that adaptation relates to ecological issues, and because ecocriticism has recently experienced its own turn towards some of the key political concerns of contemporary adaptation studies, relating to race, gender, sexuality, class and so on, as I briefly discuss below. What this article does, rather, is outline and evaluate the existing ways that adaptation studies have addressed ecological issues. It does this in order to attempt a systematisation of how such issues have been conceptualised as relating to adaptation, and to indicate how that systematisation might be further developed in the light of conventions which have already been established in our field, even if they have not yet been methodically applied to ecological issues. Kyle Meikle has recently suggested 'three policy recommendations [...] for a green movement in adaptation studies [...] in the hopes of raising adaptation studies' climate quietude above a whisper' (265). This essay attempts to identify patterns amongst those whispers, and make an additional policy recommendation which, I hope to demonstrate, is already something like a

quasi-ontological component of adaptation studies, which merely awaits application to the Anthropocene's pressing ecological concerns.¹

A useful place to begin this systematisation is with Leitch's aforementioned call 'for adaptation studies to take a generic turn' ("History as Adaptation" 18). This is because the call comes with an interesting addendum that will be doubly useful for the further development of ecocritical adaptation studies. Commenting on his revision of Andrew's earlier call for a sociological turn, Leitch writes that, '[w]ith due apologies for my lack of originality, I would suggest that echoing-but-changing is exactly what all adaptation scholars, and all scholars, and even all lesser organisms do' (18). This is useful, firstly, because I'm going to continue to echo but change the existing ecocritical adaptation studies I'm coming on to; and secondly, because this reference to 'lesser organisms' perhaps alludes to the first relatively broad example of how existing adaptation studies have used ecological and biological ideas and metaphors.

This broad context is exemplified in Gary Bortolotti and Linda Hutcheon's influential 'homology between biological and cultural adaptation', which claims that '[s]tories, in a manner parallel to genes, replicate; the adaptations of both evolve with changing environments' (444). This homology might seem like a potential beginning for something like an ecocritical adaptation studies. However, Bortolotti and Hutcheon instead address a non-ecocritical issue which has been so often debated in the field, arguing that 'the homology we are offering here does allow a different perspective on some of the theoretical problems around adaptation, especially the issue of fidelity as the major criterion of evaluation' (453). This is because, for Hutcheon,

[e]volving by cultural selection, traveling stories adapt to local cultures, just as populations of organisms adapt to local environments. We retell – and show again and interact anew with – stories over and over; in the process, they change with each repetition, and yet they are recognizably the same. What they are not is necessarily inferior or second-rate – or they would not have survived. (Hutcheon 177)

This biological homology therefore facilitates a critique of the earlier adaptation studies paradigm which claims that fidelity is an important evaluative criterion, because both genes and memes (which Hutcheon describes as ‘units of cultural transmission or [...] imitation’ [32]) inevitably mutate as they replicate. Those mutations which best fit changing environments, whether those be physical or cultural, become more successful than either those mutations which do not fit so well, or those which do not mutate at all. Thus, Bortolotti and Hutcheon state that their ‘principal aim has been to use biological concepts in a heuristic manner to help free narrative adaptation theory from the conceptual restrictions of a misleading evaluative fidelity discourse’ (454). Whether this ‘misleading evaluative fidelity discourse’ has now been largely displaced is a separate issue, but the salient point here, in terms of how the field of adaptation studies has thus far engaged with the ecological, is the fact that Bortolotti and Hutcheon use a biological context to address a non-ecocritical issue.²

That is not to say that the biological homology has not been applied to more explicitly ecological issues, however. Occasionally, this application is directly theoretical, such as Leitch’s claim that

[j]ust as Darwin asserted that the will of individual organisms was always subordinate to principles of natural selection that operated within a group, textual adaptation teaches that individual avatars of textuality, texts and oeuvres and movements and genres, are always subordinate to the incessant process of textual production, mutation, and evolution itself'. ("To Adapt or to Adapt To?" 101)

For Leitch then, the biological homology demonstrates how the 'world and the text, both of which look so solid and substantial to any given observer, are always works in progress, a Heraclitean stream whose direction incorporates, subordinates, and dissolves innumerable acts of individual and collective will' (101-2). This approach is almost something like an object oriented ontology where humans do not monopolise will, with texts not so much definitively the creations of original artists and adapters, but as active agents seeking, like genes and memes, to reproduce and mutate. Leitch notes the ecological potential of this approach, stating that '[a]dopting a view of agency that is less anthropomorphic, would have the salutary effect of decentring human agency in a world whose survival depends more and more clearly on a global rather than a merely human ecology' ("What Movies Want" 173).

More often, however, the biological homology has been applied to one of adaptation studies' most controversial and yet lingering forms – the case study. The case study is controversial because it has the potential, at least, as Robert Ray puts it, to 'lack [...] any evidence of cumulative knowledge development or heuristic potential' (44). It would be unfair, however, to dismiss the existing ecocritical adaptation case studies as examples of

Ray's 'endless series of twenty-page articles' (47), both because such a nascent body of work cannot be described as 'endless' (being confined as it is to essays by Anastassiya Andrianova; Jørgen Bruhn and Heidi Hart; Nandita Mahajan; and Andrew Plisner); and because this work demonstrates useful ways to think about adaptation in ecological terms which go far beyond the confines of what Ray calls a 'dogged resort to the individual case study' in which '[e]ach article seemed isolated from all the others; its insights apparently stopped at the borders of the specific film or novel selected for analysis' (44).

For example, Bruhn and Hart might analyse a specific example, the adaptation of the novel *Annihilation* (Jeff VanderMeer) into the film of the same name (Alex Garland), but their analysis sheds light on broader issues of how different media communicate ecological issues in different ways. Evolving the theoretical claims established by Bortolotti, Hutcheon and Leitch, they think of the source texts as 'a cluster of cultural memes (form and content traits), that together constitute the novel's aesthetic setup, as if developing (replicating and mutating) with an urge to survive, to breed' (8). This theoretical context then allows Bruhn and Hart to state that 'the question could be: in which ways can important parts of the novel survive in another cultural and formal "biotope," or medium, like the cinema?' (8). What makes this specific work explicitly ecocritical, is that they not only conceptualise the relationship between texts as inevitably memetic, but they go on to analyse how this particular intertextual relationship relates to an ecological issue to do with challenging anthropocentrism. They therefore ask

what about the constellation of ideas that we considered perhaps most pervasive in the novel, [...] namely the dissolving of dichotomies in favor of

a world infused with a multispecies perspective? How can such a vision be transported into film? [...] [W]hile the basics of plot and character are relatively unproblematic to carry across the media-specific differences between novel and film, multispecies thinking lies, so to speak, on a deeper level of the film and is not immediately transferable. (Bruhn and Hart 8)

This approach, then, considers explicitly ecocritical issues, while conceptualising different media as having different qualities which may or may not be conducive to the translation of themes/memes from one medium to another. Bruhn and Hart's approach therefore does not conform to Ray's limitation of 'insights [which] apparently stopped at the borders of the specific film or novel selected for analysis' (44).

Similarly, Mahajan's analysis of *The Hunger Games* novels (Suzanne Collins) and films (Gary Ross; Francis Lawrence) is conducive to wider conclusions about the ecocritical potential of adaptation. If Bruhn and Hart suggest how ecological issues may move from one medium to another, then Mahajan is concerned with how adaptations might have a potentially convergent and cumulative ecocritical effect. Mahajan goes so far as to make it explicit that her investigation has wider ecocritical ramifications beyond the main textual relationships she focuses on, asking, of audiences who are already familiar with a film's novelistic source, 'when the adaptation is perceived as an adaptation, text and image fuse, word and flesh collide. How does this collision impact a story's portrayal of climate change?' (245) Mahajan discusses two examples – *The Hunger Games* trilogy and its adaptations, and *The Road* (McCarthy) and its adaptation (John Hillcoat) – to develop her argument. This approach generates claims about those particular examples, so that a spectator of the former

franchise who is also familiar with the books will experience cumulative ecological messages: 'the novels' information about Panem's context of climate catastrophe gets combined with the films' rendition of environments. This enhances the story's environmental themes. [Such] palimpsestuous reading results in thematic consonance: novel and film work together to generate a weightier environmental message than either conveys on its own' (250). In addition, however, and going beyond Ray's criticisms of the case study, Mahajan is able to make the broader theoretical conceptualisation of 'the viewer's mind as a site where the convergence of multiple texts enables a specific meaning-making process, which has some effect on the environmental themes of both texts involved' (246).

These existing ecocritical adaptation studies point beyond the limitations of the case study, then. Their arguments contribute both to our field's concern with adaptations as adaptations, and also contribute to the ecocritical project of analysing how various texts communicate ecological issues. In what follows, I want to briefly outline two interrelated areas which could be further developed, and indicate how adaptation studies has existing protocols which can facilitate such developments.

The areas which could be further developed are as follows: firstly, the existing scholarship focuses on texts which have the potential to challenge ecologically-harmful ways of thinking. To an extent, this is also a feature of ecocriticism more widely, with Adrian Ivakhiv arguing that ecocritical film studies 'have tended to focus on films that are considered "environmental", especially those that portray nature and its defenders positively' (1). This might seem to be a somewhat churlish criticism, given that ecocriticism has an activist commitment to effecting positive change. But ecocriticism also needs to analyse what Simon

C. Estok calls 'ecophobia', which 'is rooted in and dependent on anthropocentric arrogance and speciesism, on the ethical position that humanity is outside of and exempt from the laws of nature' ("Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness" 216-7). Estok argues that ecocriticism must begin with an analysis of the illness that is ecophobia before it can begin to prescribe an ecophilic remedy: 'there is clearly a need to hypothesize *the existence and factuality* of ecophobia as a starting point for understanding the origins of the Anthropocene, of current environmental crises, and of climate change' (*The Ecophobia Hypothesis 2*, original emphasis). An ecocritical adaptation studies can therefore be further developed by analysing how adapted texts communicate negative attitudes towards the environment, as well as how they communicate positive attitudes.³

This leads on to the second component of what can be further developed in ecocritical adaptation studies. The above-mentioned studies have favoured the synchronic nature of intermedial relations, so that they are concerned with how the same idea or meme is communicated in different ways by different media – a novel expresses a certain melancholic anxiety about anthropogenic climate change in a certain way, while a film adaptation expresses that same sentiment in a different way, and so on. This pattern is exemplified in explicitly intermedial ecocriticism, as opposed to ecocritical adaptation studies. For example, in a chapter called "Towards an Intermedial Ecocriticism", Bruhn outlines the rationale for such a project:

the environmental humanities tradition is haunted by a methodological impasse, in that it often tends to do one of two things. The first is that in terms of media types, and thus academic disciplines, there is a tendency to

‘compartmentalize’ ecological questions, as if the ecological crisis respects the borderlines defined by media types or academic departmental traditions. The second is that when cultural theorists with broader interests that span different media types and academic disciplines examine ecological representations, they often do so, I will argue, without a sound methodological and theoretical ground. [...] I argue that the environmental humanities could be supplemented with an analytical tool that is sufficiently broad to analyse several media types and sufficiently fine-grained to do this in a detailed way. (Bruhn 120)

In addition to this focus on intermediality, adaptation studies also has a strong historical tradition. Supplementing intermedial and synchronic projects, adaptation studies can explore the intercultural and the diachronic, and can do so in a manner which demonstrates how human attitudes to various aspects of the nonhuman world around us change and adapt through time and space, thereby reactivating and repurposing Hutcheon’s notion that certain memes ‘have great fitness through survival. [...] Adaptation, like evolution, is a transgenerational phenomenon. [...] Stories [...] get retold in different ways in new material and cultural environments; like genes, they adapt to those new environments *by virtue of* mutation – in their “offspring” or their adaptations’ (32, original emphasis). This means that Bruhn’s development of an ‘analytical tool that is sufficiently broad to analyse several media types’ can be further broadened to analyse different historical epochs and cultures. Adaptation studies can thereby help address the fundamental ecocritical question – what is it about our culture(s) which cause(s) us to endanger our own survival by treating the biosphere with such contempt? – by outlining how human attitudes towards the

environment, and cultural expressions of those attitudes in the form of various kinds of texts, are adapted through time, across cultures, between texts, and so on. The texts which we analyse can provide evidence for this historical and intercultural evolution of ideas about the relationships between humanity and nature. And, given Estok's claim that ecophobia is the underlying cause of our woes, adaptation studies can analyse how texts communicate ecophobic as well as ecophilic ideas as they undergo Bortolotti and Hutcheon's memetic mutations through time and between cultures.

One last return to Hutcheon's biological homology can clarify this point. Hutcheon states that

[s]tories [...] propagate themselves when they catch on; adaptations – as both repetition and variation – are their form of replication. Evolving by cultural selection, traveling stories adapt to local cultures, just as populations of organisms adapt to local environments. [...] What they are not is necessarily inferior or second-rate—or they would not have survived. (Hutcheon 177).

Because of this, 'the fittest [stories] do more than survive; they flourish' (32). I would not want to suggest that this isn't a useful way to think of adaptation, but Hutcheon's focus, here, is on the memetic ingenuity and malleability of certain texts – how their mutated repetitions are 'not inferior' as they 'flourish'. A change of focus could shift from whether the mutated repetitions are inferior or not, to how those mutations and repetitions indicate something about how the cultures which produced them conceptualise various ecological issues. Indeed, given how ecophobic most human cultures are, the 'fitness' of a text may very well indicate

how successfully it articulates specific forms of anthropocentric exceptionalism, as the final example I discuss in this article demonstrates. Ecophobia, then, is itself a meme, or perhaps more accurately a clustering of subsidiary memes representing various aspects of ecophobia. And, like all memes, ecophobia mutates to fit into and proliferate within changing cultural environments. Adaptation studies can analyse this process.

To an extent, comparative approaches in ecocriticism have already contributed to this kind of project. For example, Michael Bennett has positioned former slave Frederick Douglass's abolitionist autobiography within a comparatively cultural context, claiming that in contrast to 'the long history of the dominant culture's romanticization of the wilderness' (209), Douglass's memoir demonstrates how the ostensibly commonsensical ecocritical view of the rural as a benevolent escape from the unnatural constraints of the urban is very different to a 'black literary tradition that, from its inception, has constructed the rural-natural as a realm to be feared for specific reasons [to do with slavery and racism] and the urban-social as a domain of hope' (198).

Adaptation studies can extend this kind of analysis. In terms of Bennett's example, this might mean constructing a genealogy of how various signifiers of the rural-natural and urban-social operate across and between texts as they mutate through time and cultures. One of the potential strengths of adaptation studies, in terms of this sort of analysis, is a tradition which can identify specific thematic and narratological paths through which these kinds of memes develop. So, in addition to a broader analysis of the different ways that, say, Biblical narratives, Ancient Greek myths, Renaissance paintings and Romantic poems represent rural locations and human experiences within those locations, adaptation studies can draw out the

historically- and culturally-specific development of more particular threads which inform and support those broader contexts. These broader contexts are made up of repeated and adapted characters and narrative events, and the relationships between these components can facilitate detailed analyses of how different historical moments and different cultures express and relate to various ecological ideas.

Indeed, Bennett's analysis of Douglass's memoir mentions an intertextual component which could be explored in more detail (and aspects of which have already been explored⁴). Bennett notes how this intertextual backdrop has both specific and more generalised forms, stating that because of

the racialization of pastoral space that excluded African Americans from such supposedly Edenic environs, Douglass's narrative points to a flaw at the heart of pastoralism that has been evident since its origins in classical Greece. From Hesiod in the ninth century B.C.E. to the present, the pastoral has always imagined some past golden age from which we have fallen. [...] Hesiod's lament for the fallen state of his own "iron age" is part of the long tradition that includes the Christian story of Adam and Eve's expulsion from their perfect pastoral precincts, on which Douglass comments. (Bennett 198)

This more specific intertextual commentary concerns an especially verdant garden in the grounds of the plantation on which Douglas laboured. Because the hungry slaves would sometimes take fruit from this garden, the slaveowner Colonel Lloyd ordered that tar be put on the fence surrounding the garden, and that any slave

found with tar on their person be flogged. Bennett notes how this specific form of the pastoral as exclusionary invokes at least two Old Testament narratives: 'resonances with the story of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden are complicated by the racialization of the story and its apparent confluence' with one of the codas to the Biblical Fall, so that the 'significant detail that those who broke Colonel Lloyd's commandment were marked with tar calls to mind God's punishment for the first sin committed after Adam and Eve's expulsion [...], when God placed a mark on Cain after he slew Abel' (200). This comingling of Biblical narratives connects the more generalized racial segregation of slave society with the more specific exclusion of the African American from the pastoral because, for Bennett, the story about Cain 'was used to suggest that the darker races were those which had been marked as the descendants of Cain and were thus deserving of ill treatment. [...] The biblical typology applied to the outcast and the enslaved was [thereby] directly mapped onto those marked as trespassers in Colonel Lloyd's garden of forbidden fruit' (200).

Douglass's memoir demonstrates, then, how various Hesiodic and Biblical intertextual memes intersect in a particular manner determined by the historically-specific cultural moment in which, and position from which, Douglass was writing. To an extent, Bennett's account is already an adaptation study, because it notes these intertextual components, and it already combines adaptation studies with politicised ecocriticism, since it provides a historical explanation for why certain people have certain attitudes towards certain aspects of the natural world. What a more formal adaptation studies methodology could add to this is an extension of the historical and intercultural components. More direct comparisons and contrasts could be drawn

between the ways that the relationships between a certain historically-specific group of people and recurring intertexts tell us something about certain attitudes towards the natural world, on the one hand, and the ways that the relationships between other historically-specific groups of people and those same recurring intertexts tell us about certain other attitudes towards the natural world, on the other hand. Again, to an extent, Bennett's writing begins to do this, since he starts with a claim about Hesiodic nostalgia for a lost plenitude, but his focus is nevertheless on a particular point in the unfolding history of recurring memes. I would not want to downplay the importance of Bennett's specific focus, but adaptation studies can take such specific snapshots and position them within much broader and longer historical and cultural contexts, in order to be more precise about how and why certain intertextual components replicate, proliferate, recur, mutate, and so on. This kind of task is by no means easy, since it requires wide-ranging expertise, given that the scholar must trace memetic patterns across areas which inevitably traverse traditional areas of academic specialisation. But, to some extent, adaptation scholars are used to crossing such epochal and disciplinary borders. So, if any field can analyse how specific components of memes like Hesiodic and Biblical nostalgia for a lost Eden mutate through time and across cultures as they appear in media as diverse as myth, literature, biography, painting, sculpture, print media, theatre, film, television, music, video games, and beyond, then that field is adaptation studies.

This particular project is yet to be fleshed out in any detail, but it is worth finishing up by pointing towards an example of a more detailed diachronic ecocritical adaptation studies which I am currently working on, and which has recently been published in a preliminary form

(Geal). This example addresses one of the key elements of ecophobic cultures – Estok’s aforementioned ‘anthropocentric arrogance and speciesism’ (“Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness” 216). Different cultures have expressed this anthropocentrism in many ways, but there are also certain anthropocentric characters and narrative events which are repeated and adapted in an intertextual manner. The differing forms that these adaptations take, from one historical period to another, and from one culture to another, reveal something about the mutation of underlying ideas about how various human cultures conceptualise their relationships with nature.

The example I use to explore this is the adaptation of the classical myth of “Pygmalion”, which is one of several stories about the borders of what it means to be human or nonhuman collected (and adapted) in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. The enduring (if mutated) influence of this story about a non-living statue which is magically transformed into a living human demonstrates Hutcheon’s point that this narrative is clearly not second-rate – it has flourished. What the ecocritical lens can add here is an analysis of how the intertextual evolution of this narrative about a human bringing a nonhuman to life reveals something about the underlying evolution of culturally and historically specific attitudes to relationships between humans and nonhumans. Antiquity’s “Pygmalion” is evidence of a culture which doesn’t entirely monopolise human exceptionalism, because the creation is benevolent and does not threaten those around her; whereas Modernity’s *Frankenstein* (Mary Shelley) is evidence of a culture which jealously guards the boundaries of what it means to be human, because the creation which transgresses these boundaries is abject, monstrous and destructive. Attitudes towards nature, and towards the borders between humans and nonhumans, have changed between these two periods, and the adaptation of “Pygmalion”

into *Frankenstein* reveals something about the precise coordinates of that change. We can similarly analyse the underlying cultural differences which produce the human/nonhuman hybrids *The Terminator* (James Cameron) and Major from *Ghost in the Shell* (Oshii Mamoru). The different visual representations and narratives of these two meditations on human/nonhuman relationships demonstrate different culturally-specific attitudes about those relationships, even in a postmodern climate which is complicated by a symbiotic interconnectivity rendering those cultures as hybrid as the fictional cyborgs.

In each of these examples, nonhuman characters who have been created by humans (even if only vicariously) demonstrate how an intertextual meme mutates under the pressures of complex cultural attitudes about humanity's place in nature. Most of these attitudes, in this example at least, are ecophobic rather than ecophilic, but either way it is possible for the adaptation studies scholar to trace the trajectory of these fundamentally important ideas.

Ecophobia has a memetic history, then, and adaptation studies can identify specific intertextual threads which reveal the contours of that history. It is certainly possible to compare any text, with any kind of apparent similarity, from one period to another, and from one culture to another. Such a comparison would offer some insight into how those different moments/cultures relate to ecological issues via those texts. But adaptations offer more specific and more privileged examples of how different moments/cultures relate to these ecological issues, because we can identify the precise moments and characteristics of either consistency or change during texts' memetic evolutions. We can therefore think of

adaptations as offering what Dudley Andrew has called 'a clear and useful "laboratory" condition' (98) for the analysis of our species' evolving history of ecophobia.

NOTES

¹ Meikle's recommendations range from the broad position that the 'study of adaptation needs to be joined with the study of political ecology in the age of climate change' (265) to more particular aspects of the material relationships between texts. This provokes various questions which the field should consider. Because 'adaptation, as a media practice, foregrounds sourcing, source materials, material relations, and impact' (269), Meikle asks '[a]re some forms of adaptation greener than others? Is intra-medial adaptation more sustainable than intermedial adaptation? Is fan fiction more sustainable than franchising? What do audiences and studios actually reuse in the adaptation process?' (269) In order to address these questions, Meikle urges that the 'study of adaptation needs to be joined with the study of recycling, remaking, and every other form of sustainability in the age of the Anthropocene' (271).

² It should also be noted that scholars have criticized this optimistic homology. Sarah Cardwell, for example, has argued that

there are obviously substantial differences to be noted between the two modes of adaptation. [...] Genetic adaptation is understood as a process by which species survive into later generations, and each new adaptation is commonly regarded as an improvement. [...] Cultural adaptation, in comparison, is seen as aiding the survival of only the organism itself. [...] Few would argue that with each further adaptation to the screen *Wuthering Heights* [Brontë] develops – or evolves – towards the creation of a far better *Wuthering Heights* than that penned by Emily Brontë. (Cardwell 13)

To an extent, Cardwell invokes a historically-damaging misreading of Darwinian evolution here, which reaches its apogee in the racist ideologies of Social Darwinism and eugenics. These approaches think of natural selection as a teleological process moving towards a specific goal, weeding out the inferior and moving towards the superior, whereas Michael Ghiselin claims that Darwin's theory necessitates 'getting rid of teleology and replacing it with a new way of thinking about [biological] adaptation' (xiii), because genetic mutation responds to random changes in environmental conditions, rather than to an impulse directed at objective 'improvement' or 'perfection': 'It is not', Darwin argues, 'the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change' (in Hutchinson 236). Thus, Cardwell's claim that '[f]ew would argue that with each further adaptation to the screen *Wuthering Heights* [Brontë] develops – or evolves – towards the creation of a far better *Wuthering Heights*' (13) relates to a misleading understanding of genetic evolution, so that if we accept that organisms don't evolve into objectively superior forms, neither should we think of texts as inevitably progressing towards teleological ends. Malleability and adaptability are more accurate criteria for success. In order not to oversimplify, it is important to recognize that Cardwell is careful to state that the ideas she discusses are popularisations ('is understood as'; 'is seen as') rather than rigorously scientific, but whatever the nuances of this homology between genetic and cultural adaptation, this

scholarly focus is on issues of fidelity and whether a source or adaptation is 'better' (Cardwell 13), rather than on applying biological ideas to the goal of activist ecocritical praxis.

³ Ecocritical adaptation studies could also explore how adaptations shift and negotiate between the ecophilic and the ecophobic as they travel across time and between cultures and media, thereby demonstrating that ecophilia and ecophobia are not necessarily binary oppositions, but are rather riddled with historically and culturally specific complexities and contradictions.

⁴ See, for example, Kramer and Wardi, who both discuss the development of African American attitudes towards the pastoral exemplified in memetic engagements with the Cain myth.

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