

# Ecologies of Kinship: Forms and Genealogies in Anglophone Literatures

Call for Contributions & Online Symposium

8-9 October 2026

Mother Earth, Father Sky, the family as tree, putting down roots? Environmental metaphors of human relatedness are extremely common and have frequently been discursively appropriated to propagate essentialist and nativist ideological visions of kinship, reproduction, and community through “the idiom of natural relatedness – through blood and genes” (Nash 452). Literature has long been a prolific field to explore, question, and (re-)imagine kinship among humans and beyond. Fictional and non-fictional literary texts can represent alternatives to anthropocentric notions of kinship as blood- or gene-related (Hanson) and their discursive appropriation in political arguments for homosocial structures. Frequently, this is the case because literature highlights its own role within such genealogies: as Rebekah Sheldon writes, “the story of the child is a story about stories” (7), which is also the case for all kinds of (human and non-human) kinships in literary texts. As such, literature itself may become a central part of kinship, community, or genealogy and help to reflect on what these forms of relation mean. In depicting how humans and nonhuman others cohabitate and intra-act, literature inevitably “involves its audiences/readers in these figures of interconnection” in a ‘co-mutable’ relationship (Middeke and Riedelsheimer 19).

Ecologies of kinship are key to this process as they resist the myths of origin and unity often attached to reproduction. By ecologies of kinship we mean those relations among and across human and non-human actors that are contingent upon, emerge from, and continue through genealogy or reproduction – the networks, assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari), or the mesh (Morton) through which information is passed on across generations and among groups – as well as reflections on and critiques of those connections. Entangled in these forms and their reflections, literature is both part of the various genealogies themselves and a site where reproduction can be (re)negotiated.

Voices from gender and queer studies have offered multiform critiques of hierarchical forms of reproduction, including the bio-political claim laid on the child and genealogical lineage as a token of social stability ensured by a heteronormative “reproductive futurism” (Edelman 2; Halberstam; Lothian; Muñoz). Various other disciplines, including ecocriticism and related approaches from posthumanist and new materialist studies, in turn have focused on decentring humans and their consanguine or genetic modes of constructing lineage or heritage (Russo 28). For Donna Haraway, for instance, kinship is “something other/more than entities tied by ancestry or genealogy” (161). Instead “all earthlings are kin in the deepest sense” (162). This ties in with interventions by new materialist critics and material feminists who have argued that “the human becomes a site of emergent material intra-actions inseparable from the very stuff of the rest of the world” (Hekman 161; Alaimo 156-57; Barad).

In contrast, ecohumanism is an evolving field that stresses the necessity of a human subject position to such discourses and reconsiders the proximity between humans, their genealogies, and the environment, stressing the “double recognition of both singular individuality and co-existential relationality” (Zapf, “Posthumanism” 9). Its focus on any reciprocal benefits and responsibilities afforded by such a close co-existence that has also sparked terms like “kincentric ecology” (Salmón 1327). More recently, scientists, artists, poets, and activists have offered interventions and provocations on the topic in the *Kinship* book series (Van Horn et al.). The focus on kinship in these approaches is a focus on relations, but also, we suggest, foregrounds the various reproductive processes that foster these relations – kinship implies reproductive relations, even if these are just metaphorical. Despite this, there are only a handful of works on the connection of reproduction and ecology in literature (Davidson; Ensor; Snyder; Vaziri; Wegener) or culture (Roach; Strathern), while kinship ecologies are often barely mentioned in handbooks on literary ecofeminism (e.g. Vakoč) or literature and reproduction (e.g. Mazzoni; Rye et al.); there is as of yet no work that systematically traces the many ecologies of kinship in Anglophone literatures.

Against this backdrop, ecologies of kinship take their cue from fields such as posthumanism and post-anthropocentrism, new materialism, new formalism, eco-feminism, queer theory, Indigenous and postcolonial theory, disability studies, multispecies studies, or life sciences, place emphasis on the mutual contingencies, lineages, and genealogies between human and non-human life, and neither reaffirm anthropocentric nor purely ecocentric viewpoints. We invite contributions to an edited collection that address ecologies of kinship in and through literature from a variety of critical angles. Besides ecocriticism, ecofeminism, new materialism, and gender/queer studies, perspectives from the new formalism that consider how “social forms and literary forms are always potentially embedded within one another” (Levine 651) may also prove fruitful in investigating literary ecologies of kinship. In critical debates over the mutual reflexivity of textual and extratextual forms, ecological forms – which include genealogies and kinship – have remained largely unnoticed so far. Suggesting a new path of inquiry for new formalist criticism, we ask how textual and ecological forms of kinship are imbricated in one another and how this entanglement can open a productive exchange between the literary, the political, and the planetary in (re)writing genealogies.

Drawing on the idea that “[l]iterature becomes a paradigmatic cultural form representing the play of similarities and differences that make up the ecosemiotic processes of life itself” (Zapf, “Cultural Ecology” 68), we thus seek contributions concerned with the interplay of textual, ecological, and human forms of kinship and genealogy. We welcome essays that address this topic and invite reflections on various genres, such as prose fiction, poetry, drama, life writing, fairy tales, folklore, etc., related, but not restricted to questions like

- how are human and non-human forms of reproduction (e.g. mitosis, pregnancy or birth), lineage, parenthood, genealogies, heritage, or relatedness linked in literary texts?
- how do literary explorations of the entanglements of human and non-human forms of kinship and community and accounts of genealogies within and across species involve readers? What ideas of kinship and community can be derived from them?
- which forms, genres, and/or textures does literature employ to describe or enact structures of kinship and community? How do they (or not) naturalise kinship structures?
- what is the role of various scientific fields (e.g. botany, genetics, epidemiology, immunology, bioscience, biotechnology) in informing literary texts and their approaches to human and non-human forms of kinship? Which textual genealogies and kinships emerge across those fields?
- how has the depiction of ecological kinships and genealogies changed throughout the centuries? What are historical approaches to this topic?
- what emotions are involved when talking about ecological kinships in literature? What forms of care?
- how are multispecies forms of kinship or relatedness explored?
- how do engagements with extratextual ecological forms enable self-reflexive discussions on form inside the text?
- what is the role of reading or literature itself in the formation of communities, co-mutabilities, or kinship among readers, among readers and nonhuman others, and between reader and text?

Please email proposals for an article in an edited collection containing a title, abstract (ca. 300 words), and bio-note (ca. 150 words) to **Martin Riedelsheimer** ([martin.riedelsheimer@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:martin.riedelsheimer@ncl.ac.uk)), **Leila Michelle Vaziri** ([leila.vaziri@uni-konstanz.de](mailto:leila.vaziri@uni-konstanz.de)), and **Sarah Wegener** ([sawegene@uni-mainz.de](mailto:sawegene@uni-mainz.de)) by **15 May 2026**. In preparation of the edited volume, we will be hosting an online symposium on **8-9 October 2026** at which contributors will present and discuss their draft papers. Full articles will be due in **Spring 2027**.

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