

‘Imagining Queer Ecologies’
British Society for Literature and Science Winter Symposium
University of Oxford
01 December 2023

‘Imagining Queer Ecologies’ is a one-day online symposium hosted by the British Society for Literature and Science and the University of Oxford. The symposium is free, open to all, and encouraging of participation from postgraduate researchers (PGRs) and early-career researchers (ECRs).

As an emerging concept in queer theory and the environmental humanities that has been adopted in scholarship across the sciences, social sciences, and arts and humanities to address questions of community, biodiversity, organicism, and posthumanism, queer ecology represents a potent framework for addressing the intersectionality of not only what is natural, but also what is queer. Timothy Morton speculates about the ‘fantastic explosion’ that could arise from ‘intimacies’ demanded by the convergence of ecology and queer theory while at the same time bringing into question human’s ‘interdependent’ relationship with ‘a fantasy Nature that never really existed’. At the same time, Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson contend that queer ecology speaks to received assumptions about the ‘natural’ world as it exists within a heteronormative framework and proposes a praxis for challenging what is ‘unnatural’ about queerness. Nicole Seymour returns to the affinities Greta Gaard traced between ‘queers’ and ‘nature’ as subjects of exploitation, suggesting that ‘the marriage between queer theory and ecocriticism’ is often disconnected in its treatment of the former as urban and the latter as rural, reminding us of its ‘roots in antiracism, decolonialism, and environmental justice’. Queer ecology thus also offers a potent critical and interpretive approach to exploring the ‘intimacies’ and ‘interdependencies’ of literature and science, medicine, and technology.

In her BSLS Book Prize-winning study, *Energy, Ecocriticism, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Novel Ecologies* (2021), Barri J. Gold confronts the imbrication of science and literature with the ‘concept of nature’ developed across the nineteenth century and locates the promotion of an anthropocentric conception of nature as ‘mere setting’, ‘raw material’, or ‘fuel’ in both literary treatments of and scientific engagements with the so-called natural world within the larger project of exploitation inherent to fossil capitalism. Queer ecology can serve as a theoretical framework to challenge this ‘concept of nature’ within and beyond the literary and scientific ecosystems of the nineteenth century in which this concept develops. How might ‘queer ecologies’ invite us to think about literature and science, medicine, and technology as a discipline? How can the theories and praxis of literature and science studies help to extend queer ecology beyond the biological relationships implied by ‘ecology’? What implications might thinking in terms of ‘queer ecologies’ have for digital, archival, performative projects or inquiries in literature and science shaped by anticolonial, queer, trans, and crip studies? How might political, ethical, and aesthetic engagements with queer ecologies help to confront ecocriticism’s legacies of racism, colonialism, classism, misogyny, and transphobia? Where might we position queer ecology within the larger constellation of literature and science studies? How might a consideration of queer ecology together with literature and science encourage us, as Gold exhorts us, to reconsider ‘the dominant way of thinking about what we call our environment, imagining nature as the stage set against which we act and which is ours to do with what we please’.

With the ‘Imagining Queer Ecologies’ symposium, we seek to foster conversations about a wide range of topics relevant to queer ecology across the field of literature and science, medicine, and technology. We also extend Gold’s invitation to reconsider ‘nature as nature’ to

imagining ways of relating to, engaging with, knowing, and representing the environment that do not reproduce the established anthropocentric, technocapitalist, petrocultural, heteronormative, cisgender, ableist, colonial models.

Proposals

We welcome proposals for 20 minute papers and/or panels of 3-4 speakers. We particularly encourage submissions from PGRs and ECRs working on any period and area of literature, ancient, mediaeval, or modern. Proposals might address the following topics and their intersections with science and literature:

- **Conservation and its alternatives:** ways of thinking about resources and extraction, and ways of configuring the non-human world beyond the paradigm of the resource
- **Sustainability:** reducing, reusing, and recycling in literary and scientific praxis, sustainable scholarly practices
- **Desire:** embodiment, subjectivity, and sexualities (including asexuality) in the landscape, across borders, between species, amongst queer, non-human and more-than-human subjects; crip perspectives on embodiment, adaptation, and desire
- **Fertility:** production, reproduction, extinctions, and queering the Anthropocene; biopolitics, necropolitics, eugenics and their others
- **Biodiversity:** embodied politics of sexuality/gender/race/class/(dis)ability and discourses of nature in literature and science studies
- **Form:** writing and writing cultures, literary history and allusion, genre and form, intertextuality engaging with Morton's concept of 'queer textual form,' writing and editing as ecology/ecological
- **Relationality:** animacies, embeddedness, community, maps, networks and webs, relation and interrelation, rhizomes and mycelial networks
- **Ecosystems:** posthumanism, ecofeminism, trans-ecology, critical race studies, post-, de-, and anticolonialism in theory, in practice, in performance, and in activism

We also welcome proposals for modes of presentation in forms other than the traditional academic paper or panel. These might include (but are by no means limited to) proposals for roundtable discussions, workshops, reading groups, performances, or anti-panels.

Event format: The symposium will take place on Microsoft Teams and registered participants will receive joining details in advance of the event. The symposium will run synchronously but will be recorded (with the option for participants to opt out of recording) so that participants can return to papers, panels, or presentations at their leisure for a period of time following the event. The symposium organisers are committed to making the event as accessible as possible and will ask about access needs upon registration.

Deadline for submission: 12 October 2023

How to submit: Please submit a 200–250 word abstract detailing your paper or other form of presentation here: <https://forms.gle/vt6sayUD3GGnQ6wf7>. For panel or collaborative proposals, please include information about each component as well as an overview of the panel or collaboration. Do not include identifying information in the abstract, as submissions will be anonymised before review.

Organisers:

Dr Laura Ludtke (she/her) is a Stipendiary Lecturer at Merton College, Oxford. Her research has focussed on intersections of modernity, technology, and aesthetics in literary and cultural depictions of urban spaces. Currently under consideration for publication by the MIT Press, her monograph, *Modernities, Technologies, and Aesthetics: London's Lightscape, 1880 to 1950*, explores the emergence of a resistance to the Enlightenment dialectic in these responses and argues for an inclusive reading of popular, genre, and middlebrow fiction alongside literary modernism in order to contextualise modernist responses to the electrification of London. Her current project, *Is it Natural? Queer Ecologies / Modernist Heterotopias*, expands the literary history of modernism by exploring the interrelation of queerness and the natural in experimental interwar women's writing. She is the co-host of *LitSciPod: The Literature and Science Podcast* and Treasurer of the BSLs Executive Committee.

Dr Joshua Phillips (he/him) is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the University of Oxford's Faculty of English and a Junior Research Fellow at Jesus College, Oxford, where he is working on a project titled 'The Digital "Anon": A Digital Genetic Edition of Virginia Woolf's Final Essays'. He is also working on a more analogue project, a monograph titled *Virginia Woolf and Futurity: Aesthetics, Ethics, Politics*. He has articles published in *Textual Cultures* and *Woolf Studies Annual*, contributed to *The Year's Work in English Studies*, and was Graduate Representative for the British Association of Modernist Studies.

Dr Martina Astrid Rodda (they/them) is the Leventis Early Career Researcher in Ancient Greek at Merton College, Oxford. Their main current interest is disability and gender in Greek literature, with a postdoctoral research project focusing on the representation of disabled mythical characters in the works of Lucian of Samosata, how it reflects changes in the ancient world's view of disability, and how the characterisation of disability intersects with gender, class, and ethnic identity. Their past and current research projects have a strong interdisciplinary outlook, with their current interests engaging closely with current research and activism in Disabilities Studies. They are also still working on the dialogue between current linguistics approaches (especially Discourse Analysis and Construction Grammar) and traditional philology, and maintain active interests in Hellenistic epic and Greek theatre, as well as Jewish literature and culture.