PALGRAVE STUDIES IN MEDIATING KINSHIP, REPRESENTATION, AND DIFFERENCE

Queer Kinship and Comparative Literature

New Approaches

Edited by Anchit Sathi · Alice Ferrebe

palgrave macmillan

Palgrave Studies in Mediating Kinship, Representation, and Difference

Series Editors
May Friedman, Toronto Metropolitan University, Toronto, ON, Canada
Silvia Schultermandl, University of Münster, Münster, Germany

This book series brings together analyses of familial and kin relationships with emerging and new technologies which allow for the creation, maintenance and expansion of family. We use the term "family" as a working truth with a wide range of meanings in an attempt to address the feelings of family belonging across all aspects of social location: ability, age, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, gender identity, body size, social class and beyond. This book series aims to explore phenomena located at the intersection of technologies including those which allow for family creation, migration, communication, reunion and the family as a site of difference. The individual volumes in this series will offer insightful analyses of the representations of these phenomena in media, social media, literature, popular culture and corporeal settings.

This series is currently accepting proposals. To learn more, please follow this link: https://www.uni-muenster.de/Anglistik/Research/Amerikanistik/research/index.html

Anchit Sathi · Alice Ferrebe
Editors

Queer Kinship and Comparative Literature

New Approaches

palgrave
macmillan

Editors
Anchit Sathi
Berlin, Germany

Alice Ferrebe
Liverpool, UK

ISSN 2752-7352 ISSN 2752-7360 (electronic)
Palgrave Studies in Mediating Kinship, Representation, and Difference
ISBN 978-3-031-66191-4 ISBN 978-3-031-66192-1 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-66192-1

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2024

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.
The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.
The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover credit: Ada daSilva

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

If disposing of this product, please recycle the paper.

Acknowledgments

We express our gratitude to Molly Beck, Silvia Schultermandl, and May Friedman for their invaluable stewardship and guidance throughout the development of this anthology. We also extend our appreciation to William Spurlin for his encouragement throughout the process, as well as his insightful feedback on our introduction. Special thanks are due to Elizabeth Freeman and Teagan Bradway, whose volume of essays on queer kinship inspired this collection. Elizabeth's untimely passing in June 2024 is a profound loss to the field and to all who knew her. Finally, we are deeply grateful to the peer reviewers for their time and thoughtful feedback.

Anchit Sathi
Alice Ferrebe

Contents

1 **Introduction: The Messiness and Paradoxicality of Queer Kinship** 1
Anchit Sathi and Alice Ferrebe

Part I Kinships in Contexts of Spirituality

2 **"What Have We To Do With That?" Queer Kinship and the Buddhist Monastery** 29
Learned Foote

3 **Queer Kinship in Boygenius: Musical Narratives Reflecting a Therapeutic Journey** 53
Nathan Fleshner

Part II Queer Relationality in Pre-Revolutionary Times

4 **Once Upon a Time in a Queer Kingdom** 77
Fanny Alice Marchaisse

5 **The Queer Family of Feeling in *Paul et Virginie*** 97
Emily Martin Engstrand

Part III Networks of Care

6 Those Who Lived and Those Who Died: Queer Communities of Care in the Swedish Play *Kurage* 121
Oscar von Seth

7 Kinship in the Contemporary Queer Novel of Care 143
Derek Ettensohn

Part IV Intergenerational Kinships

8 Yotam Reuveny and Kobi Ovadia: A Queer Kinship Between Foundling Writers 167
Guy Ehrlich

9 How to Stop Pruning Your Queer Family Tree 191
Mica Hilson

Part V Trans-Temporal Kinships

10 "It's not a Uni-verse": Kinships, Bodies, and Ecologies in the Speculative 213
Elizabeth Schoppelrei

11 Queer Diffractive Kinship in Time: Rereading the Epistolary Tradition Through *This Is How You Lose the Time War* 237
Kate Maxwell

Index 259

Notes on Contributors

Guy Ehrlich is a postdoctoral fellow at the Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies at Northwestern University. Previously he was also an Einstein Foundation postdoctoral fellow at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is interested in modern Hebrew literature, gender studies, and feminist and queer theory. His book, *The Empty Places of Yehudit Hendel*, has recently won the Yaacov Bahat Prize for Best Original Scholarly Book Manuscript in Hebrew and is forthcoming with Haifa University Press (2024).

Emily Martin Engstrand is a Ph.D. candidate in French at the University of Colorado Boulder. Her research examines late eighteenth-century literature and theater whose fictional worlds are set in the French colonial imaginary. She is interested in the ways interdependent communities of care and affective families serve as modes of envisioning greater social equality and political change.

Derek Ettensohn is an Associate Professor of English and the Humanities at Sewanee: The University of the South. He works in the fields of global Anglophone literature and the health humanities. His research is interested in the representation of illness and the ethics of care in film and the contemporary Anglophone novel. His work has appeared in journals such as *College Literature*, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction,* and *Modern Fiction Studies*.

Alice Ferrebe has led departments of literature at universities in both the UK and China, and is currently an Associate Professor, and Head of Academic Skills, at the University of Chester, UK. She has published extensively on literary gender and mid-twentieth-century British literature and culture, including two monographs, *Literature of the 1950s: Good, Brave Causes, Edinburgh History of Twentieth-Century Literature in Britain* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012) and *Masculinity in Male-Authored Fiction 1950-2000* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). She is working on a study of the British novelist Elizabeth Taylor, subtitled "Art and Labour".

Nathan Fleshner (Ph.D., Eastman) is an Associate Professor of Music Theory at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (USA). He is interested in connections between the human experience and its portrayal in music. He has written on the portrayal of mental illness, trauma, and the psychoanalytic process in music as well as on video games and popular music. He has published and presented on mental health in the music of Eminem, Prince Paul, Townes van Zandt, Tori Amos, Dave Matthews Band, Mike Shinoda, and Robert Schumann.

Learned Foote is a visiting assistant professor at Lawrence University in Appleton, WI, where he teaches courses on Buddhism, religious studies, and gender studies. In 2023, he received his Ph.D. in religious studies from Rice University in Houston, TX, with a dissertation focusing on the Tibetan life writings of Adzom Drukpa (1842-1924). He also holds an M.A. in Eastern Classics from St. John's College in Santa Fe, NM and a B.A. in History from Columbia College in New York, NY. At Rangjung Yeshe Institute in Kathmandu, Nepal, he studied classical and colloquial Tibetan and completed the Translator Training Program. Foote has presented his research at forums such as the American Academy of Religions, the Himalayan Studies Conference, and the UCR Conference on Queer and Trans Studies in Religion. He is a recipient of the Holstein Dissertation Fellowship for queer and trans studies in religion hosted by the University of California, Riverside. He was invited to contribute to the Duke University Press journal *QTR: A Journal of Trans and Queer Studies in Religion* where his research will soon be appearing. He is the co-editor alongside Jeffrey J. Kripal and Timothy Grieve-Carlson of *Opening the Archives of the Impossible*, now under peer review at Columbia University Press.

Mica Hilson is an Associate Professor at the American University of Armenia, where he chairs the English and Communications program. His writing on queer kinship and queer temporality—which often intersects with such fields as plant studies, critical animal studies, and disability studies—has appeared in such collections as *The Routledge Companion to Masculinity in American Literature and Culture* (2022), *The Ethics and Rhetoric of Invasion Ecology* (Lexington, 2016), and *Security and Hospitality in Literature and Culture* (Routledge, 2015), as well as such journals as *The Comparatist*, *Doris Lessing Studies*, *Harold Pinter Review*, and *Pacific Coast Philology*.

Fanny Alice Marchaisse is a Ph.D. candidate in the department of French & Italian at Northwestern. She received a bachelor in French Language and Literature and a Maîtrise in Arts, Literatures, Languages from the University of Paris VII. She received her Master's degree in Literature, Speech, Discourse and Francophone studies in 2018 from the University of Paris XII (UPEC). In 2022-23 she was the recipient of the Frankel fellowship while participating in the Northwestern University's Paris Program in Critical Theory. Her current research interests are geared toward questions of body, gender, and sexuality through French Literary Fairy Tales in the 17th century.

Kate Maxwell is a professor of music history, theory, and analysis at UiT The Arctic University of Norway (Romssa/Tromsø), where they work hard to transform the music history curriculum, challenge hierarchies, and convince everyone that literary theory is fun. Their research focuses on music, literature, gender, and multimodality in various contexts, including medieval studies, popular music, children's music, the environmental humanities, and pornography.

Anchit Sathi retired in 2019, but still keeps himself busy as an independent scholar of comparative literature. Anchit has taught and supervised both undergraduate and postgraduate students at the *University of Potsdam* and at the *University of Washington in Seattle*, and his work has been published in journals such as *Textual Practice*, *German Life and Letters*, *Monatshefte*, *Comparative Critical Studies,* and *Sprachkunst.* His research interests include: world literature; twentieth and twenty-first-century writing; trauma studies; and queer theory.

Elizabeth Schoppelrei is a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow at Cornell University in the Society for the Humanities. They received their dual-title Ph.D. in Comparative Literature and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies with a graduate minor in German from the Pennsylvania State University. In their research and teaching, they explore trans/queer community formations and identities, trans/queer Weimar-era Germany, poetry, speculative and science fiction, comics, queer ecologies, and Black feminist thought.

Oscar von Seth is a postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Gender Research, Uppsala University and the Centre for Queer History, Goldsmiths, University of London. His research interests are at the intersection of literature, cinema, and queer theories. In his dissertation, *Outsiders and Others: Queer Friendships in Novels by Hermann Hesse* (2022), it is argued that the male friendships at the center of Hermann Hesse's stories are "queer friendships" that challenge heteronormative conceptions of relationality, sexuality, and desire. His postdoc project, "Queer Waiting in Literature and Film" (funded by the Swedish Research Council, 2024–2027), poses the question if waiting, a universal human activity and an unavoidable aspect of life, can be understood as a queer cultural phenomenon.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Messiness and Paradoxicality of Queer Kinship

Anchit Sathi and Alice Ferrebe

Queer Kinship: Beyond the Cisheteronorm in Comparative Literature

In February 2024, Greece's Parliament voted in favour of legalising same-sex marriage, thereby vesting homosexual couples in the country with the same social and tax benefits that are offered to heterosexual couples. In doing so, the country joined a cohort of more than forty other nations that, following the lead of the Netherlands' pioneering ratification of same-sex marriage in 2001 (Human Rights Watch), have now legalised same-sex unions in their jurisdictions. Similarly, in the summer of 2022, Switzerland adopted a law allowing lesbian couples to access in-vitro

A. Sathi (✉)
Independent Scholar, Berlin, Germany
e-mail: anchit.sathi@gmail.com

A. Ferrebe
Academic Skills Department, University of Chester, Chester, UK
e-mail: alice.ferrebe@liverpool.ac.uk

© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2024

A. Sathi and A. Ferrebe (eds.), *Queer Kinship and Comparative Literature*, Palgrave Studies in Mediating Kinship, Representation, and Difference, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-66192-1_1

fertilisation (C.H.U.V.). With this legislative act, the Swiss Confederation incorporated a growing roster of nations that, since the turn of the century, have passed laws to allow queer individuals (albeit, in most cases, married ones) to access parenthood through either adoption or assisted reproduction.

These structural changes have been buoyed, at least in some of these places, by an undercurrent of greater social acceptance of kinship models that deviate from the cisheteronorm—which is to say, from the societal assumption and reinforcement of heterosexuality and cisgender identities as the default or 'normal' way of being—as evidenced, for example, by the popular referendums that approved same-sex marriage by wide margins in Ireland in 2015, Australia in 2017, Switzerland in 2021 and Cuba in 2022 (Pew Research Center, 'Same-Sex Marriage Around the World'). Broad survey-based research on social attitudes towards same-sex and transgender marriage and parenthood also signals a similar trend in much of the Western world (Pew Research Center, 'Most Say Homosexuality Should Be Accepted By Society'; Pew Research Center, 'Growing Support for Gay Marriage'; Takács et al.; Lee and Mutz; Riggs et al.). To be clear, with 65 countries that still criminalise queer identities—including 12 that allow the imposition of the death penalty in some such cases ('Map of Countries That Criminalise LGBT People')—this trend towards increasing social and legal affirmation of queer families is far from being a universal phenomenon. That said, in terms of legal reforms, in certain parts of the world at least, there have certainly been significant social and political gains for queer families in the current century.

And yet, many queer scholars and activists would argue instead that a focus on same-sex marriage and parenthood as priority areas for the expansion of kinship-based rights and obligations only obscures some of the more pervasive forms of marginalisation and oppression of queer communities. For instance: Dean Spade suggests that such efforts only serve to create 'an image of a "deserving" category of gay and lesbian people who meet straight society's norms (wealth, whiteness, monogamy, domesticity, consumption, and patriotic complacency)' (Spade 84); Sandip Roy alleges that 'legalising same-sex marriage may be less about gay rights and more about codifying an ideal of European values' (Roy); while Jasbir Puar introduces the now-famous notion of homonationalism, to wit, the idea that issues such as queer marriage and parenthood (and queer identities and issues more broadly) are only selectively embraced by nationalist agendas for political purposes, often

as a way to reinforce xenophobia, classism or other forms of exclusion (Puar). In fact, even several of the scholars and activists who happen to be supportive of the progress made for queer marriage and parenthood lament the fact that such kinship arrangements are nonetheless grounded in a cisheteronormative world-view that considers historical lineage and genealogy to be part of its foundational principles, and that perceives the nuclear family as being the prime guarantor of these principles (Butler, 'Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?'; Polikoff; Duggan). Though the specific modalities of these dissenting voices are broad-ranging and nuanced, their criticism thus finds common purpose in at least three aspects: the denunciation of queer kinship arrangements that derive from the cisheteronorm; the proposal that such structures are far from being the panacea they are sometimes projected to be for queer communities; and more broadly, the view that marriage and parenthood are exceedingly limited forms of relationality, and that they do not reflect the extensive array of kinship arrangements that are discernible in disproportionate measure within queer communities.

To some extent, this expansive amplitude of kinship ontologies within queer communities is reflected in the span of significance of the word 'queer' itself. Though the term may have emerged in early-twentieth-century English as a way of describing homosexuality alone (Brown 9), it evolved to become a reference to 'gender or sexual fluidity' in the most inclusive sense of these terms in English by the late-twentieth century (The National Archives). This transformation was facilitated by activists who increasingly embraced the term as an effectively pithy substitute for 'the "alphabet soup" of g(ay) l(esbian) b(isexual) t(ransexual) t(ransgendered) i(ntersexed) a(sexual)', which came to be deemed too unwieldy to be politically productive during this time (Callis 214). It also helped that 'queer' transcended the relatively rigid boundaries of meaning implied by each of these individual terms; it could thus be deployed to acknowledge forms of identity that have historically 'been suppressed both by heteronorms and by the homo-hetero binary', and also to validate 'ways of "experiencing" and expressing sensuality and affect that do not conform to the prevailing organisation of sexuality' at all (Hennessy 135). It is in this sense that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick famously conceptualised 'queer' as encompassing 'the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically' (Kosofsky

Sedgwick 8)—that is, as being grounded in non-normativity of gender and/or sexuality, but also as maintaining an open-endedness and deferral regarding the meaning, scope, and implications of such non-normativity. The capacious semantic scope of the term 'queer' thus mirrors the sheer multiplicity and shifting significance of queer kinship arrangements—some enduring and others transient; some sanctioned by law and others that fly in the face of social-legal normativity—that tend to be obfuscated by the inordinate focus on same-sex unions and parenthood in popular discourse.

Academic research, on the other hand, has already directed considerable attention to the diverse and broad-based nature of queer kinship structures. However, while research on this topic represents a robust and reasonably productive tradition, in the past it has primarily been led by anthropologists. This trend is exemplified by Kath Weston's classic ethnographic study of the creative ways in which gay and lesbian communities in the San Francisco Bay area were able to weave networks of relationality, support, and family-like affect in the late 1980s (Weston), as well as by Judith Stacey's more recent (and more geographically varied) investigation of similar phenomena in the United States, China and South Africa (Stacey). Remarkably, in the past decade in particular, several scholars within queer studies have endeavoured to diversify the field further through innovative approaches. Some have produced studies that, while still being rooted in anthropology, have deployed interdisciplinary methodologies to a much greater extent than their predecessors (Pierce; Brainer; Evans; Plaster). Others have issued manifestos blending theoretical insights with practical imperatives, advocating for an urgent disavowal of the Western conception of the traditional family (Robinou), or proposing novel methodologies for the study of queer kinship dynamics (Pirani and Daskalopoulou). Additionally, some scholars have also engaged in theorising the evolving significance and fluid contours of queer kinship through scholarly essays published in special editions of academic journals (Weiner and Young; Mizielińska et al.) or in edited collections (Bradway and Freeman, *Queer Kinship*) dedicated to the topic. Collectively, the kinship structures explored in these studies illustrate how 'small scale exchanges become thinkable, meaningful, and/or the basis for large-scale social formations' in queer communities (Freeman 297), thereby offering a view on relationality that transcends the constraints imposed by the cisheternormative nuclear family.

In this context, kinship might be understood as 'a means through which humans go about forming a network of relations constituted by practices of obligation, support, and care with significant and beloved others as well as offering the language through which humans give meanings to these practices' (Roebuck). *Queer* kinship, however, as the essays in this collection will suggest, is more advantageously understood in Judith Butler's terms, which is to say, as 'a site of queer coinage, of a performative re-elaboration, and the recognition of binding ties made and remade' (Butler, 'Kinship Beyond the Bloodline' 41). Bruno Latour distinguishes between the notions of 'acting-as-performance' and 'acting-as-agency': both are active within Butler's definition, as well as within these essays in their varied engagements with affective and physical practices (Latour 2005: 218). Indeed, queer bonds of kinship are most effectively apprehended when one 'shift[s] away from essentialist notions of being and towards an unending process of doing' (Fielder 59), and when they are recognised as a *process* rather than as a *state of being*—and, by corollary, as sites of constant flux and ambivalence rather than as exemplars of institutionalised (or otherwise established) norms.

It is also worth highlighting that, as illustrated by the numerous examples cited earlier, studies of queer kinship—be they rooted in anthropology or theory—have tended to place disproportionate emphasis on the late-twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, as well as on the Anglosphere—a choice of focus that might be taken to implicitly suggest that formations of queer kinship are exclusive to specific temporalities or geographies. Yet, the desire to forge queer bonds of relationality, though unmistakably rooted in the desiring subject's contemporaneous and local paradigms, has a more fluid relationship with time and space. Indeed, Elizabeth Freeman's suggestive etymology of queer belonging understands the experience as affective and situated (one 'belongs') but also as necessarily trans-temporal and enduring (it needs to 'be *long*') (Freeman 299). Separately, anthropological studies point us to the assertion that despite inarguable 'cultural peculiarit[ies]', kinship may represent 'a universal possibility in nature' (Sahlins 44). This particular collection is motivated by a belief that this supposed temporality and universality of queer kinship merits further critical attention, and that literature offers a particularly privileged site for exploring queer kinship practices across a multiplicity of modalities in this regard.

Why do literary works matter here? For one, as Rita Felski notes emphatically, '*[b]ecause they create, or co-create, powerful and enduring*

ties across space and time' (Felski 761). Consequently, they serve as invaluable repositories of knowledge for a trans-temporal and pan-geographic approach to queer kinship, aligning closely with the approach advocated within this collection. Silvia Schultermandl and Paul Rieser further calibrate these aspects to include other dimensions that are intricately interwoven into the fabric of human relationships and identities—the 'affective economies, discursive practices, and aesthetic dimensions' of kinship, for instance—that literature is especially well placed to highlight (Schultermandl and Rieser 1). On this topic, it also bears noting that, in their proposed taxonomy of 'queer intimacies', Hammack et al. wisely include 'other possible forms yet unknown' as a category in and of itself (Hammack et al. 556). Literature—and its agile, adaptive, and interdisciplinary analytical apparatus—moves across temporalities and geographies, facilitating the playful co-option of narrative form and style in order to challenge orthodoxies and to elucidate and extend configurations of relationality beyond, for example, the teleological structures so profoundly imbricated within (patriarchal) inheritance and linear chronology, and into 'types as yet unknown'.

Literary critical studies exploring queer kinships, happily, are proliferating, as a few examples will illustrate. Tracy Rutler, for instance, has delved into non-normative kinship relations within the works of canonical authors from eighteenth-century French literature (Rutler). Rutler's analysis, grounded in an extensive corpus of critical theory and philosophy, argues convincingly that these texts pioneered novel conceptualisations of intimacy for their time. Similarly, Eric H. Newman's scholarship on the Harlem Renaissance contends that literature from this era was not only culturally vibrant but also deeply informed by queer experiences. Newman provocatively suggests that the period's literary landscape was 'as gay as it was black', prompting a re-evaluation of the role queer bonds played in shaping its aesthetics and politics (Newman 167). Lamia Tayeb's research focuses on contemporary best-selling novels in the Anglophone world, exploring the intersections of immigration, technology, and queer kinship formations. By analysing works originally in English or translated into English, Tayeb sheds light on evolving understandings of intimacy and belonging in the modern era (Tayeb). These—and several other

studies[1]—provide compelling evidence of the richness and productivity of contemporary research on queer kinship dynamics in literature.

As these examples also illustrate, however—and not dissimilarly to the aforementioned observation that anthropological and theoretical work on queer kinship has tended to focus primarily on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries on the one hand, and the Anglosphere on the other—the extant body of literary research on queer kinship has also tended to focus on specific languages, literary periods, and genres at a time. This limitation underscores the unique value of a comparative endeavour such as this compendium of essays, which can offer fresh insights and perspectives for several reasons. Firstly, even scholars endeavouring to utilise literature as a means to explore specific and meticulously delineated cultural contexts are likely to concede, echoing the sentiment of David Damrosch, that 'a natural way to understand the distinctiveness of a given culture […] is to compare it with and contrast it to others' (Damrosch 326). Indeed, the juxtaposition of texts from diverse cultural backdrops in this collection—backdrops that range from the Francophone world to the Anglosphere, and from Israel to Sweden, for example—affords distinctive revelations regarding the nuances of queer kinship in these environments, in a way that the solitary analysis of any one text would not.

Moreover, such an analysis equally illuminates some of the divergences between queer kinship relations across geographical and cultural landscapes, foregrounding some of the paradoxes that inhere in such constellations—and thereby also disrupting any semblance of definitive certainty about their nature which may arise from the examination of individual texts in isolation. In fact, this underlying relationality in comparative literature—which is to say, the discipline's 'fundamentally relational and dynamic approach to cultural forms, including literary texts'

[1] One might also note, for example, how Dijana Simic's examination of contemporary Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature illuminates the use of queer kinship structures as a critique of ethno-nationalist ideologies (Simic). Simic argues persuasively that these portrayals challenge prevailing narratives that co-opt traditional family structures for nationalist agendas. Further enriching this research landscape, Gigi Adair's work explores queer kinship in contemporary literature from the Black Atlantic (Adair); Anna Guttmann's research delves into communities of kinship formed in hijra circles in the works of Arundathi Roy (Guttman); Meghan Fox's analysis focuses on the supplantation of paternity as a social structure in the work of American cartoonist Alison Bechdel (Fox); and Brigitte Fielder's scholarship examines mixed-race queer kinships in the works of Alice Dunbar Nelson (Fielder).

(Bernheimer 13)—is particularly relevant in this context, since kinship is also inherently relational, encompassing not only biological ties but also social, cultural, and emotional bonds that connect individuals and communities. Both the comparative study of texts and the exploration of kinship dynamics thus involve understanding connections and interactions between different elements, positioning comparative literature as an opportune and informative basis for the study of kinship in this regard.

Furthermore, the volume also distinguishes itself by engaging in cross-temporal comparisons, a relatively understudied aspect within comparative literature. Indeed, Rita Felski aptly observes how 'comparison across space—that is to say, across nations, cultures, or regions—has received far more attention in comparative literature than comparison across time' (Felski 755). She directs us instead to the possibility of celebrating the potential of not only cross-cultural but also trans-temporal comparisons for 'transformation, deformation, alteration, and appropriation of various kinds' (Felski 752). The present volume embraces Felski's insight by juxtaposing, for instance, depictions of queer kinship in Buddhist scripture alongside those found in contemporary song lyrics by a popular American indie group; or, to take another example, portrayals of queer kinship in twenty-first-century speculative fiction on the one hand, and those in texts by mediaeval and early modern women letter-writers on the other.

Finally, as Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek astutely notes, one of the essential functions of comparative literature is the 'inclusion of the Other, be that a marginal literature in its several meanings of marginality, a genre, various text types, etc.' (Zepetnek 13). This proposition bears particular significance for queer studies, which fundamentally revolves around the examination of marginality and marginalised narratives. Indeed, as David Halperin perceptively suggests, '[q]ueer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant' (Halperin 62).[2] Thus there exists a natural alignment between comparative literature and queer studies. This alignment is further underscored by Petra Dierkes-Thun's

[2] Halperin's implication that queerness is inherently defined by its opposition to normativity has admittedly proven to be somewhat contentious in academic discourse. For instance, Michael Warner has challenged this notion, proposing instead an understanding of queerness that centres on the establishment of sexual autonomy and, by corollary, on the legitimisation of forms of being whose ontological significance is *not* contingent upon their resistance to the states of normativity that are perceived their polar opposites (Warner). That said, the characterisation of queerness as anti-normative remains a largely prevalent perspective in queer studies today.

dual observations that 'both fields have vigorously interrogated major concepts around which their disciplines revolve: "the nation," "the body," "literature," "community," "truth," "history," "space," "time," and so on', and also that both fields have 'develop[ed] great theoretical and methodological sophistication through such critical work, simultaneously sharpening and widening their gaze to investigate complex teleological, hegemonic narratives of history, bodies, and space from increasingly transnational, global perspectives' (Dierkes-Thrun 264). Considering these converging trajectories, one might anticipate that queer comparative literature would emerge as a thriving area of scholarly inquiry. However, this is far from the current reality—a gap that this collection endeavours to address.

There are of course some notable exceptions to the claim that queer comparative literature remains underdeveloped. In 2018, Liedecke Plate's work has raised crucial questions about how attention to 'the materiality of literary works can be understood as aligned with gender and queer studies', for instance, arguing that such an awareness also 'modifies our practices as comparatists' (Plate 1). Similarly, William Spurlin's significant contributions, including a special issue on queer translation that he guest-edited in *Comparative Literature Studies* and a comprehensive anthology co-edited with Jarrod Hayes and Margaret Higonnet, have advanced scholarly discourse on queer comparative literature in recent years (Spurlin; Hayes, Higonnet, and Spurlin). Notably, in this anthology—which was aptly titled *Comparatively Queer*—the editors also expressed surprise at the delayed recognition of sexuality as a lens within comparative literature, despite calls for its inclusion that can be traced back, at the very least, to Charles Bernheimer's 'Report of Standards', a decennial report for the *American Comparative Literature Association*, that 'described the status of the field and outlined some of its recent transformations' in 1993 (Hayes, Higonnet, Spurlin, et al. 3–4). The editors' observation retains relevance in the current day: indeed, beyond a select few instances such as those mentioned above, substantive contributions to queer comparative literature (particularly in the realm of queer kinship) remain conspicuously sparse. It is within this context that the present volume offers a distinctive and substantial contribution.

To this end, the ten papers comprising this edited collection are bound together by their shared conceptual framework—their use of close readings, philosophy, and theory in their pursuit of an answer to the following question: how can we conceptualise the nature of queer kinship based on

its textual representations? At this point, it should be highlighted that we do not intend to imply that the nature of queer kinship can ever emerge as stable or clearly defined in any meaningful way. Indeed, as the next section will elucidate, the forms of queer kinship explored in this collection exemplify Tyler Bradway and Elizabeth Freeman's claim that queer kinship always 'lacks a center [and] is diffuse and mobile' (Bradway and Freeman, 'Introduction: Kincoherence/Kin-Aesthetics/Kinematics' 3). Indeed, queer kinship, as emerges through the essays in this volume, is inherently replete with paradoxes pertaining to its nature. Queer kinship, in other words, is inherently messy.

The Paradoxes of Queer Kinship

In their introduction to *Comparatively Queer*, Hayes, Higonnet, and Spurlin light-heartedly recount how, in essays written in the framework of undergraduate comparative literature courses, students routinely formulate arguments that essentially all boil down to the following simplistic assertion: 'A and B are both alike and different' (Hayes, Higonnet, Spurlin, et al. 1). When this occurs, Hayes et al. explain that they commonly seize the opportunity to counsel students on the inadequacy of such an argumentative formula for academic discourse, pointing out that '[a] strong comparative argument [...] also needs to assert *how* [A and B] are alike and different and *why* these similarities and differences are relevant'. This observation holds particular significance within the context of this volume. In this regard, it is important to note that the subsequent essays shine the spotlight on the multifaceted nature of queer kinship, highlighting the diverse and non-monolithic conceptualisations and negotiations of queer kinship relations across diverse temporal and spatial contexts. Consequently, as editors, it is important for us here to underscore not just the similarities, but also—and *especially*—the differences in the myriad forms of queer kinship explored within this collection.

Deliberating upon these distinctions is of paramount importance within this context as it serves to illuminate and crystallise a number of paradoxes—ten, specifically—that are inherent to queer forms of kinship. Indeed, as evidenced by the essays in this collection, queer kinships frequently manifest attributes and features that are fundamentally contradictory in nature—reminiscent of the principles underlying quantum theory wherein all matter in the universe is posited to exist simultaneously

as wave and particle, a concept that may initially confound comprehension. Any attempts to delineate queer kinship within rigid, hermetically sealed parameters are therefore inherently futile; paradoxes are so deeply ingrained within the fabric of queer that one might even assert, perhaps provocatively, that if there exists any remotely unambiguous manner of pinpointing what queer kinship encapsulates, it has to be the fact that the very ontology of such forms of kinship reposes upon paradox.

In this context, paradoxes are not to be viewed as detrimental to the scholarly endeavour that this volume undertakes; rather, they offer a valuable methodological approach to understanding queer kinship, proving more fruitful than attempting to confine its nature within a singular, monolithic framework. Heather Love's 'Queer Messes' offers insightful guidance in this regard. Love argues that 'traditional methods' often fall short in describing phenomena of considerable complexity, and that, 'in approaching the world as a set of determinate processes, scholars [often] strip it of contingency, ephemerality, and indistinctness' (Love 345). Instead, Love advocates for methodologies 'that aim not to stabilise the world but instead to allow for its vagueness, its ineradicable messiness', particularly emphasising their relevance within queer studies, a field that has long been focused on fundamentally 'untidy issues like desire, sexual practice, affect, sensation, and the body'. Love argues that queer texts and concepts embody instability and disorder and that they are characterised by their shifting and oftentimes contradictory significances. As she emphatically phrases it, '[w]hen it comes to being messy, *we are*'.

Crucially, Love recognises that, while scholars in queer studies have long 'acknowledged, and often celebrated, the messiness of their subject matter and have invented new modes of research, writing, and performance to deal with it', they have been slower in 'identify[ing] these new modes as *methods*' due to the conventional understanding of the term, which is ill-suited to addressing the complexities of 'embodied life'. She thus calls upon queer studies scholars to consider ways to embrace and to formalise this messiness through a variety of academic and analytical approaches. In recognising, celebrating, and shedding light on the paradoxes—which is to say, the messy and contradictory characterisations—that emerge in the study of how queer kinship manifests across texts spanning diverse temporal and spatial contexts, our aim in this volume aligns precisely with Love's call-to-action.

To facilitate this exploration, the book is organised into five parts, each fostering productive dialogues among its ten papers on a pairwise

basis. Part I, titled 'Kinships in Contexts of Spirituality', gathers scholarship delving into the emergence of queer bonds of kinship within the confines of staunch religious doctrine. This part begins with Learned Foote's article, '"What have we to do with that?": Queer kinship and the Buddhist Vinaya', which illuminates select narratives from Buddhist writing—both from the twentieth century and from ancient scripture—to explore some of the configurations of same-sex kinship relationships that have been discernible in Buddhist monasteries across the ages. While chronicling some of the challenges faced by queer nuns and monks in these contexts, Foote also cautions against the sort of overarching generalisations across diverse Buddhist traditions that the Western scholarly tradition—and its standardising orientalist gaze—has tended to make in the past. Following this, Nathan Fleshner's contribution, 'Queer Kinship in boygenius: Musical Narratives Reflecting a Therapeutic Journey' portrays the contemporary American Grammy-winning band, boygenius, as a collective bound by the ties of queer kinship, serving as a 'musical support system' for its members—Phoebe Bridgers, Julien Baker and Lucy Dacus—women who share a fraught history with religion in relation to their queerness. By treating the group's song lyrics as a form of talk therapy, Fleshner analyses their music as a means of processing personal experiences, drawing on case studies of each artist and their solo endeavours, as well as collaborative works, to demonstrate how the music unveils layered narratives akin to medical or therapeutic records. Both Foote and Fleshner converge in their nuanced, theoretically driven examination of queer kinship as a multifaceted phenomenon. They also unite in their endeavour to challenge simplistic dichotomies that position queerness and religion as inherently antagonistic.

However, the essays also illustrate how queer kinship is a complex phenomenon that defies facile classification, as exemplified by the exposition of at least two paradoxes in its nature. The first such paradox lies in the depiction of queer kinship as both liberatory and complicit. Indeed, both Foote and Fleshner acknowledge that queer kinship can offer a profound sense of community and emancipation to queer individuals, yet caution against viewing it through an overly idealised lens. Foote astutely echoes Tyler Bradway and Elizabeth Freeman's observation that queer kinship may entail 'entwinement, and even complicity, with the exclusions, violences, and abandonments of kinship' (Bradway and Freeman, *Queer Kinship* 5), while Fleshner similarly warns against the uncritical glorification of queer kinship, highlighting the potential for

exploitation and abuse within certain manifestations of it. These essays thus complicate the notion of queer kinship as a purely emancipatory force, highlighting how such forms of kinship cannot be viewed, simplistically, as utopian alternatives to cisheteronormative family structures, and revealing their capacity to reproduce the very power structures and exclusions they ostensibly seek to resist.

Similarly, the essays also suggest that queer kinship can manifest as both visible and invisible. Foote's exploration of queer kinship within Buddhist monasteries reveals how such relationships were occasionally brought to light and made visible through gossip and scandal. Yet, he also observes that '"homosexuality" itself does not seem to be a category that is relevant to the text[s]' that he explores. This observation is not surprising, in that it aligns with Michel Foucault's well-established recognition of the emergence of homosexuality as an identity category in the nineteenth century—well after the founding principles of Buddhism were established (Foucault). Nonetheless, it does highlight how queer relationships can resist explicit categorisation—how they can be rendered invisible—simply because normative discourse does not offer the right words to speak of them or to articulate their nature. Similarly, Fleshner's analysis of boygenius illuminates the public visibility of the members' queer kinship through their collaborative music, while also highlighting the privacy and intimacy that shield this bond from full public scrutiny, especially since the bond of queer kinship that the band members have forged may not always be legible to outsiders. In light of these insights, Foote and Fleshner together point to the complex ways in which queer kinship can oscillate between discernability and namelessness, sometimes being the subject of public discourse and scandal, and at other times remaining more private and unspoken. They also emphasise that this nuanced perspective challenges reductionist views of queer kinship as simply hidden or revealed, revealing instead the intricate interplay between visibility and invisibility within queer kinship dynamics.

Part II, 'Queer Relationality in Pre-Revolutionary Times', delves into the examination of queer kinship structures prior to the French Revolution, a period preceding the significant socio-political-cultural rupture of 1789 that came to define the nation's history. First, Fanny Alice Marchaisse's 'Once Upon a Time in a Queer Kingdom' scrutinises the intricate portrayal of kinship dynamics in *L'Ile de Magnificence*, a late-seventeenth-century French fairy tale by Madame de Henriette-Julie de Castelnau

de Murat, commonly known as Madame de Murat. Marchaisse meticulously explores three distinct manifestations of queer kinship bonds within the text: firstly, a marriage that, though ostensibly conforming to heteronormative standards, is notably characterised—unusually for the epoch—by genuine affection rather than adherence to arranged marital norms; secondly, an adoption by a fairy figure who lives a life devoid of 'biological filiation, procreation, or *galanterie*' of any sort; and thirdly, asexual reproduction within a realm exclusively inhabited by men. In her analysis, Marchaisse further posits that the narrative ultimately serves as a didactic account, wherein the viability of cisheteronormative partnership is only affirmed when it rests upon a rejection of traditional gender hierarchies within the dyadic marital relationship. Subsequently, this part of the volume transitions to Emily Martin Engstrand's 'The Queer Family of Feeling in *Paul et Virginie*', which explores queer kinship structures in the eighteenth-century (but pre-revolutionary) French novel *Paul et Virginie* by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. She contends that the text sheds light on the development of such structures as responses to the prevailing nuclear family capitalism of the time. To this end, Martin Engstrand analyses the affective bonds between two mothers, their children, and enslaved Africans who join their settlement. She argues that this 'family of feeling'—as she recasts Kath Weston's concept of 'chosen families'—challenges the expectations of traditional French kinship structures, which by the late eighteenth century were primarily focused on wealth accumulation through cisheteronormative marriage. Together, these contributions offer valuable insight into the subtle emergence of queer kinship formations amidst the gender orthodoxies and feudal entrenchments prevalent in the century leading up to the French Revolution. Furthermore, both texts also unite in their depiction of a paradigm in which non-normative kinship arrangements were simply unimaginable within mainland France: De Murat's text unfolds in a fairy kingdom far removed from the day-to-day reality of life in Europe, while *Paul et Virginie*'s narrative unfolds on a distant, sparsely populated island, which, though not a fantastical realm, also stands out through its remoteness from continental France.

A joint examination of both contributions also brings forth two further paradoxes in this volume's theorisation of queer kinship. To begin with, these essays suggest that queer kinship can be both subversive and normative. Indeed, on one hand, both essays emphasise how the literary works they analyse present queer kinship structures that challenge traditional heteronormative family models. Marchaisse's analysis of Murat's fairy tale