

**FERTILE IMAGINATIONS:
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IN LITERATURE**

**University of Fribourg
27th – 28th August 2026**

Keynote Speakers: Isabel Davis (National History Museum London), Jennifer Evans (University of Hertfordshire), Jennifer Heller (Lenoir-Rhyne University), Elizabeth Podnieks (Toronto Metropolitan University)
Organizers: Honor Jackson and Julia Straub

Fertility and its associated political, social, and gender implications has been a key theme in literary production in perpetuity. An essential element for political and patriarchal dynasties, ideas of reproduction also dovetail in generative ways with notions of authorship and legacy. Crucially, the private cannot not be separated from the political, especially where female fertility is concerned. Today, with the impacts of Roe vs Wade's overturning in the USA becoming ever more starkly apparent, it is of critical importance to pay close attention to the development of the discourse around fertility in anglophone literatures around the world.

This two-day conference will explore the representation of fertility and reproductive health in literature, from the medieval period to the present. It will examine how representations of reproduction and reproductive biology intersect with cultural, societal, and political contexts, sometimes reflecting, and sometimes challenging and critiquing the norms and discourses surrounding human reproduction throughout the centuries. By taking a diachronic approach to this topic, ranging from the medieval to the contemporary, and engaging with historical, feminist, sociological, and medical perspectives to literary texts, the conference aims to deepen our understanding of the ways in which maternity, fertility, and reproductive health have shaped, and been shaped by, literary traditions across time. The event will finish with a public roundtable event that will engage with a broader audience.

We seek contributions on the following topics:

- Representations of reproductive medicine, disorders, assisted reproductive technologies, childbirth, abortion
- Representation of reproductive cycles, pregnancy in literature
- Representations of male fertility / infertility
- Representations of age and fertility (geriatric pregnancy, menopause, parental demographics)
- Intersections of medical discourse and literary writing
- Motherhood narratives
- Infertility narratives (IVF memoirs, adoption, miscarriage, child-loss)
- Constructions of female authorship and reproductive matters: connection between female creativity and fertility
- De-essentialised parenthood; reproductive justice

Selected papers from the event will be published in an edited collection or special edition of a journal.

Please send a 300-word abstract for 20-minute papers and a short bio (max. 100 words) to the conference organizers, reproduction-conference@unifr.ch, by 08 February 2026 (extended deadline). Any enquiries can also be directed here.



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