



Imaginarien  
der Kraft



German Studies Association Annual Conference  
44<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference

### Panel Series: **The Forces of Nature in German Romanticism**

The Romantics had a significant aesthetic and epistemological interest in theories about the origins and interactions of what they called “natural forces”. Immanent forms of attraction and repulsion, gravity and electricity, *Bildungstrieb* and reproduction, but also the formation of language or bodily and medical phenomena were discussed as forces of nature. “Sollten die Naturkräfte gerade in gegenseitigen und individuellen Verhältnissen stehn, wie die Glieder an unserm Körper?”, Novalis pondered in his *Fragmente*. In Achim von Arnim’s *Das Loch*, for example, a chorus of ghosts embodies “die bildende Kraft der Natur”; E. T. A. Hoffmann and Caroline de la Motte Fouqué explored the effects of magnetism as a “geheimnisvolle Kraft der Natur” (*Serapionsbrüder*) or as “unbegreifliche Einflüsse in der Natur” (*Die Magie der Natur*), while Friedrich Schlegel reworked the theory of natural elements into a thinking of nature as a dynamic “Wechselspiel” of “Kräfte”, imbuing “Stoff” with “Form” an vice versa (*An die Deutschen*). Evidently, the notion of “Kraft” is crucial for the Romantics and their aspiration to fathom how every single thing relates to the whole and how the whole is mirrored in every single thing. But which forces of nature are at work to keep everything in check? How can these forces be conceptualized and imagined scientifically, philosophically and poetically? And which natural forces can become a threat, for example, in times and terms of natural catastrophes?

Arguably, conceptual approaches to forces of nature around 1800 are closely connected to reconfigurations in the natural sciences (i. a. in physics, biology, physiology and geology) and to Romantic *Naturphilosophie*, most prominently the works of Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling. In Schelling’s speculative approach, natural forces are described as antagonistic interactions ranging from the laws of physics and chemistry to electricity and ultimately transcending nature into the metaphysical realm. Force, according to Schelling, “heißt, was wir wenigstens als Princip an die Spitze der Naturwissenschaft stellen können, und was, obgleich nicht selbst darstellbar, doch seiner Wirkungsart nach, durch physikalische Gesetze bestimmbar ist” (*Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur*). Originating from the realm of physics but ultimately permeating through all of nature, the all-encompassing yet not representable principle of force allows to conceptualize the unity of nature as a generative and dynamic entanglement of *natura naturata* and *natura naturans*.

With the notion of force, it is precisely the agency of nature that comes into focus. In this respect, the literary works of German Romanticism can themselves be considered an experimental testing ground for the mysterious qualities of natural forces. Weaving textual interconnections between sciences and literature, Romantic texts articulated the agencies of nature in its diverse forms and materialities. As a result, Romantic text gave shape to proto-ecological notions as well as sometimes highly anthropomorphized or mythological representations of nature.

The panel series seeks to investigate how German Romanticism imagined and discussed “forces of nature” and aims to reconstruct the semantics, poetics and aesthetics of natural forces in

German Romanticism (see also the institutional context of our panel, <https://www.imaginarien-der-kraft.uni-hamburg.de/>).

## **PROGRAM**

## **The Forces of Nature in German Romanticism**

(organized by Frederike Middelhoff & Adrian Renner)

### **GSA Virtual Meeting 2020**

**30 Sep. and 1 Oct. 2020, 11:00am – 2:15pm (EST)**

**(Info: <https://www.thegsa.org>)**

#### **9/30: 11:00 - 12:30pm: The Forces of Nature in German Romanticism: Concepts, Theories, Practices (I)**

Moderator: **Elisa Ronzheimer** (Bielefeld University)

**Siarhei Biareishyk** (University of Pennsylvania): Kraft, Conatus, Force, Power: Novalis Reading Schelling's *Von der Weltseele*

**Joanna Raisbeck** (University of Oxford): Spinozist Pantheism in Karoline von Günderrode (1780–1806)

**Marius Reisener** (University of Zürich): “Ruhepunct am Hebel.” The Lever as Meta-Metaphora of Romantic Praxeology

#### **Discussion**

#### **9/30: 12:45 - 2:15pm: The Forces of Nature in German Romanticism: Bodies, Conflicts, Symptoms (II)**

Moderator: **Joanna Raisbeck** (University of Oxford)

**Alice A. Kuzniar** (University of Waterloo): Homeopathy's Dynamic Forces

**Frederike Middelhoff** (Goethe-University Frankfurt): Romanticizing *vis medicatrix naturae*

**Adrian Renner** (University of Hamburg): Opposite Forces: Nature, Dualism and Gender in Romantic “Lebenskraft”

#### **Discussion**

#### **10/1: 11:00 - 12:30pm: The Forces of Nature in German Romanticism: Poiesis, Powers, Impacts (III)**

Moderator: **Marius Reisener** (Humboldt University Berlin)

**Margaret Strair** (University of Pennsylvania): The Materiality of the Sensorium and the Dark Side of Nature in Justinus Kerner's and E.T.A. Hoffmann's Literary Media

**Daniel Carranza** (Harvard University): “die Kraft der Liebe:” On Symbolic Exchange in Goethe's *Märchen*

**Justus Fetscher** (University of Mannheim): Fürchterliche Fortwirkung. Die poetische Kraft von Kleists Natur

#### **Discussion**

#### **10/1: 12:45 - 2:15pm: The Forces of Nature in German Romanticism: Forms, Sounds, Patterns (IV)**

Moderator: **Daniel Carranza** (Harvard University)

**Elisa Ronzheimer** (Bielefeld University): Forces of Rhythm ca. 1800

**Steven Lydon** (University of Tokyo): Helmholtz and Schiller: Kraft and Ruhe

**Closing Discussion**