

Conference Call for Papers

Between God and Nature: Scientific Poetry and Poetics in the Early European Enlightenment

Philipps-University Marburg, 9-11 April 2026

Deadline for submissions: Monday, 15 September 2025

Email: scientificpoetry@uni-marburg.de

Keynote Speakers: Steffen Martus (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin), Reto Rössler (Universität Flensburg)

The bi-national AHRC/DFG research consortium, *Scientific Poetry and Poetics in Britain and Germany, from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Anglia Ruskin University; University of Bayreuth; University of Marburg; University of York), invites proposals for their third international conference.

The period between c. 1680 and 1740 has often been neglected both by literary scholars and those of the history of science. Recent studies however have shown the important role of the early European Enlightenment as a transitional period between the baroque and the modern. The Marburg conference will take up these impulses, exploring the relation between poetry, poetics and natural philosophy/*nova scientia* in the early European Enlightenment. With special attention to the mutual exchange between poeto-rhetorical and mathematical-empirical production and dissemination of knowledge, the conference will address and discuss four constitutive moments of early Enlightenment poetry: (1) the significance of classical poetic forms mediating between 'science' and poetry within Enlightenment poetics (e.g. didactic poems, hexameral writing, the antique ode); (2) the complex relationship between the physical and the metaphysical, the mundane and the transcendental in both poetic and scientific writing of that time; (3) the rhetoric, forms and effects of a poetization of knowledge in the transition from early modernity to modernity; (4) the impact of new media formats, notably literary journals and periodicals, on scientific poetry as part of an emerging literary public sphere.

As with the project as a whole, the conference is based on the observation that early modern scientific poetry as well as its corresponding poetics cannot be reduced to a mere addendum to natural philosophy. Similarly, natural philosophy, or the *nova scientia*, involved more than just mathematical rigour and empirical precision. While poetry revealed hidden structures and new phenomena in the created world, early modern

natural philosophy produced outsized questions and topics whose investigation demanded intuitive imaginative processes as well as poetic rhetoric. Around 1700, comprehending the world in all its religious-philosophical density entailed a complex knot of the physical and metaphysical. As a result, poetic elegance of scientific thought mattered as much as the empirical results: Poetry and 'science' sustained and informed each other in the production of knowledge as much as they worked hand in hand in the dissemination of what was and what should be known about the material world and its open or hidden composition.

In addition to a more general questioning of what we term scientific poetry (and for which there is no proper German equivalent), the Marburg conference will shed light on a blind spot in early modern Enlightenment scholarship and early modern translational studies: the thoroughgoing neglect of a substantial English-German poeto-scientific relation that from the mid-17th century onwards led to a broad diffusion of scientific-poetic forms and topics. The poetic ideas of this era, particularly its cosmopoetics, theopoetics and physicotheology, influence our understanding of emergent aesthetics especially for the vernacular poetry of England and Germany. While paying special attention to German-English relations, the conference addresses new perspectives on the *res publica litteraria* of the early European Enlightenment as a whole, discussing the compositional and referential density of scientific knowledge in a poetry that oscillated between God and nature.

Topics of interest may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The relation between poetics/literary theory and natural philosophy
- Scientific poetry and/in natural philosophical writings
- Poetic 'production' of natural philosophical/scientific knowledge and the relation between scientific knowledge and poetic imagination
- Poems, poetry and poets from the peripheries of early modern scholarly attention
- Early Enlightenment women's poetry and female writers
- Physico-theological poetry and poetics
- The shaping of the poetic sublime
- The role and function of classical poetic forms (e.g. didactic poems, hexameral writing, antique ode) within enlightenment poetics and poetry
- The impact of new media formats (e.g. literary journals, periodicals) on early Enlightenment poetics and poetry
- The relation between poetry / poetic forms and natural philosophical images (e.g. scientific illustration, microscopic / telescopic drawings)

Please send proposals of up to 300-350 words for 20-minute papers (followed by a 20-minute Q&A) along with a short biographical note (c. 50 words), to scientificpoetry@uni-

[marburg.de](https://www.uni-marburg.de) by **Monday, 15 September 2025**. The conference will mainly be held in English, but contributions in German are equally welcome. PhD students and early career academics are especially invited to submit a proposal. We endeavour to cover the costs of travel and accommodation for our speakers.

Please get in touch with any questions:

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You will find further information about the core project on our website:

<https://scientificpoetry.org/>