

## Call for papers:

### The Poetics of Early Modern Scientific Poetry

28–30 November, 2024 – University of Bayreuth, Germany

Inaugural conference of the international AHRC/DFG research consortium,  
*Scientific Poetry and Poetics in Britain and Germany, from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*

(University of York; Anglia Ruskin University; University of Marburg; University of Bayreuth)

#### Confirmed plenary speakers:

Vladimir Brljak (Durham)

Rüdiger Zymner (Wuppertal)

This conference aims to explore the ways in which scientific poetry was theorised immediately before, during, and after the ‘scientific revolution’, seeking a better understanding of the specific nature of knowledge that scientific poetry was expected to communicate and produce. For early modern prose, the ‘poetics of science’ have been extensively explored in recent years, but the specificity of verse – central to Renaissance, Augustan, and Enlightenment poetics – remains under-examined. We invite papers discussing the poetics of early modern vernacular and neo-Latin scientific poetry in international perspective.

The parallel development, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, of modern science and literary criticism, entailed frequent cross-references between the two domains. Early modern writers deemed poetry the natural medium for representing natural knowledge, and at the same time, methods and insights from the new science reflected on the practice and perceived order of literature. The negotiation between the two domains was conducted, on the one hand, in poetological discourse, such as dedicated works on rhetoric and poetics, as well as in prefaces, dedications, and commentaries to individual works of poetry as well as anthologies. On the other hand, natural philosophers – usually with sound humanist training – self-consciously used or referenced poetry as an aid for the dissemination of knowledge, or indeed to argue for a fundamental epistemological difference between the two domains.

To understand better the specific nature of knowledge that scientific poetry was expected to communicate and produce in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, attention must be paid to how it was theorised. Given that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century critics set great store by the appropriateness of literary forms for specific subjects, insight from work on prose writings (concerning concepts such as perspective, evidence and probability, and the epistemology of fiction) can fruitfully be compared to the poetics of scientific poetry. This can correct an observer’s bias by which twentieth- and twenty-first century research has privileged precursors of the novel over poetry, a form arguably more or at least equally popular for much of the period in question. Scientific poetry promises to be more fruitfully studied than prose fiction with respect to key concerns of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century aesthetics and poetics, such as the imitation of classical models; the affordances of metre and rhyme; and the sublime.

The convenors invite papers on those ‘places of criticism’ – auto-poetological statements in scientific poetry itself; but also dedicated print treatises on rhetoric and poetics; paratextual matter in poetry anthologies and translations; commentaries; as well as critical contributions to periodicals; reflections in the writings of natural philosophers; and others – where a poetics of scientific poetry is formulated.

Contributions may address questions such as,

- To what extent does scientific poetry respond to, and in turn influence, the (largely normative) poetics of its day? How are key issues such as the uses of rhetoric, the imitation of the ancients and their virtues relative to the moderns, the order and decorum of genres, and the politics of prosody framed in the context of scientific poetry?
- Which aspects – sources, forms, subjects, epistemology – were foregrounded and problematized in constructing a poetics of scientific poetry? How were they harnessed to establish parallels, links, and differences between poetry and natural philosophy?
- To what extent is the relationship between the theory and practice of scientific poetry a matter of linguistic, religious, gendered, or national contexts?
- What are national differences and transnational, as well as transhistorical, constants perceived by early modern writers on poetics, and what parallels and differences do they discuss between poetry in the vernacular(s) and in (neo-)Latin?
- Can specific ideas and practices be observed to travel through individual networks of scholars, translators, stationers, etc.?

Please submit 200—300 word abstracts, by April 5, 2024, to Florian Klaeger ([klaeger@uni-bayreuth.de](mailto:klaeger@uni-bayreuth.de)).