

PHL 400-301
The Poetry of Nature in post-Kantian Philosophy
SQ 2012-13, Arts and Letters Hall Room 303, Thursdays 1-4:10 p.m.

Instructor: Prof. Elizabeth Millán

Office Hours: Thursdays 11-12 p.m. at the Department of Philosophy, 150.8 and by appointment.
emillan@rocketmail.com

Course Description:

In this seminar we will study the role and meaning of aesthetics in the immediate post-Kantian period of German thought. We will begin with a discussion of Fichte's role in the development of early German Romanticism. Though Fichte's work and his philosophy of freedom influenced the work of Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel, both thinkers were strong critics of Fichte's very approach to philosophy. Fichte was not interested in beauty or in nature, so nature's beauty was not captured by his philosophical lens. As Schiller wrote to Fichte on August 3, 1795: "We have lived in the same time, and the next generation will see us as contemporaries and neighbors, but how little did we unite" (*Wir haben in einer Zeit Gelebt, und die Nachwelt wird uns als Zeitgenossen zu Nachbarn machen aber wie wenig haben wir uns vereinigt*). It is indeed true that in the rather small neighborhood (consisting mainly of Berlin, Jena, and Weimar) where German Idealism and early German Romanticism took root, we find an impressive diversity of philosophical views, views which do not lead to a single, unified system of philosophy.

In ten weeks, we cannot, of course, do justice to the rich diversity of views on nature and beauty that developed during the period from 1790 (the year Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft/Critique of Judgment*) was published and 1845 (the year that Alexander von Humboldt published his *Kosmos/Cosmos*). I do hope we can do some justice to the role of nature in the aesthetic writings of Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, Goethe, and Alexander von Humboldt as we explore the ways in which these thinkers' focus on philosophy's connection to art and nature began to reshape philosophy itself.

Required Texts:

1. J.M. Bernstein, editor, *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
2. Johann Gottlieb Fichte. *Vocation of Man*. Hackett Press or the Chisholm edition, which is available in used editions from The Liberal Arts Press.
3. *Goethe's Botanical Writings*, translated by Bertha Mueller. Ox Bow Press, 1989.
4. Alexander von Humboldt. *Cosmos. A Sketch of the Physical Description of the Universe*, Vols. 1 and 2. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
5. Alexander von Humboldt, *Ansichten der Natur*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1969.
6. Schulte-Sasse, Jochen, et. al, eds. *Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings*. University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Schedule of Topics and Readings:

Thursday 4 April

Introduction to Texts and Themes of the Seminar.

Reading for April 11: *Die Bestimmung des Menschen/Vocation of Man* (1800). As Prof. Breazeale is playing off of Joris-Karl Huysmans', *Against Nature*, you might want to take a look at that strange text.

Thursday 11 April

The Opening (or is it a closing) that Fichte gave to the Romantic Views of Nature.

Guest speaker: Dan Breazeale, "Fichte: Against Nature."

Reading for April 18: Schiller, *Über das Erhabene/On the Sublime* (both the German and English are on d2l).

**Of related interest:

Friday 12 April and Saturday 13 April Norms of Freedom Conference UIC

<https://sites.google.com/a/uic.edu/kanthegeelnorms>

Thursday 18 April

Fichte and Schiller on Violence in Nature.

Reading for April 25: "Earliest Program for a System of German Idealism" (1796), Selections from the Fichte-Schelling Correspondence (1800-1801), Novalis: Fichte Studies (1795-96), and Schlegel's, Fichte's Basic Characteristics of the Present Age (1808) (Schulte-Sasse, 72-118).

Thursday 25 April

Romantic Reactions to Fichte.

Reading for May 2: fragments in Schulte-Sasse, pp. 314-358; Novalis fragments (Bernstein, pp. 203-213); Novalis, "On Goethe" (Bernstein, pp. 227-234), Schlegel, "On Goethe's *Meister*" (1798) (Bernstein, pp. 269-286).

Thursday 2 May

The Romantic Relation to Goethe/The Poetry of Nature.

Reading for May 9: *Goethe's Botanical Writings*, 21-29 and 215-245.

Thursday 9 May

Goethe's Views of Nature.

Reading for May 23: Goethe's *Botanical Writings*, 31-105 and Humboldt's *Cosmos*, 3-78.

**Friday 10 May. Guest Speaker: Karl Ameriks, "History, Idealism, and Schelling," 1-3 p.m., Dorothy Day Room of Richardson Library. Please do attend this talk: Prof. Ameriks was going to join us in the seminar, but could not come on a Thursday, so we moved his talk to Friday, but the theme is connected to our seminar (and quite intentionally). Since we don't have class on Thursday, May 16, I don't feel guilty requiring your attendance at Prof. Ameriks' talk. If you cannot make it, please let me know.

Thursday 16 May

NO CLASS

Thursday 23 May

Capturing the Living Breath (lebendiger Hauch) of Nature: Humboldt's Cosmos.

Reading for May 30: Humboldt's *Cosmos*, 79-100 and 346-359.

**Of related interest:

Friday 24 May, *Literature and Culture of Violence in the Americas*. DePaul-Ibero Conference, Loop Campus.

Thursday 30 May

Romantic Delineations of Nature in Humboldt.

Reading for June 6: Humboldt's *Cosmos*, Volume 2, 19-105.

Thursday 6 June

Humboldt on Descriptions of Nature.

Evaluation:

There will be a 15-20 page paper due at the end of the quarter. The paper should address a topic that we have discussed in class, or, if you would like to expand a paper you have written for another (related) course, adding detail from readings we have done, that would be fine too. I would like each person to come to see me or contact me via email before the fifth week, that is, before April 25, to discuss the topic and organization of the paper. Ideally, each student would have a draft finished well before the end of the quarter so that I could offer feedback for the final version.

In addition, each participant is expected to do one in-class presentation of 20 minutes. The paper may be a longer version of what you present in class. I will distribute a list of presentation topics.