



Announcing a thematic research group on
The Rhine as a cultural space in romantic nationalism

Around 1800, the Rhine valley was discovered by travellers, writers and (later) painters and composers, with its picturesque and romantic castle ruins, steep vineyards and half-timbered towns and its atmosphere of convivial song and historical legends. Alongside this cultural discovery, the Rhine was to become one of the major geopolitical flashpoints of Western Europe, repeatedly spawning conflicts from the Napoleonic occupation to the German annexation of Alsace-Lorraine.

This locale, with its complementing spatial dimensions of linguistic encounter, cultural appropriations and territorial rivalry presents a topic for interdisciplinary research from a variety of national perspectives. It is proposed to thematize these various aspects in a theme group on the Rhine area as a cultural, geographical and political space in romantic nationalism, under the aegis of the Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalisms (SPIN, directed by Joep Leerssen, Professor of European Studies, at the University of Amsterdam; www.spinnet.eu). The coordination of the theme group has been entrusted to Professor Manfred Beller (formerly of the Università di Bergamo), and its duration has been planned for a five-year period.

The theme group, which is to bring together scholars from different academic and national specialisms, will hold a series of workshops, addressing issues such as

1. Travellers, tourism, economic importance and romantic imagery
2. Literature, song, visual arts and commemorative festivals: the idealization and thematization of the Rhine
3. A contested borderland: geopolitical rhetoric, political poetry and writings
4. A cultural space and site of overlapping and conflicting memories: cathedrals, castles, carnival and Kulturkampf.

Much valuable work has already been done on these topics. Even so, a task remains in inventorizing and rendering accessible a vast corpus of primary documents as yet dispersed and obscure (even by renowned authors such as E.M. Arndt and J.J. Görres): local histories and cultural studies, critical and journalistic writings, political speeches, verse and song, as well as repercussions in commercial advertising, engravings, propaganda and caricature. Between them, these sources document exemplary cross-currents between romantic imagery, national instrumentalization and commercial exploitation that also involve important episodes in European history such as the completion of Cologne cathedral and the Rhine crisis of 1840.

The four topic areas outlined above are neither fixed in any chronological order, nor definitive. The sessions dealing with them are to be mutually linked and illustrative. An initial exploratory meeting of the theme group will deal with their precise formulas and successive planning. SPIN will host these workshops and will publish relevant materials online in its source collection on European romantic nationalism, it may also broker publication of the proceedings with a reputable academic publisher. The meetings are to bring together senior scholars and younger researchers, so that the insights of earlier work can be carried over into concrete projects for future exploration.

An initial meeting of the theme group will be held in the autumn of 2010; it will address the topic of **Romantic Rhine Travels: Exotic landscape, cultural character, national perspectives**. It will also further explore the possible perspectives and themes to be pursued in future workshops. A specific description/CfP for the proposed initial meeting is subjoined as a separate document.

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