

**Dr. Mareike Schildmann**

*University of Bremen*

*Berlin, Germany*

## **How to Make the Farmers Revolt? Georg Büchner's "Hessian Messenger" (1834) and the Materialistic Aporias of Peasant Agitation in German *Vormärz***

"Fatten the peasants and the revolution gets apoplexy. A chicken in the pot of every farmer and the Gallic rooster dies." In his letter to Karl Gutzkow from 1835 the German author Georg Büchner marks the political status of the farmer as a notoriously unreliable one – just one year after he has identified and addressed the farmer as crucial revolutionary subject in his leaflet "Hessian Messenger". The lecture takes Büchner's pamphlet written in collaboration with the pastor and revolutionist Friedrich Weidig as a starting point to explore the literary formats and forms of peasant agitation and mobilization in the context of the German *Vormärz* (ca. 1830–1848). The political and aesthetic aporias that accompany the conceptualization of the farmer as both a rebellious *and* anti-revolutionary actor in theory and literature of this time (e.g. Karl Schloenbach's "Das deutsche Bauernbuch", 1948) will be analyzed from three perspectives: 1. as a question about the politically precarious status/class of the peasant between proletariat and bourgeoisie that increasingly manifests itself as an internal division in the farmer itself – a division that is still inscribed as moral dilemma in the agricultural protests of the 20th and 21st century (cf. Baier 1985). 2. as crucial stake in the debate about a new egalitarian agrarian law which at this time was not only discussed by (early) communists in France and Germany like François Babeuf, but also in the section of the "Society for Human Rights" founded by Büchner (cf. Mayer 1985), and lastly in Marx's elaboration of the peasant question 3. as an aspect of a peasant form of existence, which is located by contemporaries on the one hand in a mythical religiosity, on the other hand in a specific understanding of nature and the self. As I will argue, precisely those characteristics that mark the farmer as a model of an unalienated form of being within the cultural – critical and socialist utopias of the 18th and 19th century, at the same time render him an uncertain political ally: the farmers striving for self – sufficiency, his practical materialism, but also his sense of right and justice that arises from an agrarian reference to ground and soil and which – thinking with Marx – also reveals an ecological punchline.