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**The Aesthetics of *bildende Nachahmung*:  
A Transatlantic Dialogue between  
Ralph Waldo Emerson and Karl Philipp Moritz**

“[I]t is verbose rubbish and sounds like a parody of ‘deep’ German prose.” With these words W.H. Auden justifies why he omitted Karl Philipp Moritz’s “whole article *Concerning the Pictorial Imitation of the Beautiful*” from his translation of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Italian Journey*.<sup>1</sup> Auden’s dismissal would have surprised the German poet, for he found in this Berlin intellectual an ideal partner with whom to discuss his works. Even more significantly, he decided to insert Moritz’s treatise on the process of artistic production at the very end of his Italian travel book so as to sum up his own philosophical and scientific thoughts about nature and the world of art. Goethe notes in the introduction that these “few pages from ... [Moritz’s] presentation” have to be regarded as an outcome of their conversations which his friend Moritz had “used and developed” in his own fashion. Furthermore, Goethe remarks that the outcome of their conversations in Italy as formulated by Moritz “happily coincide with the mode of thought of the age.”<sup>2</sup> Not only was Moritz an appreciated “model reader,” a sounding-board for Goethe’s ideas and writing, but, more importantly, the respected man from Weimar chose to conclude his Roman reflections with another’s text, for he felt that “Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen”<sup>3</sup> portended the spirit of the coming age.

Over fifty years later, in a context Goethe could not possibly have envisioned, the aesthetic reflections of the two German writers would become intellectual touchstones for a young intellectual from New England. Feeling trapped in his job as a Unitarian minister, Ralph Waldo Emerson left Boston and his native New England for the European continent in search of a new vocation—and in his luggage he carried a German edition of Goethe’s *Italienische Reise* which included “Der zweite römische Aufenthalt,” the last volume of Goethe’s travel book which included Moritz’s “verbose

rubbish.” Emerson found in Goethe’s travelogue a very useful and inspiring companion. The reading helped to improve his German language skills, and the wide-ranging observations of his German precursors on politics, history, art, literature, and science stirred his imagination, sharpening not only his perception of Italian history and culture, but also, crucially, his own nascent sense of the deep interconnections between natural history, art, and aesthetics. He copied long passages of Goethe’s works into his notebook, complementing and specifying his own thoughts.<sup>4</sup> As testimony to the deep impact not only of the German poet but also of his protégée and Roman companion, Emerson would meticulously transcribe much of “Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen” three years after his return from Europe.<sup>5</sup>

The American poet’s indebtedness to Goethe’s works has received an overwhelming amount of critical attention both from contemporaries and modern scholars, and I have no intention of disputing the significance of Goethe’s thought for the development of Emerson’s writing.<sup>6</sup> A careful rereading of Emerson’s early lectures, however, reveals a striking presence of Moritz’s aesthetic ideas which has not been sufficiently recognized in the vast body of Emerson criticism.<sup>7</sup> Moritz’s philosophical investigations of the relationship of nature, art, and mimesis resonate deeply with the New England thinker’s early formulations of these issues. In order to clearly comprehend this resonance, we must first critically reconsider the relationship of the two German thinkers in Italy, for it was in this crucible that Moritz’s ideas took shape in conversation with Goethe. Why was Moritz’s text accorded such a prominent position in the *Italienische Reise*, and what were the ideas contained therein that made this short aesthetic tract so important not only to Goethe but to a whole generation of German writers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries? And in what context did Emerson encounter these ideas?

The essay’s opening part draws out biographical parallels between Goethe’s, Moritz’s and Emerson’s self-invention as artists on their respective Italian journeys and highlights the centrality of Moritz’s treatise on artistic production for the three poets. The second section puts Emerson’s explications on criteria of original artistic creation in his lectures on “Michel Angelo Bounaroti” and “The Eye and Ear” in dialogue with Moritz’s expositions of the same theme. A close reading of selected passages from the two lectures sheds light on the long-neglected relevance of Moritz’s aesthetics for Emerson. I argue that in conversation with Moritz’s work, Emerson puts forward a strikingly similar notion of artistic autonomy that would later resurface prominently in *Nature*. Finally, I suggest that the concept of “bildende Nachahmung” as it figures in Emerson’s early works turns out to provide a useful model to account for his own poetic practices.



**“All Roads lead to Weimar...”: Moritz, Goethe and Emerson in Italy**

The meeting of Moritz and Goethe in Rome in 1786, and the powerful intellectual encounter with both which Emerson would experience when he traveled through Italy in 1832 with the *Italienische Reise* as his constant companion, was anything but fortuitous. Italy—and specifically the Italy of classical antiquity whose image had been created and diffused during the Renaissance—had long been a destination for aristocratic travelers, and since the sixteenth century had been the subject of a veritable flood of personal travel narratives.<sup>8</sup> Though there were many travelers from the German territories in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, interest in and travel to Italy as part of an aesthetic education grounded in the appreciation of classical antiquity received an enormous boost with the publication in 1755 of Winckelmann's *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Malerey und Bilderkunst* which was published shortly after the author arrived in Rome. Winckelmann—both the man and his work—quickly became the touchstone for debates about the role of classical models, and his remaining in Rome until his death made that city a magnet for German artists and intellectuals.

Classical art was considered harmonious, serious and authentic. Winckelmann believed “the only way for us to be great, and if at all possible, immortal, is by imitating the ancients.”<sup>9</sup> Schiller and a whole host of German intellectuals also looked to the ancient world as a model. Here, Schiller believed, art and thought, aesthetics and philosophy flowed from a common source and nourished an integrated culture.<sup>10</sup> One reason classical culture was so appealing to these German writers was the connection between the arts and public culture which created a sense of unity among members of the society, a unity lacking in both the political, cultural, and artistic life of Germany. Within the circles of Germany's leading contemporary thinkers, Greek culture occupied a model function. For many German thinkers, ancient Greece and Rome had what the fragmented German nation so desperately needed: a rich cultural tradition expressing and celebrating the nation's aspirations, functioning as the product and protector of its shared identity.<sup>11</sup>

This larger historical context accounts for why Germany's intellectual community felt so strongly drawn to Italy, the cradle of civilization they were striving to unearth and appropriate for the creation of a national cultural consciousness. Although the story of German travelers to Italy hardly began with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, it was he who, after Winckelmann, gained the status of the German traveler par excellence.<sup>12</sup> He departed for Italy in September 1786, leaving behind a prestigious but taxing position as a long-



standing member of the Privy Council at the pleasure of Carl August, duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach. So as to remain unrecognized and to completely free himself from the personal and professional entanglements which would ensue if his artistic and diplomatic identity were known, the already famous author of *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* traveled incognito and successfully escaped making the diplomatic rounds in his whirlwind trip to Rome. He disguised himself as a painter from Leipzig named Jean Philipp Möller and traveled without servants in a simple postal coach, the common public transportation of that time.<sup>13</sup> In Rome, the city of the world and the ultimate goal of his sojourn,<sup>14</sup> Goethe joined the circle of prominent members of German society who gathered around Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein (today mostly known to us as the painter of the famous portrait *Goethe in der Campagna di Roma*) who himself was a part of the Winckelmann circle, which included Tischbein's teacher, Anton Raffael Mengs.

Goethe had traveled to Italy in part to hone his own artistic capabilities, and he spent many hours with Tischbein, who drew sketches of Goethe on their long walks through Roman gardens and the Italian countryside. On the return from one of their longer excursions the two artists, coming back to Rome, saw a horse slipping on the paved surface in front of the Pantheon, causing the poor traveler to break his arm. It was Karl Philipp Moritz, the author of an unusual travel book about England and of an unmistakably autobiographical *Bildungsroman*, *Anton Reiser*, who had only recently met Goethe before his accident.<sup>15</sup> It was the unhappy incident of Moritz's fall which proved to be a felicitous moment in the intellectual development of both men. Moritz became Goethe's patient for many weeks; the accident brought the two writers into almost continual contact, out of which would develop a long-lasting friendship. The poet never came closer to any of his friends, not even to Herder, than to this small, ugly man with his monk-like features and expressive eyes.<sup>16</sup> In a letter to Charlotte von Stein, Goethe wrote that Moritz was like a younger brother, cut from the same cloth but someone to whom fate had been less kind.<sup>17</sup>

Moritz advanced as Goethe's student and became a "model reader" with whom Goethe could discuss his writings and test the plausibility of his plant system and the metamorphosis of the plant: "Wie faßlich aber das Abstrakteste von dieser Vorstellungsart wird, wenn es mit der rechten Methode vorgetragen wird und eine vorbereitete Seele findet, seh' ich an meinem neuen Schüler [Moritz]. Er hat eine große Freude daran und ruckt immer selbst mit Schlüssen vorwärts."<sup>18</sup> Moritz proved to be a receptive and eager "Schüler." Not only was he enthusiastic about Goethe's ideas, but he also helped to further develop and define the ideas emerging from their conversations. Moritz's treatise "Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen" was the product of the two



men's nightly musings over natural phenomena and artistic production, their two favorite topics, and topics which they felt were closely related. Goethe later inserted an excerpt of this piece in "Der zweite römische Aufenthalt" of the *Italienische Reise*. This middle part of Moritz's text on the creative imitation of nature, in which he problematizes artistic production, would become the most popular and most interpreted text of his aesthetic works. Modern scholars have conceived of Moritz's theoretical treatise as principally a realization of Goethe's aesthetic ideas.<sup>19</sup> Goethe himself, however, justified the reprint of Moritz's treatise in his text by arguing that this essay is an outcome of their conversations, which Moritz then appropriated, modified and shaped: "Gedachtes Heft aber [Moritz's text] darf ich nicht unerwähnt lassen; es war aus unsern Unterhaltungen hervorgegangen, welche Moritz nach seiner Art benutzt und ausgebildet."<sup>20</sup>

Goethe clearly had a high opinion of Moritz's thinking, both while they were in Rome, and much later in his life, when the *Italienische Reise* was printed. Introducing and accounting for the reprint of Moritz's treatise in his travelogue, Goethe remarks that his friend's article is of historical interest as a window into his own and his friend's thinking at the time. Interestingly enough, it is specifically Moritz's appropriation and modification of the ideas which according to Goethe "happily coincided with the Zeitgeist of the age":

Es kann [Moritz's "Heft"] geschichtlich einiges Interesse haben, um daraus zu ersehen, was für Gedanken sich in jener Zeit vor uns auftaten, welche, späterhin entwickelt, geprüft, angewendet und verbreitet, mit der Denkweise des Jahrhunderts glücklich zusammentrafen.<sup>21</sup>

Goethe was aware that his and Moritz's pioneering ideas had been those which were most valued by their Romantic successors. It was, however, really through Moritz that these ideas spread widely. But what was so innovative and new about Moritz's aesthetic? Why was this theory so widely discussed in Weimar's circles and what exactly in Moritz's particular appropriation of the spirit of the time gave way to new impulses among his contemporaries? Obviously these are questions that go far beyond the scope of this essay; what is crucial to note is that Moritz's representation of the "creating artist" as an independent, autonomous designer, different from any other professional, had not been formulated before in such a determined and pointed way.<sup>22</sup> For him the artist occupies a status higher than others for he alone has the privilege of creating—he possesses the same characteristics inherent in the continuously productive and changing forces of nature:

Wem also von der Natur selbst, der Sinn für ihre Schöpfungskraft in sein ganzes Wesen, und das *Maaß* des Schönen in Aug' und Seele gedrückt ward, der begnügt sich nicht, sie anzuschauen; er muß ihr nachahmen, ihr nachstreben, in ihrer geheimen Werkstatt sie belauschen, und mit der lodernden Flamm' im Busen bilden und schaffen, so wie sie.<sup>23</sup>

Hence, "jedes schöne Ganze aus der Hand des bildenden Künstlers, ist daher im Kleinen ein Abdruck des höchsten Schönen im grossen Ganzen der Natur."<sup>24</sup> For Moritz, the beautiful miniature whole, originating from the hand of the artist, is an imitation of the greater whole of nature in that it is the outcome of a productive process. *What* he creates, however, is not a blunt reformulation of patterns observed in nature, but an autonomous work of art with individual structures and laws. It can be called authentic because it comes about in a process of creation; its status as an authentic and original entity, however, can only be achieved at the expense of claiming to represent reality as such. For what the creative artistic power does is to transform reality into appearance: "die Realität muß unter der Hand des bildenden Künstlers zur Erscheinung werden."<sup>25</sup> The artist turns reality into an autonomous new entity, as we shall see. Moritz's claim of a fundamental difference between the real whole of nature and the imaginary whole of the artistic object was both widely discussed and intensely disputed among writers and philosophers in the Weimar circle.<sup>26</sup>

It is the role of the artist as an autonomous producer which distinguishes Moritz's work and which helped Weimar's artists to see themselves in a new light. As Nicholas Boyle points out, the modern reader takes the proximity of such nouns as "art" and "creative" for granted and can barely imagine how recent our contemporary notion of these terms actually is. The term "creative" did not cease to be a purely theological term until the mid-eighteenth century. At the same time, the word "art" took on its "modern, more general, and high-flown meaning ('...but is it Art?')."<sup>27</sup> Most rulers did not view the writers, composers, set designers, architects and actors who provided them with drama and music as being fundamentally different from the other craftsmen who supplied luxury goods for the court's consumption—they were seen as mere servants of the court.<sup>28</sup> The idea that literature, the performing arts and music could have something in common which distinguishes them from technical crafts was new.<sup>29</sup>

Moritz smartly captured the zeitgeist of the century in his brief treatise on the predicament of imitating the beautiful. The artist is an independent producer who creates works of art which have to be appreciated "for their own



sake"; consequently, the producer of such works also has to be acknowledged and recognized "for his own sake" and not for any other tasks and duties which might accompany his position in society. So when Goethe suddenly departs incognito in a simply postal coach without servants to Italy it is more than a fulfillment of a nearly life-long yearning for the South; it is an act of artistic self-fashioning. The distinguished poet, who stood for so long in the service of Carl August, Duke of Saxony-Weimar, wants to establish himself as an artist. He writes to Carl August that in Italy he had rediscovered himself "as an artist!" and adds, "anything else I may be is for you to assess and to utilize."<sup>30</sup> Boyle points out that when Goethe uses the word "artist" with a quotation mark, the term is not applicable to a lowly craftsman but to a man of letters, implying a court function dignified in itself, and not just by virtue of the fact that he also happens to be an acting President of the Chamber at the duke's court. As a self-sufficient creator, he wants to be supported by his patron but not be subservient to the duke's purposes.<sup>31</sup>

Moritz's sudden departure from Berlin also reveals an impetuous impulse of artistic self-discovery. Shortly before his disappearance in June 1786, he wrote to his friend Karl Friedrich Klischnig: "Es ist beschlossen! Ich muß fort, wenn ich nicht zu Grunde gehen will. Ich erliege im ewigen Kampf mit einer Leidenschaft, die doch nie befriedigt werden kann."<sup>32</sup> The dramatic tone of this theatrical statement inevitably echoes Goethe's *Werther*. While in Moritz's autobiographical novel *Anton Reiser* the author fashions himself after Goethe's sensitive romantic young artist at odds with society and ill-equipped to cope with life on a textual level, Moritz stages his escape to Italy as the flight of a Werther figure from Berlin.<sup>33</sup> His stay in Italy was the crucial turning point in his life, establishing his career as a scholar of the arts.

When Ralph Waldo Emerson impetuously fled from his native New England for Italy, he carried with him Goethe's *Italian Journey* and *Wilhelm Meister*. His own expectations were conditioned by the *Bildungsreise* and the *Bildungsroman*, exemplified by the texts of a poet and scholar whose works had found a wide audience in America.<sup>34</sup> The New England poet was troubled by similar feelings of an unfulfilled vocation and a broken heart, and decided that he had to leave his hometown. Like the beleaguered Goethe fleeing from the Weimar court circle, Emerson's ministerial career was broken off. His desolate situation echoes the circumstances in which Moritz or the protagonists in *Wilhelm Meister* or *Anton Reiser* found themselves: Emerson felt uncertain of himself and his aims in life, and his wife, Ellen Tucker Emerson, had just died from tuberculosis. For a while he felt that his own life had ended, too. He began to think of going south again for the climate and took out books on the West Indies.<sup>35</sup> Then, dramatically, on 10 December 1832, on the spur of the moment, he boarded a small merchant brigantine which was about to set sail



for the Mediterranean, and the frail former Unitarian minister found himself heading back to the world of Cicero and Virgil, a world he knew through his vast knowledge of classical literature—and one which he would view through the lens of Goethe.<sup>36</sup> Leaving theology and his prestigious pastoral office behind, Emerson set off down a path which he knew would involve both literature and natural history, as it had for the poet from Weimar.<sup>37</sup> After an arduous voyage on which the already physically weakened poet found himself in constant battle with the stormy Atlantic in midwinter, causing him terrible seasickness and diarrhea, Emerson went ashore at Malta and then traveled north to Sicily and on to the Italian peninsula, tracing Goethe's steps in reverse, from south to north.<sup>38</sup> While touring through Italy, France and England, he transcribed long passages from Goethe's works into his notebooks, which would later become the basis for his lectures and essays. Besides Carlyle and Coleridge, Goethe was the thinker whom Emerson took most seriously: "It is to me very plain that no recent genius can work with equal effect upon mankind as Goethe."<sup>39</sup>

After his return to America, Emerson transformed his European experiences into writings which founded the New World's cultural independence from the old continent. In the winter of 1836, three years after his return, Emerson focused with renewed attention on Goethe after having acquired the complete, authoritative edition of Goethe's writings published by J.G. Cotta in Stuttgart, Germany, which consisted of the forty volumes of the *Ausgabe Letzter Hand* and fifteen additional volumes of *Nachgelassene Werke* that appeared between 1832 and 1833. By this time Emerson was working intensively on his German language skills so as to be able to read all of Goethe's works in the original version, a daunting project but one that he was able to complete in the following years.<sup>40</sup> This obvious fascination—one might say obsession—with Goethe has obscured the deep debt Emerson owes to Moritz, one which can be traced textually in Emerson's own journal and in his early essays. His transcript of the Moritz text in the *Italienische Reise* was published as part of *Journal B* in Volume IV of *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*.<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, Emerson's transcription ends with the statement: "[t]he rest is translated in my Goethe Transcript"; the text, however, to which the reader is referred by the editor, namely *Journal T*, in *Journals VI*, bears no relation to the remainder of Moritz's text.<sup>42</sup> Since various echoes of Moritz's treatise can be found not only in the essay *Nature* but also in Emerson's early lectures "The Eye and Ear" and "Michel Angelo Buonaroti,"<sup>43</sup> Mueller-Vollmer concludes that it is plausible to assume that there once was (or still is) a continuation of the Moritz transcript in existence.<sup>44</sup> Further corroboration of Mueller-Vollmer's hypothesis and more importantly of the centrality of Moritz to Emerson's developing ideas about the relationship of art, nature,



and mimesis is found in the presence of Moritz's ideas in two early lectures. As I demonstrate below, these early lectures contain not only direct allusions to the transcript we have, but also to the missing journal entry, and amply demonstrate how Emerson absorbed the German thinker's key concepts and molded them to fit his own Transcendental project.

### **Emerson Meets Moritz or the Aesthetics of *bildende Nachahmung***

Emerson's interest in Michel Angelo dates back to his time in Italy and accompanied him for his whole life. At the sight of the head of the Justice which sits on the monument of Paulus III, he exclaimed: "There is a heaven."<sup>45</sup> While visiting the Santa Croce in Florence, he notes: "when I came to Michel Angelo Buonaroti my flesh crept as I read the inscription. I had strange emotions, I suppose because Italy is so full of his fame. . . . I see his face in every shop window, and now I stood over his dust."<sup>46</sup> Emerson's fascination with the Italian artist is often talked about in connection with his reception of Goethe, for whom the works of Michel Angelo played an equally crucial role, as we can see in his travel account.<sup>47</sup> This focus on Goethe has obscured the debt Emerson owes to Moritz in "Michel Angelo Buonaroti." Even the significant quote at the beginning of Emerson's lecture on the relation of all beautiful objects in nature to the entire universe which is a direct translation from Moritz has been wrongly ascribed to Goethe.<sup>48</sup> And, more importantly, critics have ignored the fact that Emerson himself literally mentions Moritz at the beginning of the passages in which he engages with the key idea from Moritz's text: "Beauty cannot be defined . . . says Moritz, a German critic."<sup>49</sup> Even scholars who have carefully examined Emerson's German precursors have downplayed Moritz and misrepresented the precise nature of the relationship between "Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen" and Emerson's early aesthetic philosophy.<sup>50</sup>

In order to better understand precisely what Emerson was borrowing from Moritz, we need to get an idea of what the central concepts in the German thinker's theory of "creative imitation" consist of. The problem of artistic production as a way of mediating between art and nature is at the heart of Moritz's discussion in the middle part of his essay which Goethe published in the *Italienische Reise*. As the contradictory title "Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen" already suggests, at the core of any artistic working process lies an aesthetic paradox: the independent, creatively forming production of art on the one hand, and the regulated imitation of nature on the other. For Moritz, this paradoxical relation is the core assumption from which he develops his aesthetic theory of the autonomy of art.



The limitations of our rational understanding mark the point of departure for Moritz's discussion, leading to a rehabilitation of aesthetic insight. In response to the enlightenment notion of "Denkkraft"—of man's ability to comprehend causal relations in nature rationally—as bearing the most promising potential to arrive at some kind of higher insight, Moritz suggests a model in which irrational and dark human faculties move to the forefront. Radically turning idealist theories upside down, Moritz comes up with his idea of "dunkelahnende Thatkraft," of a dark, irrational and highly dynamic artistic power that is both superior and inferior to all other human senses. Being placed at the top and, simultaneously, at the very bottom of the idealistic value chain of human faculties, the paradoxical composition of "Thatkraft" reiterates the equally contradictory notion of artistic production as both imitative and creative on a structural level. Precisely because of its incomplete and dynamic structure, the artistic "Thatkraft" demonstrates a certain resemblance to nature. The artist imitates nature in that he creates, but *what* he creates is an autonomous work of art with individual structures and artistic laws. It can be called authentic because it came about in a process of creation; its status as authentic and original, however, can only be achieved at the expense of claiming to represent reality as such. For what the artistic "Thatkraft" does is to transform reality into appearance [*Erscheinung*], into an independent piece of art.

Emerson's indebtedness to Moritz in the talk he gave on "Michel Angelo" in February 1835 resonates on the opening pages. Introducing Michelangelo to his audience, he maps out what he takes to be most remarkable about this widely accomplished Italian artist, namely, his continuous and laborious striving to express the idea of beauty in all fields of artistic activities: "This was his nature and vocation. This Idea possessed his soul and determined all his activity. Beauty in the largest sense." To someone so entirely devoted to the study of beauty, the question "What is Beauty?" occurs naturally, remarks Emerson, and he provides an answer for his audience which derives from Moritz's text: "Beauty cannot be defined."<sup>51</sup>

Only two years later, in the period leading up to the publication of *Nature*, Moritz was again on Emerson's mind. Even more forcefully than in "Michel Angelo," the German poet's thoughts reappear in Emerson's lecture "The Eye and Ear," serving as a supportive and illuminating backup for Emerson's own ideas. This presentation is the fourth in the series at the Masonic Temple in Boston; in it Emerson discusses what man can actually see and hear in nature if he sharpens and develops the respective senses. The text centers around sensuous energies, namely seeing and hearing, which are potentially capable of receiving an impression of what Emerson terms the beautiful in the natural world: "these organs furnish us with the external elements of our



idea of Beauty. They have the highest interest for us; I shall confine to that subject the present discourse." Emerson assumes that the artist whose sensual organs are susceptible to the energies of beauty permeating the entire natural space feels in himself the energy to produce a replica of what he beholds. He thereby does not create a mere imitation of nature, but his work reveals "the mind of nature."<sup>52</sup> It is at this point in his lecture that Emerson turns to the "Italian and German masters" so as to see what they have to say about the practice of original artistic creation. Unlike in "Michel Angelo," Moritz is not mentioned in particular; the textual evidence in the following passages, however, leaves no doubt about the provenance of these ideas. In order to see how Emerson absorbed and reformed them, we need to delve more fully into Moritz's explications themselves.

In the first section of the excerpt Emerson read in Goethe's publication, Moritz states that so as to produce a true image of highest beauty, all these relations of that great whole that are only dimly sensed by the active power [*tätige Kraft*] must necessarily in some way become either *visible*, *audible*, or, at any rate, comprehensible to the imagination.<sup>53</sup> By the same token, the artist's primary task in Emerson's text is to render these harmonious correspondences between the disparate entities he experiences in nature accessible; he "never rests but toils with enthusiasm to express that which he beholds, to transfer to some *visible* or *audible* [my emphasis] object the perfection he contemplates."<sup>54</sup> The creative energies of the artist have to render the beautiful harmonies which govern all levels of the world and universe visible and/or audible in a piece of art. But *how* precisely are we to envision this very process itself? Moritz explains that the active artistic power "muß alle jene Verhältnisse des großen Ganzen und in ihnen das höchste Schöne wie an den Spitzen seiner Strahlen in einem Brennpunkt fassen"<sup>55</sup> In the context of Emerson's lecture that same principle which Moritz describes as governing the process of artistic production, namely the act of taking all the relations of the great whole and bringing them into focus, echoes in Emerson's portrayal of the finished artwork: "But that single work must stand as it were in relation to all nature, as if all influences streamed in upon it as a focal point."<sup>56</sup> And it is from this focal point, this "Brennpunkt" that, in Moritz's words, within the precise range of the eye, a fragile yet faithful image of the highest beauty must be rounded out and include in its small compass the most complete relations of the great whole of nature.<sup>57</sup> Emerson concludes likewise: "As in nature abides everywhere quiet proportion and all relations enter without crowding into every particular product so must the work of art represent all nature within its little circuit."<sup>58</sup> Both poets stress the necessity of rendering the proportions residing in nature (and making nature appear beautiful to the human eye) visible in a piece of art. And both claim that the finished



artwork can only be called truly beautiful if it reiterates nature's principle where each entity somehow refers back to a greater whole. This theory of mimesis, however, is only one side of what qualifies an artwork to be called authentic.

On the one hand, both poets lay emphasis on the aspect of correspondence between the produced artifact and the phenomenal world which initiated the artist's urge to work on a reproduction of the beautiful relations he beholds. "It is a maxim of Art," argues Emerson, "that every true and perfect masterpiece is a whole; does take up into itself all beauty, and reminds the beholder of the entire beauty of nature." On the other hand, however, Emerson and Moritz stress the autonomous status of original art: "Hence follows the severe demand that the work of art should concentrate the look, the thought, the interest of the beholder so that he shall think of nothing out of it, nothing near, nothing else. A masterpiece of art should... annihilate everything else."<sup>59</sup> How can an artwork represent the beautiful of the whole of nature in its little circuit and, at the same time, be an entirely autonomous entity that ideally succeeds in bracketing off all other associations? It is Moritz who provides an explanation as to why art derives its original status precisely by hovering between imitation and autonomy. The artwork as a whole in and for itself can only exist as such because the artist has transformed the inner essence of nature into an appearance, into a non-representational piece of art. The beauty of nature itself, as we know from Moritz's "Über die bildende Nachahmung" and Emerson's lectures, cannot be represented. The beautiful is beautiful precisely *because* of its incommensurable status. Moritz's recapitulation of this artistic predicament at the particular point in his discussion which I have been comparing with Emerson's rendering of the same ideas reads as follows:

Und weil dieser Gegenstand wiederum, wenn er *wirklich* [emphasis is only in Moritz, *SAP*, 76/38, not in Goethe], was er darstellt, *wäre* [s.a.], mit dem Zusammenhang der Natur, die außer sich selber kein wirklich eigenmächtiges Ganzes duldet, nicht ferner bestehen könnte, so führet uns dies auf den Punkt, wo wir schon einmal waren: daß jedesmal das innre Wesen erst in die Erscheinung sich verwandeln müsse, ehe es durch die Kunst zu einem für sich bestehenden Ganzen gebildet werden und ungehindert die Verhältnisse des großen Ganzen der Natur in ihrem völligen Umfange spiegeln kann.<sup>60</sup>

So what the artist in both texts ideally does is to uncover what Emerson calls "the mind of nature" and what Moritz introduces as nature's unique features: permanently in motion, it has the faculty to continuously reform



itself and to produce. It is an autonomous entity, a totality in itself that cannot be represented. It is governed by its own laws which we will never be able to fathom entirely.

The artwork resembles nature the moment it succeeds in also appearing as a totality in and for itself. This specific design of the artwork does not have to bear any resemblance to the structures the artist beholds in nature. On the contrary, the "masterpiece of art should exclude and for the time annihilate everything else." In other words, the resemblance to the great whole of nature does not consist in a content-related fashion but in the very fact that the artwork, like nature, is being produced and that all its parts are somehow related to its entirety. Emerson talks about a certain feeling that is "excited by the masterworks of art, and by the works of nature" in the beholder; both are joined together and yet autonomous. There is a particular bond, for in both entities a productive energy is at work, "a certain link joins what is beautiful in productions [art] that speak to the eye and ear, with what is beautiful in action [nature]." The artwork, however, is at the same time independent from nature's beauty, for it is not beautiful in proportion to anything that lies outside of the scope of vision of the beholder: "The object is beautiful in proportion to the skill of the eye. All cultivation of the man decks the things he beholds."<sup>61</sup> The harmonious structure of nature lies entirely within the experience of each person. Hence, whatever we experience, whatever we see, not see or how we see it is in proportion to our individual horizon. The observing artist transforms nature the way it appears to *him* into an artistic object which echoes the part/whole structure that both Moritz and Emerson understand to be the governing principle in the natural world. The artwork deserves to be called original and autonomous because the artist does not even pretend to reflect something which can be measured by any objective criteria of artistic production. Art is the transformation of one particular experience of reality into a newly constructed and thus authentic entity. These core ideas of "Über die bildende Nachahmung" and of Emerson's appropriation in his early lectures are the ones that provide important building blocks for Emerson's far more complex and elaborate discussions in *Nature*.

If we try to locate any of these thoughts, obviously recalling Moritz work, in Emerson's long transcript of Moritz's text in his journal from 1833, the effort is in vain. The first part of "The Eye and Ear" demonstrates that Moritz's footprints can be seen even in sections of Emerson's text which are not drawn directly from the extant transcript, a fact which strongly supports Mueller-Vollmer's argument for the existence of another transcript, one mentioned by Emerson himself.<sup>62</sup>

The subsequent part of "The Eye and Ear" which follows up on Moritz's discussion of dilettantism can once again be tracked back to Emerson's journal transcriptions. Emerson distinguishes between those who merely



perceive and those who actually produce beauty, picking up on the last paragraphs concluding Moritz's excerpt in the *Italienische Reise*: "It is not to be denied meantime that the greatest difference exists between the capacity of different individuals to create and to judge of what is beautiful."<sup>63</sup> This debate about the two forms of artistic skills had already occupied Emerson in his "Michel Angelo"<sup>64</sup> lecture; the respective part in "The Eye and Ear," however, moves beyond the corresponding paragraphs in the earlier version. Like Moritz, Emerson specifies the difference between those who have such highly developed sensual organs that they are susceptible to the beauty of nature and the elite group of people who moreover have artistic energies to transform what they perceive into a new, autonomous object:

The doctrine of Art explains the different susceptibility of men to Beauty by supposing that where the organization of the individual is not perfect, so that his power of reception does not correspond point for point with the relations of surrounding Nature but here and there a point is missing, then he is not an artist; all his attempts to represent the beauty of the world will miscarry.<sup>65</sup>

No matter how capable someone is of producing art, if his aptitude is incomplete, if "his power of perception does not correspond point for point with the relations of surrounding Nature," he is simply not a real artist. Emerson inserted in his lecture an abbreviated version of his comprehensive transcript of Moritz's ideas from his journal. Moritz's original text reads:

Wenn nämlich das Organ nicht fein genug gewebt ist, um den einströmenden Ganzen der Natur so viele Berührungspunkte darzubieten, als nötig sind, um alle ihre großen Verhältnisse vollständig im kleinen abzuspiegeln, und uns doch ein Punkt zum völligen Schluß des Zirkels fehlt, so können wir statt der Bildungskraft nur Empfindungsfähigkeit für das Schöne haben: jeder Versuch, es außer uns wieder darzustellen, würde uns mißlingen und uns desto unzufriedener mit uns selber machen, je näher unser Empfindungsvermögen für das Schöne an das uns mangelnde Bildungsvermögen grenzt.<sup>66</sup>

It is revealing to scrutinize the way Emerson transfers Moritz's key expressions into his native language. Moritz's "abspiegeln," for instance, is rendered as "re-image" in the transcript in his journal; whereas "reflect," the closest English translation of "abspiegeln," would suggest a purely mimetic connotation of the word, the semantic "re-image" is closer to Moritz's artistic



aesthetic as both imitative and individual.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, he capitalizes not only some of the crucial German nouns such as “the Beautiful” or “the Creative,” but also pivotal adjectives for the argument Moritz is making, namely the distinction between “Bildungskraft” and “Empfindungskraft” as two essentially distinctive yet interwoven faculties allowing man to correspond with nature. The artist who finds himself “in lieu of the *Creative*,” echoes Emerson, can still be endowed with “the *Perceiving* [my emphasis] faculty for the Beautiful.”<sup>68</sup>

But why, we may ask, does the organic structure of the artist’s senses, not woven finely enough to offer the inflowing whole of nature as many points of contact as needed to mirror, or re-image completely, all its relations in miniature, force him to give up on his creative power altogether? Emerson argues that “the want of one relation destroys the harmony as much as the want of a thousand.”<sup>69</sup> Like many philosophical observations in these early essays, this remark cannot be traced back to any previous journal transcripts but nevertheless resonates powerfully with a similar statement by Moritz: “Weil nämlich das Wesen des Schönen eben in seiner Vollendung in sich selbst besteht, so schadet ihm der letzte fehlende Punkt so viel als tausend, denn er verrückt alle übrigen Punkte aus der Stelle, in welche sie gehören.”<sup>70</sup> Since it is rare to find oneself among the select few who do not lack one point or another indispensable for the essence of beauty to consist in its being complete within itself, it seems more reasonable to part with one’s amateurish energy to create altogether, especially given the fact that one’s giving up something one won’t ever successfully master anyway is rewarded with an increased susceptibility to nature’s splendor: “[das] Empfindungsvermögen eröffnet sich zum Lohne für sein bescheidnes Zurücktreten in seine Grenzen dem reinsten Genuß des Schönen, der mit der Natur seines Wesens bestehen kann.”<sup>71</sup> Emerson provides equally encouraging advice for the amateur who cannot represent true beauty in his art, for he lacks a couple or maybe even only one of these significant points which together form something that is worth labeling authentic art: “yet to that man is still left the perception of the beautiful. He has no art. He has Taste.”<sup>72</sup> Nature only rarely allows the indwelling creative power so many people believe they feel to fully develop, and the reason is simple: genuine beauty must remain rare otherwise it loses its preeminent status.<sup>73</sup>

### **Imitation and Autonomy: “The most indebted man”**

In both early lectures Moritz’s aesthetic ideas on principles of artistic production figure prominently. It is in *Nature*, however, where this concept of art as an independent entity, taking shape in a creative process, moves like



a red thread through the fabric of this dauntingly multifaceted text. There, in Emerson's key chapter on beauty, the resonance of his discussions of Moritz is most conspicuous.<sup>74</sup> However, it would be presumptuous to argue that Emerson's continuous reformulations and renegotiations of ways to make nature accessible to the human eye all point back to Moritz's aesthetics as they resonate in Emerson's journal and his early lectures. On the contrary, as Barbara Packer demonstrates convincingly, "*Nature* is a case study in the pleasures of eclecticism."<sup>75</sup> Numerous Emerson scholars have meticulously hunted down the sources the poet read or even glanced at, providing evidence that he tapped into an immensely large pool of global thought to support and enhance his intellectual probing into the issues he addresses. It would not serve the purpose of this study to further engage in identifying and discerning Emerson's sources of inspiration, demarcating traces of Moritz's aesthetics from other intellectual influences. Instead, I suggest that Emerson's appropriation of Moritz's idea of "bildende Nachahmung" provides a model of thought useful not only for discussing of perspectives on artistic production in *Nature*, but also for accessing the author's own artistic method. In other words, the method of reforming and reorganizing structures inherent in different contexts in nature in a creative new way can also be seen as a key to Emerson's own reworking of his source material.

How have critics assessed this dazzling deployment of texts and traditions in *Nature* and the rest of Emerson's essays? We can broadly distinguish between three different yet intertwined approaches. Often, the foreign influence is acknowledged as important but regarded as a confirmation of already existing tendencies in a nascent American canon, a welcome mental import that helped to authorize, reinforce and specify native impulses.<sup>76</sup> Other critics disregard the presence of non-native thought by highlighting the amateurish preoccupation of the transcendentalists with German metaphysics and concluding that foreign influences were not significant. Instead, they emphasize that this fledgling American literature is a unique homegrown product—even when (or especially when) it is a creative misreading of continental precursors.<sup>77</sup> More recent approaches, however, attempt to introduce a new vocabulary and methodology for discussing the evolution of nineteenth century American culture.

The work of Kurt Mueller-Vollmer both critically reviews this history and takes it in new directions that are especially interesting in light of the connections traced above between Moritz and Emerson. He demonstrates convincingly that understanding American intellectual culture during the decades from the 1820s through the 1840s is impossible without taking into account the pivotal role German philosophy and literature played in the shaping of a specifically American national literature. Mueller-Vollmer is,



however, not alone in making broad claims about the transatlantic impulses behind much writing in early and mid nineteenth century New England. In the most recent critical biography of Emerson, Lawrence Buell introduces the most prominent representative of the Transcendentalist movement in New England as someone we cannot think of in terms of "a single cultural context."<sup>78</sup> Emerson, he writes, has to be regarded as anticipating a "postnational form of consciousness," as a thinker who had a "surprisingly limited patience for nationalism as such and would probably have been far more supportive than critical of the increasing interest being taken today by historians of U.S. culture in how it has been shaped in interaction with transatlantic ... influences."<sup>79</sup>

This study follows the critical tradition of Mueller-Vollmer and Buell, which attempts to dislodge the Emerson who stands at the origin of a distinctly American literary tradition and recuperate an Emerson more attuned to and receptive of transatlantic literary and philosophic currents. And it proposes that the double structure of "bildende Nachahmung," of creation and imitation that Emerson develops in conversation with Moritz's work provides a framework to approach the issue of Emerson's eclecticism. In *Nature* and his lectures he talks about moments of original creation as always going hand in hand with actualizing universal laws of interrelation between individual human experience and nature. By the same token, his texts, that we admire for their refreshing independence and inventiveness, turn out to be both deeply indebted and yet unique. They are mimetic in that they emerge from a large web of foreign thinking, but to what extent then can these texts also be called original?

Regardless of the subject matter, questions of influence occupy him in basically all of his essays. "No man," he says in "Art,"

can quite emancipate himself from his age and country, or produce a model in which the education, the religion, the politics, usages, and arts, of his times shall have no share. Though he were never so original, never so willful and fantastic, he cannot wipe out of his work every trace of the thoughts amidst which it grew.<sup>80</sup>

*Nature's* chapter on "Discipline" notes in the first paragraph that "this use of the world includes preceding uses, as parts of itself."<sup>81</sup> In "Experience" he writes: "The history of literature—take the net result of Tiraboschi, Warton, or Schlegel—is a sum of very few ideas, and of very few original tales, all the rest being variations of these."<sup>82</sup> Consequently, since no true originality can exist, the best authors are the best borrowers; "the greatest genius," he



proclaims in *Representative Men*, "is the most indebted man."<sup>83</sup>

Emerson unravels the matrix of the matter of intellectual influence comprehensively in his essay, announcing the crux of the debate already in its heading: "Quotation and Originality." Quotation for Emerson is not limited to actual verbal citation; rather, it expands to take in all areas of human action and interaction, anything that is somehow historically connected: "All minds quote. Old and new make the warp and woof of every moment. There is no thread that is not a twist of these two strands.... We quote not only books and proverbs, but arts, sciences, religion, customs and laws; nay, we quote temples and houses, tables and chairs by imitation."<sup>84</sup> If we "confine ourselves to literature," we can discover innumerable degrees of influence, ranging from concrete citation to merely remote resemblances of thought.

The various ways and degrees of influence Emerson addresses enclose all genres of intellectual history and lead him to a notion of collective authorship: "Read Tasso, and you think of Virgil; read Virgil, and you think of Homer; and Milton forces you to reflect how narrow are the limits of human invention. The *Paradise Lost* had never existed but for these precursors." He continues by pointing out the common ancestors of Eastern and Western Bible traditions:

What divines had assumed as the distinctive revelations of Christianity, theologic criticism has matched by exact parallelisms from the Stoics and poets of Greece and Rome. Later, when Confucius and the Indian scriptures were made known, no claim to monopoly of ethical wisdom could be thought of; and the surprising results of the new researchers into the history of Egypt have opened to us the deep debt of the churches of Rome and England to the Egyptian hierology.<sup>85</sup>

Emerson thereby "puts an end to the Christian 'monopoly' of 'ethical wisdom' by showing its 'deep debt' to other tradition," notes Julie Ellison in *Emerson's Romantic Style*.<sup>86</sup> By the same token, mythology is introduced as an aggregation of fragmented musings of the folk; being "no man's work... the legend is tossed from believer to poet, from poet to believer, everybody adding a grace or dropping a fault, until it gets an ideal truth."

Albeit Emerson incessantly emphasizes our indebtedness to the past, he does not hold back his uneasiness about tracing any philosophical idea or modern invention back to prior forms, admitting that "there is something mortifying in this perpetual circle... [leaving] a very small capital of invention... how few thoughts!" The disassembling of complex philosophical arguments laid out by the world's intellectual elite demystifies Emerson's idea of the possibilities of original citation, and he concludes that the term "original" is



altogether inappropriate and deceptive; suggesting that it is a fatal illusion to think of any "original thought" as an unprecedented entity, he writes: "Swedenborg, Behmen, Spinoza, will appear original to uninstructed and to thoughtless persons: their originality will disappear to such as are either well read or thoughtful; for scholars will recognize their dogmas as reappearing in men of a similar intellectual elevation throughout history." Thorough scrutiny allows us to place basically every book in a long genealogy of similar thought: "Renard the Fox, a German poem of the thirteenth century, was long supposed to be the original work, until Grimm found another original a century older. M. Le Grand showed that in the old Fabiliaux were the originals of the tales of Molière, La Fontaine, Boccaccio, and of Voltaire."<sup>87</sup>

Imitation is a vexed issue for Emerson; the difference between original and unoriginal quotation is a slippery slope. From reading Emerson's early discussion of the subject's possibilities to appropriate nature in an original way along with Moritz's idea of creative imitation, we are familiar with the theoretical premises of what he takes to be authentic mimesis. In a similar way, Emerson suggests that literary indebtedness only registers as legitimate if the quoting author has also established a relationship to nature that is not mimetic in the sense of a one-to-one representation but imitative in a creative way. "As [people] do by books, so they *quote* the sunset and the star, and do not make them theirs...[they] quote thoughts and thus disown them."<sup>88</sup> The reason for man's failure is not located in the very act of not being able not to quote but in their lack of quoting creatively, of not "mak[ing] them [sunset and stars] theirs." Hence, Emerson concludes his essay by saying that "only an inventor knows how to borrow, and every man is or should be an inventor. We must not tamper with the organic motion of the soul."<sup>89</sup>

The similar patterns determining both the reception of a text and of what Emerson describes as the poet's struggles in his attempts to account for nature's beauty are obvious. A crucial difference, however, lies in the fact that in reading or quoting from a text, the reader/author is faced with something that is an outcome, a product of the practice Emerson determines as imperative for all original artistic creation. Consequently, an artist who has the ability to turn his perception of nature into production, in this case text production, always finds himself indebted in a twofold way. He is indebted to nature as a source of inspiration and in adopting certain laws of relation and incommensurability. At the same time, he finds himself as part of a web of textual discourses in which these phenomena have been expressed prior to his contemporary formulations. It is therefore logical to declare that only people who know how to "*quote* the sunset and the star"<sup>90</sup> may succeed in citing another book in an original manner. The crisis of belatedness burdening the reception of a text can only be mastered if the reader extends beyond



the past utterance and becomes a genius himself. Since the product of his desire, the text of the other, is a result of creative nature quotation—besides being of course also another item within the discursive web of prior texts—he can only grow up to the challenge of producing original work himself if his appropriation of the thoughts in the other text coincides with the skill to experience nature: “And what is Originality? It is being, being one’s self, and reporting accurately what we see and are. Genius is in the first instance, sensibility, the capacity of receiving just impressions from the external world, and the power of coordinating these after the laws of thought.”<sup>91</sup> If the author has internalized these principles, he is likely to succeed in producing something equal to the quality of the text he finds worth quoting—the “most indebted man” becomes the independent creative genius.

The preceding investigations of Emerson’s adoption and reworking of Moritz’s concept of “bildende Nachahmung” and Emerson’s multifaceted explications of the role of the texts of others for the generation of modern works suggest a notion of originality evolving from indebtedness. Emerson was intricately enfolded in the intellectual discourses of his times and highly receptive of transatlantic literary and philosophical currents. This Emerson needs to be carefully excavated, and I hope the close readings of two short texts performed here demonstrate the ways in which these currents entered into his prose. This labor needs, however, to be performed not just from the perspective of Boston, Cambridge or Concord; we need a criticism that is also attuned to the transmission of texts and ideas in Europe. Thus I also endeavor here not just to recover the textual traces of Moritz in two early essays, but also to follow the genealogy of Moritz’s ideas as they evolved out of the particularly charged atmosphere of late-eighteenth century Weimar and Rome. Emerson’s encounter with both men was culturally over-determined; his encounter with Goethe—with the *Bildungsroman*, with the *Bildungsreise*—repeated in a new context the encounter of Moritz and Goethe in Rome in 1786. I attempt here to carefully follow these encounters, retracing the steps—physical and textual—of all three men, attempting to do justice both to the cultural and historical context and to their writing. My efforts also take their cue from these writings themselves, for they are all deeply concerned with issues of imitation and autonomy, of mimesis and artistic production. I hope that these efforts demonstrate the complex ways in which “the most indebted man” turns out also to be the greatest genius.

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Notes

<sup>1</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Italian Journey*, ed. and trans. W. H. Auden, and Elizabeth Mayer (London: Penguin, 1962), 18-19.

<sup>2</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, vol. 11 of *Goethes Werke*, ed. Erich Trunz (Hamburg: Christian Wegner, 1951), 536 [my translation].

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, translations from the excerpt of Moritz's treatise in the *Italienische Reise* are taken from *Italian Journey*, vol. 6 of *Goethe: The Collected Works*, eds. Thomas P. Saine and Jeffrey L. Sammons, trans. Robert R. Heitner (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989). Further references to the English translation will be to this and not to the Auden edition.

<sup>4</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*, gen. eds. William H. Gilman et al 16 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1960-82. There are over thirty entries on Goethe between 1832 and 1834.

<sup>5</sup> Emerson, *Journals V*, 129-30.

<sup>6</sup> See Robert D. Richardson's biography *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 170-74 for a discussion of Emerson's reading of the *Italienische Reise* and his debt to Goethe. In *Emerson* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), Lawrence Buell notes that "of all the ideal character types Emerson constructed out of famous historical personages, the portrait of Goethe in *Representative Man* comes closest to a self-portrait" (47).

<sup>7</sup> The editors of Emerson's *Journals*, though they include a version of Emerson's Moritz transcript in volume five, do not ascribe these particular text passages to Moritz (*Journals V*, 129-30). And even critics who do recognize Moritz's influence read the text simply as a summary of Goethean thought; see, for example, Gustaaf van Cromphout, *Emerson's Modernity and the Example of Goethe* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990). Kurt Mueller-Vollmer is the first scholar to point out the importance of Moritz for Emerson, though he does not explore the issue in depth; see *British America and the United States, 1770s-1850s*, vol. 2 of *The Internationality of National Literatures in Either America: Transfer and Transformation*, ed. Armin Paul Frank and Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2000), 308-18.

<sup>8</sup> The subject of travel literature has been the focus of much recent scholarly work; for a useful recent summary, see the bibliography and relevant chapters of Tim Youngs and Peter Hulme, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Rudolf Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship: From 1300 - 1850*, (Oxford: 1972), 167.

<sup>10</sup> Many ideas in this paragraph on the German relation to classical culture are drawn from James Sheehan's interesting overview of "Eighteenth-Century Culture" in *German History, 1770-1866* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 144-90.

<sup>11</sup> In her enormously influential study of German character and culture, *De l'Allemagne*, Madame de Staël locates this collective enthusiasm for classical civilization precisely in the lack of direct Roman influence: "The Germanic nations steadily resisted the Roman yoke; they were civilized later and solely by Christianity. They passed directly from a sort of barbarism to Christian society. The era of chivalry and the spirit of the middle ages are their strongest memories. Though their learned men have studied the Greek and Latin authors even more than have the Latin nations themselves, the genius natural to German writers belongs to an earlier era but not to antiquity" (*Germaine de Staël: Politics, Literature, and National Character*, ed. and trans. Morroe Berger [NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2000], 274). For these reasons, de Staël believed, Germany offers the best of modern—Romantic—thought. This text was translated into German and, significantly, into English in 1814; the latter edition was published in the United States and was a formative influence on American—and especially New England—



ideas of German Romantic philosophy and literature.

<sup>12</sup> See Gretchen L. Hachmeister's introduction to *Italy in the German Literary Imagination: Goethe's "Italian Journey" and Its Reception by Eichendorff, Platen, and Heine* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Gunther E. Grimm, "Ein Gefühl von freierem Leben": *Deutsche Dichter in Italien* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1990), 61.

<sup>14</sup> Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, 125-26.

<sup>15</sup> Norbert Miller, *Der Wanderer: Goethe in Italien* (München: Karl Hanser Verlag, 2002), 146.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, *Der Wanderer*, 148-49, and Nicholas Boyle, *Goethe: der Dichter in seiner Zeit* (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1995), 637.

<sup>17</sup> Cited in German in Miller, *Der Wanderer*, 149.

<sup>18</sup> Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, 400.

<sup>19</sup> See Alessandro Costazza's overview of the reception of Moritz in "Die ausbleibende Rezeption von Moritz' Ästhetik" in his *Schönheit und Nützlichkeit: Karl Philipp Moritz und die Ästhetik des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1996), 11-33. In *Goethe-Studien* (Graz: Böhlau, 1962), Hans Pyritz calls Moritz's text "eine wundervoll gestraffte und verdichtete Übersetzung Goethischer Kunstgedanken in Moritzens spekulativ geschulter Sprache" (26). Devaluing Moritz's philosophical and intellectual capacities, he claims that Goethe's student could never have composed such a text which clearly lies far beyond his capacities. Pyritz notes: "Nie hätte Moritz, der geistig so ganz andere Wege als Goethe gegangen war, diese Synthese zwischen Geniegefühl und klassischem Griechenerlebnis von sich aus vollziehen können. Sie muß ihm zugebracht worden sein von dem einzigen, der sie eben in sich selber gefunden hatte" (33).

<sup>20</sup> Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, 534.

<sup>21</sup> Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, 534.

<sup>22</sup> See Nicholas Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 497.

<sup>23</sup> Karl Philipp Moritz, "Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen," in *Schriften zur Ästhetik und Poetik*, ed. Hans Joachim Schrimpf (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1962), 73.

<sup>24</sup> Moritz, "Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen," 73.

<sup>25</sup> Moritz, "Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen," 74.

<sup>26</sup> See Boyle, *The Poet and the Age*, 497.

<sup>27</sup> For Dr. Johnson, for instance, that meaning was still unknown; when he refers in his *Dictionary* to many different "arts," he chooses as one example "the art of boiling sugar." And even in Herder's *Ideas*, "art" often means something like "technology," covering for example ship-building and navigation (Boyle, *The Poet and the Age*, 498).

<sup>28</sup> See Sheehan, *German History*, 151.

<sup>29</sup> The notions that artistic productions "are self-contained little worlds, in something like the way in which the great world, the universe, is self-contained, that these products can no more be judged by standards (for example, moral standards) external to them than can the universe, and that their producers are thus analogous to the producer of the universe Himself and so are rightly called creators—these notions had all separately been developing in the matrix of eighteenth-century German aesthetics and Moritz brings them together within a brief compass and demonstrates their interrelation." Boyle, *The Poet and the Age*, 498.

<sup>30</sup> Cited in Boyle, *The Poet and the Age*, 499.

<sup>31</sup> Boyle, *The Poet and the Age*, 499.

<sup>32</sup> Cited in Volker C. Dörr, "Reminiscenzen": *Goethe und Karl Philipp Moritz in intertextuellen Lektüren* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1999) 119.

<sup>33</sup> On Moritz's imitation of Werther, see Karl Gotthold Lenz's "Karl Philipp Moritz,"



in *Nekrolog auf das Jahr 1793*, ed. Friedrich Schlichtegroll (Gotta: 1795), 209 and Dörr, "Reminiszenzen," 121.

<sup>34</sup> On the enthusiastic reception of Goethe in New England see Frank Mehring, "American German Mania: Kritische Anmerkungen zur Goethe-Kontroverse aus deutsch-amerikanischer Perspektive 1815-1850," *Forum Vormärz Forschung* 9 (2003), 171-201.

<sup>35</sup> Emerson, *Journals* IV, 46.

<sup>36</sup> See Richardson, *Emerson*, 127.

<sup>37</sup> Richardson, *Emerson*, 127.

<sup>38</sup> Gay Wilson Allen, *Waldo Emerson: A Biography*, (New York: The Viking Press, 1981), 195-198.

<sup>39</sup> Emerson, *Journals* V, 314.

<sup>40</sup> Mueller-Vollmer, *British America and the United States*, 312; Henry A. Pochmann, *German Culture in America: Philosophical and Literary Influences 1600-1900* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957), 594-95, n.118.

<sup>41</sup> Emerson, *Journals* IV, 129-130.

<sup>42</sup> Emerson, *Journals* IV, 130, n.394.

<sup>43</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, eds. Stephen Whicher, Robert E. Spiller, vol. I, 1833-36, 87-117, and vol. II, 1836-38, 262-77 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959-1964).

<sup>44</sup> Mueller-Vollmer, *British America and the United States*, 313, n.49.

<sup>45</sup> Emerson, *Journals* IV, 160

<sup>46</sup> Emerson, *Journals* IV, 168.

<sup>47</sup> Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, 145. See Sigrid Bauschinger, *Die Posaune der Reform: Deutsche Literatur im Neuengland des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1989), 27, 29.

<sup>48</sup> "What other standard of the Beautiful exists, than the entire circuit of all harmonious proportions of the great system of Nature?" asks Emerson like Moritz. He then provides the same answer: "All particular beauties scattered up and down in nature, are only so far beautiful as they suggest more or less in themselves this entire circuit of harmonious proportions" (Emerson, *Early Lectures* I, 101, n.4). Moritz also first asks the rhetorical question: "Was gibt es noch für einen Vergleichspunkt für das echte Schöne, als mit dem Inbegriff aller harmonischen Verhältnisse des großen Ganzen der Natur, die keine Denkkraft umfassen kann?" [Moritz's remark that the whole of nature cannot be embraced by the cogitative power – Denkkraft – has not been omitted by Emerson but simply put right before and not after the question: "What other standard of the Beautiful exists..."] and then answers: "Alles einzelne hin und her in der Natur zerstreute Schöne, ist ja nur in so fern schön, als sich dieser Inbegriff aller Verhältnisse jenes grossen Ganzen mehr oder weniger darin offenbart" (Moritz, "Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen," 78 and Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, 536). Compare also Emerson's transcript in his notebook: Emerson, *Journals* V, 129.

<sup>49</sup> Emerson, *Early Lectures* I, 101.

<sup>50</sup> Sigrid Bauschinger, for example, who actually notices that Emerson, when he talks about Michelangelo in his lectures, refers back to Moritz and not Goethe, makes no further commentary about Emerson's precise borrowings. In a move that finds resonance in many critical comments on Emerson's use of German philosophy, she argues that Emerson's engagement with "Über die bildende Nachahmung" is just an indicator of the amateurish reception by New England's intellectuals of foreign sources in general. Bauschinger, *Die Posaune der Reform*, 31.

<sup>51</sup> Emerson, *Early Lectures* I, 98-101.

<sup>52</sup> Emerson, *Early Lectures* II, 262-66.

<sup>53</sup> Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, 535: "Alle die in der tätigen Kraft bloß dunkel geahndeten Verhältnisse jenes großen Ganzen müssen notwendig auf irgendeine Weise entweder sichtbar,



hörbar, oder doch der Einbildungskraft faßbar werden.“ See also Moritz, “Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen,” 76.

<sup>54</sup> Emerson, *Early Lectures* II, 266.

<sup>55</sup> Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, 535, and Moritz, “Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen,” 76.

<sup>56</sup> Emerson, *Early Lectures* II, 266.

<sup>57</sup> Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, 535, and Moritz, “Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen,” 76. For the English translation see Goethe, *Italian Journey*, 432.

<sup>58</sup> Emerson, *Early Lectures* II, 266.

<sup>59</sup> Emerson, *Early Lectures* II, 267.

<sup>60</sup> Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, 535, and Moritz, “Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen,” 76-77.

<sup>61</sup> Emerson, *Early Lectures* II, 267-269.

<sup>62</sup> See Mueller-Vollmer, *British America and the United States*, 313, n.49 and Emerson, *Journals* IV, 130, n.394.

<sup>63</sup> Emerson, *Early Lectures* II, 267.

<sup>64</sup> Emerson, *Early Lectures* I, 101.

<sup>65</sup> Emerson, *Early Lectures* II, 267.

<sup>66</sup> Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, 537, and Moritz, “Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen,” 78-79.

<sup>67</sup> See also Mueller-Vollmer, *British America and the United States*, 315.

<sup>68</sup> “When namely the Organ is not (fine enough) close woven enough to present to the in-streaming All of Nature so many points of contact as are necessary in order to re-image in miniature with completeness all her great proportions, and there still is lacking to us a point to the fulfillment of the Circle, then can we, in lieu of the Creative, have the Perceiving faculty for the Beautiful. Every experiment to (describe) represent it again, out of us, will miscarry, and make us so much more dissatisfied with ourselves the nearer our susceptible power borders on the deficient Creative power” (Emerson, *Journals* V, 130).

<sup>69</sup> Emerson, *Early Lectures* II, 267.

<sup>70</sup> Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, 537, and Moritz, “Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen,” 79.

<sup>71</sup> Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, 539, and Moritz, “Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen,” 80.

<sup>72</sup> Emerson, *Early Lectures* II, 267.

<sup>73</sup> Compare Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, 540, and Moritz, “Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen,” 81.

<sup>74</sup> On the repercussions of Emerson’s engagement with Moritz in the section on beauty in *Nature* see Mueller-Vollmer, *British America and the United States*, 308-18.

<sup>75</sup> Barbara Packer, *Emerson’s Fall: A New Interpretation of the Major Essays* (New York: Continuum, 1982), 25.

<sup>76</sup> In 1955, Stanley M. Vogel wrote in his introduction to *German Literary Influences on the American Transcendentalists* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1955) that “The value of this German philosophy to these New Englanders, however, lay not in obtaining an exact doctrine but in the authorization it gave to their own ideas, and especially the presence of God in the individual heart. . . . Transcendentalism was a faith rather than a philosophy, and it went to Germany to find confirmation of that faith.” In *R.W. Emersons Naturauffassung, und ihre philosophischen Ursprünge. Eine Interpretation des Emersonschen Denkens aus dem Blickwinkel des deutschen Idealismus* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1987), Thomas Krusche portrays the New England poet as an independent thinker whose writing bears a striking proximity to German works on metaphysics. Although the influence of the



German philosophical inheritance on Emerson cannot be overlooked, Krusche believes his mode of thinking is nevertheless essentially rooted in the past of his Puritan ancestors: "Wenn in der vorliegenden Arbeit das Hauptgewicht auf Emersons Auseinandersetzung mit dem Denken des deutschen Idealismus gelegt wird, so soll damit keineswegs geleugnet werden, dass Emersons Transzendentalismus zunächst als Weiterentwicklung des amerikanischen Puritanismus verstanden werden muß" (27). Cf. Bauschinger, *Posaunen der Reform*, 60, and Patrick Labriola, "Ralph Waldo Emerson's Nature: Puritan Typology and German Idealism," *The Concord Saunterer*, N.S. vol. 10, 125-33.

<sup>77</sup> See Pochmann, *German Culture*, and René Wellek, "Emerson and German Philosophy," *New England Quarterly*, XIV, March 1943, 41-62.

<sup>78</sup> Buell, *Emerson*, 4. When it comes to the question of what made up the fabric of New England literary culture, Buell's latest research differs markedly from his earlier studies. In *New England Literary Culture: From Revolution through Renaissance* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1986), he depicts literary history in America as an integral cultural process which evolved from colonial provincialism to a supra-regional status representative of an American national culture (3). In the postscript, however, Buell acknowledges that the "regional impulse" could only partially explain the literary culture in New England, for numerous literary forms and conventions deployed by its writers had been derived from European models (371). In *Emerson*, he accounts for the fact that the important authors of nineteenth century American literary culture were international in the scope of their reading and the sources they appropriated by stating that we have to think of Emerson in terms of four cultural contexts: "the regional-ethnic, the national, the transatlantic, and the global" (4). Emerson, Buell writes, strove to overcome national allegiances: "for most of his life [he] attached less intrinsic value to such allegiances than is usually thought. For this reason I pay an unusual amount of attention to lines of connection between Emerson and foreign sources, contemporaries, and readers" (4).

<sup>79</sup> Buell, *Emerson*, 3.

<sup>80</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Art," *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson. Vol. 2 (London: Archibald Constable, 1903), 352-53.

<sup>81</sup> Emerson, *Nature*, 23.

<sup>82</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Experience," *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, ed. Joel Porte and Sandra Morris (New York: Norton, 2001) 199.

<sup>83</sup> Emerson is referring to Shakespeare here in *Representative Men*, see Emerson, *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*, 247.

<sup>84</sup> Emerson, "Quotation and Originality," 178-79.

<sup>85</sup> Emerson, "Quotation and Originality," 180-82.

<sup>86</sup> Julie Ellison, *Emerson's Romantic Style* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 144.

<sup>87</sup> Emerson, "Quotation and Originality," 179-81.

<sup>88</sup> Emerson, "Quotation and Originality," 188.

<sup>89</sup> Emerson, "Quotation and Originality," 204.

<sup>90</sup> Emerson, "Quotation and Originality," 188.

<sup>91</sup> Emerson, "Quotation and Originality," 201.

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