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Karl Philipp Moritz' *Götterlehre* and the Freedom of the Artwork and Artist

C. Allen Speight[*]

ABSTRACT

Karl Philipp Moritz has been heralded as the "first to have combined in his work all the ideas" (Todorov) that came to determine the romantic aesthetic—above all, in the new attention Moritz directed to the artwork as a self-signifying totality and to the creative power of the artist. This paper offers a re-exploration of the relation between these two sides of Moritz' interest in the freedom of art, examining them through the lens of his own roles as author and interpreter of myth in his *Götterlehre oder mythologische Dichtungen der Alten*.

Keywords: Moritz, aesthetics, freedom, myth, Todorov

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Karl Philipp Moritz wurde als der „erste gepriesen, der in seinem Werk alle Ideen vereinte" (Todorov), die die romantische Ästhetik bestimmten. Dieses Lob bezieht sich vor allem auf die Aufmerksamkeit, die Moritz dem Kunstwerk als einer selbstbedeutenden Gesamtheit widmete sowie auf seine Untersuchung der schöpferischen Kraft des Künstlers. Dieser Aufsatz bietet eine erneute Untersuchung der Beziehung zwischen diesen beiden Aspekten in Moritz' Interesse an der Freiheit der Kunst und untersucht sie im Hinblick auf seine eigene Rolle als Autor und Interpret von Mythen in seiner *Götterlehre oder mythologischen Dichtungen der Alten*.

Stichwörter: Moritz, Ästhetik, Freiheit, Mythos, Todorov

[*] Professor of Philosophy, Department of Philosophy, Boston University, 745 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts 02215 – casp8@bu.edu

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1. Introduction

Although he remains still far less known than many other central figures in the development of German aesthetics, Karl Philipp Moritz (1756-93) is an important source for understanding key shifts that open up in the aesthetics of the romantic age. Tzvetan Todorov in fact heralded Moritz (as opposed to a range of other possible options, including Herder, Rousseau, Vico and Shaftesbury) as the "first to have combined in his work all the ideas" that came to determine the aesthetics of romanticism. For Todorov, Moritz' importance for romantic aesthetics could be seen especially in the new attention he directed toward two aspects of freedom in artistic engagement: the *artwork as a self-signifying totality* and *the creative power of the artist*.[1] This paper offers a re-exploration of the relation between these two sides of Moritz' interest in the freedom of art, examining them particularly through the lens of his own roles as author and interpreter of myth (and of the artistic modes of its creation and re-creation) in his *Götterlehre oder mythologische Dichtungen der Alten*.

This paper will first explore the two claims that lie behind Todorov's assessment of Moritz' importance for Romantic aesthetics—the first concerning the freedom of the artwork and the second concerning the freedom of the artist—as they appear in two crucial texts by Moritz. § 2 will explore his 1785 "Attempt to Unify All the Fine Arts and Sciences under the Concept of 'That Which is Complete in Itself'" ("*Versuch einer Vereinigung aller schönen Künste und Wissenschaften unter dem Begriff des in sich selbst Vollendeten*").[2] § 3 will examine his 1788 essay "On the Artistic Imitation of the Beautiful" ("*Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen*").[3] After examining Moritz' claims in these two essays, § 4 will show how the relationship between these two claims about artwork and artist plays out in Moritz' *Götterlehre oder mythologische Dichtungen der Alten*—frequently cited as a forerunner to Romantic appropriations of mythology by Schelling, Schlegel, and others.[4] The key argument pursued here is that Moritz sees Greek mythology as an

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[1] Tzvetan Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 6.

[2] Karl Philipp Moritz, *Beiträge zur Ästhetik*, ed. Hans Joachim Schrimpf and Hans Adler (Mainz: Dietrich'sche, 1989), 3-9; English translation by Elliott Schreiber in *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 127.1 (2012): 94-99.

[3] English translation in J.M. Bernstein, ed., *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 131-144.

[4] Karl Philipp Moritz, *Götterlehre oder mythologische Dichtungen der Alten* (Berlin: A.W. Schade, 1816). There is a nineteenth century English translation of the *Götterlehre* by Charles Frederick William Jaeger, *Mythological Fictions of the Greeks and Romans* (New York: Carvill, 1830) [reprinted by Forgotten Books (London 2018)].

ideal poetic point of fusion between the two sides of his claims about freedom, a point which has a number of important ramifications, including how we are to understand the relation of differing artistic genres and the relation between ancient and modern conceptions of art's relation to life. These questions (§ 5) emerge especially in Moritz' encounter with two singular artists: Goethe, who took great interest in Moritz' two essays on aesthetics during their time in Rome, and whose influence is reflected in the *Götterlehre* and other publications that Moritz pursued following his Italian sojourn; and Asmus Jakob Carstens, a friend of Goethe's whose collaboration produced the *Götterlehre*'s extraordinary illustrations of mythological subjects.

2. The Artwork as "Complete in Itself"

Published in 1785, Moritz' "Attempt to Unify All the Fine Arts and Sciences under the Concept of 'That Which is Complete in Itself'" (*Versuch einer Vereinigung aller schönen Künste und Wissenschaften unter dem Begriff des in sich selbst Vollendeten*) is credited with offering a classic formulation of the notion of the "intransitive signification" of artworks—that works of art signify nothing outside themselves.[5]

Dedicated at its first printing in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* to Moses Mendelssohn, Moritz' concise nine-paragraph essay initially situates itself within a familiar set of earlier eighteenth century attempts to give an account of the *unity* of the fine arts.[6] Moritz' essay begins with a discussion of the *pleasure* we take in works of art and how it can help distinguish the beautiful from the useful. When it's a matter of *usefulness*, he argues, one regards an object merely as a means to one's own comfort or convenience:

> The merely useful object is thus not whole or complete in itself but only becomes so by achieving its end in me, or by becoming complete in me. But when regarding the beautiful object I roll the end out of myself and back into the object itself: I regard it as something that is not complete in me but is rather *complete in itself*, that thereby constitutes a totality in itself and affords me pleasure *for its own sake*.[7]

[5] Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol*, 162.
[6] The initial dedication to Mendelssohn did not appear in later editions. On Moritz' sources and intellectual debts, see the wider discussion in Alessandro Costazza, *Schönheit und Nützlichkeit: Karl Philipp Moritz und die Ästhetik des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1996).
[7] Karl Philipp Moritz, "An Attempt to Unify All the Fine Arts and Sciences under the Concept of 'That Which is Complete in Itself,'" 97.

> Der bloss nützliche Gegenstand ist also in sich nichts Ganzes oder Vollendetes, sondern wird es erst, indem er in mir seinen Zweck erreicht, oder in mir vollendet wird. Bei der Betrachtung des Schönen aber wälze ich den Zweck aus mir in den Gegenstand selbst zurück: ich betrachte ihn, als etwas, nicht in mir, sondern in sich selbst Vollendetes, das also in sich ein Ganzes ausmacht, und mir um sein selbst willen Vergnügen gewährt; indem ich dem schönen Gegenstande nicht sowohl eine Beziehung auf mich, als mir vielmehr eine Beziehung auf ihn gebe.[8]

Moritz argues that works of art that give us pleasure involve an *internal purposiveness*: "I must find so much purposiveness in its individual parts that I forget to ask, What is actually the point of the whole thing? In other words, I must find pleasure in a beautiful object only for its own sake; to this end, the lack of external purposiveness must be compensated for by inner purposiveness; the object must be complete in itself."[9]

Although Moritz' claims here are sometimes taken to be forerunners of Kant's notions of disinterestedness and purposiveness-without-purpose in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, as well as the later notion of "art for art's sake," there are reasons to distinguish these later claims from Moritz' argument for the artwork's "completeness in itself." Paul Guyer, for example, reads Kant's notion of "subjective" or "formal" purposiveness as "probably a repudiation" of Moritz' conception rather than as a successor to it: "What Moritz actually held is that the 'internal purposiveness' of a work of art is an intimation of the perfection of the world as a whole, and that we enjoy it precisely as such an intimation."[10]

Interestingly, Moritz' language seems to suggest a position that does not seem predicated on a division between subjective and objective sides of aesthetic experience at all, but rather one that makes a case for their inherent interrelationship and reciprocity.[11] Moritz' notion is that as aesthetic

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[8] Moritz, *Beiträge zur Ästhetik*, ed. Hans Joachim Schrimpf and Hans Adler (Mainz: Dietrich'sche, 1989), 3.

[9] Moritz, "An Attempt to Unify," 99.

[10] Paul Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics: Volume I: The Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 412. On the issue of disinterestedness and its connections to the notion of autonomy, see also the cautionary discussion in Mattias Pirholt, "Disinterested Love: Ethics and Aesthetics in Karl Philipp Moritz's 'Versuch einer Vereinigung aller schönen Künste und Wissenschaften unter dem Begriff es in sich selbst Vollendeten,'" *Goethe Yearbook* 27 (2020): 63-81.

[11] I follow here the argument of several readers of Moritz' essay who have emphasized the relationality and process-oriented character of Moritz' claims here, including Pirholt, Edgar Landgraf ("Self-Forming Selves: Autonomy and Artistic Creativity in Goethe and Moritz," *Goethe Yearbook* 11 (2002): 159-76), and Erdmann Waniek ("Karl Philipp Moritz's Concept of the Whole in his *Versuch einer Vereinigung*," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 12 (1983): 213-222).

spectators our *regard* for the artwork as being *complete in itself* is something that evolves precisely from an interactive relationship with it. As he nicely puts it, we "*roll back*" the purposiveness inherent in art *to the object itself*: this way of describing the relationship suggests both that, while there is something original in the object itself that must in some way be *returned* to it, my own action of returning that purposiveness is nonetheless a crucial aspect of the experience I have with beauty.

Moritz' essay emphasizes this relationship between spectator and artwork further in his account of the correlative *need* between work and spectator. On the one hand, he argues, one does not contemplate a work of art *because* one needs it—one needs it only insofar as one can contemplate it (*man braucht es nur, insofern man es betrachten kann*). On the other hand, the beautiful work of art *needs us* in order to be recognized (*erkannt*), as Moritz memorably points out—for why else do we feel displeasure if an excellent performance is given to an empty theater?

> We can easily exist without contemplating beautiful works of art, but they cannot very well exist as such without our contemplating them. So the more we are able to do without them, the more we contemplate them for their own sake, in order, through contemplating them, to give them their true, full existence. For through our growing recognition of beauty in a beautiful artwork, we magnify its beauty, as it were, and endow it with ever more value. Hence our impatient demand that everyone pay homage to what we have recognized as beautiful…[12]
>
> Wir können sehr gut ohne die Betrachtung schöner Kunstwerke bestehen, diese aber können, als solche, nicht wohl ohne unsre Betrachtung bestehen. Je mehr wir sie also entbehren können, desto mehr betrachten wir sie um ihrer selbst willen, um ihnen durch unsre Betrachtung gleichsam erst wahres volles Dasein zu geben. Denn durch unsre zunehmende Anerkennung des Schönen in einem schönen Kunstwerke vergrössern wir gleichsam seine Schönheit selber, und legen immer mehr Werth hinein. Daher das ungeduldige Verlangen, dass alles dem Schönen huldigen soll, welches wir einmal dafür erkannt haben…[13]

If Moritz' argument here regarding *need* opens up a set of claims crucial for the relation between *artwork and spectator*—including, as he develops it, the importance of a correlation between aesthetic disinterestedness and a selfless form of love—there is a further elaboration of the relation between *artwork and artist* that will become crucial for his later essay on imitation.

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[12] Schreiber, *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 127.1 (2012): 98.
[13] Moritz, *Beiträge zur Ästhetik*, 4-5.

The latter part of the essay imagines a dialogue with an artist about the proper understanding of pleasure and purposiveness in art that provides a helpful context for Moritz' sometimes misconstrued image of the empty theater:

> If pleasure were not *such a subordinate goal*, or rather only a natural consequence of beautiful works of art, why would not the genuine artist attempt to spread this pleasure to as many people as possible rather than sacrifice to the perfection of his work the pleasant feelings of many thousands of people who have no sense for its beauty?—If the artist says, 'But if people like my work or find pleasure in it, I have achieved my purpose,' I answer, On the contrary! Because you have achieved your purpose, people like your work; or the fact that people like your work *can perhaps be a sign* that you have achieved your purpose in the work itself.[14]
>
> Wenn das Vergnügen nicht ein *so sehr untergeordneter Zweck*, oder vielmehr nur eine natürliche Folge bei den Werken der schönen Künste wäre; warum würde der ächte Künstler es denn nicht auf so viele als möglich zu verbreiten suchen, statt dass er oft die angenehmen Empfindungen von vielen Tausenden, die für eine Schönheiten keinen Sinn haben, der Vollkommenheit seines Werks aufopfert?—Sagt der Künstler: aber wenn mein Werk gefällt oder Vergnügen erweckt, so habe ich doch meinen Zweck erreicht; so antworte ich: umgekehrt! Weil du deinen Zweck erreicht hast, so gefällt dein Werk, oder dass dein Werk gefällt, *kann vielleicht ein Zeichen* sein, dass du deinen Zweck in dem Werke selbst erreicht hast.[15]

In looking at the essay as a whole, the key for both the artwork / spectator and artwork / artist relationships would seem to be Moritz' overarching emphasis on inner purposiveness as what makes an object "complete in itself": "In other words, I must find pleasure in a beautiful object only for its own sake; to this end, the lack of external purposiveness must be compensated for by inner purposiveness; the object must be complete in itself."[16]

This keynote of Moritz' early essay is echoed elsewhere with reference for our interest in Moritz' ultimate claims about ancient art and mythology. In his essay *Über die Allegorie*, Moritz holds up beauty's completeness in contrast with allegory (or hieroglyphical expressions on works like obelisks or pyramids), which he thinks signify *something else* (*allos*): "The genuinely

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[14] Schreiber, *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 127.1 (2012): 99.
[15] Moritz, *Beiträge zur Ästhetik*, 7.
[16] Schreiber, *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 127.1 (2012): 99.

beautiful (*das wahre Schöne*) consists in the fact that an object just means itself (*bloss sich selbst bedeute*), signifies itself (*sich selbst bezeichne*), contains itself, is a *whole that is complete in itself*. An obelisk means—the hieroglyphs on it mean—something *outside* it (*nach aussen*) which are not itself and receive their value solely through this [external] meaning…"[17]

3. The Artist and the Role of Imitation

There are substantial internal connections between Moritz' 1785 "Concept of 'That Which is Complete in Itself'" essay and his 1788 essay "On the Artistic Imitation of the Beautiful" ("*Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen*"). The earlier essay, concerned as it is with the question of *unifying* the arts, had begun with the insistence that the principle of the "imitation of nature" could no longer serve as "the ultimate purpose of the fine arts and sciences" and both essays address the importance of pleasure for parsing the relations between beauty and utility.

The "Imitation" essay takes Moritz' argument somewhat further in terms of the role of the artist. It begins its discussion of *bildende* imitation with what it means to *ethically* imitate someone. Socrates, for example, became the aspirational goal of ethical imitation for philosophers across a range of Hellenistic schools of philosophy, but the path of following a command like "imitate Socrates" is different from what an actor would need to take into account in imitating the *actions* of Socrates onstage (as presumably some actor with Aristophanes' lines for the *Clouds* must have done in 5th century BCE Athens).

Not only must we distinguish between imitating someone's *actions* (in the sense of copying the way they walk or talk) and imitating someone's *character* (in the sense of following their way of life), but we must also think about the difference in imitation as it involves ethical and aesthetic matters. A key distinction for Moritz in this regard seems to be that (unlike the ethical imitation of the good), the beautiful "can't enter us through imitation" but must be *created or produced out of us*:

> [I]nsofar as it distinguishes itself from the noble, which is only understood as out in opposition to the inner, the beautiful cannot enter us through imitation—it must, if it is to be imitated by us, necessarily be created out of us… Genuine imitation of the beautiful distinguishes itself from the moral imitation of the good and the noble primarily

[17] Karl Philipp Moritz, "Über die Allegorie," in *Schriften zur Ästhetik und Poetik*, ed. Hans Joachim Schrimpf (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1962), 113.

> because, according to its nature, it must strive not, as the other does, to create something within itself but must create out of itself."[18]

> Das Schöne aber, insofern es sich dadurch vom Edlen unterscheidet, daß, im Gegensatz gegen das innre, bloß das äußre Schöne darunter verstanden wird, kann durch die Nachahmung nicht in uns herein-, sondern muß, wenn es von uns nachgeahmt werden soll, notwendig wieder aus uns herausgebildet werden… Die eigentliche Nachahmung des Schönen unterscheidet sich also zuerst von der moralischen Nachahmung des Guten und Edlen dadurch, daß sie, ihrer Natur nach, streben muß, nicht wie diese in sich hinein-, sondern aus sich herauszubilden.[19]

Moritz' language of beauty in terms of *creation or production* here—which echoes the language of the "*Vereinigung*" essay's notion of our "rolling back out of ourselves" a purposiveness into the beautiful work of art itself—opens up a new understanding of the role of the artist: breaking free of a limited, copyistic notion of "imitating nature " in favor of a notion of the artist as imitating in the sense of taking up nature's productive / creative force: as Todorov puts it, Moritz' innovation is to change the subject of the verb "imitate" (and hence what is imitated): it is now the *artist*, not the *work*, that imitates and he imitates nature not as a *product* but as a *productive principle*: one should speak of *construction*, not imitation—the artist has a power to *form*, a *Bildungs-kraft*.

In the context of this essay, Moritz thus does not completely leave a notion of mimesis behind, but it is understood in a broader way in the sense of a poiesis that is rooted in the power of nature: "The creative genius's horizon of active power must be *as extensive as nature itself*" and "each beautiful whole coming from the hand of the artist is thus an impression in miniature of the highest beauty of the whole of nature; *mediated* through the hand of the artist, it recreates that which does not immediately belong to the great plan."[20]

Moritz' account of what the creative artist in this new sense of non-copyistic imitation does is above all to *penetrate* to nature's being:

> Whoever has been impressed by nature with a sense of the creative power in his whole being, and has received the impression of the *measure* of the beautiful in his eye and soul, cannot content himself merely to observe it; he must imitate it, strive after it, eavesdrop on nature in its

[18] Moritz, "On the Artistic Imitation of the Beautiful", 134.
[19] Moritz, *Beiträge zur Ästhetik*, 66, 67.
[20] Moritz, "On the Artistic Imitation of the Beautiful", 141.

> secret workshop and make and create with blazing flames in his heart, as nature itself does: he does this by penetrating the inner being of nature, to the very spring of beauty itself…[21]
>
> Wem also von der Natur selbst der Sinn für ihre Schöpfungskraft in sein ganzes Wesen und das *Maß* 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: Indem seine glühende Spähungskraft in das Innre der Wesen dringt, bis auf den Quell der Schönheit selbst…[22]

These passages emphasize several themes that will be key for Moritz' *Götterlehre*. The creative artist's powers must be seen as being reflective of the natural order of the cosmos—yet *also* not understandable just in allegorical terms but as active and reciprocal productive forces within the world. And those creative powers are precisely ones that must be understood as parts of a productive force (*Bildungskraft*) that at their best strive to get at nature's secrets—descriptions that influenced both of the artists whose influential treatments of mythological figures such as Prometheus inspired Moritz' *Götterlehre*.

4. Art and Artist in Moritz' *Götterlehre*

Moritz' *Götterlehre oder mythologische Dichtungen der Alten* was published in 1790, one of the key works that followed the Italian journey he shared with Goethe.[23] It is striking that interpretation of Moritz' text has turned especially on the role of central oppositions in that work: Elliott Schreiber has traced the opposition between competing aesthetic demands of "containment" and

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[21] Moritz, "On the Artistic Imitation of the Beautiful," 139. "Nature… could only plant the sense of the highest beauty in the power of action, and could only make the mediated impression of this highest beauty palpable in the imagination, visible to the eyes, audible to the ears, because the horizon of the power to act encompasses more than the outer senses, the imagination and the power of thought," Moritz, "On the Artistic Imitation of the Beautiful," 140.

[22] Moritz, *Beiträge zur Ästhetik*, 73.

[23] In addition to the *Götterlehre*, Moritz published also a travelogue of his Italian journeys and a remarkable exploration of life in antiquity he titled *ANTHOUSA oder Roms Alterthümer: Ein Buch für die Menschheit* (1791). On the latter, see Carl-Friedrich Berghahn, "'Kostbarste Ueberreste'. Das Bild der Antike in Karl Philipp Moritz' *Anthusa*," *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, NF 16 (2006): 623-632; and "Anthropologie und Ästhetik in Karl Philipp Moritz' Italienischen Schriften (Reisen eines Deutschen in Italien, Götterlehre, ANTHOUSA)," in *Aspekte der Romantik in Europa. Ein deutsch-italienisches Symposion*, Sonderband der Germanisch-Romanischen Monatsschrift, ed. Renate Stauf and Cord-Friedrich Berghahn (Heidelberg 2005), 25-45.

"free play," for example, and Alexander Hampton the opposition between the transcendental and immanent.[24] In this section, I want to use the discussion of the previous two sections to emphasize the opposition—or perhaps better the inter-action—between the two sides of the poetic encounter that are central to Moritz' notion of freedom: the artist and the art work.

Key to both sides of this opposition is understanding the role of *Phantasie*, which Moritz places at the center of the initial section of the *Götterlehre* as a whole. This initial section is focused on what Moritz called the correct "point of view" (*Gesichtspunkt*) required for exploring mythological poetry (*mythologische Dichtungen*). Mythological poetry, Moritz argues, must be understood above all as a *language of imagination* (*Sprache der Phantasie*)—and, taken in this sense, it will "constitute a world for itself" and at the same time be "lifted above the connection to actual things" ("Die mythologischen Dichtungen müssen als eine Sprache der Phantasie betrachtet werden: als eine solche genommen, machen sie gleichsam eine Welt für sich aus, und sind aus dem Zusammenhange der wirklichen Dinge herausgehoben").[25]

These initial claims—which Moritz says will provide the guiding thread (*Leitfaden*) though the "labyrinth" of ancient mythological works—set up a twofold consideration about mythological poetry and its "completeness": on the one hand, imagination creates a "world for itself" that has its own totality (the key claim of the first of the earlier essays discussed), but it is a world that is construed precisely in terms of its being lifted above "actual things."

Such is precisely the imaginative appeal, Moritz says, of myth: on the one hand, since it concerns the prehistory of human experience, it can be explored with greater imaginative freedom (imagination can here "reign without resistance" in her own realm), but on the other hand, insofar as it does shape the human world that follows, mythological poetry cannot be viewed as "mere play of wit (*blosses Spiel des Witzes*)." Thus the ancient stories are "not a mere dream or hollow poetic production", but gain through their connection to ancient events "a weight which prevents them from dissolving into mere allegory."[26]

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[24] Elliott Schreiber, *The Topography of Modernity: Karl Philipp Moritz and the Space of Autonomy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Alexander J.B. Hampton, "Moritz and the Aesthetics of the Absolute," in *Romanticism and the Re-Invention of Modern Religion: The Reconciliation of German Idealism and Platonic Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 108-132.
[25] Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 1.
[26] Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 2.

Moritz might also have said that the territory of *mythologische Dichtungen* involves a *religion* of imagination as well: the *Gesichtspunkt* frames from the start the differing theological perspectives that ancient Greek and Roman myths take. Imagination affords itself a wide *Spielraum* which avoids abstract metaphysical ideas, Moritz claims—a point he emphasizes in terms of a consideration of traditional God-predicates that are not to attributable to any of the gods in the polytheistic Greek and Roman canons (infinity, omnipotence, omnipresence).

The inheritance of the "completeness" essay is clear in Moritz' emphasis on the self-signification of mythological poetry—something that he now connects to being able to see what a work portrays holistically and at a single glance: "that these tender blossoms of poesy may not be blighted, it is necessary to take them at first just as they are, without any regard to what they may signify (*bedeuten*), in order to behold, as much as possible at one single view, the whole of them (*mit einem Überblick das Ganze zu betrachten*)."[27] And Moritz also returns to the opposition between beauty and allegory: "A true work of art, a beautiful product of imagination, is something finished and complete in itself; it exists for, and carries its value in itself, as well as in the well-arranged proportion of its parts; while, on the other hand, mere hieroglyphics or letters may be ever so ill-shaped, provided they point out the thoughts of the writer. The man who, after the perusal of Homer, should ask, what the *Iliad* means, and what the *Odyssey* means, must certainly have been little touched by their sublime poetical beauties" (*Ein wahres Kunstwerk… ist etwas in sich Fertiges und Vollendetes, das um sein selbst willen da ist, und dessen Werth in ihm selber*).[28]

The inheritance of the "imitation" essay and its expansion of the artist's task as going beyond copyistic imitation is also clear, but Moritz, the friend and traveling companion of Goethe, pursues this side of mythological poetry in a way that defers to the poet. After his initial account of the *Gesichtspunkt* of his study, Moritz now asks that the reader allow "a poet who, in the most faithful strains, has sung the praise of fancy" be the one to "lead us into her domain." The appeal to Goethe comes first in the form of his poem "Die Göttin," which praises imagination as the "companion" which alone has allowed human beings to rise out of the realm of mere necessity to one of freedom:

> Let us all praise the old venerable father, who has granted to mortal men so fair a companion… For to us alone he has united her with heavenly

[27] Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 2.

[28] Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 3.

> band… All the other poor races of prolific earth… wander and feed in the blind enjoyment, as well as the dull pain of momentary, limited life, bent under the yoke of necessity…[29]
>
> Lasst uns alle
> Den Vater preisen!
> Den alten, hohen,
> Der solch einer schöne
> Unverwelkliche Göttin
> Den sterblichen Menschen
> Gesellen möglichen! …
>
> Alle die andren
> Armen Geschlechter
> Der kinderreichen,
> Lebendigen Erde
> Wandeln und weiden
> Im dunkeln Genuss
> Und trüben Schmerzen
> Des augenblicklichen
> Beschränkten Lebens,
> Gebeugt vom Joche
> Der Notdurft.

While allowing Goethe's poem to frame the issue of poetic *Phantasie* and its emergence, Moritz is nonetheless not shy to outline his own account of artistic production, both drawing on the "imitation" essay and in some ways also going beyond it. The key section of the *Götterlehre* in which Moritz opens up this question is entitled *Die Erzeugung der Götter* ("The Production of the Gods"), which immediately follows his insertion of Goethe's poem about *Phantasie.* The "production" in question is of course not only *theogonic* in that it traces the emergence of powers in the early shaping of the world, but also—if *Phantasie* herself is one such power—*poetic or "plastic"* in the sense that Moritz aims to give an insight into how the artist and poet work as well.

Thus, in language reminiscent of the "Imitation" essay's encouragement that the artist must "make and create… by penetrating the inner being of nature," Moritz traces in his account of the *Erzeugung der Götter* how "out of strife and sedition among the primeval beings, beauty *develops and forms itself*." It is true, Moritz says, that where the eye of *Phantasie* can't penetrate there is chaos, night and darkness, yet the sublime imagination of the Greeks carried even into this night a faint glimmer, which gave charms to its very

[29] Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 6.

terrors: thus "in the very first outset of these *mythologische Dichtungen* the opposite extremes of things are brought together; beauty and loveliness being united with the terrors of night and darkness. Form and beauty must arise out of shapelessness and deformity; light must spring from darkness."[30]

Moritz' linkage of the theogonical and the poetic / plastic tasks involved in ancient mythology allows him to expand on the critique of copyistic imitation that the "imitation" essay had offered. As Schreiber has suggested, Moritz now offers in the *Götterlehre* a stance that goes beyond the critique of imitation in the earlier essay in two key ways. First, while the earlier essay had carefully distinguished imagination from the *thätige Kraft* of nature, the *Götterlehre* no longer makes such a distinction but links imagination itself much more closely to sublime and primal powers. Second, while the earlier essay had argued that there was an appropriate sense of artistic "imitation" (just not a "copyistic" one), the *Götterlehre* now goes beyond this point. Imagination could not be *imitative* in its engagement with the primal forces in this world but must somehow engage the task of how they emerge in its own wrestling with the chaos and terrors present in the world.

These expansions beyond the "imitation" essay point toward a much higher engagement on Moritz' part in the *Götterlehre* with the *sublimity* of art's power, as opposed to its engagement with beauty. As Moritz' theogonic account renders it, this is precisely the fight between the earlier titanic forces that held sway in the time of Uranus and Saturn and the emergent Olympian deities like Jupiter who have greater clarity on their side. Moritz in fact views the central fight between Jupiter and the Giants—where "power is in sedition against power"—as "one of the sublimest subjects which plastic art can make use of" (*Macht ist gegen Macht empört—einer der erhabensten Gegenstände, den je die bildende Kunst benutzte*).[31]

And it's at this point that the link Moritz wants to draw between the theogonic and poetic tasks of the *Götterlehre* is suggestively opened up again by a turn directly to the work of an artist. But while it is Goethe's *poetry* that introduces the entire *Erzeugung der Götter*, Moritz turns in his account of beauty's ongoing *development* to the plastic arts, in particular to the work of the artist Asmus Jakob Carstens, a friend of Goethe who had assisted Moritz in preparing illustrations for the *Götterlehre* of the ancient mythological scenes he discusses. Carstens played a significant role in the shaping of the published form of the *Götterlehre* (despite the work's focus on *Dichtungen,* its subtitle nonetheless emphasized the role of the visual arts in it: *Mit fünf und sechzig in*

[30] Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 9.
[31] Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 15.

Kupfer gestochenen Abbildungen nach antiken geschnittenen Steinen und andern Denkmälern des Alterthums), but the relation between poetry and visual arts in the book is one that still deserves more exploration.[32]

The first of Carstens' illustrations, which Moritz incorporates into the frontispiece for the *Götterlehre*, is a rendering precisely of the "sublimest" scene of the battle between Jupiter and the Giants (see *Illustration 1* below). Moritz places this illustration without commentary at the start of the volume and only in the section on *Die Erzeugung der Götter* makes clear that the scene shows that "the ancients did not ascribe to their gods immense magnitude. Intellectual power (*das Gebildete*) had always with them the preference over corporeal bulk (*vor der Masse*), and the monstrous beings that Phantasie created, rose into existence, only in order to be vanquished by the divine power of intellect, and to sink down under their own shapelessness (*Unförmlichkeit*)."[33]

On the frontispiece, immediately below the sublime rendering of the battle between Jupiter and the Giants, Moritz placed the contrastive portrait of Saturn (*Illustration 2* below), who represents only after his overthrow a golden age, a "happy period, when mankind lived in a state of perfect equality, and all things were in common" ("this fiction is extremely beautiful and attractive, because of the unexpected transition from war and destruction to peace and the quiet exercise of justice and benevolence"). Saturn appears sometimes as a symbol of all-destroying time (see the gem with him and his scythe) and sometimes as a king in quiet Latium; so what's related of him is "neither mere allegory nor true history, but both are mixed and blended together according to the laws of fancy" (*beides zusammengenommen nach den Gesetzen der Einbildungskraft verwebt*).[34] Carstens' illustration thus captures both the time-consuming father whose icon is the scythe, but placed against a ship which Moritz thinks indicates his tutelary connection to a specific Italian locale.

Moritz' appeal to both the poetic and visual arts raises a number of questions about how we should think through the relation between his claims about the freedom inherent in the self-signifying artwork and the freedom inherent in the artist who goes beyond the notion of merely copyistic

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[32] On Carstens' role in the execution of drawings made from ancient gems in Lippert's Dactyloteca and the private collection of von Stosch, see Frank Büttner, "Asmus Jakob Carstens und Karl Philipp Moritz", *Nordelbingen, Beiträge zur Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte* 52 (1983): 95-127; Ulrike Münter, "Gebannter Bilderrausch. Bild und Text in Karl Philipp Moritz' *Götterlehre*", in *Karl Philipp Moritz in Berlin 1786-1793*, ed. Christof Wingertszahn, Ute Tintemann (Hannover-Laatzen: Wehrhahn, 2005), 39-56.

[33] Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 16.

[34] Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 18.

imitation to explore her own creative power. His second appeal to Goethe's poetry—one which, in this case, Moritz actually *pairs* with Carstens' visual renderings—is helpful in that exploration.

Following his treatment of the *Erzeugung der Götter* and the war of the Titans and Olympians, Moritz turns in a third section precisely to a moment that brings together his theogonic and poetic interests—namely, the *Bildung der Menschen*, the shaping of humankind, that is the subject both of Goethe's famous "Prometheus" poem and of Carstens' renderings of the god who stole fire and *technē* from Jupiter for the use of human beings. Moritz' account of Prometheus offers an opportunity to bring together the related themes of the freedom of artwork / artist and the theogonic / poetic. In Moritz' treatment of Prometheus, we can see an artist in action scaling and re-scaling its presumably complete achievements—thus allowing us to see more closely the relation between the freedom of a produced object (ourselves!) that could have "completeness in itself." If we look at the key images of Prometheus from Carstens' illustrations (*Illustration 3* below), we see in the first instance a rendering of Prometheus precisely as a *sculptor*—one who, notably, is not looking off to any model to copy what he is producing (despite the fact that Moritz emphasizes in his text that Prometheus creates human beings "in the gods' image"). Moritz draws both on Goethe and Carstens' rendering for his description:

> Prometheus took a piece of earth, a portion of clay still impregnated with divine particles, moistened it with water, and formed man after the image of the gods, so that he alone raises his look to heaven, while all the other creatures bend their eyes to the ground. This representation shows that fancy could not ascribe even to her gods a superior form to that of man, because there is indeed in universal nature… no being deserving of this preference…
>
> Prometheus is represented, upon ancient works of art, as an artist engaged in his professional employment, with a vase standing at his feet, and before him a human *bust,* on which he seems to bestow the most intense consideration, in order to bring it to perfection…[35]

Moritz' Prometheus is both shaped by Goethe's and Carstens' renderings but is distinctive in its own way, since it opens up a reflective inquiry about the role of artistic formation that addresses the issues of artwork / artist freedom and theogonic / poetic activity. But Moritz' account also opens up further questions that Moritz acknowledges are not at all settled by the Promethean

[35] Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 22.

myth. On the one hand, Prometheus is, as both Moritz and Goethe see it, a figure of artistic freedom (in Goethe's case, decisively against a godhead for whom he has disdain), yet that freedom as a transgressive action is followed by suffering and vulnerability in Prometheus' punishment. The remaining illustrations on the same page show the vulnerability and suffering that Prometheus' transgressive actions on behalf of humankind bring in their wake: Pandora and her box, the vulture eating Prometheus' liver.

The development of the Prometheus theme shows that, despite Moritz' emphasis on art's "completeness" and irreducibility to moral allegory, there is nonetheless a kind of wisdom that it offers—about the presence of conflictual strife in the world, the role of hope, and (as Moritz concludes this section) the enduring need for tragedy, a topic which is central to his aesthetics.[36] The openness of art to the inclusion of these themes is the focus of the final section of this paper.

5. Moritz on Completion, Creativity and Wisdom: Ancient and Modern Meanings

This final section begins with a return to Moritz' initial framing of the *Gesichtspunkt* of the *Götterlehre* and the issue of "completion." As Moritz had put it in that initial section: "All that a beautiful work of fancy signifies lies in itself."[37] But he then follows this claim of completion with an interesting qualification: despite its completion and essential self-signification, a work nonetheless "reflects, in its greater or smaller compass, the relations of things, the life and fate of man, and teaches wisdom, according to Horace, better than Crantor and Chrysippus."[38]

Moritz' appeal to Horace's assessment might seem strange at first glance, given that it makes a claim of poetry's relation to wisdom by reference to two ancient philosophers who might be thought of as embodiments of the sort of allegorizing and commenting that Moritz viewed as destructive to the imaginative freedom of poetry—namely, the later-generation head of Plato's Academy first associated with writing commentaries on the master's dialogues and the head of the Stoic school which developed thoroughly allegorical readings of the Homeric poems.

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[36] On the notion of the tragic in Moritz, see Alessandro Costazza, *Genie und tragische Kunst: Karl Philipp Moritz und die Ästhetik des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999), and Franco Cirulli's account of Moritz' "tragic theo-aesthetics" in *The Age of Figurative Theo-Humanism: The Beauty of God and Man in German Aesthetics of Painting and Sculpture (1754-1828)* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015), 5.

[37] Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 4.

[38] Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 4.

And indeed Moritz does go on to say in the next section that all such considerations about a wisdom that poetry can offer must be secondary to the self-signifying experience of poetic beauty: poetry can teach better because it gives grace and charm to instruction, he claims, but it would be frivolous to seek instruction in mythological poetry, since there "man is of so little moment, that he in general, and his moral wants (*seine moralischen Bedürfnissen*) in particular, are totally disregarded" and in fact often appears in myths as nothing but the sport of the gods, who are by no means "moral beings (*Wesen*)."[39]

Yet the *mythologische Dichtungen* of the ancients do seem to open up a certain kind of wisdom for their human listeners and readers.[40] What sort of wisdom is that? Moritz emphasizes issues of enduring conflict and human and divine vulnerability that raise questions for the "completion" of artistic creativity and production in the Prometheus myth. Thus, even though Moritz holds that the *schöne Kunst* of the ancients had as its chief feature the overcoming of shapelessness and enormity, there is something of the sublime and formless that retains a power.

Although the Olympian gods replace the Titans—the youthful Apollo emerging in place of the sun god Helios, for example—there is something of the ancient force behind the emergent power. Thus, as we look at the renderings of Apollo, the image of Helios, Moritz says, "still shines through, uncertain and wavering, so that imagination, in poetical works, often confounds them."[41] We can also see this in the attempts by the younger gods to avoid powers that will threaten them: as Moritz recounts it, Jupiter married Metis, but to prevent a child who combined her prudence and his strength he instead had Minerva; he was also warned for similar reasons about marrying Thetis. "In this manner the mightiest being, as it is represented in these fictions, always dreads a still mightier one. With the idea of an entirely unlimited power every poetical fiction ceases, fancy having no farther scope (*Bei dem Begriff der ganz unumschränkten Macht hört alle Dichtungen auf, und die Phantasie hat keinen Spielraum mehr*)."[42]

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[39] Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 4.

[40] See in this connection Pirholt's discussion of Moritz' indebtedness to the Shaftesburyan and Baumgartenian traditions with respect to the close relation between the moral and aesthetic. Moritz' goal aesthetically may not be completion in the sense of something given once and for all but rather must involve "a kind of dialectical relationship between subject and object" (Pirholt, "Disinterested Love," 73).

[41] Moritz, *Götterlehre,* 17. See Schreiber's helpful discussion of this image in connection with his account of the Moritzian conflict between the aesthetic demands for "containment" and free play in *The Topography of Modernity*, 58.

[42] Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 20.

From the stories of Jupiter's fight with the Giants and the punishments Jupiter gives Prometheus and humans, Moritz thus draws wisdom about human (and artistic) limitation and vulnerability—a point which may seem in conflict with his sense of art's "completion in itself." Yet just as Moritz has traced the *Erzeugung* of the gods in the ancient world in parallel with the emergence of *Phantasie*, so we might find a similar parallel in the exploration of art's resonance for the future. The freedom associated with art in a contemporary polyvalent world must take into consideration the place of vulnerability and limitation Moritz saw in ancient mythology.

Many have read Moritz' *Götterlehre* as a sort of updated textbook on ancient mythology. Yet his own engagement with the questions of art's role suggests a different stance. Moritz' insistence that art could not any longer be understood in terms of copyistic imitation has an important application in terms of modern artists' understanding of their work in light of the ancients. The two artists contemporary to his own time whose work Moritz drew into the *Götterlehre* are both examples of how imaginative freedom involves the possibility of seeing something new even in taking up ancient images and themes. Carstens' illustrations had offered Moritz a clean, modernist line for the age of popular lithographic reproduction. Goethe's *Prometheus*—framed, like the *Gesichtspunkt* of Moritz' *Götterlehre*, in terms of specifically modern theological conflicts—is a reimagination of the importance of the ancient god associated with human capacities in the arts and sciences for a contemporary world reconstruing its own sense of power and limitation. And likewise, it might be said that Goethe's *Iphigeneia at Tauris* (the metrical version of which Moritz' work on German prosody may have had an influence) is a work which goes beyond the attempt to appropriate Euripides' play and to capture instead an image of humanity. Moritz' engagement with Carstens and Goethe suggests that he sees the task of the *Götterlehre* in similar terms, as exploring precisely the concerns that had shaped his earlier essays with the freedom of artwork and artist in the modern world—concerns that, as has been seen, open up the realm of the aesthetic to an ongoing exploration of art's power as well as its vulnerabilities and limitations.

Illustrations

Illustration 1. *Frontispiece—Jupiter fighting the Giants*.

Illustration 2. *Frontispiece—Saturn*.

Illustration 3. *Prometheus*.