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Poetry and the aesthetic experience in Ralph Waldo Emerson

Poezja i doświadczenie estetyczne u Ralpha Waldo Emersona

Abstrakt:
W niniejszym artykule analizuję złożoną relację między pięknem a doświadczeniem estetycznym w poezji, skupiając się na utworze R. W. Emersona The Rhodora. Twierdzę, że poezja jest aktem metamorfozy, poprzez który poeta powraca do natury i staje się jej częścią, dynamicznym procesem stawania się, dramatyzacją duszy, która ją ożywia. Poeta, dostrojony do tego ruchu, umieszcza się w strumieniu mądrości i mocy natury, pozwalając pięknu wyłonić się poprzez poetycką ekspresję. Dlatego poezja nie jest tylko tworzona i czytana; jest recytowana, śpiewana i głoszona jako potwierdzenie samego życia. Zadaniem poety jest połączenie zmysłowości i tego, co nieuchwytne, wyrażając nieskończoność poprzez symbole. Poezja przeciwdziała tendencji intelektu do abstrakcji, przywracając jedność doświadczenia poprzez ujawnienie, że każdy koniec w Naturze jest nowym początkiem. W ten sposób poezja, podobnie jak natura, ożywia intelekt i odkrywa prawdę. Nie oddziela się ani nie agreguje, ale działa z czujną integralnością, odzwierciedlając całość samej natury. Ostatecznie poezja mówi o pięknie, budząc umysł poprzez swoją transformacyjną moc.

Słowa kluczowe: Emerson, poezja, natura, piękno, estetyka

Abstract
This paper explores the intricate relationship between beauty and aesthetic experience in poetry, centring on R.W. Emerson's *The Rhodora*. It argues that poetry is an act of metamorphosis, through which the poet returns to and becomes part of Nature, a dynamic process of becoming, a dramatization of the soul that animates it. The poet, attuned to this movement, places themselves within Nature's stream of wisdom and power, allowing beauty to emerge through poetic expression. Therefore, poetry is not merely composed and read; it is recited, sung, and proclaimed as a reaffirmation of life itself. The poet's task is to bridge the sensual and the ineffable, expressing the infinite through symbols. Poetry combats intellect's tendency toward abstraction, restoring the unity of experience by revealing that every end in Nature is a new beginning. In this way, poetry, like Nature, enlivens the intellect and unveils truth. It neither detaches nor aggregates but instead operates with a vigilant integrity, mirroring the wholeness of Nature itself. Ultimately, poetry speaks of beauty, awakening the mind through its transformative power.

Keywords: Emerson, Poetry, Nature, Beauty, Aesthetics

"In May, when sea-winds pierced our solitudes,
I found the fresh Rhodora in the woods,
Spreading its leafless blooms in a damp nook,
To please the desert and the sluggish brook.
The purple petals fallen in the pool
Made the black water with their beauty gay;
Here might the red-bird come his plumes to cool,
And court the flower that cheapens his array.
Rhodora! if the sages ask thee why
This charm is wasted on the earth and sky,
Tell them, dear, that, if eyes were made for seeing,
Then beauty is its own excuse for Being;
Why thou wert there, O rival of the rose!
I never thought to ask; I never knew;
But in my simple ignorance suppose
The self-same power that brought me there, brought you."
Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Rhodora*

1. Introduction[1]

In this work I aim to explain the intricate relationship between beauty and aesthetic experience in poetry by focusing on R. W. Emerson's *The Rhodora*. To such end, I contest that poetry links thought to Nature, insofar as the *poem* is an act of metamorphosis, through which the poet returns to nature and becomes part of it. Indeed, Nature itself is metamorphosis, it is constant becoming and dramatization of the soul that sits at its core, a soul that in turn has so much infused its strong enchantment into this earthly vehicle, that the poet only prospers if they accept its advice. Poetry requires the poet must place themselves in the middle of the stream of power and wisdom that flows through Nature, so they can appreciate life; because poetry is none other than the exultant song of life and Beauty: "place yourself in the middle of the stream of power and wisdom which animates all whom floats", Emerson exhorts, "and you are without effort impelled to truth, to right, and a perfect contentment"[2]: then you are the world, he concludes, the measure of right, of truth and beauty. Poetry, then, is not simply written and read, it is rather recited, sung and proclaimed: every poem marks the return to life as it is, every poem is a process through which Nature encircles all reality with the gesture of asking itself how come it is alive.

1 As the reader will tell, most of my references to Emerson's texts are quoted from the twelve-volume edition of his complete works published in 1903 by Edward W. Emerson at *The Riverside Press Cambridge*, which is known as the *Concord Edition*. The reason for this is to retain, as much as possible, Emerson's own style of writing free of notes, subtle modifications and abbreviations.

2 R. W. Emerson, *The complete works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. VIII, The Riverside Press Cambridge 1903, p. 139.

In this sense, the poet is able to marry the sensual experience of the world with their inner voice; somehow, poetry expresses through symbols and signs the profound existence of that which is not signified. Since the simplicity of nature is to be inexhaustible, the poet ought not to pretend otherwise, their work must instead express the infinite as it lies stretched in smiling repose. As Emerson suggests, "not in nature but in man is all the beauty and worth he sees. The world is very empty, and is indebted to his gilding, exalting soul for all its pride"[3]. Therefore, the object of the poet is to make the mundane passing of days shine by suffering the law of becoming and traversing the whole Being without obstruction, so that on whatever point their senses befall they be able to come back to nature chanting their bunce.

Certainly, the world of the senses is a world of appearances, of shows and dramatizations, it does not exist for itself, but rather as symbol of the inner laws that make things happen. Therefore, the poet is entrusted with the gruelling task of freeing us from intellect's fancy for separation and abstraction, poetry must convince us that there is no end in Nature, that every end is a beginning: "Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning; that there is always another dawn risen on mid-noon, and under every deep a lower deep opens"[4]. When approaching the world intellectually, only half of it is experienced: Nature shows itself formed and bound and the intellect "separates the fact considered from *you*, from all local and personal reference, and discerns it as if it existed for its own sake"[5]. The intellect pierces form, it reduces all of Nature's riches and treasures to principles, horizons and ideas. As fast as a truth about life is abstracted by the intellect, spontaneous action is murdered, and with this poetry struggles. In sum, the world is experienced at random when thought remains undetermined, when no focus is applied; then, as "we only open our senses, clear away, as we can, all obstruction from the fact, and suffer the intellect to see" (Intellect); only then, however paradoxical, we become prisoners of the ideas that force us to see the world as the unfathomable gift it is:

"By and by we fall out of that rapture, bethink us where we have been, what we have seen, and repeat as truly as we can what we have beheld. As far we can recall these ecstasies, we carry away in the ineffaceable memory the result, and all man and all the ages confirm it. It is called truth. But the moment we cease to report, and attempt to correct and contrive, it is not truth"[6].

The law of the intellect resembles the law of Nature, by which all poets are inspired. Poetry is the breath, the law of undulation by which Nature conceives its children; it tells us to labour with our brains and forbear our activity to see what the great Soul shows. This way, the intellect is a whole that demands integrity in every action, one should not devoid

3 Ibidem, p. 147.

4 Ibidem, p. 301.

5 Ibidem, p. 326.

6 Ibidem, p. 329.

itself from all motion and devote to a single thought, and by one's ambition to combine too many:

"Truth is our element of life; yet if a man fasten his attention on a single aspect of truth, and apply himself to that alone for a long time, the truth becomes distorted and not itself, but falsehood. Herein it resembles the air, which is our natural element, and the breath of our nostrils; but if a stream of the same be directed on the body for a time, it causes cold, fever, and even death"[7].

Therefore, it is neither by detachment, nor aggregation, that the integrity of the intellect is transmitted. It is rather done by a vigilance, which brings the intellect in its greatness and best state to operate every moment: the poem has the same wholeness that Nature possesses. And so, just as how Nature stings our intellect and puts it in motion, poetry does. How is it done so? What does poetry have that allows it to successfully perforate our mind? It speaks of Beauty.

2. Beauty and Nature

The concept of Beauty is scattered throughout the corpus of Emerson, who does not always define it in a straightforward and unanimous fashion. Nevertheless, whenever mentioned, Beauty is related to the tripartite transcendentality of Being, of which the poet is part. As emphasized in the essay *The poet*, the universe has but three children, whose fire is rekindled throughout the times (for they are eternal): the Knower, the Doer and the Sayer, who, respectively and equally, experience the unison of Truth, Good and Beauty. Furthermore, these transcendentals are manifested by the encircling metamorphosis of Nature:

"For the Universe has three children, born at one time, which reappear under different names in every system of thought, whether they be called cause, operation and effect; or more poetically, Jove, Pluto, Neptune; or, theologically, the Father, the Spirit and the Son; but which we all call here the Knower, the Doer and the Sayer. These stand respectively for the love of truth, for the love of good, and for the love of beauty. These three are equal. Each is that which he is, essentially, so that he cannot be surmounted or analyzed, and each of these three has the power of the others latent in him and his own patent"[8].

The poet is then the Sayer, who names and represents beauty, who stands at the centre, to whom the world is not ostentatious, painted and adorned, but rather always beautiful. Beauty, the creator of the universe, the language spoken by God, who has not made some beautiful things, but allowed the world to unfurl tenderly and joyfully charming. Life is a series of surprises, it is pure force extent of calculation and methods.

Poetry was written before time, for it is spoken, it penetrates the world like music: "the sign and credentials of the poet are that he announces that which no man foretold"[9]. As

7 Ibidem, p. 339.

8 Ibidem, p. 6–7.

9 Ibidem, p. 8.

Vivian C. Hopkins states in her thorough assessment of Emerson's aesthetics, the Poet, as creator and Sayer, finds the enrichment of their doing outside themselves, their action requires the outward motion of dissolving oneself in nature, so it then completes the initial inward movement that agrees with Beauty as it metamorphosis: "the creative artist forms his 'inner perception' by a mental and spiritual response to the spirit dwelling in natural forms"[10]. But how does a poet speak the truth of the world? How is beauty represented, if the beautiful is the ever-changing instantiation of the eternal Ideas in Nature? As a transcendental, Beauty is to be experienced, searched for in the world. The poet invests themselves in an act of complete mutability, they stand before the secret of the world, where Being passes into Appearance and Unity into Variety. The poet sings about Truth: that Nature cannot be surprised undressed, that Beauty breaks in everywhere, that "the Universe is the externization of the soul", and that "wherever life is, that bursts into appearance around it"[11].

Hence poetry is about being open to the balancing powers that make life move onwards. The poet dances amidst the becoming of the world by posing their true regard without impediment. It is not coincidental, then, that Emerson opens his seminal essay, *Nature*, with a beautiful and concise piece of poetry:

"A subtle chain of countless rings
The next unto the farthest brings;
The eye reads omens where it goes,
And speaks all languages the rose;
And, striving to be man, the worm
Mounts through all the spires of form."

This incredibly succinct poem expresses the backbone of Emerson's philosophy: we experience the world through the senses, yet we know it through ideas that pale against the rich vocabulary exposed by the rose. The poet sees the world for what it is, they bury their hands in the encircling of its forms, bathe in the earthly taste of its soil and become transformed by the infinity of its scent. To understand this inherent dichotomy in all human experience is crucial, for it is the core of how poetry is life's response to Nature's overflowing oneness. It is through the poem that we can consolidate our experience and what we think of it, since poetry is not just written, it is also recited, an activity where our voice meets Nature as part of it. Through the poem, we become something to be experienced aesthetically: we become aroma, touch, sight and flavour; all the richness of life lies on our sung experience. Because is it truly experience if it remains dormant in thought? In essence, poetry is our response to the glorious back and forth that is life. Each poem is the sum of experiences and ideas, where each word is a small glimpse of the aesthetic intercourse between thought and world:

10 V. Hopkins, *Spires of form: a study of Emerson's aesthetic theory*, Harvard University Press 1951, p. 61.

11 R. W. Emerson, *The complete works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, op. cit., p. 14.

"There [*in Nature*] I feel nothing can befall in my life, no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me my eyes), which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, -my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, -all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. […] I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty"[12].

In essence, beyond our perception, reality is a whole intertwined with our consciousness. Nature and the ability to perceive are rhythmically the same. For the poet, the very path that leads toward reality or nature is what they will eventually come to know or conceive. Truth, reality itself, is a whole, an infinite sphere only perceived when delimited by a horizon. By a leap, we manage to conceive reality as a sum. Therefore, there is a power, a congregation of abilities and energies that allow us to act in accordance with the Soul. Power is what breaches the gap between intellectual abstraction and Nature's continuous becoming:

"We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime, within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal One. And this deep power in which we exist, and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficient and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing and the seen thing, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one. We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shinning part, is the Soul"[13].

Therefore, the soul is an organic compound of our powers, it is an hypersensible capacity to respond to all forms of experience. Power is the ability to create as reaction, it is emotional, moral and witted. Through the power of the soul, the individual is able to assimilate experience and phenomena in themselves and become one with Nature and God. The soul is always onto Truth. Hence, the poet embodies our inability to fully comprehend and keep pace with the boundless prowess of the soul, its relentless drive to understand everything. Of course, this is why every poem is a surprise, just as any person is an event. This is what Nature's poem is about: one must not forget the sensation it conveys the desire to be nothing, yet see everything, to be independently absolved of all corporeality and yet to be the very thing that observes, a flow without fixation, without anchorage. A worm dreams of being a butterfly, a poet sings of becoming appeased. To go beyond freedom, beyond the destiny that binds us to the ceaseless struggle of searching and finding nothing but an even greater desire to search further, that is the essence of poetry. All of this arises from Nature.

What is Beauty, then? Let me avoid this question and begin by defining Nature. Nature is both broad and simple. It is the way things are. Philosophically, Emerson states that the universe is made up of nature and soul, or nature and consciousness. Everything that is not "I" is Nature; therefore, Nature is itself, art, the others, and my own body. How do we access it? Nature speaks a language, that of forms and harmony, she provides us with our first

12 Ibidem, p. 10.

13 Ibidem, p. 269.

and most reliable standard of Beauty. We are predisposed to seek Beauty, because Nature communicates with us through Beauty itself. We learn that beauty often approaches us without being sought, astonishing us and leaving us in awe when we recognize its existence. The beauty of nature is reshaped in the human mind, not merely for barren contemplation, but for new creations. Beauty is the realization of the strong bond between body and soul, between Nature and life. For Emerson, transcendence arises from experiencing in the purest way the world around us life, its actions, and its organization. Above all, it is about the way life expresses itself. Moreover, it is the soul that desires Beauty, and the world exists and presents itself as beautiful to fulfil this devotion. In consequence, Nature is the vehicle of thought, insofar as Beauty is Nature's tongue. Indeed, there is an apparent contradiction in his philosophy. On one hand, the human soul participates in an absolute an infinite reality that we are drawn toward. On the other, Emerson acknowledges a finite, fragile, tangible physical world that limits us, one we can only transcend through marrying thought to experience. Out of this conundrum, Beauty leads us. By the means of Beauty, Nature gives herself as a pathway through which the soul or consciousness connects with the divine, the absolute soul: she is a continuous message that, through its influence, allows us to express ourselves. Words are emblematic, they are nothing if life is not referred to, they are symbols of existence, and so language is immediately dependent on nature. The essence of language, then, is imagery. The world is emblematic, human discourse is but a metaphoric description of the world, for beyond human-imposed formulas or reasoning, truths are what they are because Nature itself admits them as such. As stated by Richardson:

"Emerson is an idealist, a believer that process, purpose, or concept precedes and determines the product. The most daunting and for a modern reader, the most demanding aspect of Emerson's nature is his argument that nature teaches us to see beyond itself. […] The beauty and interrelation of the physical world, the striking quality of nature, lead him to inquire into the internal laws of nature that determine its external appearance"[14].

Fundamentally, Nature its laws and forms, it is the inner circling of becoming by invisible and internal laws; it is the idealistic abstraction of itself through visible and external forms. Nature is relationships, is the way in which the world is shaped by externalizing deeply coveted processes. A sense of perpetual fluidity compels Emerson's thought, leading him to write in his essay *The Over-Soul*:

"The soul circumscribes all things. […] It contradicts all experience. In like manner it abolishes all time and space. The influence of the senses has, in most men, overpowered the mind to that degree, that the walls of time and space have come to look real and insurmountable; and to speak with levity of these limits is, in the world, the sign of insanity. Yet time and space are but inverse measures of the force of the soul. The spirit sports with time"[15].

Emerson perceived and understood nature as a process rather than a fixed entity. It is pure dynamism, where everything functions like an organ driven solely by the fact that it is

14 R. Richardson, "Emerson and Nature", in: J. Porte and S. Morris (eds.), *The Cambridge companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Cambridge University Press 1999, p.101.

15 R. W. Emerson, *The complete works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. II, The Riverside Press Cambridge 1903, p. 272.

alive. Just as there is no clear reason why the soul seeks Beauty, the answers to life's deepest questions remain obscure and elusive as long as one continues to question them. Emerson called this idea of universal fluidity Metamorphosis. In *Compensation*, in relation to Fate, he writes: "Everything in nature contains all the powers of nature. […] Each thing is made of something hidden, just as the naturalist sees a type behind every metamorphosis"[16]. A constant relationship exists between the mind a stable, qualifying force and the infinite variety of external nature.

In this sense, Nature is humanity's most useful reference to avoid error, for she is rich in resources: she is the totality of experience and of life. When we are in Nature, she imprints us with the Truth, she always gives herself fully. What persists of her on us through ideas and abstractions are her external forms, but her inner workings can never be recollected. Therein lies the poet, as they understand why Nature changes. Poetry is thus the constant interaction between soul and Nature, it is to live the spectacle of life. Nature opposes the soul, responding to it piece by piece. One is the Seal, the other the Impression. Its Beauty is the beauty of the mind itself. Its laws are the laws of the mind. Hence, for Emerson, Nature is, in a way, the theory and application of the nature of things how things are and what one might do. Beyond mere thought about the object, Nature is the experience of nature itself. It is something felt. The connection to the One occurs through experience; it manifests as a constant unison, a moment of experience, and nature's own method. In short, poetry is when the soul meets the metamorphosing power of Nature, it is to sing about the ecstasy of life; by which Emerson means the joyful consciousness of the rich fullness of existence. The poet dissolves beyond their conjectures, possessing their own nature.

What is Beauty, then? Pure enthusiasm, pure *impetus*. It is the method of life as spoken by Nature. The beautiful asks for surrender, they who listen to Nature's language, immerse themselves in this state of genuflexion and draw as close to the heart of Nature as possible. To be nothing and see everything that detachment from the body and its present limitations. It is through these limits that we recognize Beauty and the ecstasy that constantly presents itself to us. Thus, the Emersonian *invisible eye* is not a deduction or a transcendental construct; it is *metamorphic ecstasy*, the purest transformation that can only begin by being anchored to nature so that one may yield fully to it.

3. The poet, or the aesthetic experience of Nature

The poet is the sayer and the representer, a poem represents beauty in all its prowess. In a sense, all poetry is eternal, since when metamorphosized into voice it becomes part of Nature's eternal form, and so it becomes already been written, as it is showcased in the theatre of life. As uttered by Emerson, "words are also actions, and actions are kind of words"[17]; the

16 Ibidem, p. 101.

17 Ibidem, p. 139.

poet beholds not only the ideas obtained from their encounter with Nature, but Nature's own creatures, be them as insignificant as they may, just as the *rhodora*, humble rival of the rose. All things, to the eyes of the poet, are symbols of Truth and Beauty.

Nothing is isolated, nothing is arbitrary in Beauty, because Nature is an endless combination and repetition of a very few laws, she hums the old well-known air through innumerable variations. The poet, then, witnesses and conjoins the metamorphosing world through all its masks, through all its dramatizations; their performance is that of becoming, of eternal law and infinitude. In other words, the poet experiences Nature as a mutable cloud which is always and never the same, that is replete of a sublime likeness that is expressed throughout her oeuvre as delight and power, as surprising Beauty, that springs and flows continuously to the keen eye. So, as R. Richardson points out in his study *Emerson and Nature*, the poet's theory of aesthetics is grounded in Nature itself[18]. Nature, or the "sea of forms", provides the human eye the outline of what beauty is while it showcases how it is expressed. Beauty is Nature's language; it is the goal and terminus of our symbolic experience of the world, it is what makes life understandable for us. And this is because, to the Sayer, Nature is symbol of the whole, for the beautiful rests on the foundations of the necessary. One must always remember that, as one of Nature's names, Beauty is also creator, which resonates with what Emerson states in *Circles*:

"Yet this incessant movement and progression which all things partake could never become sensible to us by contrast to some principle of fixture or stability in the soul. Whilst the eternal generation of circles proceeds, the eternal generator abides. That central life is somewhat superior to creation, superior to knowledge and though, and contains all its circles. Forever it labours to create a life and thought as large and excellent as itself; but in vain, for that which is made instructs how to make a better"[19].

There is an insurmountable distance between the poem and what is experienced, as Beauty overflows and flees from the capturing word. Action can only so much approximate life's power and Nature's metamorphosis, reason why the poet beseechs only the Idea, it pledges the persistence of the bigger, the truer, the better:

"Human life is made up of the two elements, power and form, and the proportion must be invariably kept, if we would have it sweet and sound. Each of these elements in excess make a mischief as hurtful as its defect. Everything runs in excess: every good quality is noxious, if unmixed, and, to carry the danger to the edge of ruin, nature causes each man's peculiarity to superabound. […] You who see the artist, the orator, and poet, too near, and find their life no more excellent than that of mechanics and farmers, and themselves victims of partiality, very hollow and haggard, and pronounce them failures, -not heroes, but quacks,- conclude very reasonably, that these arts are not for man, but are disease. Yet nature will not bear you out. Irresistible nature made men such, and makes legions more of such, every day. You love the boy reading in a book, gazing at a drawing, or a cast: yet what are these millions who read and behold, but incipient writers and sculptors? Add

18 R. Richardson, "Emerson and Nature", op. cit., p.101.

19 R. W. Emerson, *The complete works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. III, The Riverside Press Cambridge 1903, p. 318.

a little more of that quality which now reads and sees, and they will seize the pen and chisel. And if one remembers how innocently he began to be an artist, he perceives that nature joined with his enemy. A man is golden impossibility. The line he must walk is a hair's breadth. The wise through excess of wisdom is made a fool"[20].

Since our encounter with Nature is mediated by vision, which it may be argued is not just the act of seeing (physically) but the act of envisioning how all is connected, we experience it by becoming nothing but a transparent eyeball that sees all the currents of the Universal Being circulating through oneself, a connection that shows how one is particle of God. Beauty and aesthetic experience go hand in hand. One does not simply "contemplate" beauty, one creates the new when the beauty of nature re-forms itself in the mind, for nothing divine dies and all good is eternally reproductive. Why then ask, "whence the rose?" Emerson, I believe, asks "whence the beauty?", and, ultimately, "why is there a rose?", "Why is there beauty?". The experience of beauty, or the aesthetic experience itself, is not plainly sensorial, rather it is a spiritual envision of how Beauty in nature is not terminated. By experiencing life unfolding in glorious and tender fashion, the poet realizes how Beauty is the herald of the inward and internal forms of Nature. The charming and delightful flow of the world is the highest expression of the final cause of Nature.

In consequence, Truth is the realization that everything is amidst a sea of forms, an aesthetically pleasing world. The universe in which each and every living form is itself prepossessing is the effect of a self-causing Soul that encircles around itself. Hence the rhodora, a "rival of the rose", should not be outcasted and left alone as a mere flower, it should be encountered and asked: "*why you?*", "*why am I here, in front of you? What are you showing me?*". For even if souls never touch their object, the subject and the object are one.

When asking why is the rhodora in front of him, Emerson is asking why has the Supreme Being put her forth. The sages, says Emerson, have overlooked something as simple as the fact that the world proceeds from the same spirit as the body of man, they have been oblivious to such reality ever since they have highlighted the beauty of the rose. The manifestation of the rhodora is a clear indication of the flow and volatility of the universe. The movement and progression which all things partake is only sensible to a mind that can fathom the hue of the fabric of the universe by contrast to something permanent, or fixed, in the soul itself. Such a constant is the unbeknownst beauty of the rhodora, or the acknowledged beauty of the rose, the collision of both is transformed in the mind, and by the mind as well:

"Tell them, dear, that if eyes were made for seeing,
Then beauty is its own excuse for being"

There is a corelation between the desire for beauty that impregnates the human mind and the existence of a flower such as the rhodora, which is beautiful in its own way and not mere "waste" of charm.

20 R. W. Emerson, *The complete works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. II, op. cit., p. 318.

In conclusion, the notion of Beauty expressed in Emerson's The Rhodora is nothing else but the language spoken by Nature. The human mind envisions Beauty and, in doing so, experiences the constant flow of the universe. As we aesthetically experience the world, we understand how every piece fits and belongs to it, thus, concluding that even a flower such as the rhodora is beautiful in her own way. Realising this is the most efficient way to comprehend the entirety of God's creation, as the poet himself claims in *Each and all*:

"As I spoke, beneath my feet
The ground-pine curled its pretty wreath,
Running over the club-moss burrs;
I inhaled the violet's breath;
Around me stood the oaks and firs;
Pine-cones and acorns lay on the ground;
Over me soared the eternal sky,
Full of light and deity;
Again I saw, again I heard,
The rolling river, the morning bird; –
Beauty through my senses stole;
I yielded myself to the perfect whole."

4. Appendix: On Emerson's transcendental aesthetics and its relationship with Kant

In this section, I will briefly address a point raised by reviewers of this work namely, the apparent influence of German transcendentalism, and idealism more broadly, on Emerson, particularly regarding his aesthetics. Given that this is not the central focus of the present study, and that a thorough treatment would exceed its scope, I will concentrate primarily on Kant's account of beauty and aesthetic ideas. This approach enables me to engage specifically with what would have been considered transcendental philosophy at the time of Emerson and the emergence of New England philosophy, setting aside the domain of Romantic philosophy or idealism. This distinction is significant, as the latter's conception of aesthetic judgment and beauty is not entirely compatible with Kant's notion of the transcendental.

Before proceeding with the analysis, I would like to briefly assess the credibility of the purported Kantian influence on north American transcendentalism by re-examining early twentieth-century scholarship concerning Emerson's intellectual sources and his engagement with German and French philosophy, particularly regarding their role in shaping his views on perception, the transcendentals, and experience. As evidenced by the works of Theodore Parker and William Girard (1916), Régis Michaud (1918, 1919), Woodbridge Riley (1918), Albert Schinz (1918), and René Wellek (1943), among others, Emerson's philosophy, and north American transcendentalism in general, cannot be reduced to "a mere

mechanical assembling of imported parts"[21]. Furthermore, as pointed out by Guardiano, "Emerson's philosophy was dubiously labeled from the beginning. The appellation 'Transcendentalism' was not self-given by him or his intellectual peers, but by an outsider, a conservative Unitarian pastor, who intended it as a pejorative. That individual was Francis Bowen whose review of Emerson's Nature in the Christian Examiner apparently contains the first use of the term to describe Emerson's and his peers' liberal perspectives"[22].

Additionally, from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, scholarship on the influence of German idealism on Emerson does not consistently support the assumption of a direct or substantial relationship. In many cases, the connection between German and north American transcendentalism is presupposed rather than critically examined. Moreover, the early literature on the subject is frequently neglected, suggesting a general lack of engagement with the complexities of the debate. For instance, in Larry Reynolds and Tibbie Lynch's article *Sense and Transcendence in Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman* (1979), one finds the following claim:

"As is well known, Transcendentalism in America was inspired by dissatisfaction with the emotional and spiritual sterility of Unitarianism, a sterility attributed to the Unitarian acceptance of Lockean «sensationalism». In their attempt to renew the religious idealism of their own Puritan past, the American Transcendentalists turned to contemporary German philosophers, particularly Kant"[23].

However, as Schinz points out, north American thinkers were in search of a practical philosophy capable of grounding a renewed doctrine of life, one that would be directly accessible through personal experience and intuition, rather than through abstract rationalist debates on Revelation and moral axioms, as characteristic of Calvinist theology. What distinguishes north American transcendentalism is its pragmatic orientation, which is not entirely concerned with analytic discourse on human nature or moral law, but rather with the lived experience of an enduring soul that encounters the divine through the body, nature, and what Emerson termed the Over-Soul:

"One sees at once already, that not only has this Transcendentalism nothing to do with German transcendentalism (except when Pure Reason is replaced by Practical Reason-which Kant borrowed from Rousseau), but the first excludes the second: there is no room in a theory of personal conscience for a theory of knowledge such as Kant's, i.e., getting truth by way of philosophical speculation when it has been already imparted directly and as a whole, a theory leading then to the Metaphysical systems of Kant's followers. Truth will be considered again as imparted to man, immediate and whole, by divine revelation; only the revelation is not through Scriptures or Tradition, but given directly by God to each individual man".

21 W. Riley, *American Thought from Puritanism to Pragmatism and Beyond*, New York 1915, p. 286.

22 Samantha Harvey's *Transatlantic transcendentalism* (2013) also offers a complete reading on Emerson's aesthetics idealistic and romantic roots via Coleridge.

23 L. J. Reynolds and T. E. Lynch, *Sense and Transcendence Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman*, "The South Central Bulletin" 1979, Vol. 39, No. 4, p. 148.

Accordingly, as highlighted by Percy Brown, Emerson's aesthetic theory rests on three loose and broad categories that underpin his non-systematic philosophy while condensing the above:

"He held soul to be divine, that intuition or divine spark within every man, whereby every man is capable of infinite growth. He regarded Nature as the lengthened shadow of God cast upon human sense, a kind of incarnation of some Divine Power here on earth. And he believed Deity ever near to man, and every soul possessed of access to Deity, not continuously, but at least in moments of exaltation. This triple structure-the primacy of the soul, the immediacy of Nature, and the Divine Immanence-might be called the skeleton framework of his message"[24].

Thus, as Theodore Brown suggests (1956), Emerson's aesthetics remain organic and pragmatic, and do not conform entirely to German transcendentalism but represent instead a novel approach to the relationship between the world and experience, between ideas and intuition. While the label *Transcendentalism* may invite comparisons with Kant, especially given Emerson's documented interest in his work, as well as the fact that Kant is frequently mentioned by Emerson, "who owned a copy of the 1838 translation of *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Francis Haywood"[25], this is not sufficient to assert a direct philosophical debt, especially beyond the domain of moral and reformist discourse. As Riley[26] observes, idealism will become predominant in rather late New England philosophy through the translations and engaging works of George Sylvester Morris.

There is, therefore, no strong basis for claiming that the German idealists, more than their French or British counterparts, exerted significant influence on Emerson's conception of the transcendental or on his engagement with idealism in general. As the literature briefly examined indicates, North American transcendentalism shares few substantive points of contact with eighteenth-century German philosophy. The perceived connection rests largely on the nomenclature assigned to the early philosophical movements in New England and on the widespread translation and subsequent discussion of contemporary German and French texts. Moreover, as argued by William Girard and later elaborated by Schinz, "even though the transcendentalists on this side of the ocean might have found their theology in German authors, the papers and reviews of the time show conclusively that they did not find it there, but in French works". Which is also, as proved by Schinz himself, a mischaracterized, and sometimes overestimated influence. While Victor Cousin, who with Carlyle and Coleridge was an essential philosophical source to the New England thinkers, did engage with German philosophy in his writings the claim that German transcendentalism reached America through Cousin is misleading. As William Girard and others have argued, Cousin was fundamentally an eclectic thinker who synthesized ideas from multiple traditions, transforming them in the process. His engagement with German

24 P. W. Brown, *Emerson's philosophy of aesthetics*, "The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism" 1957, No. 15(3), p. 350.

25 R. Wellek, *Emerson and German philosophy*, "The New England Quarterly" 1943, No. 16(1), p. 44.

26 W. Riley, *American Thought from Puritanism to Pragmatism and Beyond*, op. cit., p. 289.

thought, particularly Kant, was selective and limited; for instance, he retained little more than Kant's notion of free will, which he situated within a broader moral framework already prefigured by Rousseau and aligned with the Scottish moral sense school. Cousin's core philosophical commitments remained consistent before and after his contact with German thinkers, centred on the idea of an innate moral faculty distinct from reflection or sensation. Thus, what Cousin transmitted to America was less German transcendentalism than a reformulated French philosophy infused with eclectic elements.

Finally, I align broadly with René Wellek's reading on the matter[27], who maintains that Emerson's work constitutes a distinct reconceptualization of transcendentalism that is rooted in experience and intuition, rather than an appropriation of German idealist or British Romantic models. For this reason, the following analysis will briefly engage with key aspects of Kant's *Analytic of the Beautiful* to assess the extent to which Emerson's reflections on art and artistic creation intersect with or diverge from Kantian aesthetics. This line of inquiry has already been partially developed by Jeffrey Downard (2003). Nonetheless, Downard's argument relies on the presumed influence that the *Critique of Practical Reason* may have exerted on Emerson's moral and ethical views, particularly in the composition of *The Divinity School Address*, a claim that, based on the preceding discussion, is at least partially supported by the existing literature. Downard's central contention is that Emerson appears to adopt, almost verbatim, several of Kant's claims concerning the spontaneity of judgment, particularly in the context of aesthetic evaluation, and then engage and directly quarrel with them when attempting to purport a more pragmatic approach to what entails aesthetic judgement. Indeed, according to Downard, Emerson's notion of a spontaneous judgment, distinct from one grounded in moral principle, corresponds to Kant's concept of reflective aesthetic judgment, which involves a free play between the faculties of imagination and understanding.

Consequently, Downard supports this interpretation primarily on moral and ethical grounds, arguing that Emerson maintains two concurrent positions: first, that the moral law imposes absolute demands upon action; and second, that one's conception of this law is susceptible to revision through experience. This tension, Downard suggests, is inherently Kantian. On these grounds, the concept of spontaneous judgment enables the embodiment of spiritual law in nature, thus integrating it into the historical process and, more significantly, permits a transposition between aesthetics and ethics. However, the foundation of Downard's interpretation (this supposed philosophical dialogue between Kant and Emerson) ultimately rests on the contested assumption of Transcendentalism's Romantic and idealist lineage:

"The structure of Emerson's account of spontaneous judgments is similar on virtually all of the key points to the structure of Kant's account of aesthetic reflective judgments of beauty. I do not expect the reader to accept this hypothesis Instead, there are two considerations circumstantial as an article of faith. that weigh in its favor. The first is the evidence that Emerson was quite explicitly working in what has come to be known as the Romantic

27 R. Wellek, *The minor transcendentalists and German philosophy*, "The New England Quarterly" 1942, No. 15(1), p. 652–680.

tradition. For many writers in this tradition, Kant's third Critique and especially his conception of reflective judgments served as a starting point. It is well known that writers such as Schiller, Goethe and Coleridge endeavoured to extend Kant's insights into aesthetic judgments beyond the realm of art into the realm of ethics. Because Emerson is directly of intellectual in this line descent, it is likely that a Kantian account of reflective judgments played an important role in the development of his thought"[28].

While it is true that Emerson sees the unity of thought and morals running through all animated Nature, does Emerson understand by Nature (and intellect's experience of it) the same as Kant, particularly when it comes to our aesthetic judgement of the sensible phenomena? Let me briefly examine what I consider the main points of Kantian aesthetics and then contrast it with what I have claimed above regarding Emerson's definition of aesthetic experience.

While Kant includes in the *Critique of Pure Reason* certain considerations about the faculty of judgment, it is not until the *Critique of Judgment* that he offers a treatment of it as a fully developed faculty in itself, which means that judgement should have its own a priori principle and therefore it requires a 'critique' to determine its scope and limits. Firstly, then, Kant describes judgment as having two main roles: determining and reflecting. On the one hand, judgment subsumes the particular under concepts or universals that are already given, which aligns with the role Kant already assigns to judgment in the *Critique of Pure Reason*; here, judgment does not operate as an independent faculty but is governed by principles of the understanding. On the other hand, judgment takes on the task of finding the universal for the given particular. Judgment, insofar as it is reflective, plays the fundamental role of making all cognition possible, insofar as it allows the subject to view nature as empirically law-governed, while also being responsible for the formation of all empirical concepts.

Now, within Kant's epistemological theory, a judgment is universally valid to the extent that a concept is applied to it; at the same time, judgment is "the faculty for thinking the particular as contained under the universal"[29]. That is, a judgment of knowledge is either correct or incorrect in relation to the concept that serves as the rule against which the content can be judged. If the concept is given, then the judgment that subsumes the particular under it is determinant. However, if the judgment is merely particular, then the determining universal must be found, since it is not given; in this case, it is a reflective judgment. This type of judgment has the obligation to ascend from the particular in nature to the universal and requires a principle that is neither given nor can be derived from nature, because it must even ground the unity of all empirical principles under equally empirical principles. It follows, then, that reflective judgment can only give itself as law a transcendental principle akin to its own constitution, being unable to derive it from elsewhere (otherwise it would be determining judgment), nor prescribe it to nature, since nature guides the reflection on its

28 J. Downard, *Emerson's experimental ethics and Kant's analysis of beauty*, "Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society" 2003, No. 39(1), p. 93.

29 I. Kant, *Critique of the power of judgement*, Cambridge University Press 2000, p. 66.

laws, and is not itself guided by the conditions under which we strive to acquire a concept of it–conditions that are entirely accidental with respect to nature.

Indeed, in the judgment of taste, Kant finds that there is no concept of the beautiful to determine whether something is or is not beautiful, just as there is no key or definition as a possible predicate (as would be the case with the object, which allows us to inquire "what is an object?"). As a reflective judgment, the judgment of taste derives from the fact that its universal concept is not given; the beautiful is not an *a priori* determinable quality because there is no determining judgment for the concept of beauty. In other words, the justification for the universal validity of the judgment of taste, if it has one, cannot depend on conceptual determination, "as if there were no rule against which the action could be judged"[30]. Indeed, the predication of beauty does not determine something about the object under consideration, but rather the judgment "this is beautiful" indicates that the object affects the subject in a particular way. This allows Kant to state that the judgment of taste does not provide knowledge about the object being judged but is instead the subject's reflection on the interaction of its own faculties, where imagination synthesizes the intuition freely (since there is no concept determining the judgment or how it must be formed). An object is beautiful insofar as the combination of its elements is in harmony with the understanding, or its faculties, without being determined by any particular concept of the understanding. Thus, the beautiful object acquires a symbolic character. Indeed, the beautiful would be a symbol of the free and harmonious conjunction of the faculties of understanding in the judgment of taste, and also a symbol of everything that lies outside of all possible experience, that is, where no determining concept is present.

This free play between the faculties of understanding brings them into accord with one another, which is, as will be seen, the necessary condition for all cognition in general. Therefore, in the judgment of taste, one becomes aware of the harmony of the cognitive faculties as that which causes pleasure in the contemplation of a given object, which is then judged to be beautiful. The judgment of taste is founded thus on a concept from which nothing can be either known or demonstrated regarding the object, "because it is in itself indeterminable and unfit for cognition"[31], meaning it lies outside the bounds of possible experience. Indeed, aesthetic judgment derives its universal validity from this concept because the determining ground of this judgment resides in the concept of "that which can be regarded as the supersensible substratum of humanity"[32]. This is a subjective purposiveness, since it rests on the free play of the imagination, where what prevails is what one takes from nature in reflection:

"[…] Nature has the property of containing an occasion for us to perceive the inner purposiveness in the relationship of our mental powers in the judging off certain of its products, and indeed as something that has to be explained as necessarily and universally

30 M. Küplen, *Beauty, Ugliness and the Free Play of Imagination: an approach to Kant's Aesthetics*, Springer Verlag 2015, p. 31.

31 I. Kant, *Critique of the power of judgement*, op. cit.,, p. 216.

32 Ibidem, p. 216.

valid on the basis of a supersensible ground, cannot be an end of nature, or rather be judged by us as such a thing: because otherwise the judgment that would thereby be determined would be grounded in heteronomy and would not, as befits a judgment of taste, be free and grounded in autonomy"[33].

When the harmony of the faculties is determined by one of them for example, the understanding determines speculative interest, reason determines practical interest it is assumed that the faculties are first and foremost capable of a free harmony without which none of their determinations would be possible. Thus, the indeterminate unity and free concord of the faculties not only constitute the deepest aspect of the soul, but also prepares the advent of the highest faculty, that is, the supremacy of the faculty of desire, and make possible the transition from the faculty of knowledge to this faculty of desire. In this sense, natural beauty as a symbol refers to the idea that nature has produced something beautiful that accords with the free play of the faculties of cognition. At the same time, genius is precisely the innate disposition through which nature gives to art both a synthetic rule and rich material:

"Now I maintain that this principle is nothing other than the faculty for the presentation of aesthetic ideas; by an aesthetic idea, however, I mean that representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., concept, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible. One readily sees that it is the counterpart (pendant) of an idea of reason, which is, conversely, a concept to which no intuition (representation of the imagination) can be adequate"[34].

Imagination, insofar as it is liberated, is capable of creating another nature from the material that real nature provides; it enables the transformation of everyday experience through analogical series and principles that reside higher in reason, and which are also natural to us, just like those according to which the understanding apprehends empirical nature. Hence, one senses in this capacity of imagination a certain freedom from the law of association, through which the subject receives material from nature in experience. This material, thanks to imagination, can be reworked by us with a view toward something entirely different-namely, something that surpasses nature. Kant calls these representations of imagination Ideas because they aim toward something that lies "beyond the bounds of experience"[35], and because they seek to approximate a presentation of the concepts of reason; thus, they would be rational Ideas. This gives them the appearance of objective reality while, as inner intuitions, no concept can be fully adequate to them.

Thus, when a poet aims to make rational Ideas of invisible beings sensible, whose experience is impossible, he does so through the power of imagination. In fact, when a representation of the imagination of a concept, such as an invisible being, by itself prompts much

33 Ibidem, p. 224.

34 Ibidem, p. 192.

35 Ibidem, p. 192.

thought, more than can ever be grasped in a determinate concept, then the imagination sets in motion the faculty of rational Ideas to think more than can be apprehended or made clear within it. Beauty, insofar as it is conceived from a reflective judgment that reaches the foundation of the cognitive faculty the free play of the faculties is a symbol of the Ideas of reason; because free imagination has the power to refer to that which exceeds possible experience and constitutes the Ideas of reason.

"Those forms which do not constitute the presentation of a given concept itself, but, as supplementary representations of the imagination, express only the implications connected with it and its affinity with others, are called (aesthetic) attributes of an object whose concept, as an idea of reason, cannot be adequately presented. Thus, Jupiter's eagle, with the lightning in its claws, is an attribute of the powerful king of heaven, as is the peacock of the splendid queen of heaven. They do not, like logical attributes, represent what lies in our concepts of the sublimity and majesty of creation, but something else, which gives the imagination cause to spread itself over a multitude of related representations, which let one think more than one can express in a concept determined by words; and they yield an aesthetic idea, which serves that idea of reason instead of logical presentation, although really only to animate the mind by opening up for it the prospect of an immeasurable field of related representations"[36].

Thus, Kant defines the aesthetic Idea as a representation of the imagination that is associated with a given concept "linked to such a multiplicity of partial representations"[37] for which no expression exists that designates a determinate concept. Based on this, it is plausible to propose that beauty is a symbol of aesthetic Ideas, since the symbolic character of the representation would derive from the power of the imagination and not from the concord or harmonic unity of the faculties of cognition. But Kant also notes that the unification of the mental powers (imagination and understanding) constitutes genius, in an aesthetic sense, provides beyond that agreement with the concept, although not intentionally, a rich, undeveloped material for the understanding, which the latter had not considered in its concept. So, while the Idea of reason exceeds experience, whether because it lacks a corresponding object in nature (e.g., the concept of an invisible being), or because it transforms a simple phenomenon of nature into an event of the spirit, the aesthetic Idea exceeds all concepts and creates the intuition of another nature than that which is given to us, thus forcing thought by expressing what is inexpressible in it.

Consequently, this is not what I claim entails Emerson's aesthetic experience, which is centred on the profound, dynamic relationship between the poet, Beauty, and Nature. As I have shown above, Beauty is not a static quality but a transcendental force, one of the three eternal principles alongside Truth and Good that is manifested through Nature's continuous metamorphosis; dramatic becoming which all souls experience when the distance between them and Nature becomes the narrowest. For Emerson, every truth leads

36 Ibidem, p. 193.

37 Ibidem, p. 225.

in another, just as the bud extrudes the old leaf, for in every truth that which will supplant it is carried and embodied. Moreover, it is the same thing, the same fact the sentiment of Nature's lawfulness and the mind's will conformity to the divine, for Nature is an irresistible law that exerts its influence over nations, intelligent beings, kingdoms of brutes and movements of atoms. Therefore, all experiences do determine our comprehension of Nature's unravelling, they do conform to its truth. However, and here Emerson compliments his aesthetics with his theology, all intellectual experiences of truth are intuitive as well as active. There lies what allows Emerson to remove himself from the transcendentalist tag and self-diagnose idealism, the transcendental condition is what links Intellect, Beauty, Nature and the Divine. However, action must partake, for all experiences are a call to act, for intellect is beckoned by the great principle of Undulation in Nature, who shows herself in the inspiring and expiring of the breath, in desire and satiety, in the ebbing and flow of watery bodies, for the laws of Nature are those of the spirit.

So, as Emerson writes in *Poetry and imagination*, "whilst the man is startled by this closer inspection of the laws of matter, his attention is called to the independent action of the mind"[38]. Identity of law, physical order, and the perfect parallelism between the laws of Nature and those of thought does exist, yet our experience of it is but symbolic and imaginative, for what Nature provides is "a copy of every humor and shade" of one's own character and mind: "the world is an immense picture-book of every passage in human life. Every object he beholds is the mask of a man"[39]. This means that every correspondence between mind and matter suggests a substance older and deeper, whose law we see gleaming through Nature's metamorphosis. And it is the poet no less "who plays with it with most boldness", who is "most profound and most devout"[40].

A metaphysician, the poet only sees in Nature's dramatic becoming an inevitable step in the path of the creating mind, they give us the eminent experiences only, for the real worth of experiencing truth and factual law is to illustrate one's own thought:

"Seas, forests, metals, diamonds and fossils interest the eye, but 't is only with some preparatory or predicting charm. Their value to the intellect appears only when I hear their meaning made plain in the spiritual truth they cover. The mind, penetrated with its sentiment or its thought, projects it outward on whatever it beholds"[41].

Consequently, intellect is determinant, it projects itself into all things and bathes them in divine value. The mind transcends, it conjoins the Divine, the Over-soul by drawing lawful circles into all the events of Nature's ecstasy. Kant's main points are then rejected by Emerson. True, for the later, all aesthetic judgements are symbolic and imaginative, that they join Nature in genius and supra sensible faculties, in Ideas and abstract laws. However, these symbols are determinant, they transform nature, they bring in new vistas and comprehensions:

38 R. W. Emerson, *The complete works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. VIII*, op. cit., p. 6.

39 Ibidem, p. 9.

40 Ibidem, p. 10.

41 Ibidem, p. 11.

"A happy symbol is a sort of evidence that your thought is just. I had rather have a good symbol of my thought, or a good analogy, than the suffrage of Kant or Plato. If you agree with me, or if Locke or Montesquieu agree, I may yet be wrong; but if the elm-tree thinks the same thing, if running water, if burning coal, if crystals, if alkalies, in their several fashions say what I say, it must be true. Thus, a good symbol is the best argument and is missionary to persuade thousands"[42].

The poet, as "the Sayer," stands in a privileged position, not merely to describe Beauty but to embody and participate in it. Poetry becomes the act through which the soul expresses its unity with Nature, as the poet dissolves individual subjectivity and enters the flow of universal Being. This means that Emerson does not treat Beauty as an object to be grasped intellectually but as an experience to be lived, and here is where I believe enters the argument for Kantian influence in Emerson's aesthetic thought. However, Beauty is to Emerson an event in itself, and it is not upon the lawfulness and empty forms that fundament all cognitions that the intellect and Nature (or Beauty) correspond. What is transcendental to Emerson is a living god, an overarching Soul that beckons our experience through its beautiful body. Beauty is the transcendental existence of Nature, of the divine, where inner perception responds to the spiritual dimension embedded in natural forms. Nature is both the path and the language through which the soul communicates with the divine. Beauty, then, is Nature's way of making herself intelligible through form, rhythm, and relationship. In poetry, experience and language meet; the poet becomes a transparent medium through which the ecstatic energy of life is articulated. Ultimately, Emerson's aesthetic theory is framed by a metamorphic ecstasy: the soul's ongoing transformation through its surrender to Nature's rhythm. Beauty leads us not through abstraction but through embodied experience, and poetry is the voice of that transformation. Beauty is the life-force itself: intimate, excessive, and luminous. The poem is both its residue and its reanimation.

42 Ibidem, p. 13.

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