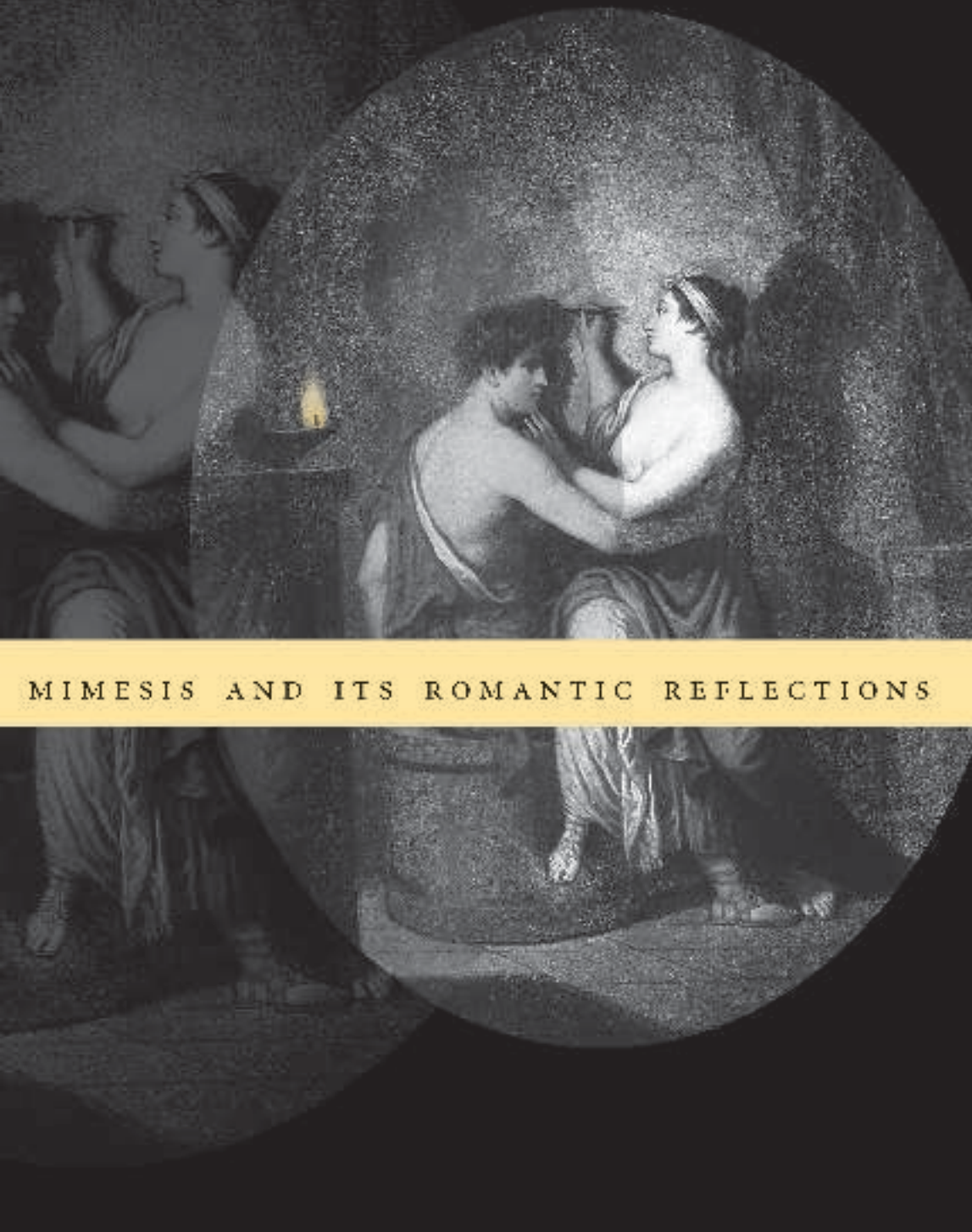


Frederick Burwick



MIMESIS AND ITS ROMANTIC REFLECTIONS

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F r e d e r i c k B u r w i c k



M I M E S I S A N D I T S R O M A N T I C R E F L E C T I O N S

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ABBREVIATIONS

I use the following abbreviations to identify frequently cited works. These works are cited in full in the Bibliography.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

- BL* *Biographia Literaria*. The 1983 Princeton edition.
BL 1907 *Biographia Literaria*. The 1907 Oxford edition.
CL *Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*
CN *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*
CPW *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*
C&S *On the Constitution of the Church and the State*
LL *Lectures 1808–1819 on Literature*
LS *Lay Sermons*
M *Marginalia*
Sh C *Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism*
Shedd *The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*

THOMAS DE QUINCEY

- DQ* *The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*

FRIEDRICH WILHELM JOSEPH VON SCHELLING

- KN* *Über das Verhältnis der bildende Künste zu der Natur*
Methode *Vorlesung über die Methode des akademischen Studiums*
PdK *Philosophie der Kunst*
StI *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*
SW *Sämtliche Werke*

INTRODUCTION

In *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946), Erich Auerbach moves from Schiller and Goethe to Stendhal and Balzac, passing over those writers whom he labels romantic. They were no longer concerned, he says, with the representation of reality. Instead, they had become preoccupied with the “fragmentation and limitation of the realistic.” To the extent that they made any attempt at all “seriously to represent objects of contemporary society,” their effort was half veiled in the “fantastic or idyllic.” Never comfortable with society, Rousseau found its institutions unethical and sought retreat in nature. The generation that followed him, so Auerbach reasoned, persisted in this rejection of society and continued to nourish their own inner fragmentation and isolation.¹ In them representation of reality had given way to individual subjectivism.

Imitation, as a way to interpret reality and the social condition through the performative and representative means of literature, had a broad intercultural tradition. Yet it was a tradition that had begun to disintegrate. Auerbach—a German Jew in exile, a professor of romance philology at Marburg driven by the Nazis from his own country—was trying to rejoin the fragments of mimesis.² Various pieces were being used to reflect factional interests, or to serve as propagandistic instruments of nationalism. Although Auerbach knew that the “fate” which is operative in mimetic fictions is always imposed from without, and is never “a fate which results from the inner processes of the real, historical world,” he hoped that his call for an informed historical and cultural vantage would surmount the potential for ideological abuse.³

It was only a few years after Auerbach’s book was published that Martin Hei-

1. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur*, pp. 399, 406–7, 414–15.

2. Luiz Costa-Lima, “Erich Auerbach: History and Metahistory.”

3. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 35; idem, “Philology and Weltliteratur,” p. 17: “We must return, in admittedly altered circumstances, to the knowledge that prenational medieval culture already possessed: the knowledge that the spirit [Geist] is not national!”

degger declared that mimesis in the arts propagated fundamental deceptions about Being. Although it may not be altogether fair to identify Heidegger's former endorsement of National Socialism with the Nazi atrocities that had driven Auerbach from his country, his denunciation of so-called mimetic realism was most certainly informed by his belated recognition of the propagandistic abuse of its fictions. Our habituation to a mimetic way of thinking, he announced in 1953, had led us to neglect the essential difference between Being and beings. Precisely because it focused on how ideas might be manifest or replicated in things, the philosophical inquiry into the nature of Being ignored the ontology and pursued with fascination the phenomenal appearance in being. Instead of looking for the informing physical energy, we reenact our anthropocentrism and accept the world of phenomenal appearances as an imitation of our ideas.⁴ It was this very insistence on the mimetic illusion of "reality" that brought about the modern and postmodern confrontation with the constitutive pretenses of art, philosophy, and the social sciences.

The potential for deception, although exploited by the mimetic tradition in the arts, is actually located, as Jacques Derrida has demonstrated, in the redoubling of language. The constitutive structures of language are all the more difficult to assess because we can refer to them only from the inside. So thoroughly does language substitute for being that even when we think we are referring to an external world of things, our language is referring only to itself. The strategy of Derrida's deconstruction is to show how the mimetic presumptions of a text can be detected and exposed from within the illusory structure of signs and symbols. He opposes not imitation *per se*, but imitation that does not recognize its own redoubling, or which presumes that there is an original out there for it to copy.⁵

The generation of the physical world of being is a redoubling movement in which matter and energy take on shapes and forms that can be seen and named. In the *Poetics* (1451a.24), Aristotle posits mimesis as a consequence of *physis* (*ingenium*, instinct). The *physis* is first redoubled as its energy manifests itself in nature, and is then redoubled once more in the mimetic sign that records its intelligible presence: "Physis is revealed in mimesis," writes Derrida, "or in the poetry which is a species of mimesis, by virtue of the hardly apparent structure which constrains mimesis from carrying to the exterior the fold of its redoubling."⁶

The "fold," hidden within the denotation, is the differential that Derrida ex-

4. Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 164.

5. Jacques Derrida, "La double séance," in *La Dissémination*.

6. Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 237.

poses. When a judgment of taste asserts itself as a logical judgment, which it never can be, the manifestation might be judged paradoxical. The nonconceptual, after all, is now said to resemble the conceptual—a mimetic act. “There is no contradiction here,” Derrida says, “which is not reappropriated by the economy of *physis* as *mimesis*.”⁷ Among its manifold possibilities, *physis* may enter into human activity as *mimesis*, an activity of determining and representing which Aristotle will allow only to human beings. Responding to the declaration in the *Poetics* that “imitation is natural to man from childhood” and that the human being “is the most imitative creature in the world” (1448b.6–9), Derrida observes that Aristotle has thus located human activity within mimetic redoubling: “The power of truth, as the unveiling of nature (*physis*) by mimesis, congenitally belongs to the physics of man.”⁸ From his observation that only human beings imitate, through his poetic principle that “man imitates man,” Aristotle seeks to reinforce his presumption that in the drama a mimetic relation between the act and the human being would be disclosed. Rather than reveal the truth of Being, Derrida suggests, the mimetic act only redoubles the figurations of self.

Because writing produces only signs or traces for what is not present, it always defers direct reference to what it represents. The sign pretends to a sameness which it offers only in its difference. This mode of reference which defers in and through difference is what Derrida calls *différance*. Unless there is an awareness of *différance*, the “folding” of the *physis* within the mimetic structure of textuality remains unread. The redoubling in Plato’s *Republic* (book 10) involves two modes of mimesis. In one, the idea manifests itself in reality. In the other, the artist replicates the reality. The danger, according to Plato, is that the viewer may confuse the two. But Derrida sees a more fundamental confusion: Plato’s “double inscription of mimesis” privileges *eikastic* representation, for example, in *Timaeus* and *Laws*, where the *eikon* is identified as the true likeness of the idea in the real and condemns *fantastic* representation, for example, in the *Republic* and *Ion*, where the *phantasma* or *eidolon* are dismissed as the sense-deceptions of the poet or artist.⁹

Derrida’s deconstruction of mimesis would be disturbing enough if it had gone no further than Plato in exposing the *fantastic* images of poet and artist. But he also deconstructs Plato’s *eikastic* images, which are only representations of a textual ontology (i.e., of an ideal that is only textual, only itself a mimetic

7. Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 76; Derrida cross-references his comments on mimesis in *The Truth in Painting*, pp. 47–48, 76, 110, 377, to his essay “Economimesis.”

8. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 237.

9. Derrida, “Economimesis,” p. 67; idem, *Dissemination*, pp. 186–87.

redoubling). Because mimetic activity is essentially textual, an attempt to give external representation to experience, the human being is always caught up in *différance*. The mimetic gesture expresses only the absence, the difference, not the sameness it seeks to produce. If the disparity were simply of the sort that Plato attributes to names and signs (*Cratylus*; *Phaedrus* 242c), then the difference could be resolved simply by relying on the capacity of mind to divine the truth. Thus it might be argued that proper education, intellectual discipline, and alert and informed perception could overcome the naive confusion of the signifier with the thing signified. What Derrida demonstrates is that this supposed capacity to penetrate or transcend the limitations of the sign-system is itself defined by the same self-referential textual ontology.

Where the *mimemes* are plural, as Derrida discovers them to be in Mallarmé's *Mimique*, their constant destabilizing means that they could be held to be part of the movement of *différance*. Mallarmé takes as his text the text of the mime. The mime's text is the body, inscribing itself through gesture and facial expression. In this originary, performative act, the mime might be said to present rather than represent. Because he performs what he means, the mime's text could then be perceived as overcoming the usual absence of referentiality. This would seem to recapture, Derrida recognizes, the original Greek sense of *μιμεῖσθαι*.

Mallarmé's mime might thus be the one to unveil the truth of Being. Derrida, however, emphatically denies the possibility. He grants Mallarmé's point that the mime is indeed mimicking, but he is mimicking nothing (no thing): in Derrida's words, this mimicry "is difference without reference, or rather reference without a referent." Yet it is precisely in revealing nothing that "the differential structure of mimicry or mimesis" is preserved. Because it is the business of the mime to unveil absences rather than presences, he is not entangled in the double bind of Plato's metaphysics: "This 'materialism of the idea' is nothing other than the staging, the theatre, the visibility of nothing or of the self. It is a dramatization which illustrates nothing."¹⁰ Because there is "nothing outside of the text," Mallarmé's mime has a singular advantage in imitating nothing.

In an equally devastating attack, René Girard attributes the social mechanism of victimization and violence to the insidious and compelling power of mimesis. Mimetic representation inculcates a desire for the object and implicates its appropriation. Imitation thus fosters rivalry. "When any gesture of appropriation is imitated," Girard says, "it simply means that two hands will reach for the

10. Derrida, *Dissemination*, pp. 206–8.

same object simultaneously: conflict cannot fail to result.”¹¹ Like Derrida, Girard locates the fundamental mimetic act in a concealed redoubling. In the chapter from *Rasselas* titled “The Wants of Him who Wants Nothing,” Samuel Johnson has his hero call out for “something to desire.”¹² Unlike hunger, desire requires an external stimulus. This Johnsonian moral truth is crucial to Girard’s declaration of the mimetic nature of desire. We desire because we see others desire, and we desire what they desire.¹³

Desire thus has a triangular structure. Praising Amadis of Gaul, Don Quixote declares “that whoever imitates him best will come closest to perfect chivalry.” Don Quixote desires whatever Amadis might desire. Amadis thus becomes the invisible mediator of desire. The subject’s relationship to the object of desire, whether it be to possess the barber’s basin or to vanquish the windmills, is merely a mirroring gesture, a way of enacting the deeper desire to be like Amadis.¹⁴ In order to enact the desire for the object, the subject forgets that this desire is only a mimetic act. The desire becomes “real,” felt and experienced as one’s own. In this moment, the mediator becomes the rival. Whether they desire similar objects or the very same object, they both perform the same act. What began in admiration is transformed into rivalry. To complete the process of the imitation, it is necessary to eradicate the traces of difference: to annihilate what one imitates. This is the “mimetic crisis,” the source of violence.

Paradoxically, the attempt to assure social order initiates social disorder as well. As the role model for the child, the adult gives the injunction, “Imitate me!” Hidden within this injunction, however, is the secret countermand, “Don’t imitate me!” (which means, Girard explains, “Do not appropriate *my* object”; or averting the double bind of role model, “Do as I *say*, not as I *do*”). What Freud tried to explain as the Oedipal conflict, Girard identifies as a virtually universal double bind present in all human relationships, not merely that of father and son. “If desire is allowed to follow its own bent,” he declares, “its mimetic nature will almost always lead it into a double bind.”¹⁵

To break the deceptive hold of redoubling, Derrida proposed the deconstruction of texts. By disclosing the differential structure of language, where reflexivity masquerades as referentiality, Derrida shows that all efforts at mimetic representation are caught in an infinite regress of textuality. To alleviate the violence of “mimetic desire,” according to Girard, society has encouraged two

11. René Girard, *To Double Business Bound*, p. 201.
12. Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas*, in *Works of Samuel Johnson*, 4:15.
13. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 145.
14. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, pp. 1–5.
15. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 146–49, 170–72.

modes of revealing the potential victimization: religion and art. The revealed mimesis of religion and art allows for a conscious understanding of the concealed mimesis of human desire. The sacrifice is to religion what tragedy is to art: a surrogate crisis, a “ritualized mimesis” that functions “to keep the conflictual mimesis from beginning afresh” and destroying the social order.¹⁶

Unlike Heidegger and Derrida, Girard recognizes a redemptive function in the ritualization of “mimetic desire.” He argues, not that it is possible to step outside the textual system, but rather that within that system certain presentations of mimetic desire expose its origin and its destructive power. The novel, no less than the liturgy, defuses the potential violence by exhibiting the whole course of its causality. By affirming this positive function of traditional mimesis, Girard may seem to have joined forces with Auerbach. Girard, however, makes no claims for an international, intercultural tradition. The rituals of sacrifice and tragedy are meaningful only in terms of the immediate community. This is why violence breaks forth unchecked when the community disintegrates.

Also at odds with Auerbach, Girard recognizes a romantic mimesis and describes an internal as well as an external mode of mediation. In the objective mode, characters openly announce the nature of their desires. In the subjective mode, characters disguise and often misconstrue their desires.¹⁷ Stendhal’s *The Red and the Black*, a novel which Auerbach considers representative of the epoch of “modern tragic, historically grounded Realism” (*Mimesis*, p. 404), is for Girard a prime example of the romantic. In narrating Jean Sorel’s illusions, Stendhal does not ignore the displacement of the mediator; rather, he transplants the triangular structure of desire into the mind of the “romantic *vaniteux*,” who then attributes all of its workings to his own mind. Thus for Girard romantic mimesis is characterized by a spontaneous creation, “a ‘parthenogenesis’ of the imagination.”¹⁸

In spite of the modernist and postmodernist critiques of mimeticism, and the prevailing suspicion of its ontological and ideological entrapment, contemporary art has yet to abandon altogether the pretenses of realistic representation. Nevertheless, a postmodernist author, rather than repeat the cliché that the work “holds up a mirror to reality,” is more apt to claim that the work examines the dark side of the mirror and exposes what is going on behind the backs of our illusory self-images. The critique of mimeticism is actually as old as the mimetic tradition itself. As Derrida noted, Plato put forth two discreet

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 148–49.

17. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, pp. 9–27.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

accounts of mimesis, approving its formal functions and rejecting its appeal to the senses.

By the eighteenth century, so many corollaries had been added to the doctrine of imitation that Alexander Pope's seemingly simple precept, "First follow Nature," implicated a broad array of propositions. To imitate human action, as Aristotle proposed, had come to mean as well to imitate those poets who had already succeeded in the endeavor. To imitate ideal form, as Plato advocated, had been replaced by the requirement to imitate those formal principles on which the best tragedies, the best epics, the best elegies, had been constructed. Because poets and artists were thus expected to follow their predecessors, the new standards of taste tended to subordinate and devalue originality.¹⁹

In reaction to the eighteenth-century emphasis upon imitating past masters, a number of critics began to plead the cause for originality. Edward Young, in his *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), scorned imitation as a "meddling ape," capable only of lulling us into the languor of one "who listens to a twice-told tale," while "our spirits rouze at an *Original*." The valorization of the self, which had its rise in the shift toward democratic politics, is evident in the introspective modes of romantic literature as well as in the insistence on the original rather than the derived.²⁰ Although originality, in the aesthetics and criticism of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, was esteemed in terms of the value accorded to the individual self, the ground for validating originality was gradually redefined in reaction to mass production and industrialization. By the mid-nineteenth century, such critics as John Ruskin and William Morris recognized the threat of commodification. It was necessary, they argued, to reaffirm the value of individual creativity and to return the production of the artifact to the artist and artisan.

There were those, of course, who still asserted that all originality had given us was original sin. To cast out tradition would mean to relinquish traditional values. The most complete and perfect imitation possible, as affirmed by the Cambridge Platonists, is that rational act by which we repeat in our own mind the idea of God.²¹ Why abandon, for the sake of originality, that credo which had centered the *ethos* of religious life in the *imitatio Dei* or the *imitatio Christi*?

This question has recently been repeated by William Schweiker in his *Mimetic Reflection* (1990). He argues that in literature and the arts, no less than in religion, imitation failed because it could not keep its promise. Because its final

19. W. J. Bate, "The English Poet and the Burden of the Past, 1660–1820," in *Aspects of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 251.

20. Thomas McFarland, "The Originality Paradox," in *Originality and Imagination*, pp. 1–30.

21. Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, 1:583–86.

goal, the identity and sameness, was unattainable, imitation was seen as a false criterion that called attention to the incapacity of representation. Rather than reconciling “consciousness in language,” the pretense to imitation “actually broke them apart.” But if we delete “imitation” from our postmodern discourse, Schweiker asks, “what vocabulary can we use to help us interpret ourselves and our world?” His answer is that we must restore the term as a viable concept by emphasizing “not iconic copying but the praxis of figuration.”²²

This point is essentially the same as the one made by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In the context of that earlier version of the debate now confronting postmodernism, Coleridge had insisted upon the difference between copy and imitation. In Chapter 3, “Mimesis of the Mind,” I shall call attention to the influence of Schelling in Coleridge’s exposition of the distinction between copy, as mechanical replication, and imitation, as an exposition of the mental process of apprehension. Crucial to this romantic definition of imitation is the shaping presence of the mind. The mediating self is revealed in and through the external artifact.

If the debate over the nature and function of mimesis, over its use and abuse, has thus persisted through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, what are we to make of the various declarations of its disintegration and demise? Auerbach, in 1946, rallied a defense of mimesis by recounting a tradition of responsible social criticism in the representation of reality. Heidegger, in 1953, accused that same mimetic tradition of perpetuating a grand metaphysical deception. That very year, in *The Mirror and the Lamp*, M. H. Abrams claimed that attention to mimetic representation was replaced during the romantic period by an expressive mode of creativity in the arts. René Wellek supported that argument in his 1955 volume on *The Romantic Age (A History of Modern Criticism, II)*, where he links “the rise of an emotional concept of poetry” to “the implied rejection of the imitation theory.”²³

Another explanation of the decay of mimesis has been advanced by John Boyd, S.J. In 1968, Father Boyd laid the blame on “the noetic impact of the Enlightenment and its dehumanizing rationalism.” The mimesis of the later eighteenth century took too seriously its own models of the representational capacities of the mind. As he defined its cognitive function, mimesis is metonymic rather than metaphoric. Aristotle had divined that “intense metonymy” which informs the mimetic relation between art and culture. The metonymy of mimetic representation involves “one or another form of vol-

22. William Schweiker, *Mimetic Reflection*, pp. 12–13.

23. René Wellek, *The Romantic Age*, p. 2.

untarism,” rather than an absolute and necessary “realism.” For two thousand years mimesis persisted “as a small but compelling metonym of the state of Western cultural history.” To be sure, the mighty monument erected by the Greeks had already been rechiseled by the pragmatic and rhetorical concerns of the Roman theorists, and further modified by the scholasticism and religious humanism of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. When the essential metonymy that held the structure together was finally washed away by the insistent “scientism” of the Enlightenment, the romantics abandoned the ruins of imitation and began to worship at the shrine of subjectivism.²⁴

But was it another shrine? Perhaps, as John L. Mahoney suggested, the romantics were content to refurbish what they found in the ruins: “If imitation in its classical roots means the capturing of what is essential in the events and actions of human life, can it not now mean the capturing of what is central in the imaginings and emotions?” Rather than pit the expressive against the mimetic, as Abrams and Wellek had done, Mahoney sought to recognize a mimetic validity in representations of the “inner life.”²⁵ Although the romantic doctrine of mimesis may well be disparaged for falling away from a positivist affirmation of external reality, romantic poetry and philosophy did make a relevant and lasting contribution to the exposition of the self. Nor was the turn from an outer to an inner reality a radical revision of the mimetic tradition.

When Aristotle stipulated that a character be shown responding, doubting, deliberating, choosing, as requisite to the “imitation of human action,” he certainly provided a ground for the subjective experience. In order to give serious deliberation to the problems of mimesis as imitation of the mind’s apprehension of reality, romantic critics frequently turned to the phenomenological and transcendental philosophers of the age. My opening chapters will give particular attention to the contributions of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Friedrich Schelling, Georg Friedrich Hegel, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Thomas De Quincey. Reacting to discoveries in physical and physiological optics, they all recognized the fallibility of the senses. If the means of perception and the media of representation are unreliable, then any attempt to define imitation in the arts will obviously be complicated by disjuncture.

Acknowledging that representation is constantly baffled (the senses are fallible; the aesthetic illusion is not long sustained; the organic whole is realized only in fragments; validity is only contrived), romantic critics, making a virtue of necessity, developed a number of strategies for coming to terms with dis-

24. John D. Boyd, *The Function of Mimesis and Its Decline*, pp. 298–307.

25. John L. Mahoney, *The Whole Internal Universe*, p. 3.

juncture. It is precisely the confrontation with what defies imitation and representation that gives to the romantic doctrine of mimesis its relevance to present-day criticism.

Nor did the romantic poets neglect the traditional modes of representation. When Auerbach asserted that they made no serious attempt "to represent objects of contemporary society," he could not have been thinking of the profound literary response to the French Revolution and the rise and fall of Napoleon. The striking scenes of the Revolution recounted in Wordsworth's *Prelude*, or the ball in Brussels and the advent of the battle at Waterloo narrated in Byron's *Childe Harold*, can scarcely be surpassed for vivid descriptive detail in re-creating the historical moment. Examples could be drawn from Continental romanticism as well, from Victor Hugo, Théophile Gautier, Heinrich von Kleist, or Achim von Arnim. Auerbach seems to acknowledge that "the representation of reality" as he endeavors to trace it through European literature is conspicuous in the works of Kleist, and later Georg Büchner, whom he therefore considers at odds with other romantic writers. Furthermore, the changes that they might have brought about, he says, were thwarted because they were given no opportunity to develop. To call attention to the powerful descriptive passages in romantic literature, however, is not to say that Auerbach, and the many others who shared his opinion, held without reason to a mistaken conviction that the romantics had spurned the mimetic tradition and were no longer interested in representing the objects of society.

The reason, to some extent, is obvious. The romantics were preoccupied with the self. The rise of individualism, a major factor in the political turmoil of the age, was also manifest in the literary exploration of the individual consciousness and the individual experience. The paradox, of course, was that the very self-assessment crucial to the social changes then taking place would be appraised by critics of subsequent generations as self-indulgent escapism. Having reaped all the advantages of the new definition of the self, the critics then forgot the urgency and poignancy of that endeavor to lay claim to previously uncharted regions of subjectivity. The Byronic exile and the Wordsworthian recluse both spoke directly to the concerns of their time, and not merely as advocates or apologists for the retreat into the self. When the Byronic hero declared that "to fly from, need not be to hate mankind," he was making a declaration of independence that gave his contemporaries a new image of self-assertion.

A less obvious reason, certainly not one expressly pondered by Auerbach, is that the province and techniques of mimesis were being redefined in romantic literature. Self-awareness, with its alert attention to the subjective apprehension

of external reality, involved an attendant concern with the representation of the interior processes of perception. It also led to a suspicion about the pretenses of mimesis, especially that version of mimesis which seemed to favor the external and material. Plato's notion that music is the most, sculpture the least mimetic of the arts (*Laws* 397a–b, 400d–401a) gave priority to ideas rather than things. In Aristotle's *Poetics* the mimetic doctrine is set forward with the insistence that "the imitation of human actions" depends upon *proairesis* rather than merely *praxis*; mimesis must reveal, that is, the interior response, deliberation, and choice that precedes and determines the external action. Thus Schelling appeals to a venerable classical tradition when he tries to redeem the mimetic doctrine from that mode of definition which had limited it to representation of a merely external reality. Johann Joachim Winckelmann was right, Schelling asserts, that art is essentially mimetic, but Winckelmann made the mistake of directing that mimetic activity to external nature. What art imitates is not the external world, Schelling clarifies, but how the mind perceives the external world. Coleridge repeats this distinction in "On Poesy and Art" from his 1818 lecture series (*LL* 2:217–25), where he lays claim to it as his own by ridding his text of the tell-tale reference to Winckelmann. Sir Joshua Reynolds was right, Coleridge announces in a bold stroke of originality, the function of art is mimetic, but it imitates how the mind beholds, not simply what it beholds.²⁶

Romanticism, in terms of the twentieth-century denunciation of mimetic and expressive theories, is therefore doubly damned. Mimetic theory is damned because by pretending to reveal the true attributes of human nature and the constitutive forms of culture, it has perpetuated conventions contaminated by the dominant ideology. The romantic endeavor to redefine the function of art as the expression of the individual artist simply relocated the same proprietary ideology. The one no less than the other has served the dominant ideology by furthering, even if unwittingly, the self-centered, self-serving politics of possession. It has been a major preoccupation of recent criticism to expose the rhetoric and the semiotics of entrapment which inform the arbitrary pretense of the natural sign. While attention to textuality and intertextuality may well reveal an inherent deception which has masked itself as "representation" of human nature, it is also true that the self-reflexive aesthetics of romanticism often anticipated such critical exposure, calling attention to the deception and the-

26. Coleridge goes on to borrow Schelling's distinction between Poesy and Art, announcing that he has personally "cherished the wish" to desynonymize the words as genus and species. *LL* 2:219. Schelling's account of the dissemination of "Poesie" and "Kunst" as genus and species—in *StI* and *PdK* §64, in *SW* 3:618, and 5:473–74—is also evident in Coleridge's "Principles of Genial Criticism" (1814, in *BL*), and in Lecture 1, 1811–12, in *LL* 1:185–97.

matizing the entrapment. Skepticism and incredulity coexist, or at least alternate with, illusionism and that “willing suspension of disbelief which constitutes poetic faith.”

In Christian Dietrich Grabbe’s comedy, *Jest, Satire, Irony, and Deeper Meaning* (*Scherz, Satire, Ironie, und tiefere Bedeutung*, 1822; published 1827), the poet Ratpoison (Rattengift) struggles to write a poem. Many a poet of German romanticism (Ludwig Tieck, Joseph von Eichendorff, Friedrich Schlegel) had written a poem about writing a poem. Ratpoison, totally destitute of ideas, decides to write a poem about not being able to write a poem. With mimetic representation drastically limited—“I sat at my desk and chewed quills”—he grasps desperately for some “Calderonian” and “Homeric” metaphors to camouflage the nothingness of a poetic elaboration “on the thought, that I can find no thoughts.”²⁷ This negative version of the trope ridicules the solipsistic entrapment of self-reflexivity. Writing a poem about not being able to write a poem was not, of course, merely an invention of Grabbe’s farcical imagination. Coleridge, in “Dejection: An Ode,” had already recorded the plight—“My genial spirits fail”—and how he had struggled to drive off the “viper thoughts, that coil around my mind.” A timely visit from the Devil enables Ratpoison to escape the entrapment of his non-inspiration. Coleridge manages his escape by addressing his more fortunate auditor.

Each of the first three chapters in this work presents a foundational concept in the understanding and application of mimesis during the romantic period. Each of the subsequent three chapters explores one of the grand tropes or thematic provinces of self-reflexivity through which the mimetic process not only informs but becomes the very subject matter of the literary work. It is fitting, therefore, that the first concept to be examined is “*l’art pour l’art*.” This is a concept, to be sure, that many readers will associate, not with the art, literature, or criticism of the early nineteenth century, but with the arguments of Baudelaire and Gautier in the 1840s, or with the Aestheticism and Decadence of the *fin de siècle*. In fact, the phrase was first used in 1804 in Germany by an Englishman speaking to a Frenchman. Henry Crabb Robinson, who attended Schelling’s lectures on the philosophy of art at Jena, met with Madame de Staël and Benjamin Constant in Weimar, and he used the phrase “*l’art pour l’art*” in explaining to

27. Christian Dietrich Grabbe, *Scherz, Satire, Ironie, und tiefere Bedeutung*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, pp. 19–82: “Ach, die Gedanken! Reime sind da, aber die Gedanken, die Gedanken! Da sitze ich, trinke Kaffee, kaue Federn, schreibe hin, streiche aus und kann keinen Gedanken finden, keinen Gedanken!—Ha, wie ergreife ich’s nun?—Halt, halt! Was geht mir da für eine Idee auf?—Herrlich! Göttlich! Eben über den Gedanken, das ich keinen Gedanken finden kann, will ich ein Sonett machen, und wahrhaftig dieser Gedanke über die Gedankenlosigkeit ist der genialste Gedanke, der mir nur einfallen konnte! Ich mache gleichsam eben darüber, daß ich nicht zu dichten vermag, ein Gedicht!”

Constant Schelling's appropriation of the Kantian idea of "disinterestedness." Kant had sought to make aesthetic judgment a matter of reason rather than feeling. Schelling, however, wanted to grant to the artistic endeavor a reconciliation of subject and object. It was this movement that had such a profound influence on Coleridge and, presumably through Coleridge, on Wordsworth.

The second foundational concept is *idem et alter*, as elaborated by both Coleridge and De Quincey in their effort to explain that *difference* was not a failure in artistic representation but rather the essential attribute of success. The mimetic process provides visible evidence of the artist's transforming power of imagination. Coleridge claimed that he had the idea of *idem et alter* from Philo of Alexandria. De Quincey, whose reformulation *idem in alio* emphasizes the projection of the identity of perception *into* the work, calls it "the great catholic principle" of art.

The third foundational concept is the *palingenesis* of mind as art, as propounded by Schelling and Coleridge. Coleridge's reference to poetry and art in the "Principles of Genial Criticism" (1814) echoes Schelling's account of poesy and art as genus and species; in his lecture "On Poesy and Art," Coleridge further elaborates in Schelling's terms the infinite power of poesy and its finite immanence in art as organic process. This chapter examines Coleridge's oft-repeated distinction between "copy" and "imitation," documents Coleridge's indebtedness to Schelling, and shows how they both argued in behalf of an external realization in art, a mimesis, of the mind's own interior reflections.

In Chapter 4, I turn to a discussion of how the object of mimesis can be the mimetic process itself. If art is the product of mimesis, then a poem about a painting or a sculpture is a mimesis of a mimesis. *Ekphrasis* is the classical term for this self-reflexive mode of representing in the verbal arts an artifact of the visual arts. The focus in this chapter is on De Quincey's use of *ekphrasis*, especially in the culminating "Dream Fugue" of *The English Mail-Coach*, where the statue of a Dying Trumpeter winds a stony trumpet. The statue acts, while the helpless opium-eater remains in the bondage of his dream; the statue's dreadful blast proclaims from the field of battle the human sacrifice to the gods of war and empire. The poetic exposé of the conflict, aesthetic and ideological, is neither a skeptical breakdown of the poetic endeavor nor an ironic breaking-out-of the reflexivity of art imitating art imitating art; it is, rather, a confession of deadly entrapment as painful as Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode."

In Chapter 5, I examine how the poets make an effective trope for the mind's reflective capacities by describing actual reflections in a mirroring surface. In *Biographia Literaria* and "On Poesy and Art," as noted in Chapter 3, Coleridge sought to reassert the leverage of mimetic objectivity in romantic subjectivity

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