
Frederick Burwick. *Mimesis and Its Romantic Reflections*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001. 203p.

Kandi Tayebi
Sam Houston State University

The field of Romanticism has assumed that mimesis declined or was completely rejected by the end of the eighteenth century. This in large part was due to M.H. Abrams' seminal work *The Mirror and the Lamp*. As Frederick Burwick points out in his work *Mimesis and Its Romantic Reflections*, Abrams' book has encouraged critics to "presume that once the lamp began to glow the mirror was shattered" (46). This assumption has brought about a lack of analysis of the mimetic techniques used by the Romantic poets. Critics argue that the poets' turn inward toward an examination of the creative process forced the Romantics to abandon "the ruins of imitation" and begin to "worship at the shrine of subjectivism" (9). But the debate over the role of mimesis in literature has continued throughout the ages even into our present day. Burwick's work begins with the acknowledgement that mimesis continued to be important to the Romantic poets and that the mimetic tradition from as far back as Aristotle made room for the subjective experience that was the cornerstone of Romanticism. Yet Burwick does not allow his argument to become outdated and irrelevant to Romantic studies today. Instead, he not only traces the historical development of the mimetic tradition but then illustrates how romantic critics confronted and dealt with the disjuncture evident in representation. Thus, Frederick Burwick's *Mimesis and Its Romantic Reflections* provides a look at the mimetic tradition that is not only thought provoking but also relevant to present-day criticism.

Structuring his work into two parts—the first three chapters explore the philosophical basis of key foundational concepts concerned with mimesis and the last three chapters analyze common manifestations of mimesis in the works of the writers of the time period—Burwick discusses the reconception of mimesis in the Romantic aesthetic. The first concept he explores is art for art's sake, a phrase usually identified with the latter half of the nineteenth century, not Romanticism. Burwick argues that this concept used in association with Schelling had a "profound influence on Coleridge and, presumably through Coleridge, on Wordsworth" (13). By filling in the gaps in the history of the term left by other critics, Burwick chronicles how art for art's sake is engendered by a mimetic process that requires an "interplay of the object perceived, the imagination of the

perceiver, and the material medium in which its form and essence were to be communicated" (44). He then connects this concept with the principles of mimesis as identity and alterity and mimesis as the palingenesis of mind in art.

Tracing the historical antecedents of the romantic idea of identity and alterity, Burwick does not limit himself to literary accounts but instead explores the concept as it is developed in logic, rhetoric and theology. In this way, he argues that Romantics, such as De Quincey and Coleridge, recognize that art can only retrieve similarity in difference, only "phantom images of perception, memory, and imagination" (76) and that this becomes a major component of the Romantic aesthetic.

The last key concept, the palingenesis of mind, provides perhaps the most interesting approach to mimesis. His discussion of Coleridge's distinction between copy and imitation clarifies the concepts at the same time it complicates Coleridge's arguments. Burwick not only traces Coleridge's indebtedness to Schelling but also illustrates how Coleridge alters the initially Schellingian concept so that it takes on an obviously non-Schellingian emphasis. Burwick surprises us with the demonstration of how widely Coleridge applies his ideas of copy and imitation, and his fresh take on Coleridge's appropriation of Schelling shows why the idea of mimesis is important to Romantic studies. Coleridge is able to adapt the idea of mimesis without ignoring the willing participation of the individual. Thus, Burwick argues, Coleridge stressed what Schelling ignored: the individual "manipulating the lever" (106).

Although the first three chapters lay important groundwork for the analysis to come, the last three chapters are the most interesting, presenting new insights into Coleridge, De Quincey, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats, as well as in-depth analyses of Charles Brockden Brown's *Arthur Mervyn*, E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Kater Murr*, and James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Burwick focuses his attention on the use of ekphrasis, mirror images, and double-voiced narratives. While the examples of the above techniques are not unique, his association of these techniques with his ideas on mimesis makes for particularly insightful readings. In the end, Burwick argues that the Romantic self-reflexivity achieved through mimetic techniques heightened the awareness of the "fragility of the mimetic presumption and the illusory structure of signs and symbols" (184).

Overall, Burwick succeeds in providing a meticulous study of mimetic techniques in Romantic literature. He explores a wide range of genres and hints how the importance of mimesis was not limited to the male writers of the time by including a quick reference to Felicia Hemans. An exploration of her works in more detail would have helped round out his analysis of the use of mimesis by Roman-

tic writers. Still, Burwick's work perhaps will open up the debate over the function and nature of mimesis in Romanticism once again. ✱