

Frederick Burwick

Coleridge and Schelling on Mimesis

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Essays for Thomas McFarland

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FREDERICK BURWICK

Along with his more celebrated discrimination between fancy and imagination, the distinction between copy and imitation is essential to Coleridge's critical theory: he repeats it, again and again, whenever he explains the creative process. The earliest formulation occurs in the Notebook entries of October–December 1804. Developing and refining his analysis of imitation in the context of his lectures, essays and *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge turned to Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854).¹ Several critics of the eighteenth-century had explained mimesis as an artistic metamorphosis rather than as a reduplication. Schelling gave this metamorphosis a new significance by claiming that the artist accomplished what the philosopher could only deliberate: art reveals the essential coincidence of mind and nature. Coleridge drew from Schelling's 'Naturphilosophie' and 'Identitätsphilosophie', altering Schelling to suit the development of his own critical theory. The fullest exposition, and the most extensively indebted to Schelling, is 'On Poesy and the Arts' from his 1818 lecture series (*LL*, ii, 217–25).²

1 *CN*, 2211 (Oct. 1804), 2274 (Dec. 1804; or 1808?), 4066 (April 1811), 4397–8 (March 1818=Lect. XIII, 'On Poesy and Art'), 4497 (March 1819); *LL*, i, 126, 133–4.

2 Otto Hasselbeck, *Illusion und Fiktion* (Munich: Fink Verlag, 1979), reviews the concept of difference in eighteenth-century theories of mimesis, citing the works of Jean Baptiste Du Bos, Johann Jacob Bodmer, Johann Jacob Breitinger, Johann Elias Schlegel, and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. For discussion of Coleridge's use of Schelling see: Thomas McFarland, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition*; Gian Orsini, *Coleridge and the German Idealists*; Kathleen Coburn, *Experience into Thought: Perspectives in the Coleridge Notebooks* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979); James Engell, *The Creative Imagination*; Walter Greiner, 'Deutsche Einflüsse auf die Dichtungstheorie von Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Eine neue Untersuchung über den Einfluss von Tetens, Kant und Schelling auf Coleridge' (Diss. Tübingen, 1957); Norman Fruman, *Coleridge: The Damaged Archangel*; M. M. Badawi, *Coleridge: Critic of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Emerson Marks, *Coleridge and the Language of Verse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) pp. 42–95. See also the commentary and notes on copy vs. imitation: *LL*, i, lxx, 307n; ii, 218n, 266n; *BL*, i, xli, cv–cvi, cxi, 76, 137, 293, 305n; ii, 27n, 43, 54, 72, 83n, 84n, 144, 212.