English Faculty Publications

English

1991

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Recommended Citation

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The Romantic Prelude

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The most notable element of Plato's theory of art, or at least the most memorable, is his censorship of poetry from the ideal state (*Republic* III: 398; X: 607). However Plato's argument is construed, it is enlightening to note the domestication to which it is invariably subjected. Since Aristotle's theory is eminently more amenable to our contemporary appreciation for art, and, in one form or another, is judged more central to the history of Western literature, Plato's attack is dispensed with after due characterization as ironic,[1] unmanageably ambiguous,[2] valid only in a most limited context,[3] or excusable in the light of the extraordinary circumstances peculiar to Plato's profession, day, and society (his philosophic loyalties,[4] didacticism as a norm,[5] and the decadence of Athenian literature).[6] Now we could dispense with the assertions that his ban was an ironic gesture or innocuously hypothetical by pointing out that while the Republic Plato envisioned, in earnest or not, was never realized, the attack on art he espoused was tangible enough in its repercussions. And as for the argument that the extraordinary circumstances of Plato's day preclude the validity of the theory it fostered, it must be remembered that later philosophers were not indifferent to the role of art in man's moral and intellectual development, classical Athens was far from the least aesthetically sophisticated of societies, and literature of that period was neither significantly more subversive nor more edifying than our own. (And obviously these circumstances did not predetermine the conclusions of Plato's famous student.)

But rather than address these attempts to neutralize Plato's objections to art, we might with profit ask why such an impulse has been so persistent and so powerful, and how this tendency may have significantly conditioned our understanding of important chapters in the history of aesthetics. Plato's condemnation of poetry rests upon his equation of art with imitation and his assessment of the inherent failings—metaphysical and ethical—of art-as-mimesis. Thus, when Plato's attack on art is dismissed, his impact on the mimetic tradition is minimized or dismissed *ipso facto*. This move therefore makes possible a condition that, given the long and complex history of mimesis, is a dubious state of affairs.

The prominence of the principle of mimesis in Western literature and critical history amounts to what John Boyd has called "twenty-three centuries of . . . hegemony."[7] This lengthy hegemony would seem to presuppose the enduring vitality of a fairly constant, coherent concept. But such a monolithic characterization of critical history would clash with an admittedly diverse—radically diverse—array of concepts at times only obliquely related under the rubric of "mimesis."[8] The solution has been to assign one of those significations commanding authority—and it is not Plato's.

In the only full-length treatment of mimesis in the English language, Boyd argues that the mimetic tradition is largely the history of a concept that is grossly misunderstood and misinterpreted, amounting finally to an utter "decay in the critical understanding of mimesis."[9] In spite of the fact that mimesis has a history predating Plato and continuing to the present, Boyd does articulate a suprahistorical definition: the Aristotelian. Mimesis is the probable rendered into structure. He complains that this structure-grounded meaning is replaced, by the late eighteenth century, by an attenuated mimesis that comes to assume a "time-place context of meaning." By this "empirical and superficial notion of mimesis" he means an emphasis on the representational aspect rather than the cognitive element.[10] Boyd is certainly not the first to see the history of this concept as the corruption of Aristotelian mimesis. In his learned study of eighteenth-century mimesis John Draper chronicles the two "false meanings [which] passed current in England as vulgate Aristotelianism": "one making it a copy of actions and things, the other a copy of accepted masterpieces."[11] Even earlier, Irving Babbitt described how, "while claiming to follow Aristotle, these [neo-classicist] theorists really became pseudo-Aristotelian."[12]

This dominance of the Aristotelian paradigm is problematic because a position that simultaneously asserts the centrality and the corruption of Aristotelian mimesis runs the risk of blurring questions of history and semantics, of confusing descriptive and prescriptive aesthetics. I would suggest that the vital interrelationship of literary theory and literary history may be better illuminated by shifting attention to the dynamics of that theory which initiated the mimetic tradition rather than tracing the decline of what might have proved a more enduring centerpiece of literary theory, the Aristotelian art-as-the-probable.

By reasserting the primacy of the Platonic paradigm, it becomes possible to see the Aristotelian response for what it more properly is: not an alternative to Platonic mimesis, but rather a critique of the possibility of mimesis itself in any meaningful sense. As I hope to suggest, the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century dismantling of mimesis which we call Romanticism is no more than the rendering explicit and specific of what in Aristotle's critique is embryonic.

Aristotle's name writ large in the history of mimesis obscures the implications of his discussion not being the first, nor ultimately the most influential. (That Aristotelian mimesis is *not* central to the mimetic tradition is tacitly acknowledged in any account of apostasy from the Aristotelian position, like Boyd's, Draper's, and Babbitt's.) Of course even though Plato was the first to use the word in an extended discussion of art, even he was appropriating a term with a well-established meaning. As H. Koller writes,

> Dabei ergab sich, daß μίμησις "Nachahmung" bedeuten *kann*, daß das Wort aber im übrigen ein ganz anderes Bedeutungsfeld besitzt als die Ausdrücke "Nachahmung", "imitatio". *Sein Bedeutungszentrum liegt im Tanz.* μίμησις heißt primär: durch Tanz zur Darstellung bringen.

> [The result was that μίμησις *can* mean "imitation," but that the word otherwise has a semantic range entirely apart from the terms "imitation," "*imitatio.*" *Its central meaning lies in dance.* μίμησις means primarily: to effect a representation through dance.][13]

This is not to say that philological origins are determinative of a word's "true meaning." It is to say that if neoclassical conceptions of mimesis as

"empirical" or as "copy of actions" are considered naive and superficial, good precedent exists. Plato, of course, is at times still very close to this root context of mime or dance, as when he refers to the two fundamental styles of poetry as simple narration and impersonation (which he calls mimesis); hence his appellation of poets as "pantomimic gentlemen" (*Republic* III: 398).[14] And Plato's treatment of mimesis is not one that Aristotle's simply supplanted.

Plato's treatment—and condemnation—of art included a challenge that subsequent critics could not possibly resist: "let us assure our sweet friend and the sister arts of imitation, that if she will only prove her title to exist in a well-ordered State we shall be delighted to receive her" (X:607). The unacceptability of Plato's mimesis-centered theory of art meant that Aristotle's poetics was a rebuttal before it was a proposal. Plato, of course, was the first to transpose this term to the poetic arts in something approaching systematic fashion. We must not forget this fact, since Aristotle, before he can articulate a new vision of the nature and function of poetry, must first address head-on the Platonic attack on art, that is, on art-as-mimesis. Aristotle's discussion of mimesis is, therefore, *ab initio* a critique of (Platonic) mimesis. It seems most reasonable, hence, to at least consider Aristotle not as "the originator of the imitative fallacy,"[15] but as its first critic. And the possibility is now advanced that the collapse of mimesis in the eighteenth century is the working out of an Aristotelian critique of mimesis, rather than an abandonment or distortion of Aristotelianism.

As Gerald Else remarks, mimesis is the "master-concept" of the *Poetics*.[16] His daunting study is largely the anatomy of the "drastic revision" of Plato's concept by Aristotle, which revision, he argues, constitutes "in effect a new theory."[17] But if Plato's version of mimesis led him to condemn art as immoral, deceptive, and unphilosophic, and Aristotle's revised theory entailed no such conclusions, then we need to locate the point of departure, and how Aristotle manages to disarm the Platonic argument. It will here prove helpful to outline the essential features of a theoretical model for mimesis, in light of which we may frame our comparative analysis of Plato and Aristotle.

Reducing the principle of mimesis to its essential elements, we find that whether we interpret the term as imitation, representation, copying, mimicking, etc., three things are constant: an object of representation, which

we may call the model, the product of representation, or the presented object, and some relation of likeness that obtains between them. It has been traditional to characterize mimetic theories according to variations in the first constant alone, the model; imitation is of the ancients (Horace), of nature's entelechy (Aristotle), or of surface appearances (Plato). Such an approach distorts Plato, obviates Aristotle's critique of Plato, and misdirects the study of eighteenth-century mimesis and its decline.

First, the case of Plato. It is simply reductive and inaccurate to equate Plato's mimesis with copying of superficial appearances. Certainly this view is indicated in his bed analogy. But at other times he refers to the imitation of virtues and character traits (*Rep.* III: 395) or even to non-existent hypothetical entities or "patterns," as in his discussion with Glaucon:

> Would a painter be any the worse because, after having delineated with consummate art an ideal of a perfectly beautiful man, he was unable to show that any such man could ever have existed?
> He would be none the worse.
> Well, and were we not creating an ideal of a perfect State? (*Rep.* V: 472)

J. Tate argues convincingly that at least on some occasions Plato uses mimesis to refer to the use of a "divine paradigm," in which the "ideal world" is imitated.[18] Boyd, as well, acknowledges that in *The Laws* Plato "admired an ideal poetry, which sought to reveal the forms, the perfection of human life as it should be lived."[19] (These last two judgments would diminish considerably the distance separating Plato's "superficial copying" from Aristotle's mimesis as a structure with universal significance.)

The real question, however, is not "what elements of Plato's theory of art-as-mimesis will render it most justifiable, most redeemable?" but rather "what aspect of mimesis leads Plato to condemn art?" At least, the latter is the dilemma that Aristotle inherited, and that his or any revisionary theory of art would have to address. It has been widely argued that it is precisely those times when imitation *is* of superficial appearances only that Plato condemns art,[20] and that Aristotle dispensed with this problem by redefining mimesis in terms of the model.[21] However, if we examine various contexts for Plato's attack on art, we see that the common denominator in his examples is not to be found in the model. Three examples will suffice.

If we confine ourselves to the discussion of art in the *Republic,* we may summarize Plato's objections to mimesis as either ethical or metaphysical. On the one hand, Plato argues in book III that imitation may corrupt by providing accounts that, however accurate, are inappropriate models of conduct. Neither the horror of death and "the world below," nor excessive levity, nor lasciviousness are "meet for the ears of boys and men who are meant to be free" (III: 387). After dealing with the negative consequences of such poetic subjects, Plato turns to a critique of what he sees as the detriments of imitative style. Personation, the enactment of alien personalities and actions, is condemned because 1) "no one man can imitate many things as well as he would imitate a single one" and 2) the youth of Athens "should not depict or be skillful at imitating any kind of illiberality or baseness, lest from imitation they should come to be what they imitate" (394–5).

In book X, on the other hand, Plato turns to his metaphysical or ontological critique of imitative art. Plato considers only the ideal to be "true existence" (X: 601), and he faults art for its being thrice removed from this ideal, as the bed analogy demonstrates. A close look at this discussion reveals that for Plato an artistic representation does not "fall short" of the ideal, as much as it distorts it by what it adds. This fact is implicit in Plato's explanation of the uniqueness of the ideal in terms of a *tertium comparationis* argument:

> God, whether from choice or from necessity, made one bed in nature and one only; two or more such ideal beds neither ever have been nor ever will be made by God.
>
> Why is that?
>
> Because even if He had made but two, a third would still appear behind them which both of them would have for their idea, and that would be the ideal bed and not the two others. (X: 597)

What this means is that any two objects exhibiting any relationship of likeness will always imply a third object, with respect to which they are similar. This third object would therefore be essentially similar to the two objects, but would differ in leaving only potential what they render actual, thereby establishing their identity and difference. But what this statement further implies is that an ideal object (Plato's Idea) will always be distinguished from any concrete manifestation or replica thereof, by

virtue of that ideal object's state of potentiality. To render an ideal particu-
lar is therefore inevitably to actualize some of its potential features, while
inevitably leaving some undetermined. An artistic representation, there-
fore, is always distinguished from the ideal not only because it confines
itself to the presentation of a phenomenal aspect of the ideal, but because
it particularizes it, and thus concretizes or actualizes variables only latent
in the model.

Ironically, art is also condemned for falling short of the physical. Plato's
idealism leads us to assume that art, being the product of physical media-
tion and therefore at two removes from the *eidos*, or "true existence," is
condemned for this remoteness.[22] But that would be to oversimplify
Plato's scheme. That more is at stake emerges from Plato's question to
Glaucon about the carpenter: " 'is not he also the maker of the bed?' 'Yes.'
'But would you call the painter a . . . maker?' 'Certainly not' " (X: 597).
Both God and carpenters may be called "makers," while the painter may
not. Why, if the bed is clearly a particularization of the ideal just as the
painting is? Because the carpenter's bed, regardless of its not being "a real
object" ("he cannot make true existence, but only some semblance of
existence"—597), is sufficiently distinct from its model to be free from
the charge of deceptiveness. Moreover, its existence and subsistence are
dependent upon an independent function (reclining) which further distin-
guishes it from its ideal model. It therefore constitutes a distinct, autono-
mous object. The painting, on the other hand, "is designed to be—an
imitation of things . . . as they appear." With imitation as its end, its
existence and subsistence are model-dependent. And if its end is
achieved, "if he is a good painter, [the artist] may deceive" (598).
    This deception is in fact inevitably realized to some degree, if not fully,
as the result of the transformation of a physical model via a representa-
tional medium and into a presented object. In making this criticism, Plato
must raise an objection that is the virtual converse of the problem we
have seen with rendering the ideal into art (the particularization of the
essential, the making actual of the potential). When the model is physi-
cal, the artist will unavoidably produce an object that leaves schematic
and indeterminate that which in the model is fully determinate and
actualized.[23] Still in the context of the bed analogy, Plato relates this
weakness to the deceptive nature of human perception itself: "you may
look at a bed from different points of view, obliquely or directly or from

any other point of view, and the bed will appear different, but there is no difference in reality" (X: 598). Similarly, an artist can do no more than to "lightly touch . . . on a small part of [the model]" (X: 598). It is the fact that art emulates this perspectival limitation, and not art's degree of ontic remove from the ideal, which is the essence of this stage in the critique. Art thus falls into a double bind, in that it is condemned with specific relation to both the ideal and the physical for opposite reasons.

In this discussion of the bed analogy, then, the bed is at one remove from the ideal, but carpenters are not therefore vilified. Neither carpenters nor painters are faulted strictly in terms of their position *per se* in a metaphysical hierarchy. Rather, each is evaluated according to its relation to its presumed model. In the case of representational art, we may now call that relationship one of pseudo-identity. Even in this, the most philosophical of Plato's objections, the bottom line is ethical, not ontological: "if he is a good painter, he may deceive." Not, it must be emphasized, because he falls into deceitfulness, but as a consequence of practicing his art well.

We have now arrived at the crux of Plato's critique of mimetic art. Whether his condemnation is considered to be ontological, didactic, or moral, his arguments have one essential feature in common, but only one. They presume neither a common model (it may be historical, physical, or ideal) nor a common medium (poetry or painting). But all are predicated upon a criticism of art's effects, art's fearful power. This power inheres neither in the model nor in the presented object itself, but in the illusory potential of that relationship which joins and confuses them. It is the potential for this paramount degree of likeness or correspondence, for a misguided identification of model with presented object, which is the *sine qua non* of Platonic mimesis.

Obviously, this confusion of the work of art with the model cannot be taken to mean that a bird will attempt to eat a poem about fruit, in the same way that hungry birds were said to attack the canvases of the legendary Zeuxis. Or, in Plato's terms, a painting of a bed may "deceive at a distance," but a poem about one will not.

Roman Jakobson has already raised this objection:

> While in painting and in the other visual arts the illusion of an objective and absolute faithfulness to reality is conceivable, "natu-

ral" (in Plato's terminology), verisimilitude in a verbal expression
or in a literary description makes no sense whatever.[24]

I would argue that, on the contrary, any time representational art acts
upon us so as to elicit responses appropriate to the model it imitates,
illusion, i.e., effectual displacement in our consciousness of the represen-
tation by the model, has occurred. Plato obviously concurred that the
delusory implications of mimesis were not substantially different from
medium to medium.

This pseudo-identity is the most important feature of Plato's discussion
of mimesis (as it will prove to be pivotal in the concept's history and
demise), and one that has received scant attention. This is the more
significant, considering that mimesis is generally defined, its various us-
ages differentiated, on the basis of the object imitated (is it antiquity, the
classics, nature, life?). The constant in Plato's several remarks on mime-
sis, and the feature that determines his condemnation of the imitative
arts, is the confusion of the model with the presented object. Whether we
choose to locate that confusion in audience misperception, leading to
undesirable consequences (and thus enable a reading of Plato's ban as
ironic, given *his* ability to differentiate), or whether we attribute that
confusion to Plato's insistence that art *is*, in its most fundamental dimen-
sion, imitative, does not immediately matter. Because the false teaching,
the emotional debilitation, and the metaphysical shortcomings all depend
for their ill-effects upon an unrestrained potential for art to function in an
illusory way, for the representational medium to fade into transparency,
the presented object to feign the authenticity of the model, for difference
to masquerade as sameness.

If this is true, then Aristotle's challenge is clear. He must address
neither the appropriateness of the model nor the effects of the presented
object, but rather the degree of likeness that can conceivably obtain
between them, the limits of semblance that are possible, for therein lies
the key to the condemnation or the rehabilitation of art-as-mimesis.

Certainly it would be easiest for Aristotle to simply bypass the Platonic
objections to art. He could do this by arguing that art is *not* mimesis, not
an attempt to replicate a model, but an object *sui generis*, to be judged on
its own merits. Or he could argue that mimesis is properly understood in a
far less restrictive sense than Plato, thus freeing art from the demand that

it conform in every particular to the model on which it is based. While both of these points may be seen as implicit in the position Aristotle articulates, by themselves they fail to address the objectionability of art's seductive verisimilitude that is the heart of Plato's complaint.

It is the nature of that correspondence between real world and "realistic" art on which Plato's condemnation of art hinges, and to which Aristotle first directs himself. He therefore begins with Plato's premise that the various arts are, indeed, essentially characterized as forms of imitation (πᾶσαι τυγχάνουσιν οὖσαι μμήσεις τὸ σύνολον [1447a15–16]).[25] And then Aristotle immediately addresses the charge that it is the appeal of art, its seductive power to please while corrupting by causing us to confound illusion with reality, that calls for art's condemnation. In chapter 4 of the Poetics Aristotle, in analyzing the sources of aesthetic pleasure, undermines this Platonic objection and the mimetic principle it presumes: "Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity" (1448b). Aristotle is here alluding to an instance of the principle of aesthetic distance. This remark is a surprisingly simple indication of Plato's failed critique. For in the example Aristotle cites, the unpleasant experience of beholding a corpse is transformed through a representational medium, into the pleasant experience of apprehending its representation. Clearly, the object of apperception is not the same in the two cases. Consequently, the imitative intention (to present an unpleasant subject matter) is utterly thwarted.

This product of imitation (which I will call "representation," as distinct from the activity, "imitation"[26]) exhibits characteristics, in fact, an entire ontology, quite distinct from and independent of its model. It is a distinction dramatically emphasized by divergent experiences of the model and of its representation, a divergence not anticipated in the notion of imitation itself. The relation of model to presented object can never, therefore, transcend mere approximation. And this is not an approximation sufficient to elicit the consequences so deplored by Plato.

Aristotle's theory of catharsis may be seen as further corroboration of Aristotle's insistence on the inescapability of aesthetic distance and its corollary: imitation may legitimately be considered as motivational or causal, but never as descriptive of the quiddity of art itself, since the distinction between model and product is not accidental but fundamental. The ugliness of the corpse is not diluted; it is displaced by a quality

which evokes pleasure. Similarly, in the case of catharsis,[27] emotional benefits are seen to accrue from the depiction of tragedy and horror. Such an effect would require that audience identification with the flawed characters stop short of emulation or emotional confusion. These errors can only be avoided if at some point in the viewing of the spectacle, detachment occurs to turn emotional seduction into moral betterment (in a manner analogous to the transformation of a corpse's ugliness into aesthetic pleasure).

And finally, Aristotle again confirms that imitation is inessential as a characteristic of art when he discusses the antlered doe. In chapter 25, he reaffirms and reemphasizes the threads of his anti-mimetic critique.[28] He concedes the place of imitation in the creative process as one that combines a universal impulse to mimic with an unrestricted range of models. The artist "must imitate . . . things as they were or are, things as they are said or thought to be, or things as they ought to be" (1460b). He immediately proceeds to disabuse his audience of false conclusions about the propriety of judging the products of such imitations in accordance with the Platonic model. Neither ethics ("the standard of correctness is not the same in poetry and politics" [1460b]) nor fidelity to a model is an appropriate standard. To illustrate the latter point, Aristotle uses an extreme case. A doe neither has, is said to have, nor ought to have antlers. If an artist inadvertently renders them in a painting (through "wrong choice" or "technical inaccuracy"), then we have a blatant discrepancy between the model (whether it was real or ideal) and the presented object, and a prime candidate for Plato's objections. Here Aristotle underscores his break with Plato, by emphasizing that such a failing pertains not to what "touches the essence" of art, but to what is "accidental" to it: "not to know that a hind has no horns is a less serious matter than to paint it inartistically" (1460b). Platonic imitation, whereby art is evaluated according to the integrity of its product, i.e., its correspondence to originary model, is adjudged neither a sufficient nor even a necessary condition for successful art. This critique must be seen as predicated upon an already demonstrated disjunction between the imitative process and the independent representation as product. Aesthetic distance is evidence of a paradigm that is inappropriate because it is impossible. We might say that for Plato, art is condemned because it imitates so well without imitating perfectly. For Aristotle, art is redeemed because it cannot imitate that well after all, and so imitates artistically.

If the foregoing is true, then it is not sufficient to say, as does Else, that in Aristotle's hands mimesis is transformed into "a really new idea."[29] For it is essential to Aristotle's purposes methodically and systematically to remove mimesis from its central position in literary theory. Plato's objections were simply not controvertible by reintroducing more appropriate models or expanding the concept of imitation to allow more freedom. The problem, as we have seen, was in the degree of likeness implied by the very concept of imitation, and which if admitted as a perennial possibility, doomed art to perennial suspicion and censure. So Aristotle had to wrench the work of art free from the tyranny of a model it could never successfully emulate. And this independence of the presented object is simply not reconcilable with mimesis in any meaningful sense (other than as descriptive of the origin or process of artistic creation). But to remove mimesis as the essential characterization of the work of art is simultaneously to remove the grounds of aesthetic quality, since pleasure can no longer be predicated upon the features of the model imitated ("if you happen not to have seen the original, the pleasure will be due not to the imitation as such, but to the execution, the colouring, or some such other cause" [1448b]).

Aristotle knows that an alternate theory of the grounding of aesthetic quality is required of his poetics, and is in fact already indicated in the observation that pleasure accrues from depiction of unpleasant subjects. In such a case, the aesthetic quality of a work obviously cannot derive from the model or evocation of the model. The enjoyment which Aristotle notes must obtain in spite of the accuracy of representation, not because of it. For the nearer a representation comes to replace mere resemblance with the illusion of identity, the more our experience of the representation would approximate our experience of the reality. Hence, the more accurate the painting, the more illusional, the more it should repel us (if a base object). But in art, just the reverse proves to be the case. Our negative response to reality has been displaced by a positive response to a semblance. Evidently, then, a representation's accuracy, its impulse toward illusion, is opposed by a deeper aesthetic dimension which pleases only by a transformation, not replication, of its object, creating in the process new (aesthetic) qualities.

This aesthetic grounding, of course, is precisely the function of Aristotle's *mythos*. His working out of this element of tragedy is framed in terms orchestrated to fill the void left by a dismantled mimesis. *Mythos* is

defined in three essential ways, all of which emphatically assert its role as grounding aesthetic quality; organic unity, the probable impossible, and the self-determination of beginning, middle, and end, are all means whereby the work as a thing made is freed from any essential reliance upon or reference to an external model.

The irony in the mimetic tradition is that Aristotle, having successfully emasculated the concept of mimesis by reducing it to a motivational or foundational role, or descriptive of a process, has been repeatedly thrust into the role of being father to a tradition he did so much to disavow and reform. His real (though unrecognized) accomplishment was to have redirected critical theory to the issue of artistic transformation—how representation restructures our experiences of reality, not how art parallels reality. It is from his perception of this uniqueness of the aesthetic experience that Aristotle infers the uniqueness of the work itself. In specific opposition to Plato's demand that art serve a referential function, Aristotle poses the objection that fundamental to the nature of representation are particular features we experience in a manner quite incongruous with our lived experience of the world itself. The work of art and the world it embodies are thus recognized to exist for us in a manner quite unlike the way autonomous objects exist. Aristotle does not pursue this insight. The investigation of the unique ontology and phenomenology of the work of art would not begin in earnest until the eighteenth century. But Aristotle does lay the foundation for its consideration as an object of a peculiar kind.

The pertinent question now raised is, How does the literary medium necessarily modify our experience we call aesthetic? It is, in fact, this line of questioning that will ultimately be pursued to the final collapse of mimesis in the eighteenth century. Beginning with the revolt against Cartesian linguistics in the seventeenth century (and its ideal of a pure, transparent language) and culminating in the work of the pre-Romantics, the essential constant of the mimetic paradigm will again be perceived as the degree of likeness to a model attainable through art, and not the model itself. And, in the writings of Descartes, Vico, Diderot, Shelley, and their contemporaries, the critique of mimesis will but elaborate Aristotle's fundamental insight into the limits of semblance imposed by a representational medium.[30]

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NOTES

1. See R. G. Collingwood, "Plato's Philosophy of Art," *Mind* 34 (1925): 154–72; and Allan Gilbert, "Did Plato Ban the Poets or the Critics," *Studies in Philology* 36 (1939): 1–19. Most of these attempts to rehabilitate Plato's tarnished reputation among poets presuppose an enlightened understanding of art's exemption from extra-literary standards which was vouchsafed to Plato, but which he would not deign to share with an audience blinded by naive, didactic expectations. Such readings are generally tautological (since they presume but never substantiate the presence in Plato of that modern aesthetic sensibility which is itself the source of our repugnance to Plato's ban). See, for example, John Boyd's criticism in *The Function of Mimesis and its Decline*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham UP, 1980) 16–17.

2. The most extreme example of this position seems to be J. G. Warry, who believes that "any attempt to credit Plato's discussion of art in the *Republic* with an intelligent basis leaves too much to be explained away." In *Greek Aesthetic Theory: A Study of Callistic and Aesthetic Concepts in the Works of Plato and Aristotle* (London: Barnes and Noble, 1962) 66.

3. Darnell Rucker's peculiar defense is based on the facts that, first, Plato's censorship is only hypothetical ("the Republic is not Athens") and, second, the censorship standard is clearly expressed. See "Plato and the Poets," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 25 (1966–67): 167–70.

4. M. H. Partee, for example, considers Plato's judgment a great philosopher's inevitable privileging of the "beauty of virtue and knowledge . . . [over] the lesser beauty of language." See "Plato's Banishment of Poetry," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 29 (1970–71): 209–22.

5. See Gilbert 9 ff.

6. In *Plato: The Man and his Work*, 7th ed. (London: Methuen, 1966) 279, A. E. Taylor contends that "the object of attack [is] the art of the Periclean age." Boyd refers to the common suggestion that Plato's objections are conditioned by the decline of tragedy and the emergence of a decadent comedy (7).

7. Boyd ix.

8. In classical times alone, the Platonic, Horatian, and Aristotelian distinctions are generally considered fundamental. Standard treatments include Göran Sörbam, *Mimesis and Art: Studies in the Origin and Early Development of an Aesthetic Vocabulary* (New York: Humanities, 1966); and Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas: An Essay in Aesthetics* (Warsaw: Nijhoff, 1980). By the eighteenth century divergent strains have, if anything, multiplied. Mimesis means anything from stylistic aping (Edward Young's "Conjectures on Original Composition") to selective copying of the beautiful in nature (Charles Batteu, *Les beaux arts réduits à un seul principe*, 1747), to experiential illusion (see Marion Hobson, *The Object of Art: The Theory of Illusion in Eighteenth-Century France* [Cambridge: 1982]).

9. Boyd 98.

10. Boyd 110–12.

11. John Draper, "Aristotelian 'Mimesis' in Eighteenth Century England," *Publication of the Modern Language Association* 36 (1921): 393.

12. Irving Babbitt, *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1910) 9.

13. H. Koller, *Mimesis in der Antike* (Bern: A. Francke, 1954) 119. Translation mine.

14. All citations to Plato's *Republic* are from Benjamin Jowett's translation, *The Dialogues of Plato* (New York: Random House, 1937).

15. Such is the title assigned to Aristotle by Scott Elledge in his *Eighteenth Century Critical Essays,* 2 vols. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1961) 2: 1174–75.

16. Gerard Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1963) 12.

17. Else 97.

18. J. Tate, "Plato and 'Imitation'," *Classical Quarterly* 26 (1932): 162.

19. Boyd 11.

20. See for example J. Tate's discussion of Plato's dual use of "mimesis" in " 'Imitation in Plato's *Republic*'," *Classical Quarterly* 22 (1928): 16–23. His rationale, however, is at times almost disingenuous, as when he summarizes in a later article:

> He [Plato] admits, and indeed welcomes, that kind of poetry which is imitative in the good sense . . . and which he calls either imitative or non-imitative. . . . No doubt Plato would have made things easier . . . if he had used technical terms to distinguish the two senses. But at the time of writing the *Republic* he had not yet descended to such devices. ("Plato and 'Imitation' " 161)

See also W. C. Greene, "Plato's View of Poetry," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 29 (1918): 1–75, for a discussion of Plato's distinction between "true imitation" and "false imitation."

21. The definition of Aristotelian mimesis as the probable or potential as opposed to the actual is generally seen by critics like S. H. Butcher as a liberation of art from its narrow, Platonic constraints. See *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art,* 4th ed. (New York: Dover, 1951) 121–62.

22. Tate's treatment of the bed analogy is typical in its insistence on the "remoteness" of the painting from the truth as the crux of the critique ("Imitation" 20–21). In fact, he later argues that art would be vindicated if it could be found to be "a direct (only once-removed) imitation" ("Plato" 163–64). In the argument of a critic such as Collingwood, by contrast, these different "ontic spheres" are the key to art's redemption, not its condemnation, since distinctness and not distance is taken to be the point. Mimesis is therefore interpreted not as a "replica, . . . an object of the same order as the original, but an object of a wholly different order, having the characteristics proper to that order" ('Plato's Philosophy of Art" 157). Such an apologia is an anachronistic reading based on a formalism incipient in Aristotle but not even latent in Plato. For as I show in the following discussion, an object's independent function (Collingwood's "characteristics proper to an order"), insofar as such function or characteristics may define that object's distinctness *vis à vis* a model, may render that object ethically acceptable. But even if we see here an implicit concession on Plato's part to teleological evaluation, such a move does not preempt his ultimate application of an ethical standard ("does it deceive?"). For this reason Collingwood's different "orders" can hardly be considered separate ontic spheres as they will be in a truly formalist conception of art.

23. The fullest modern treatment of the heteronomy of the presented (literary) object, and the ways in which it is ontically distinct from real objects, is to be found in Roman Ingarden's *Das literarische Kunstwerk* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1960).

24. Quoted in A. D. Nuttall, *The New Mimesis: Shakespeare and the Representation of Reality* (New York: Methuen, 1983) 51.

25. As Else remarks, "there can be no doubt that Aristotle took this concept of μίμησις as the common character of ποιητική from Plato" (12). All citations of *The Poetics,* unless otherwise noted, are from the edition by S. H. Butcher, *The Poetics of Aristotle* (London: Macmillan, 1907).

26. Else corroborates this all-important distinction, the key to the Aristotelian critique of Platonic mimesis: "μιμήσεις, like ποίησις . . . is verbal and active in sense: not 'imitations' or even 'modes of imitation,' with the translators, but 'processes of imitation,' 'imitating' " (12).

27. "Katharsis," like "mimesis," is of course subject to numerous definitions and interpretations. Leon Golden designates four major theories in Alex Preminger, et al., *Classical and Medieval Literary Criticism* (New York: Ungar, 1983) 101–02. All definitions, however, concur that depiction of pity and fear produces, by whatever means and mechanisms, positive results.

28. Somewhat astonishingly, Else omits this chapter from his edition of *Aristotle's Poetics,* ("with the hope of publishing it elsewhere"). Even though it "notoriously presents one of the thorniest problems of interpretation in the *Poetics*" he considers it "relatively independent and not likely to have a major effect upon the interpretation of the rest of Aristotle's work" (632). The chapter contains, however, Aristotle's clearest and most focused critique of Plato's aesthetic.

29. Else 13.

30. See my "Blind Men and Hieroglyphs: The Collapse of Mimesis," *European Romantic Review* 2 (1991).