

## THE IDEA OF “DELIGHT AND INSTRUCT” IN ARISTOTLE’S POETICS, HORACE’S ARS POETICA AND WILLIAM WORDSWORTH’S PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS

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### ABSTRACT

*Literature has emerged from man’s need of expressing himself and interpreting life. Historically speaking, writers have considered literature from different points of view and tried to define its goals and the ways by which it has to be constructed. This study points out how Aristotle, Horace and William Wordsworth, three literary figures living in different periods of time, have interpreted literature or poetry as a “representation” medium in terms of satisfying man’s needs, shaping and enlarging his moral vision. The idea of literature either as a craftsmanship or outburst of feelings is but a vehicle for both “delighting and instructing” man and this is not only what they have asserted but also what they have practiced as the main rule for their own literary creation.*

**Keywords:** Mimesis, Creation Process, Human Nature, Please, Instruct.

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### ARISTOTLE’İN POETICS, HORACE’İN ARS POETICA VE WILLIAM WORDSWORTH’ÜN PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS ADLI ESERLERİNDE “EĞLENDİRME VE EĞİTME”

#### ÖZET

*Edebiyat, insanın kendini ifade etme ve yaşamı yorumlama ihtiyacından doğmuştur. Tarihsel yönden bakıldığında, yazarlar edebiyatı farklı açılardan düşünmüş, edebiyatın amaçlarını ve yapılandırma yollarını tanımlamaya çalışmıştır. Bu çalışma, farklı dönemlerde yaşamış üç sanatçının; Aristotle, Horace ve William Wordsworth’ün “gösterme” ölçütü olarak edebiyatın ya da şiirin insanın ihtiyaçlarına cevap vermesi, ahlaki bakışını şekillendirmesi ve genişletmesi konularını nasıl yorumladıklarını ortaya koymaktadır. Sanatkârlık ya da duyguların dışı vurumu olarak edebiyatın, insanı “eğlendiren ve eğiten” bir araç olması, bu sanatçıların yalnızca savundukları düşünce değil aynı zamanda kendi edebi eserlerini yaratmada uyguladıkları başlıca kuraldır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Taklit, Yaratma Süreci, İnsan Doğası, Eğlendirme, Eğitim.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout literary history, literature aimed at “mimesis”; the representation of life, nature or reality through literary works using various devices, genres, rhetoric, diction, and decorum. Writers tried either to please their readers or instruct them through representation or they aimed at achieving both.

Aristotle, preferring tragedy as an imitation of man “in action” to epic, states that man can improve himself through representation, as human beings are naturally delighted with representation in general. Horace clearly defines the “delight and instruct” rule whereas with William Wordsworth, “the instruction” part of the rule has vanished. However, the idea of instruction seems to be covertly present with Wordsworth as long as the reader responds to the representation with his moral, emotional and rational sympathies. Therefore Aristotle, Horace and Wordsworth have literally met face to face in terms of affective theory that deals with the readers’ psychological responses, emotions, literary tastes and moral understanding.

This study not only explores that these three literary figures, writing in different periods, have expressed the idea of “delight and instruct” in their literary works in some way or another and have explained it in their authentic poetic theories, but also discusses why they have insisted on the importance of “delight and instruct” rule in creation process.

## 2. “PLEASURE” THROUGH “THE SOUL OF TRAGEDY” AND CATHARSIS

In his *Poetics*, which was written in 330 B.C. as Vincent B. Leitch has noted (2001: 117), Aristotle explains how representation in the art of poetry can be both pleasing and instructive at the same time:

Two causes seem to have been generated the art of poetry as a whole, and these are natural ones. Representation is natural to human beings from childhood. They differ from the other animals in this: man tends most towards representation and learns his first lessons through representation. Also everyone delights in looking at the most detailed images of things which in themselves we see with pain, e.g. the shapes of the most despised wild animals even when dead. The cause of this is that learning is most pleasant, not only for philosophers but for others likewise. ... For this reason they delight in seeing images, because it comes about that they learn as they observe, and infer what each thing is, e.g. that this person [represents] that one. For if one has not seen the thing [that is presented] before, [its image] will not produce a pleasure as a representation, but because of its accomplishment, colour, or some other such cause (93)<sup>7</sup>.

Therefore by nature, human beings are interested in representation, and through art they are delighted and instructed by what is presented in front of them. Stressing the difference between the epic and the dramatic, Aristotle regards comedy and tragedy as the best of the poetic kinds because they are “greater and more honourable in

<sup>7</sup> All subsequent references to the primary texts given in parentheses are taken from *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, noted in reference section. Aristotle (2001); “Poetics”, in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, gen. ed. Vincent B. Leitch, W. W. Norton & Company Inc., New York, pp. 90-117.

their forms". Subordinating comedy to tragedy, he defines the rules for writing tragedy in a formalist way. However, an implicit emphasis that is put on the emotional aspect of a tragic play is found in his definition of "tragedy": "Tragedy is a representation of a serious, complete action which has magnitude, in embellished speech, with each of its elements [used] separately in the [various] parts [of the play]; [represented] by people acting and not by narration; accomplishing by means of pity and terror the catharsis of such emotions" (95). Thus, tragedy can be helpful in purifying the feelings of pity and terror [that is, catharsis], when the audience has seen what has happened to the tragic hero, a man "who neither is superior [to us] in virtue and justice, nor undergoes a change to misfortune because of vice and wickedness, but because of some error, and who is one of those people with a great reputation and a good fortune" (100). From the audience's point of view, the pleasure of what is represented on the stage comes through experiencing the feeling of pity and terror with the tragic hero and a kind of relief that such a misfortune has not fallen on them. The hero is important in terms of producing pity and fear in the audience because if he is a wicked man passing from misfortune to good fortune, this will be "neither morally satisfying nor pitiable nor terrifying (100). "Since the poet should use representation to produce the pleasure [arising from pity and terror]" (101), the pleasure that comes from tragedy is mostly dependent on "the structure of the incidents"; the plot "the soul of tragedy" (96), "in accordance with probability or necessity" (97); "This is superior and belongs to a better poet. For the plot should be constructed in such a way that, even without seeing it, someone who hears about the incidents will shudder and feel pity at the outcome. ... Since the poet should use representation to produce the pleasure [arising] from pity and terror, it is obvious that this must be put into the incidents" (101). The poet "should put what is amazing into his tragedies. ... What is amazing is pleasant" (113).

Departing from Plato who censored poetic pleasure in his reasonable vision, Aristotle makes use of "pleasure" through catharsis, which exists with the goal of instructing. Although he does not discuss the moral effect of drama explicitly, he seems to point out that the moral effect is a part of dramatic structure, not a result of mere imitation of a moral action. Pleasure is a special insight that begins with the "complex" plot of tragedy and comes to an end with the purgation of the feeling of pity and fear. It seems to be paradoxical at first sight and one may ask how a man is pleased and instructed through the purgation of pity and terror. The fact of purgation of such feelings is directly related with the idea of gaining a new perspective psychologically. Pity, terror, suffering and misfortune lead the audience to feel pity for the others while they are terrorized with the truth that this misfortune might have fallen on them. These feelings and insights, which are personal, come to the surface of consciousness with the aid of pleasure. Therefore, catharsis is important in the sense that one experiences a moment that enlightens him emotionally. Considering "catharsis" as a key word, an emphasis is put on the union of emotional purgation and intellectual clarification, which comes to the foreground with the action of a tragic play.

As stated before, the idea of pleasure appears together with the idea of instructing in *Poetics*. Being both "philosophical" and "serious", "poetry tends to speak of universals. ... A universal is the sort of things that a certain kind of person may

well say or do in accordance with probability or necessity - this is what poetry aims at... a poet must be a composer of plots... (*he*) represents actions ... that have happened from being the sort of things that may happen according to probability, e.g. that are possible" (98) and "[the poet] might investigate what is universal" (105). If poetry is the composition of a highly unified plot as "what is more concentrated is more pleasurable" (117), and purposeful events imitating the universals with regard to the probability and necessity rule, then it must instruct people about the realities and truths of life. Furthermore, if poetry is the source of universal knowledge about human behaviour and experience, then it instructs and delights people with what it represents because "everyone delights in representations". The poet has to work hard in order to express the experience of emotions because "given the same nature (*with their spectators*), those [poets] who experience the emotions [to be represented] are most believable, i.e. he who is agitated or furious [can represent] agitation and anger most truthfully. For this reason, the art of poetry belongs to the genius or the madman; of these, the first are adaptable, the second can step outside themselves" (104). The poet imitates a sense of truth that transfers itself into human action. So, the art of poetry represents what ought to be, rather than what it is and this brings its moral function into consideration.

### 3. POET AS "THE MAN WHO COMBINES PLEASURE WITH USEFULNESS"

Unlike Aristotle who expresses the "pleasing and instructing" factor implicitly within the idea of probability, in *Ars Poetica (Art of Poetry)*, which Leitch has remarked as a versified letter written to a father and his son named Piso in 10 B.C. (2001: 122-23), Horace clearly dictates the "delight and instruct" rule of poetry. Stressing a "simple and unified" form that is deprived of any "purple patch" (124)<sup>8</sup> and a suitable diction for the subject matter at hand, Horace lists the rules for creating a perfect literary work. He says, poetry like "painting", is a craftsmanship and can be learned by "scratching in and out" with the help of objective self-criticism. The charm and excellence of poetry is to be judged by how much the poet depends on the study of Greek literary models, whether decorum and appropriateness are fully achieved and the expression of the "teach and delight" aim of the poetry. Therefore, the "charm and excellence" of a work does not mean that its propriety through the help of "scribbling carefully" is achieved fully; "It is not enough for poetry to be beautiful, it must also be pleasing and lead the hearer's mind whatever it will. ... If you want me to cry, mourn first yourself; *then* your misfortunes will hurt me" (126). So, poetry does not only appeal to the eyes but also ears. It is a kind of art related to the emotional faculty of the reader and its appropriateness can be achieved by its life-like characters with real emotions that have to be experienced by the poet himself as well. The effect of emotional expression is successful when what is presented to the reader is "true-to-life" with its characters that "should always remain faithful to what is associated with *their ages and suit them*" (128). This can be achieved if the poet "*marks the manners of each time of life, and assigns the appropriate part to changing natures and ages*", because, as Horace asserts, "soon interests change".

<sup>8</sup> Horace (2001); "Ars Poetica", in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, gen. ed. Vincent B. Leitch, W. W. Norton & Company Inc., New York, pp. 124-135.

For Horace, if poetry motivates the human emotional faculty through pleasing with what is represented, so it should be instructing while appealing to the human rational faculty;

Wisdom is the starting-point and source of correct writing. Socratic books will be able to point out to you your material, and once the material is provided the words will follow willingly enough. If a man has learned his duty to his country and his friends, the proper kind of love with which parent, brother, and guest should be cherished, the functions of a senator and a judge, the task of a general sent to the front - then he automatically understands how to give each character its proper attitude. My advice to the skilled imitator will be to keep his eye on the model of life and manners, and draw his speech living from there. Sometimes a play devoid of charm, weight and skill, but attractive with its commonplaces and with the characters well drawn, gives people keener pleasure and keeps them in their seats more effectively than the lines empty of substance and harmonious trivialities (131). ... Poets aim either to do good or to give pleasure - or, thirdly, to say things which are both pleasing and serviceable for life. Whatever advice you give, be brief, so that the teachable mind can take in your words quickly and retain them faithfully. Anything superfluous overflows from the full mind. Whatever you invent for pleasure let it be near truth. ... The man who combines pleasure with usefulness wins suffrage, delighting the reader and also giving him advice. Poetry is like painting. Some attracts you more if you stand near, some if you are further off. One picture likes a dark place, one will need to be seen in the light, because it is not afraid of the critic's sharp judgement. One gives pleasure once, one will please if you look it over ten times (132). ... The path of life was pointed out in verse. ... Entertainment was found there also, and rest after long labour (133).

The pleasure of poetry for readers and spectators should be mingled with moral and practical knowledge, as "wisdom is the starting point and source of correct writing". Thus, the goal of poetry is to be both "delighting and instructing" for its readers. The effect of a literary work on its beholders and spectators is measured by how they are moved and instructed spontaneously in the process of experiencing the representation.

#### **4. POETRY AS "THE SPONTANEOUS OVERFLOW OF POWERFUL FEELINGS" AND FOR "A WORTHY PURPOSE"**

It is quite interesting to observe that both Aristotle and Horace mention the idea of "delight and instruct" in a literary work, the former implicitly and the latter explicitly. Yet, it is much more interesting to find out some issues of this idea in William Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*. As Vincent B. Leitch has stated, *The Preface* was written in 1802 (2001: 668), in the Romantic period. The date of the work is significant, since it was written much later than *Poetics* and *Ars Poetica*, even later than the neoclassical literary works. In the *Preface*, the idea of instructing by the representation of general human knowledge or a moral uplift exists within the idea of pleasing. Rather than obeying the neoclassical rules and traditions for poetic inspiration, Wordsworth advocates the importance of general human emotions, especially the ones related with passions and experiences, "incidents and situations from common life", narrated through a language "really used by men" which is "permanent" and "philosophical", because it is "arising out of experience and regular

feelings”(650)<sup>9</sup>. Wordsworth explains how the feelings and thoughts of human beings can be improved through good poetry that has “a worthy purpose”, which is “to illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement” (651);

For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings ... (*the poet*) is a man, who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and, as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other we discover what is really important to men, so, by the repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections ameliorated (651). ... The subject is indeed important. For the human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants; and he must have a very faint perception of its beauty and dignity who does not know this, and who does not further know, that one being is elevated above another, in proportion as he possesses this capability.. .to endeavour to produce or enlarge this capability is one of the best services in which, at any period, a Writer can be engaged (652). ... I am recommending ... a selection of the language really spoken by men; that this selection, wherever it is made with true taste and feeling ... will entirely separate the composition from the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life, and if metre be superadded thereto, I believe a dissimilitude will be produced altogether sufficient for the gratification of a rational mind (655).

The pleasure of poetry, which is “in itself of the highest importance to our taste and moral feelings” (655) comes from the representation of the intense human feelings and common human experience. Therefore, poetry throws some light upon both emotional and rational human faculties. If a poet is “a man speaking to men ... endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind, a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on-of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create where he does not find them” (655), then, why can not he be a guide, with his “divine spirit” (658), for his readers by means of urging them to explore what their own nature is capable of? And if, as Aristotle says, poetry is philosophical, then it must have the aim of representing and instructing people about universal truths, general human experience and knowledge of wisdom. Wordsworth states that “Aristotle, I have been

<sup>9</sup> William, Wordsworth (2001); “Preface to Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems (1802)”, in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, gen. ed. Vincent B. Leitch, W. W. Norton & Company Inc., New York, pp. 648-668.

told, hath said, that Poetry is the most philosophical of all writing: it is so: its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative: not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion, truth which is its own testimony, which gives strength and divinity to the tribunal to which it appeals, and receives them from the same tribunal. Poetry is the image of man and nature” (657). Knowledge is important for the poet and it is the “pleasure” (658) for him, thus, the poet “singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion ... (he) bids together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time. ... Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge-it is as immortal as the heart of man”. Therefore, feelings and passions supported by the general truths should be directed to the instruction of the human beings about life and human nature. Those feelings and passions do not differ from man to man as they are general passions and feelings, and they are connected with “our moral sentiments and animal sensations, and with the causes which excite these; and with the operations of the elements and the appearances of the visible universe” (659).

The main goal of poetry for Wordsworth is to enlighten the reader about the universe with the Romantic literary emphasis on the correspondence of human nature and physical nature and about the everlasting universal truths of human life. Poetry instructs by giving “pleasure” through the feelings and emotions that are shared both by the poet and the reader and this pleasure is conveyed through “real language of men”. Poetry as the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (661) and the motivation of the parts of “general sympathy which are pleasing and delightful” (656) can also be morally edifying because the reader experiences such an excitement in the poem that it leads him to meet with the general truths of human nature and realities of life in general. Being deprived of “superadded meter” of the unusual language in which “the true and false became so inseparably interwoven that the taste of men was gradually perverted” (*Appendix to the Preface*, 666), Wordsworth’s poetry delights and instructs the readers by representing “the great and universal passions of man, the most general and interesting of their occupations and the entire world of nature ... with endless combinations of forms and imagery” (660). Poetry “delights” with “pleasure” of knowledge about human nature and universal realities conveyed in the poem, and it instructs with the portrayal of what is general and operative; in other words, what is “true”.

## 5. CONCLUSION

It is not wrong to say that Aristotle, Horace and William Wordsworth have shared some common points and poetic precepts as they have defined the creation process of poetry in their literary works. What is more striking is that while defining this process, all of them have depended on the rule of “delight and instruct” in one way or another. For all of them, the art of poetry, like “painting”, represents man, nature, truths or realities of human life, and the representation of these important issues is delightful as long as they satisfy the readers or spectators by making them “see” themselves from different perspectives and adding wisdom and knowledge to their rational, emotional and moral way of understanding. There-

fore, it is worth giving value to their insistence on the rule of “delight and instruct” when the aims of literature are reconsidered today.



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