

A Review of the Book "On Reading, Writing, and Living With Book's

Okumak, Yazmak ve Yaşamak Üzerine Kitap İncelemesi

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ABSTRACT

Arthur Schopenhauer's *On Reading, Writing, and Living* provides a profound philosophical examination of knowledge acquisition, dissemination, and individual thought processes. The author addresses the two fundamental enemies of human happiness: suffering and boredom. Schopenhauer explains how these states manifest differently across social classes. While the lower classes struggle with the hardships of survival, the upper classes face the challenges of boredom, highlighting a universal truth about the human quest for happiness. The book offers sharp critiques of reading habits, emphasizing their potential to weaken independent thinking and mental autonomy. Schopenhauer argues that individuals should not merely consume knowledge but also process it through intellectual reflection to form their own ideas. Nonetheless, he acknowledges the benefits of carefully chosen works in fostering intellectual growth and personal enrichment. The author categorizes literature into enduring and transient forms. Enduring literature encompasses works that withstand the test of time, carry profound meaning, and shape individual thought. Conversely, transient literature, often produced with commercial motives, is quickly forgotten. Schopenhauer's reflections on authorship and style further enrich the book's insights. He stresses the importance of clarity and simplicity as fundamental principles of effective writing. According to Schopenhauer, writers should avoid unnecessary embellishments and convoluted expressions, which detract from a work's impact and disrupt the reader's engagement. However, his critical tone and tendency toward generalizations may lead readers to approach his arguments with a degree of skepticism. Despite these critiques, Schopenhauer's timeless ideas elevate the book beyond mere criticism. *On Reading, Writing, and Living* is a work that promotes independent thought and explores the societal and individual impacts of reading and writing. The book stands as both a critique and a guide, offering valuable insights for those seeking to understand how knowledge influences intellectual processes and societal structures. It is an essential resource for readers interested in the interplay between personal growth, intellectual engagement, and the broader cultural significance of reading and writing.

Keywords: Knowledge acquisition, reading habits, enduring and transient literature, independent thought

ÖZ

Arthur Schopenhauer'ın *Okumak, Yazmak ve Yaşamak Üzerine* adlı eseri, bilgi edinimi, paylaşımı ve bireysel düşünce süreçleri üzerine derinlemesine bir felsefi analiz sunar. Yazar, insan mutluluğunun iki temel düşmanı olan ıstırap ve can sıkıntısını ele alır ve bu iki durumun sınıfsal bağlamda farklı şekillerde ortaya çıktığını ifade eder. Alt sınıflar temel ihtiyaçlarını karşılamak için sürekli bir mücadele içindeyken, üst sınıflar can sıkıntısıyla başa çıkmaya çalışır. Bu salınım, bireylerin mutluluk arayışındaki evrensel bir gerçeği yansıtır. Kitap, okuma alışkanlıklarına yönelik güçlü eleştiriler içerir. Schopenhauer, sürekli ve dikkatsizce yapılan okumanın bireyin düşünme kapasitesini zayıflatabileceğini ve zihinsel bağımsızlığı köreltebileceğini savunur. Ona göre, birey sadece okuma eylemiyle yetinmemeli, aynı zamanda bu bilgiyi düşünce süzgecinden geçirerek kendi fikirlerini oluşturmalıdır. Ancak, dikkatlice seçilmiş eserlerin bireysel ve entelektüel gelişime önemli katkılar sağlayabileceğini de vurgular. Schopenhauer, edebiyatı kalıcı ve geçici olarak ikiye ayırır. Kalıcı edebiyat, derin anlamlar taşıyan, zamana meydan okuyan ve bireyin düşünce dünyasını şekillendiren eserlerden oluşurken, geçici edebiyat genellikle ticari kaygılarla üretilen ve kısa sürede unutulmuş eserleri ifade eder.

Yazarın yazarlık ve üslup üzerine yaptığı değerlendirmeler de dikkat çekicidir. Schopenhauer, netlik ve sadeliğin yazının temel ilkeleri olması gerektiğini belirtir. Karmaşık anlatımlardan ve gereksiz süslemelerden kaçınılması gerektiğini savunur, çünkü bu unsurlar okuyucunun ilgisini dağıtarak metnin etkisini azaltır. Bununla birlikte, yazarın sert eleştirel dili ve zaman zaman genellemeler içeren ifadeleri okuyucuyu eleştirel bir mesafede durmaya sevk edebilir. Tüm eleştirilerine rağmen, Schopenhauer'ın bilgi ve düşünce süreçlerine dair zamansız fikirleri, bu eseri yalnızca bir eleştiri kitabı değil, aynı zamanda entelektüel bir rehber haline getirir. *Okumak, Yazmak ve Yaşamak Üzerine*, bireysel düşünceyi teşvik eden, okuma ve yazmanın bireysel ve toplumsal etkilerini irdeleyen, derinlemesine bir çalışmadır. Bilgiye ve onun bireysel/toplumsal bağlamdaki etkilerine ilgi duyan herkes için vazgeçilmez bir kaynaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bilgi edinimi, okuma alışkanlıkları, kalıcı ve geçici edebiyat, bireysel düşünce



Introduction

Arthur Schopenhauer's "On Reading, Writing, and Living" is a profound inquiry into knowledge and its processes of dissemination. The author places humanity's need to know and communicate on a philosophical foundation, exploring the individual and societal impacts of these processes. The book delves not only into reading and writing habits but also into the dynamics of human thought. Through his work, Schopenhauer invites readers to approach the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge with greater consciousness and critical perspective. However, his deeply analytical approach is open to debate in certain aspects, revealing both strengths and weaknesses for readers to consider.

The book's primary goal is to question the relationship individuals have with knowledge, both personally and socially. Schopenhauer argues that merely possessing knowledge is insufficient; understanding how it is acquired and processed is equally important. Divided into five sections, the book offers readers a broad perspective. Schopenhauer asserts that reading, writing, and thinking are interconnected processes, emphasizing that their mismanagement can hinder individual thinking.

One of the book's most compelling aspects is its timeless and insightful analyses of its themes. In particular, the chapter "The Two Main Enemies of Human Happiness: Suffering and Boredom" provides a thought-provoking discussion of the pursuit of happiness within the context of social class differences. Schopenhauer eloquently describes the oscillation between suffering and boredom as one of life's fundamental truths: "The most general observation shows us that the two main enemies of human happiness are suffering and boredom. Furthermore, we might say that being fortunate enough to escape one brings us closer to the other" (Schopenhauer, 2022). This analysis highlights not only the quest for personal happiness but also the influence of societal structures on individuals. However, this class-based analysis might seem somewhat superficial when applied to today's diverse and dynamic societies. Expanding this perspective to reflect the modern world's complexities would have further enriched the book's scope.

Schopenhauer's critique of reading habits is particularly striking. He questions the effects of reading on the individual's thought processes, arguing that excessive reading can undermine mental independence: "When we read, another person thinks for us: we merely follow the mental process of someone else. Just as a student learns to write by tracing over letters drawn by their teacher, so too, when reading, much of the thinking process is already completed for us" (Schopenhauer, 2022). By this, Schopenhauer warns against reducing one's relationship with knowledge to mere passive consumption. However, his discussion could benefit from considering the broader, more creative aspects of reading. For example, examining how reading fosters dialogue and societal change might add depth to his argument.

Another strength of the book lies in its critical perspective on literature, distinguishing between enduring and ephemeral works. Schopenhauer defines lasting literature as works that withstand the test of time and possess depth, while transient literature comprises pieces created primarily for commercial purposes and quickly forgotten. "There are always, though they may not be aware of one another, two forms of literature coexisting side by side — one genuine and enduring, the other merely superficial and transient. The latter flares up like a fire of straw, only to va-

nish" (Schopenhauer, 2022). This distinction is relevant to contemporary literary discourse. However, his harsh criticism might lead readers to dismiss the potential value of ephemeral literature in capturing the spirit of specific eras, which, despite being transient, can hold historical significance.

Schopenhauer's analysis of writing and style also stands out as a key aspect of the book. He categorizes writers into two groups: those who write to share valuable ideas and experiences and those who write merely to write. "There are fundamentally two kinds of writers: those who write for the sake of their subject and those who write for the sake of writing" (Schopenhauer, 2022). This distinction contributes to discussions of quality versus quantity in the literary world. Schopenhauer also emphasizes the importance of clear communication in writing, criticizing unnecessary embellishments in language. However, his tone, at times overly critical, might alienate some readers. A more balanced tone could have made the book more accessible to a broader audience.

The book also highlights the significance of individual reflection in the process of thought. According to Schopenhauer, individuals should not only acquire knowledge but also process it through their intellectual filters to transform it into their ideas. "One only truly knows what one has reflected upon" (Schopenhauer, 2022). This statement underscores the value of interpreting and integrating knowledge rather than merely accumulating it. It also demonstrates the book's success in encouraging readers to reassess their relationship with knowledge.

However, one of the book's weaker aspects is its reliance on broad generalizations. For instance, Schopenhauer's claim that excessive reading can render individuals foolish overlooks the variability in personal reading habits. Additionally, the book does not sufficiently address the positive effects of reading on creative thinking. Reading, as Schopenhauer suggests, may pose certain risks, but it can also enrich intellectual development. Addressing this duality with a more comprehensive perspective would have enhanced the book's critical impact.

In conclusion, "On Reading, Writing, and Living" is a compelling work that offers a nuanced critique of knowledge and its dissemination. Schopenhauer's timeless ideas provide readers with an opportunity to question their relationship with knowledge. The book's in-depth analyses and critical approach make it a valuable addition to any intellectual library, though its reliance on generalizations and harsh tone may encourage readers to maintain a critical distance in some areas. Nonetheless, the book's success in prompting readers to reevaluate their thought processes largely compensates for these shortcomings.

Schopenhauer's work carries significant messages not only about knowledge but also about the relationship individuals build with themselves. When individuals engage with knowledge as active thinkers rather than passive consumers, they achieve a genuine sense of intellectual fulfillment. For this reason, "On Reading, Writing, and Living" is not merely a critique but also a guide to living.

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