

Aeshetics as a possibility for the study and understanding of the art of word – literature

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Abstract: Aesthetics, as a discipline, has evolved in parallel with the arts, reflecting an increasingly broad and interconnected range of concerns. It now encompasses a wide array of categories, concepts, and principles that continue to develop. During the European Enlightenment, art was regarded as a means of transmitting knowledge and promoting moral refinement. In contrast, Romantic aesthetics foregrounded imagination, creativity, and human freedom, thereby challenging Enlightenment ideals. Aesthetic thought has consistently been shaped by both individual and collective tastes, cultural contexts, and the ongoing development of artistic traditions and critical frameworks. Despite internal tensions and historical transformations, the field of aesthetics has expanded continually. Literature—particularly oral literature—cannot be fully understood outside of its cultural and performative context. Scholars such as Stefania Skwarczyńska and Ibrahim Rugova emphasize that while written literature is confined within the boundaries of the text, oral literature transcends those limits, engaging dynamically with its audience and environment. This paper further explores Aristotle’s Poetics, with particular attention to his conception of tragedy—not merely as the representation of suffering, but as a means of clarifying thought and evoking emotional insight. The contributions of additional scholars are examined through the lenses of interpretation, language, and perception. Ultimately, the study argues that the aesthetic experience of literature emerges through the interplay between the text and the reader’s context, individual sensibility, and capacity to engage with deeper meanings. In conclusion, aesthetics is essential for understanding the fundamental nature of literature, its artistic function, and its effect on the reader.

Keywords: *Aesthetics of literature, Autonomy, Context, Literary impact, Cultural context, Oral literature, Philosophical aesthetics, Poetic language, Literary work, Poetics.*

1. Introduction

In the development of aesthetics as a discipline, significant changes have taken place - and continue to unfold - not only in its object of study but also in the phenomena that it seeks to examine. Aesthetics engages a range of complex and evolving issues, particularly those considered aesthetic in nature. Contemporary aesthetics encompasses a broad spectrum of categories, concepts, principles, and laws, and is marked by a spirit of continuous development and transformation.

Across different historical periods, and even within the same period, the study of aesthetics has undergone notable shifts, closely mirroring the evolution and transformation of the arts themselves. For instance, during the European Enlightenment, a dominant perspective emerged that viewed art as a conduit for knowledge, wisdom, and as a means of achieving moral and social refinement. In contrast, Romantic aesthetic theory challenged the principles of classical and neoclassical aesthetics, advocating instead for the imaginative force of artistic creation, human creative freedom, and the expression of

fantastical visions. At the same time, there were also tendencies to reduce art to mere entertainment, devoid of deeper purpose.

Aesthetic thought has also been shaped by a variety of external factors, most notably the tastes of individuals, social groups, and specific cultural contexts. These preferences have played a key role in shaping how aesthetic phenomena are perceived, interpreted, and categorized in relation to the broader socio-cultural environment, as well as the historical legacy of art theory and aesthetics. Although aesthetic thought has not always followed a unified or linear path - often marked by contradictions and shifts in perspective - it has, over time, expanded and deepened in scope.

From antiquity onward, when philosophy first emerged as a formal discipline, it was recognized that intellectual development is a continuous process of inquiry. One of the central avenues in this process was the study of knowledge itself. As a result, philosophers came to understand that a crucial component of philosophy was gnoseology - the theory of knowledge - which could serve as a foundational framework for understanding the nature of both philosophical and aesthetic inquiry [1].

2. Methodology

This paper employs a multidisciplinary and historical-analytical methodology to explore the evolution of aesthetics as a discipline and its interrelation with literature. The research is primarily qualitative, grounded in extensive textual analysis, philosophical inquiry, and critical interpretation. It integrates perspectives from classical, modern, and contemporary theorists, drawing on primary sources such as Aristotle, Baumgarten, Gadamer, Lotman, and Rugova, as well as secondary commentary and scholarly critiques.

The methodology involves a comparative approach, examining aesthetic theories across different time periods—from antiquity through the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and into modern aesthetic discourse. It also emphasizes the interplay between poetics and rhetoric, and the shifting dynamics of reader response, cultural context, and artistic expression. By analyzing theoretical frameworks and applying them to literary examples, the study reveals how aesthetics has continuously reshaped itself in response to broader intellectual, social, and artistic movements.

Additionally, the research includes an ontological-expressive lens, focusing on how language, form, and aesthetic structure create meaning in literary works. The study is structured to show how both theoretical developments and the evolving nature of the literary text contribute to our understanding of beauty, creativity, and artistic value.

2.1. Multiplicity and Continuous Enrichment of Views

Throughout the historical development of theoretical and critical thought on literature, numerous authors have presented a wide range of perspectives, often drawing upon the traditions that preceded them or the specific cultural and intellectual contexts in which they lived. As Nicolas Boileau aptly observed, "With time, all things change" [2]. Aristotle himself, in his seminal work *Poetics* - described as "the principal monument of the Greek classical period" - built upon earlier philosophical reflections, some of which survive only in fragments or titles, such as Democritus's *On Poetry*, and, more substantially, the works of Plato.

Aristotle approached poetry not by its external formal features (e.g., verse) but through its unique creative method of transforming life's material based on the principles of probability and necessity. This perspective is particularly evident in his conception of plot composition, which he argued must exhibit internal coherence and unfold a complete action. As he notes in Chapter 8 of *Poetics*, a plot should be so unified that "no part can be removed without altering the whole." Poetry, as a living and complete organism, should evoke the kind of pleasure appropriate to its nature. For Aristotle, *poetics* does not simply entail a mimetic reproduction of reality; rather, it involves creative construction. He frequently emphasizes that for a literary work to be considered complete, one must assess how it is perceived by its audience and the emotional or intellectual impressions it leaves [3].

Alexander Baumgarten, the first to introduce the term *aesthetics*, defined it as *ars pulchre cogitandi* - the art of thinking beautifully. Hans-Georg Gadamer noted that this definition was constructed by analogy to rhetoric, traditionally defined as *ars bene dicendi* - the art of speaking well. Citing Cvetan Todorov, we see that rhetoric and poetics have been historically intertwined, with rhetoric often holding primacy. Todorov argues that poetics should not be concerned with explaining aesthetic judgment; instead, it should focus on understanding the structure of the literary work. However, when poetics intersects with the study of reception - examining the reader's role and the foundations of aesthetic judgment - it begins to bridge the gap with aesthetics. If such a synthesis is possible, whether through analysis of tradition or the innate sensibilities of the individual, then the age-old question of artistic beauty can once again be meaningfully explored [4].

Rhetoric, despite a lack of rigidly defined research parameters, has long played a multifaceted role in literary analysis. From the early 20th century, rhetoric was regarded as synonymous with stylistics, even extending to a science grounded in linguistic analysis that aimed to rival poetics by addressing the full spectrum of discourse. A renewed scholarly interest in rhetoric and stylistics emerged during this period, driven by the desire to re-examine their theoretical potential despite their diminished status in the wake of Romanticism. Often, rhetoric sought to assert itself as the study of individual expression - of stylistic deviation from linguistic norms. Classical rhetoric's status as a discipline beyond language is justified by its concern with the totality of the message, not merely its linguistic form.

Modern rhetorical theorists such as Jakobson [5] have expanded the scope of analysis by conceptualizing communication as a system comprising multiple elements: the sender, receiver, channel, and, critically, the message itself. While some critique the treatment of the message as just another factor, contemporary general rhetoric argues that the message should be seen as the synthesized product of all these elements - both shaped by and exerting influence upon them. Consequently, rhetoric is grounded in the linguistic code and emerges from the transformation of linguistic components at all levels of message construction, including morphology, syntax, and semantics [6].

Despite the lack of strict definitional boundaries, rhetoric and stylistics have each contributed to illuminating the characteristics and nuances of literature and the literary text. The incorporation of multiple disciplines in literary studies underscores the inherent complexity of literature and the need for diverse methodological approaches. As Guido Marpurgo-Taljabue observes, "Artistic methods do not arise from nature, but from other artistic methods; one style is born out of conflict with another" (Marlo). Ibrahim Rugova adds that the most enduring contributions to modern aesthetic theory are grounded in the principle of specialization in the study of art and literature as autonomous systems, as well as in the complementarity - rather than dogmatism - of aesthetic and poetological theories [7, 8].

The literary work and literary text thus possess a multitude of distinctive features and phenomena that defy singular, definitive categorization. When we speak of the poetic literary work or text, we are - either consciously or unconsciously - also referring to language, the particularities of expression, and the messages conveyed through those expressions.

3. Literature Moves in Language as a Two-Layered Medium

Naturally, when analyzing a literary work, one is not merely referring to language as a fixed system of grammatical rules, categories, or syntactic forms, nor as a set of structures that make it uniquely distinguishable within or across linguistic systems. Rather, attention is directed toward the expressive qualities of utterances and the multiplicity of meanings that emerge from linguistic structures - particularly the various interpretive possibilities and the influence these structures exert. As Edward Sapir notes, "Literature moves in language as a medium, but this medium consists of two layers: the hidden content of language - our intuitive notes of experience - and the specific arrangement of a given language - this is a particular way of our experience" [9].

This phenomenon occurs, as Lotman [10] emphasizes, because the artistic text is not solely the realization of structural norms, but also their deliberate transgression. It operates within a dual-structured field composed of tendencies toward both adherence to, and violation of, these norms.

Although each tendency aspires to dominate and suppress the other, the triumph of either would ultimately be detrimental to the vitality of art [10].

It is precisely this dynamic and layered nature of the poetic work that gives rise to diverse interpretations and evaluations by different readers - and even by the same reader at different moments in time. Revisiting a literary work implies entering into a deeper, more reflective communication with it, in search of previously unnoticed elements or alternative interpretations shaped by the reader's evolving sensibilities.

As previously noted, literary poetics is concerned with fundamental questions: How is a literary work constructed? What are its constituent elements, and how are they structured? What forms of language - particularly poetic language - do authors employ, and which narrative techniques do they utilize? How are opposing ideas or phenomena represented within the poetic text? What kinds of messages emerge from the text, and in what ways is concrete reality transformed through language? Furthermore, how does the poetic literary work distinguish itself from the poetic literary text? Thus, poetics is primarily engaged with analyzing the structural and functional components of literary works, their stylistic features, their internal relationships, and the formation of a cohesive expressive and meaningful whole. It also addresses the classification of literary genres and examines their specific functions and characteristics.

There are, of course, several areas explored by literary poetics that fall outside the domain of literary aesthetics. While the aesthetics of literature does indeed consider poetic language as a medium through which beauty is created and conveyed, it focuses more on how aesthetic experiences are generated and received. Aesthetics explores the ways in which beauty operates in the literary work and the various forms through which it exerts an aesthetic influence upon the reader.

The literary work, in contrast to the literary text, encompasses a broader conceptual field. It includes cultural and social contexts, as well as the relationships among the author, the text, and the reader. As Wellek [11] aptly states, "[...] the literary work is not only filled with values; it is itself a structure of values," originating from the mind and imagination of the author and possessing the potential to influence readers aesthetically. Constructed through language, the literary work engages with multiple layers of meaning: "A word carries with it not only its lexical meaning but also an atmosphere of synonyms and homonyms. Words not only signify but also evoke associations, emotions, origins, and even oppositions" Wellek and Warren [12]. Ducrot and Todorov [13] also emphasizes, "Language is a social phenomenon, whereas speech is an individual act" [13].

Moreover, the text cannot be viewed as completely detached from its context. This becomes especially evident when examining oral literature, which is, in a certain sense, not wholly self-contained. As Skwarczyńska [14] explains, "The work of written literature is entirely contained within the text, within the written form, whereas oral literature transcends the boundaries of the text" [14].

In discussing the aesthetics of literature and the ontological nature of the literary work as an autonomous expressive whole, Rugova [8] underscores the importance of objective-ontological aesthetics. This branch of aesthetics, he argues, examines the aesthetic object as it exists within the artistic creation - studying the aesthetic being as a real, objectified entity within the literary work. According to Rugova [8] this form of aesthetics enables a proper examination of literature in its aesthetic dimension, affirming the literary work's autonomy as an artistic system that coexists with society, but is not reducible to it. Its existence in the social world may be studied by disciplines such as the sociology or philosophy of literature, which have attempted to elevate literature to the level of aesthetic theory.

Even Rugova [8] notes, approached literature differently at various stages of his intellectual development. In his early, more philosophically oriented writings, Marx regarded literature as an autonomous system. However, in his later work on political economy and labor, he positioned literature as a tool within broader social and ideological structures. This dual perspective led to different interpretations - some of which, as seen in socialist realism, instrumentalized literature, reducing it to a tool of ideology. In contrast, thinkers within Marx's anthropological-humanist tradition, along with

contemporary proponents of objective-ontological aesthetics, have emphasized literature's autonomy and creative independence [8].

This conception also finds echoes in Aristotle's *Poetics*, where he defines tragedy as "an imitation of an important and complete action, of certain magnitude, conveyed through language that is pleasurable and appropriate to each part, enacted by characters and not merely narrated, and which, through pity and fear, achieves the purification of emotions" (Chapter IV). Thus, in literary Works - particularly in tragedy - suffering is not simply an evocation of terror or pain, but a process through which thought is clarified and emotions are refined. Marcus Aurelius expresses a similar idea in his *Meditations* (Book VI), where he notes that tragedies should remind audiences that events on stage mirror those in life, and that what once entertained should not later cause distress in the broader "theatre of life" [3].

Reflecting on the aesthetics of speech, particularly in drama, T.S. Eliot writes: "I would not wish to end without attempting to present, even in the most general terms, the ideal toward which poetic drama should aspire. It is an unattainable ideal - that is precisely what makes it compelling, as it invites continual experimentation. The function of all art is to impose order upon life so as to enable our perception of it. The painter does this by selecting and emphasizing from the visual world, the musician through sound. Beyond the motives and emotions of conscious life - those addressed by prose drama - there lies an elusive dimension, sensed only in moments of detachment from action, which poetic drama seeks to express" [15].

In conclusion, the literary work is inherently bound to the aesthetics of literature and the influence it seeks to exert. As Lotman observes, "Language creates its own world and evokes the unconscious imagination concerning the expansion of our existence" [16]. Thus, the literary work, far from being a static or isolated text, is a dynamic, aesthetically charged system capable of transforming both perception and experience.

4. The Complexity of the Nature of Literature and Aesthetics

To illustrate the complexity inherent in the nature of literature and the aesthetics of its works and their various forms, we turn to the thought of Turoldo [17]: "No one can say what a poem contains. Yes, everything can be said, but without 'betraying': that is, without distortions, without improvisations, and without exceptions. Everything" [17]. This sentiment resonates with Wasserman [18] assertion that "[...] the creation of a poem is also the creation of a cosmic totality that gives meaning to the poem, and each poet must create independently of their worldview, by speaking within the constraints of speech itself" [11].

Distinguished linguists Xhuvani and Cipo [19] in their seminal work *Beginnings of Stylistics and General Literature*, underscore the symbiotic relationship between literature and its essence: "Writing is not an ordinary task easily accomplished without effort. To achieve the gift of eloquence, a natural disposition must be accompanied by extensive training, sustained attention, and considerable interest in the subject matter, so that the writer can feel and follow it wholeheartedly and sincerely." These scholars further highlight the importance of language as the principal medium through which the literary work and its aesthetic value unfold. In their words: "When we can, through our words and writings, help others understand our thoughts and feelings in such a way that convinces them of their truth; when we can use a sequence and structure of expressions and words in a description such that the reader perceives, as if with the eyes of their mind, the frame, the scene, the vision just as they appear to the writer, then we can say that our words have achieved their purpose, that our speech acts have successfully impacted others."

Thus, the crafting of a literary work necessitates not only skill and knowledge but also dedication in the construction of the text, the meticulous selection, and the precise elaboration of words, expressions, and sentences that form the aesthetic beauty of the art of language. As Xhuvani and Cipo [19] assert: "All the work of our writing - the substitution of one word for another, the emphasis of one aspect of our thought over another, the illumination, the clarification, the reformulation - summarizes the effort

to make words and sentences convey not only ideas and thoughts but also our emotions and feelings. This is the true activity of writing" [19].

While it is often reiterated that the value of a work lies within itself, in the text and the poetic messages it conveys, its true life emerges only when the reader engages with it. This process, however, cannot be fully encapsulated without acknowledging the complexities involved in the reception of the text. Context, individual circumstances, preparation, and personal taste all contribute to the reception process. No reader perceives or discovers the multiplicity of poetic messages in the same manner. This is not only due to the poetic language and its inherent multiplicity of meanings but also because of the reader's individual context and their capacity to establish a meaningful connection with the poetic text. To achieve this, some texts demand more concentration, dedication, and knowledge from the reader than others.

For instance, a scholar of aesthetics analyzing the oral poetry of the Berisha [20] such as *High on the Peak of a Mountain*, will first observe the harmony achieved within the rhapsody's text, the result of its creator's careful and sophisticated development, where individual parts interconnect and complement each other on multiple levels [21]. The scholar will also examine the manner in which beauty is expressed across different parts of the text and how these parts complement one another, especially in the section where the poem speaks of a kiss and its magical consequences. Beyond this, the scholar must consider the tradition that informs the text; they will explore, if possible, the intentions of the text's creator, as expressed through their worldview and the uniqueness of their environment, thus uncovering the aesthetics of that environment where a kiss could have such transformative effects. Mukařovský [22] aptly observed that the basic structure of individual consciousness, even in its most profound aspects, is intrinsically linked to the content of collective consciousness, a dynamic that is also present in the art of language and in literary works [22].

The scholar of aesthetics must focus particularly on how beauty is created through poetic expression - through the poetic messages that emerge from the text, which together form the essence and aesthetic of the work. Furthermore, the scholar must explore how reality is shaped through language - poetic language, in contrast to the concrete, everyday reality - and the potential influence such constructed realities can have on the recipient. In essence, the scholar of aesthetics must engage with the concept of artistic truth, which forms the foundation of the text's beauty. Bualo [23] in his *Poetic Art*, emphasized this notion: "The virtuous author, in verses full of grace, / while stirring feelings, leaves the heart pure" [23].

The scholar's work does not end with the analysis described above. They must also assess the significance and extent of the beauty created, and the potential impact such beauty may have on the recipient, both as an act of communication and recognition and as a form of spiritual enrichment.

The scholar, including the scholar of aesthetics, expresses their insights based on the impressions they derive from reading, whether through personal experience or the experiences of others which they have internalized through various forms or through reading. However, they must resist reducing the phenomenon of aesthetic impact to a rigid or closed model. Todorov [4] argued: "There is no literary procedure whose exploitation necessarily produces an aesthetic experience," and further stated that "aesthetic judgments are testimonies that, to a large extent, imply the process of self-expression. Such a judgment cannot be considered outside the speech act in which it is articulated, nor can it be detached from the subject who expresses it. I may speak of the beauty with which, for me, Goethe's work stands out, and ultimately, I can also speak of the beauty it holds according to Friedrich Schiller or Thomas Mann. However, the matter of its beauty for itself is meaningless. Classical aesthetics might have based itself on these features of aesthetic judgments when it posited that they are always individual" [4].

5. Conclusion

Aesthetics, initially a branch of philosophy and now an independent discipline, has undergone a complex and varied evolution. Although it did not always develop in a continuous or unified manner, it has nevertheless expanded and enriched itself over time. As such, aesthetics plays a crucial role in the

study and understanding of literature, particularly as an art form rooted in language. It is also essential for the exploration and illumination of the poetic values inherent in specific literary works, especially regarding the nature of their aesthetic impact on the recipient. This impact is one of the key components that define the art of language and its significance. Aristotle emphasized this in *The Poetics*, noting the centrality of aesthetics to the understanding of literature [20].

Despite its often-fragmented development, aesthetic thought has continuously evolved and enriched itself. The aesthetics of literature, therefore, concerns itself with the poetic language through which beauty is created within the literary work. It examines how this beauty functions, its various manifestations, and the potential forms of its aesthetic influence on the recipient - whether as a means of communication and recognition or as a form of spiritual enrichment. Lotman [16] highlights the deep connection between poetics and the aesthetics of literature, noting that "Language creates its own world and awakens the unconscious imagination about the scope of our existence" [16].

The poetics of literature focuses on the analysis and interpretation of the components that make up literary works, exploring their peculiarities and qualities. It examines how different elements of a text function and merge, contributing to the creation of a cohesive, expressive, and meaningful whole. This extends to the study of literary types and their respective characteristics and functions. In this context, aesthetics is closely interwoven with poetics, as it illuminates the values embedded in a literary work, the beauty contained within it, and the significant impact it has on the reader. The two fields are not only interconnected but mutually reinforcing, operating on various levels and through multiple facets of literary analysis.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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