

Mimetic Tradition and the Critical Theory

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ABSTRACT

Mimesis as a concept essentially refers to the basic principle that art, and therefore the artist, copies nature. In other words, the mimetic theory of art is particularly based upon the assumption that any form of representative arts is a copy of nature. Mimesis, as a critical term as it is in use today, has originally emerged from the theoretical writings and discussions of two prominent classical Greek sources. It was, according to the acknowledgement of the Western canonical literary theory, Plato and Aristotle, who methodically established and expanded the connotations of the term to their students and followers. Plato, for example, associates mimesis with imitation. According to Plato, however, imitation, and thus whoever and whatever is associated with imitation, will be harmful since imitation is removed from the truth itself. Plato, as a result of this, banishes representative arts, and the artists, from a healthy state. Poetry, Plato believes, is misleading as it is only an illusion. Therefore, Plato builds an unfavourable model of mimesis. In addition to Plato, his most outstanding pupil, Aristotle, agrees with his tutor on the principle that poetry, as a form of the representative arts, is mimetic. However, Aristotle postulates that mimesis, which denotes imitation, further proposes the notion of interpretation. Moreover, mimesis, Aristotle believes, is a natural part of man since man is an imitative being. In addition to this, mimesis for Aristotle is an important component of the process of education. Western critical heritage, particularly the English, is mimetic. Especially during the English Renaissance, and especially after the discovery of the original copy of Aristotle's *Poetics*, the idea of mimesis becomes more and more authoritative in English literature and literary theory. Sir Philip Sidney, as a representative of the sixteenth-century English writer and statesman, translates the classical notion of mimesis into his own practise. Sidney foregrounds the idea of interpretation that mimesis signifies. During the English Romanticism, for example, William Wordsworth and S. T. Coleridge interpret mimesis in their cultural epoch. This study, therefore, makes an analytical reading of the meaning of the term mimesis starting from the classical examples and ending with twentieth-century interpretations.

Keywords: Mimesis, Imitation, Reality, Representation, Reinterpretation, Art, Artist, Literature, Nature.

Mimetik Gelenek ve Eleştirel Kuram

ÖZ

Bir kavram olarak mimesis, sanat ve dolayısı ile de sanatçının, doğayı taklit etmesini ifade etmektedir. Başka bir deyişle, mimetik sanat kuramı, herhangi bir temsili sanat türünün doğanın kopyası olduğu varsayımı üzerine kuruludur. Günümüzde kullanıldığı şekliyle mimesis, aslen başlıca iki Yunanlı kaynaktan doğmuştur. Batı edebiyat eleştirisi esasına göre, Platon ve Aristoteles kendi öğrencileri ve takipçilerine bu kavramın çağrışımlarını yönetsel olarak oluşturmuş ve yaygınlaştırmışlardır. Örneğin Platon mimesisi taklitle özdeşleştirir. Bununla birlikte Platon'a göre, gerçeğin kendisinden uzaklaşmış durumda olduğu için taklit ve taklitle ilgili herkes ve her şey zararlıdır. Bunun sonucu olarak Platon, sağlıklı bir devletten temsili sanatları uzaklaştırır. Platon, edebiyatın yalnızca bir yanılsama olduğunu varsaydığından, yanlıcı olduğuna inanır. Bu sebeple de Platon, olumsuz bir mimesis örneği inşa eder. Bütün bunlara ek olarak, Platon'un en öne çıkan öğrencilerinden biri olan Aristoteles, bir temsili sanat türü olarak edebiyatın mimetik olduğu konusunda, öğretmeni ile aynı fikirdedir. Fakat Aristoteles, taklit anlamını veren mimesisin, yorum kavramını da ifade ettiğine inanır. Ayrıca Aristoteles, insan taklit edici bir varlık olduğundan, taklit yeteneğinin insanın doğal bir parçası olduğunu düşünür. Buna ilaveten, mimesis Aristoteles'e göre eğitim sürecinin önemli bir ögesidir. Batı eleştiri kültürü, özellikle de İngiliz geleneği, mimetiktir. Bilhassa İngiliz Rönesansı boyunca, özellikle de Aristoteles'in *Poetika'sının* özgün nüshasının bulunmasından sonra, mimesis kavramı İngiliz Edebiyatı ve edebiyat eleştirisinde daha da etkili hale gelir. Sir Philip Sidney, 16. Yüzyıl İngiliz yazarı ve devlet adamı düşüncesinin bir temsilcisi olarak, mimesis kavramını kendi uygulamasına aktarır. Sidney, mimesisin belirttiği yorum kavramını öne çıkarır. Örneğin İngiliz Romantizmi döneminde, William Wordsworth ve S. T. Coleridge, mimesisi kendi kültürel devirleri için yorumlarlar. Bu nedenle bu çalışma mimesis kavramının anlamı üzerine, klasik döneme ait örneklerden başlayan ve 20. Yüzyıl yorumları ile sona eren, çözümleyici bir inceleme yapmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Mimesis, Taklit, Gerçek, Temsil, Yorumlama, Sanat, Sanatçı, Edebiyat, Doğa.

I. Mimesis as a Classical Term

Originally developing into the contemporary stage of scholarly discussion from the ancient Greek philosophy of art – as it is, at the moment, the general consensus on this assertion – the concept of mimesis, which is conclusively in use in the present in the theoretical interpretations of all forms of representative arts including literature, has methodically emerged especially from the aesthetic theories of two essential classical sources – Plato and Aristotle's analytical writings and discussions about the nature

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of poetry.† Mimesis as a theoretical doctrine has since the classical period, where “the notion of a literary tradition grounded in mimicry or dramatic tradition” (Malette, 2009; 585), occupied so influential a character that, as it is described here in this quotation, “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’” (Givens, 1991; 122). Although it has now generally been acknowledged by the academia that mimesis as a special term has since principally referred to the act of copying life as it is through artistic formation,‡ *representation* or *reinterpretation* of the contemporary historical reality – in other words, especially in terms of literature, the contemporary socio-economic truth – which has been uniquely achieved by the artist, should perhaps be the more proper explanation of what this particular theoretical term today truly refers to.§ Therefore, “Mimesis ... is a re-presenting of something that the poet has witnessed. Or it is a counterfeiting of some object of imitation which the poet emulates by producing some counter for it, some image that projects its likeness” (Heninger, 1989; 400). Throughout the history even more alternatives have been offered to the standard reading of the term mimesis. One of them is the suggestion that “The word mimesis in Ancient Greek did refer to imitation alone. A better translation would be the ‘enactment of a role’ or the act of ‘giving presence to a character,’ acts that are possible even in the absence of a predecessor to ‘imitate’” (Söffner, 2010; 91). In order to figure out, therefore, the connotations of the idea of mimesis and in order to formulate a better understanding of the implications of the term in modern critical theory more comprehensively, a chronological analysis of the most illustrative canonical texts of the Western theory of literature that have specially referred to the idea of imitation in terms of artistic creation is likely to help.

II. Plato and Mimesis as Imitation

According to the oldest acknowledged (at the same time the oldest canonical) source of reference to the Western philosophy of art – that is, Plato’s theory of the representative arts, which the Greek philosopher particularly discusses in his best-known Socratic dialogue about philosophy and political theory, *The Republic*,** and which is itself claimed to be “a form of *mimesis*” (Golden, 1969; 151) – all forms of artistic creation, whether it is painting or poetry, as it is specially signified by the philosopher himself, is essentially a mode of imitation – that is to say, in its original terminology, mimesis.† Plato, in the book’s dialogue, quite noticeably associates poetry with mimesis – imitation – nearly in every individual chapter of his discussion.‡ Plato significantly remarks, for example, that “the thing I was really trying to say we should make up our minds about was this. Shall we permit poets to use imitation in their works? Or partly imitation and partly narrative? In which case, when they should use one, and when the other? Or should they not use imitation at all” (2000; 83)? Because of this principal thesis of his philosophy of the nature of the relationship between representative arts and imitation, Plato, particularly emphasising in a very practical way only the negative connotations of the idea of mimesis, further declares that “I’m sure you won’t denounce me to the writers of tragedy and all the other imitative poets – everything of that sort seems to me to be a destructive influence on the minds of those who hear it. Unless of course they have the antidote, the knowledge of what it really is” (2000; 313). These remarks of Plato might be paraphrased as “for Plato *mimesis* does not present a true account of reality” (Hall, 1990; 5). In other words, the discussion here is that “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” (Givens, 1991; 122). Especially in terms of the relationship between the representation and the reality, it is emphasised that “For Plato we must be extremely careful never to confuse reality with *mimesis*, and we may, perhaps, understand Plato’s well-known negative judgments on imitations and imitators as a warning not to commit this serious error” (Golden, 1969; 150). Plato specifically accentuates the claim that poetry, as a form of

† That is, literature in its more encompassing sense.

‡ The Romantic notion of the colouring of imagination becomes more significant here.

§ By historical reality, what is actually meant is the contemporary social and economic reality.

** Written around 380 BC.

†† The essential connotations of the term dramatically change when it is interpreted by Aristotle.

‡‡ The book is divided into ten chapters from Book I to Book X.

representative arts, has already been significantly removed from the idea, the philosophical interpretation of the ultimate truth that specially belongs to God. He says pointing to one of his most frequently referred categories in the history of Western philosophy that “I take it there are many couches, if you like, and many tables ... But when it comes to forms for these pieces of furniture, there are presumably two. A single form of a couch, and a single form of a table” (2000; 314). As a result of such empathic reasoning, Plato principally concludes his argument that poetry includes no truth in itself; and therefore it significantly damages the rational elements of the human mind. Such a pejorative impression of imitation – and thus mimesis – is due to the context that “Plato invented mimesis as a degraded copy, at two removes from the truth, a magical illusion that seduces the audience to succumb in turn to imitative behaviour” (Kahn, 2006; 1).

In order to reinforce the notion of an adverse image of poetry as a form of aesthetic performance based on the artist’s simple imitation of nature, Plato makes quite a pragmatic comparison between the poet and an artisan – the carpenter in particular – formed on the guiding question to the listener of which one of these craftsmen is necessarily closer to the truth. Obviously granting all the privilege to the carpenter, Plato asserts that “Don’t we usually say also that for each type of furniture the person who makes it looks at the appropriate form? Then one will make the couches we use, another will make the tables, and so on with other kinds of furniture. But the form itself is presumably not the work of any of the craftsmen” (2000; 314). According to Plato, the poet, in contrast to the carpenter, enjoys the unique status in which he mistakenly seems to be able to create whatever he personally wishes to conceive. Since what the poet produces in terms of poetry is only a false impression of the truth, the work of the poet is then merely an imitation that Plato believes to be absolutely meaningless. This particular situation is interpreted as the claim that “where Plato attacks artistic *mimesis* he is reminding us of the all-important distinction between reality and *mimesis* and asserting the priority of reality” (Golden, 1969; 150). There is also the impression that “Platonic imitation is bound up with the idea of approximation and does not mean a true copy” (Golden, 1969; 151). The reason for this conclusion is ironically the idea that the poet, as Plato asserts, “is not only capable of making any sort of furniture. He can also create all the things that grow out of the earth. He produces all living creatures – including himself – and on top of that produces heaven and earth, the gods, everything in heaven, and everything under the earth in Hades” (2000; 314).

Besides the idea of mimesis, one of the underlying key concepts in Plato’s discussion about representative arts is another frequently used term – representation. Plato uses this term in order to advocate the presumption that poetry is characteristically far from the truth, and thus poetry is but a false undertaking. In addition to this, according to Plato, poetry is an art that offers nothing more than illusions. Corresponding to this particular statement, Plato argues that poetry is such a deception that the poet accomplishes his poetic formation “often – and easily – practiced” (2000; 315). He says, “I suppose the quickest way is if you care to take a mirror and carry it around with you wherever you go. That way you’ll soon create the sun and the heavenly bodies, soon create the earth, soon create yourself, other living creatures, furniture, plants, and all the things” (2000; 315).^{§§} As a result of this misconception, as stated by Plato, what develops from the art of the poet are only the things “as they appear to be ... not ... as they truly are” (2000; 315). This approach touches upon the problem of the concept of appearance: “In his comparison of a bed made by a carpenter and a bed made by a painter, Plato tries to rebuke the poets in his *Republic*. The argument is not about representations or effigies (as often has been argued), but about whether the *ergon* of a bed is realized in its being and hence according to its principle (*eidos*), or whether it is just realized as mimicry – that is, as a mere appearance” (Söffner, 2010; 97-98). In other words, what is specially underscored here is the fact that “In [Plato’s] theory of mimesis there is no place for representation or reference. The painter’s bed does not refer to a real bed. It is a bed. Or kind of: since you cannot sleep in it, it lacks that thing that makes bed a bed. It lacks the essence that would allow one to say that it is a bed. It lacks the bed’s being (Söffner, 2010; 98). Plato’s well-known example of a bed, therefore, shapes into the idea that there are three beds: the first one originally belonging to God, and the

^{§§} One of the most remarkable references to Plato’s mirror image in literature is the scene in *Hamlet* (Act III, Scene II) where Hamlet talks to the travelling players. He says, “the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the/first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the/mirror up to nature” (2000; 109).

other two respectively to the carpenter and to the poet. As Plato already establishes the unfavourable image of poetry through this example, it is concluded that the least valuable work among the three is that of the poet. However, what appears today from the contemporary perspective as it is argued elsewhere that “In his banishment of the poets from the republic, Plato seems to be at his most paradoxical. He has painted a rich, vivid and poetic picture in words of a state, itself full, on many levels, of things which do not appear as they are – which may be seen as imitations or representations of something else. Yet Plato appears to condemn this very thing” (Mamary, 2001; 73).

III. Aristotle and Mimesis as Interpretation

Widely comparable to Plato’s emblematic discussion about representative arts but never displaying derogatory attitudes or idea – like that of Plato – towards the poet or poetry, another ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle’s theory of mimesis, as it is exposed in his *Poetics*^{***} – one of the earliest surviving works of literary, but particularly dramatic, theory – and as it is inherently similar to the mimetic theories of Plato, is explicitly based upon the same assumption that all representative arts are essentially the result of the imitation of the artist. Aristotle similarly declares in his *Poetics*, for example, that “epic poetry and the making of tragedy, and also comedy and dithyrambic poetry, as well as most flute-playing and lyre-playing, are all as a whole just exactly imitations” (2006; 19). In other words, “Aristotle define[s] art as imitative in essence” (Hagberg, 1984; 365). Although it is certainly obvious that Aristotle particularly agrees with Plato on the principal notion that poetry is the outcome of the artist’s imitation of nature,^{†††} mimesis for him is a natural yet special ability endowed by God to human beings. Relevant to this remark, Aristotle’s notion of mimesis suggests “the way in which an action that is strongly evoked but not actually performed replicates an essential feature of all *mimesis*, or imitation. Any *mimesis* is an evocation of an action that does not really happen, that is not really performed, that only gives the illusion of actually taking place” (Murnaghan, 1995; 757). Therefore, absolutely contrasting to Plato’s fundamental argument, Aristotle suggests in terms of the essence of mimesis that “it is likely that two particular causes, and these natural ones, brought into being the poetic art as a whole. For imitation is co-natural with human beings from childhood” (2006; 22). Aristotle’s approach to imitation – mimesis – is outlined here as the claim that “Aristotle inherits from Plato the notion that art is essentially mimetic, but his reaction to the artist is very different ... Aristotle does not want to banish the artists, because they are not leading the audience's attention away from the Forms towards a thrice-removed particular” (Hagberg, 1984; 366). Furthermore, according to Aristotle, mimesis is a special process of learning in which human beings almost enjoy a form of schooling: “they differ from the other animals because they are the most imitative and produce their first acts of understanding by means of imitation; also all human beings take delight in imitations” (2006; 22). This learning process, according to an analysis of the essential connection between mimesis and pleasure, is illustrated as the claim that “It is the mimetic framework, then, that explains why the pleasure derived from mimesis could be of the same sort as the pleasure we find in learning. The pleasure is derived from clarification that poetry provides about human nature. Mimesis is not an imitation of reality but a direct reference to it, in which we can come to understand reality more clearly. That we come to understand through mimesis is the basis of our pleasure in learning” (Worth, 2000; 335). Mimesis as a learning process becomes comprehensible especially when Aristotle’s detailed definition of and special emphasis on the tragedy as a genre is recalled. The following observation provides a corresponding remark. It is argued that “Aristotle prefers the dramatic mode because it most fully realizes the potential of poetic mimesis. Imitation for Aristotle benefits from a visible component (what he called *opsis* or spectacle), which renders the imitation more objective, more lifelike” (Heninger, 1989; 397). Mimesis also means learning for Aristotle since “Specifically in connection with tragedy, Aristotle stresses the intelligibility of the way it places events within a comprehensible causal pattern so that even if they occur unexpectedly ... they occur because of one another” (Murnaghan, 1995; 764).

Over and above all these illustrations of the suggestion of the character of imitation in terms of the concept of mimesis, Aristotle notably observes poetry either as the imitation of the actions of noble men

*** Written around 335 BC.

††† Imitation, for Plato, is misleading.

or as the imitation of the actions of base men – definitely corresponding here, as it is universally known, to the literary genres of tragedy and comedy respectively. And further making a comparison between poetry and history as two different but at the same time similar – both as being types of narratives – areas of scholarly study, Aristotle observes poetry much more philosophical and creative than history. This situation, he argues, is because of the fact that while history is naturally limited to what happened once in the past, poetry as imitation is practically limitless since it implies what may possibly happen at any time; past, present or future – this is, in other words, the categorical difference between fact and fiction.^{##} According to Aristotle, therefore, “poetry is a more philosophical and more serious thing than history, since poetry speaks more of things that are universal, and history of things that are particular” (2006; 32), since as it is recorded elsewhere, “[Aristotle] stress[es] only those characteristics of historical works that make them unlike *mimesis*” (Carli, 2010; 318). The relationship between poetry and history, for Aristotle, might be considered to involve the idea that “Aristotle has defined art as essentially imitative, but the accurate recordings of events by the historian are not works of art, and thus the simple understanding of imitation as fidelity to facts is not what Aristotle meant by imitation, or at least aesthetically relevant imitation” (Hagberg, 1984; 368). It has become obvious that although Aristotle’s perception of poetry significantly differs from that of Plato since Aristotle draws a positive impression of imitative arts in general, poetry, as both of the philosophers agree, is essentially the output of imitation.

IV. Sidney and the Aristotelian Mimesis

Principally following not only from Plato but also from Aristotle’s – especially from Aristotle – discussions about mimesis, Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586), one of the most prominent and the most influential of the English poets, scholars and intellects of the Elizabethan era,^{§§§} makes use of literally the same concept – imitation – in his theoretical writings so as to describe the essential nature of poetry within the implications of imitation. Therefore, “Following Aristotle, Sidney prescribed a sort of mimetic poetry that was to be read, but was also to be visualized in the mind’s eye” (Heninger, 1989; 395). Particularly in his most famous work of literary criticism, *An Apology for Poetry* (1595),^{****} where “the Aristotelian theory of mimesis serves as baseline” (Heninger, 1989; 399), Sidney intellectually defends poetry especially against the contemporary attacks on and criticisms about the English stage of the time. Systematically presenting a chronological order of the theory of literature starting from the classical Greek thinkers,^{†††} Sidney characteristically declares in his defence of poetry that “Poesy therefore is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word *mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth – to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture; with this end, to teach and delight” (2007; 139). Related to these features of poetry as imitation, it is asserted that “Sidney perceives the artful imitation of nature as a ‘speaking-picture’ used to teach and delight. Speaking-picture becomes Sidney’s extension of Aristotle’s philosophy of imitation. Pleasure and learning result from imitation according to Aristotle’s [*Poetics*]” (Payne, 1990; 243). It is unquestionably noticeable here in this quotation that Sidney’s concept of poetry^{###} is specially built upon the Aristotelian theory of mimetic literature although “Sidney and Aristotle agree that poetic imitation goes beyond what we would call mere photographic representation” (Kishler, 1963; 63). That is to say, “Poetry for him is an art of imitation as Aristotle had termed it in the word *mimesis*. It is a figuring forth, a producing of visible images” (Heninger, 1989; 401). However, what Sidney actually did was that “he nonetheless modified that aesthetic and combined it with the new concept of poetry as mimesis found in the recently recovered *Poetics* of Aristotle” (Heninger, 1989; 395). In other words, Sidney paraphrases in his work the classical theory of mimesis systematically introduced by Plato and Aristotle. Sidney’s significance as a poet and as a literary theorist in terms of the concept of mimesis is because of the fact that “It was Sidney, though, who introduced his countrymen to

^{##} See, for example, the Argentine writer and poet Jorge Luis Borges’ (1899-1986) 1941 short-story “The Garden of Forking Paths” for the interpretation of the categorical difference between literature and history.

^{§§§} Sidney was one of the most outstanding figures of his time in terms of the personality and the intellect.

^{****} Posthumously published.

^{†††} Even including Plato despite his negative approach to poetry.

^{###} This is literature in general.

the *Poetics* of Aristotle. Before Sidney, no one in England had seriously broached the question of Aristotelian mimesis” (Heninger, 1989; 400). This means that poetry for Sidney was imitation just as it had been observed by the previous theorists of literature and the other forms of representative arts. Sidney’s original addition to the mimetic theory, however, mostly comes from the fact that he believes poetry informs as well as it amuses. In addition to these qualities, Sidney’s authenticity in terms of his personal interpretation of the meaning of mimesis lies in the fact that “Sidney advances the idea of the poet as maker, the imitative poet who does not simply copy nature” (Raiger, 1998; 22).

As it is already indicated, Sidney mostly paraphrases – essentially due to the spirit of the time, the Renaissance – the basic points of Aristotle’s argument of the mimetic character of poetry. Sidney’s paraphrases, moreover, characteristically display a central motif – the motif of imitation – as the idea that the writer uses most frequently. Therefore “when Sidney redefines poetry as an art of imitation according to Aristotle’s explanation of mimesis, he quite naturally turns to the term metaphor^{§§§§} as a major means of achieving this imitation” (Heninger, 1989; 400). Sidney argues, for example, that imitation means poetry since imitation is the defining characteristic of literature; although it is also the case that “For Sidney imitation contains an improvement on nature, so he claims that the poet creates an ideal ‘golden’ world” (Katona, 1991; 96). According to Sidney, the idea is that “imitation whereof poetry is, hath the most conveniency to nature of all other; insomuch that, as Aristotle saith, those things which in themselves are horrible, as cruel battles, unnatural monsters, are made, in poetical imitation, delightful” (2007; 145). Even formulating a generic comment on the relationship between poetry and imitation, Sidney proposes, for example, the claim that “comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life” (2007; 147). However, what Sidney makes is a synthesis of both Platonic and Aristotelian notions of imitation. As it is outlined here in this remark, “Imitation for Sidney is a notion wider than that of emulation. Sidney links the Platonic with the Aristotelian tradition successfully. While Plato suggests that the poet should imitate the ideal, Aristotle rejects ideal imitation as he thinks that only concrete action can justify character” (Katona, 1991; 100).

V. Coleridge and Mimesis as Imagination

In addition to the above illustrations of the interpretations of mimesis that have been provided by different literary theorists in different historical periods, the nineteenth-century English poet, literary critic and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) eloquently contributes to the assumptions about the interpretation and significance of the term mimesis. According to a critical remark, “As for Coleridge, most scholars note his traditional views on mimesis and universality; some even remark how ‘neoclassical’ he seems in this regard. Coleridge indeed leaves little room for doubt; at the opening of chapter 14 of the *Biographia*, he sets forth one of the ‘cardinal points of poetry’: ‘the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature’” (Hayden, 1981; 74). In other words, it could be stated that “In the criticism of ... Coleridge, literature is clearly mimetic” (Hayden, 1981; 78). Coleridge makes use of, in his poetry, supernatural elements in order to balance the use of everyday subject matters. Despite this quality, his characterisation is said to be mimetic (Hayden, 1981; 74). Coleridge, first of all, plainly states his personal agreement with the previous readings of the approaches to the idea of mimesis which have been principally based upon Plato’s analyses. As a consequence of this, for example, Coleridge predominantly asserts that “the composition of a poem is among the imitative arts” (1930; 201), which confirms that “This is the [mimetic] tradition, and Coleridge is a part of it” (Creed, 1954; 1164). However, Coleridge’s understanding of imitation in terms of artistic creation – that is, in other words, mimesis – specially foregrounds the point that imitation – as an act here – should certainly be differentiated from the idea of merely copying the source material. As a consequence of this, Coleridge reinterprets the idea of imitation in such a way that “imitation, as opposed to copying, consists either in the interfusion of the same throughout the radically different, or of the different throughout a base radically the same” (1930; 201). As it has specially become notable through Aristotle’s disagreement with Plato on the connotations of the idea of imitation, Coleridge exclusively accentuates the artist’s active involvement as a subjective entity in the act of poetic composition through mimesis. The artist imitates, yet his imitation is principally

§§§§ *Energieia*, as Aristotle calls it; it is the liveliness that the poet has.

more like interpretation than passive mimicry.^{****} Coleridge's poet is actively involved in the process of creation through the employment of the faculty of imagination. Because of this particular situation, Coleridge "accepts the Aristotelian doctrine of imitation, and a great part of the metaphysics introduced in the *Biographia* as an explanation of the faculty of imagination can be read as an attempt to develop a psychology for the special kind of imitation that is poetry" (Creed, 1954; 1164).

Coleridge specially acknowledges imitation as a human faculty that the poet critically needs as part of his imagination – one of the most pivotal keywords of Coleridge's theoretical discussion – to compose his poetry. Furthermore, Coleridge fuses imagination with pleasure, "a pleasure from internal relationships within a poem, and a more permanent pleasure that results from transferring the nature of poetry to the reader himself" (Creed, 1954; 1169). This interpretation of Coleridge's notion of pleasure is associated with the idea that "There is ... a reasonable relationship of part to whole within the poem: this is Aristotelian *imitation*; it is in the poem, according to Coleridge's theory, because the poet has produced a true work of the imagination" (Creed, 1954; 1169). The poet, according to Coleridge, is naturally endowed with specific faculties in terms of the five senses such as "the eye, the ear, the touch" (1930; 152). In addition to this, Coleridge illustrates the following as "the imitative power, voluntary and automatic; the imagination, or shaping and modifying power; the fancy, or the aggregative and associative power; the understanding, or the regulative, substantiating and realizing power" (1930; 152) as part of the process of imitation. According to Coleridge, the artist's – the poet – representation of the source material is a natural process, which Coleridge calls "the naturalness ... of the things represented, as raised and qualified by an imperceptible infusion of the author's own knowledge and talent" (1930; 180). Coleridge further claims that these qualities refer to an idea of imitation "as distinguished from a mere copy" (1930; 181). Imitation, according to Coleridge, requires a well-balanced infusion of the poet's talent and knowledge. Instead of being an apathetic performance, imitation is rather an effective operation to recreate the world – nature, or the universe – through an aesthetic achievement. Therefore, it becomes comprehensible that "[Coleridge's] investigation centers, then, on the imagination as the faculty which makes possible the kind of Aristotelian imitation that is art" (Creed, 1954; 1170).

Whether it is poetry, painting or even music,^{####} mimetic theory of art is based upon the ruling principle that any form of artistic creation is necessarily a copy of nature.^{####} The artist – the poet, the author, or the painter – in order to finalise his aesthetic formation, principally copies what he considers as the necessary elements of the contemporary historical reality. Beginning significantly from Plato and Aristotle's theories of representative arts, the term mimesis, throughout the history of the theory of literature, has notably been associated with the idea of copying. The characteristic of the artist's act of copying here, however, is quite far away from the idea of construction of a mere replica of the reality that is being copied. Instead, what the term mimesis principally advocates is the concept of interpretation that the artist is supposed to achieve through actively engaging in the process of creation.

VI. Auerbach and Mimesis as Representation

In addition to the interpretations of what should properly be called the classic theorists of literature, one of the most recent prominent studies of the theory of mimesis in representative arts has been accomplished by the German philologist and literary critic Erich Auerbach (1892-1957). Auerbach's most remarkable study, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946),^{#####} is a distinguished work of literary criticism that specially focuses on the theory of representation meticulously examining a number of significant texts of Western literature even including the stories from the Bible, which is specially because of the fact that "One of Auerbach's main objectives in *Mimesis* is to show how the aesthetic structure of Biblical texts, namely the Gospels, provides a model for realistic representation in secular literature" (Doran, 2007; 357). Auerbach's *Mimesis* is described as "His magnum opus ... written during his exile in Turkey and published just after the war, continues to be widely studied and discussed

^{****} This is the romantic philosophy of poetry especially articulated by Wordsworth; the man, the individual.

^{####} Aristotle also considers, for example, "flute and lyre playing" as mimetic.

^{####} As already stated, it is the contemporary socio-economic reality.

^{#####} Auerbach wrote the book in İstanbul where he worked as an exile from Nazi Germany.

more than fifty years after its initial publication” (Doran, 2007; 353). Auerbach in this analytical book spans almost the entire history of Western literature beginning from the classical period, the works of Homer, particularly *The Odyssey*, in order to provide direct and pertinent examples of mimetic representation in literature from some of the most noteworthy literary texts. The accomplishment of Auerbach’s study is naturally due to a few reasons “the most obvious being Auerbach’s custom of introducing every chapter with a close reading of a representative work. Auerbach’s way of drawing out the essence of an entire period from the reading of a single text is a hermeneutic tour de force that has few if any rivals” (Doran, 2007; 353).

Specially concentrating on the nature of the realistic details present in his chosen examples, Auerbach defines realistic literature accordingly as “the imitation of real life and living” (2003; 119), and as “the direct imitation of contemporary reality” (2003; 258). This is, in other words, the perception that “*Mimesis* is the story of realist representation in language, defined not in ontological terms as a verbal approximation of reality (correspondence of mind to world ...), but in formal and aesthetic terms as the serious presentation of human reality in its aspects that are most common or ordinary” (Doran, 2007; 354). Providing a more detailed explanation of imitation, furthermore, Auerbach argues that “Imitation of reality is imitation of the sensory experience of life on earth—among the most essential characteristics of which would seem to be its possessing a history, its changing and developing” (2003; 191). Imitation, therefore, becomes the most essential key word that Auerbach frequently employs in his discussions about the meaning of mimesis in terms of representative arts. From a different perspective, the romance as a literary genre, for example, cannot be considered as an example of realistic imitation. Auerbach illustrates that “The romance ... is—in the other specimens and fragments that have come down to us—so crammed with magic, adventure, and mythology, so overburdened with erotic detail, that it cannot possibly be considered an imitation of everyday life” (2003; 30). The nature of imitation, according to Auerbach, is to display enough realistic details; and he specifies that imitation is “the description of random everyday life” (2003; 44). Auerbach associates imitation with the artist’s individual experiences of life so intensely that any form of diversion from this principle would likely generate astounding complications. He asserts that “Imitation of reality is imitation of the sensory experience of life on earth—among the most essential characteristics of which would seem to be its possessing a history, its changing and developing. Whatever degree of freedom the imitating artist may be granted in his work, he cannot be allowed to deprive reality of this characteristic, which is its very essence” (2003; 191). As essential human nature has remained the same throughout the history, the artist’s imitation of life, as Auerbach claims, should mirror the reality since “the direct imitation of contemporary reality [has] served a timeless and universal purpose” (2003; 258).

VII. Conclusion

Mimesis both as a critical and as a philosophical term has essentially been structured around the idea of imitation as it is principally designated through the classical theories of Plato and Aristotle. In addition, this formulation has alternatively been pronounced in such a brief statement that the artist imitates life. In other words, what truly makes sense in such an exposition is the fact that mimesis is the principal perception that art imitates life as it is. And exactly this notion of mimesis has so far been the mainstream understanding of the term starting, as it has already been stated in the above chapters, especially with the classical literary theories of both Plato and Aristotle. Following from Plato and Aristotle’s philosophy of representative arts including poetry, therefore, many other significant figures of the Western theory of literature have drawn attention to the same argument of the meaning of imitation – and thus mimesis – in artistic creation. Among these leading names are especially Sir Philip Sidney, John Dryden and Samuel Taylor Coleridge from English Literature and literary theory; and more recently, it is one of the most influential scholars associated especially with the study of mimesis, Erich Auerbach from the German experience. What these writers and theorists have especially foregrounded is the opinion that literature as an art is necessarily the product of the artist’s imitation of life although each of these theorists has developed his own understanding of the term. In other words, it should be underscored that in each

personal interpretation, the idea of imitation, which is essential to the notion of mimesis, has focused on the most principal theoretical perception that art imitates life.

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