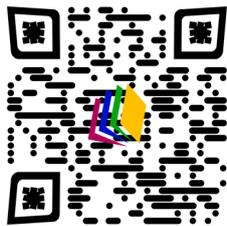


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Debating the Techniques of Expression: Lukacs, Brecht, and the Aesthetic Conflict between Realism and Modernism

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ABSTRACT:

In 1930s Georg Lukacs and Bertolt Brecht engaged in a stimulating debate on the efficacy of modernism and the commitment of modernist writers. The debate produced some of the important arguments on aesthetics and politics, artistic autonomy, and the suitability of mode of expression for representation of individuals in the backdrop of capitalism. Lukacs denounced the modernist technique of stream of consciousness and more specifically the absence of historicity in the writings of modernist novelist. He believed realism is better art for portraying the individuals trapped in capitalism. Brecht, however, rejected Lukacs' criticism of modernism on the ground that his views are conservative; he argued that the mode of expression in a literary epoch is characterized by the socio-economic problems of the age and therefore, the contemporary artists can use newer techniques to respond to these challenges and thus, they cannot be compelled to employ the techniques used by their predecessors. This paper intends to reexamine the realism-modernism debate from a fresh perspective to gain insight into the question of form, content, and literary commitment.

KEY WORDS: Realism, Modernism, Aesthetics and Politics, Georg Lukacs, Bertolt Brecht.

INTRODUCTION

“Modernism”, Roland Carter and John McRae (2016) write, “has been described as one of the most profound changes and upheavals ever to have occurred in the history of literature” (400). Influenced by the psychological writings of Sigmund Freud and anthropological works of James Frazer novelists like Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and D.H. Lawrence, and poets like T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, and W.H. Auden significantly changed the literary landscape with their experimentation with both medium and manner of expression (349). Stream of consciousness and a sense of alienation of self and society became defining features of modernist writings. However, the modernists