

Poetry as Protest: Brecht's German War Primer and the Politics of Wartime Trauma

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Abstract

In German War Primer, Bertolt Brecht responds to the terrible events of World War II with poems that look closely at violence, suffering and how humans can still endure. Untamed realism and transformational ideals collide in Brecht's writings and it becomes clear that his poetry answers to a widespread sense of wartime shock. This work argues that suffering should be fought against, not accepted quietly and that poetry serves not only as a way to create art but also to bring about social and political changes. Brecht's plays reveal that trauma is mainly about living violence and loss, with resistance and remind us of the importance of struggling against the ways wars reduce people to barbarity. This paper looks at how poetry plays a part in working through, sharing and healing the mental and emotional injuries that follow events such as war, being driven from your home, ongoing violence and losing someone. The purpose is to explore how poetry serves to release inner emotions, gives a platform to hidden voices and aids in the sharing of experience with other members of society about conflict and its results.

Keywords: Resilience, Notion, Trauma, Resistance, Inflicted, Displacement, Systemic Violence, Collective Catharsis.

Introduction

Bertolt Brecht helped change the way we think about theater during the 20th century. He was born in Augsburg, Germany and was talented in both dramatics, poetry, directing and being an actor. People remember him as the inventor of the 'epic theater' style. Many artists and audiences are encouraged by Brecht's original theatre style which emphasizes questioning society and politics. His three most well-known plays are "The Threepenny Opera," "Mother Courage and Her Children," and "The Caucasian Chalk Circle," each addressing matters of social inequality, war and capitalism. Brecht wrote about 2,000 poems and songs, though only a portion were published in his lifetime and the early collections included only a few. Among Brecht's notable poems on war are "To Those Born Later" (An die Nachgeborenen), "A German War Primer" (Deutsche Kriegsfiel), "Legend of the Dead Soldier" (Die Legende vom toten Soldaten), "General, Your Tank Is a Powerful Vehicle," and "From a German War Diary." This analysis examines Brecht's A German War Primer which is made up of many short poems written during the Second World War. Brecht attaches poems to newspaper images

to shed light on the hardships faced by people because of war. Because he was living in exile after escaping from Nazi Germany, he used his writing to oppose fascism and the tricks of the powerful. Many of the poems are short and sharp and contain a lot of irony or sarcasm. Brecht tried to motivate his readers to analyze information from the media and think for themselves. Instead of praising battles, he explains how the wealthy gain from them and the weak suffer. Not only does the collection express poetry; it stands for protest. A German War Primer suggests that we carefully review the pictures and stories we see and never stop challenging those in control.

Objectives

1. To examine how Brecht's German War Primer uses poetry to depict the traumatic effects of war on the individual and collective psyche.
2. To analyse the relationship between Brecht's Marxist political ideology and his poetic responses to the suffering caused by war.
3. To explore the role of poetry as a form of resistance and healing in the aftermath of trauma.
4. To evaluate the social and political function of Brecht's work in the context of the Second World War, and how it challenges both the public's perception of war and the structure of societal responses to conflict.

Review of Literature

(Ulomov Bexruz G'aybulla O'g'li, n.d.) Igbo poets demonstrate that poetry helps silence the emotions caused by traumatic experiences and highlights the many sides of emotional expression in Igbo poetry and how it can transform emotions. Additionally, the research showed that expressing feelings plays a role in personal and group healing, resilience and empowerment. The research shows that Igbo poetry helped people deal with their emotions and trauma.

Ware's (2025) paper investigates how poetry is used by people in long-lasting conflict areas to heal themselves. Several themes present in the poems have been explored in the paper such as indigenous metaphors, hope, imagination and humor.

The author (Winifred Okeke) has pointed out that after World War II, poets dealt with the remaining effects of trauma and loss, not just with what they could see. Far from providing a list of battles, this book explores the lasting effects of war, touching on trouble, remorse, the decrease in faith and the process of repairing what has crumbled.

Materials and Methodology

This study will employ a qualitative, literary-critical approach to analyse Brecht's German War Primer. The methodology will involve close textual analysis, focusing on key poems within the work and exploring Brecht's use of language, imagery, and form. The analysis will be informed by post-traumatic stress theory, which will provide a lens to examine the emotional and psychological impact of conflict on individuals and societies. Additionally, Brecht's Marxist ideological framework will be considered in the context of his poetry as a call for political and social transformation. Comparisons with other wartime poetry, as well as Brecht's broader oeuvre, will be drawn to highlight the distinctive ways in which German War Primer engages with the themes of trauma and conflict.

Materials

This research uses various literary texts to show how Bertolt Brecht's "A German War Primer" emphasizes the destructive results of war on poor people which creates conflict and distress for them. In addition to literary pieces, writers on the topic of war are examined to see how they discuss transformation.

Results and Discussion

Bertolt Brecht, in *A German War Primer*, uses simple and strong words and images to uncover the true horrors of war and expose those who manipulate people into getting involved. In 1945, the poet wrote the poem as four separate sections that tell about preparation, attack, defense and the events that occurred after the war. During the “Preparation” part, Brecht mocks the propaganda that promises soldiers are fighting for good reasons. For instance, a poem on a delayed bomber points out how useless acts of destruction are when the opposition is ahead. Brecht reveals, in “Attack,” how soldiers are trained to commit violence callously, even showing that some may enjoy the experience. This part highlights the way war leads to dehumanizing opponents.

In this section, the book explains the tragic losses faced by ordinary people during the war. In a moving verse, Brecht explains that seeing dead children and burning homes is just a usual part of war now. In the “Aftermath” section, the book looks at what happens to soldiers in the long run, both physically and mentally. After battle, those wounded still lie in hospitals, thinking of peace as well as of fresh battles which shows the continuous conflict and trauma within them. All through the poem, Brecht employs irony, repeats certain lines and writes in plain language to go against usual war stories. “Another day of fighting, nothing to record,” suggests that violence has become regular and his alternate expressions—“enemy attacks, we withdraw / when they pull back, we advance”—show how confusing and mixed up the events in war truly were.

By using an impersonal, fact-based tone, Brecht actually makes the horror more emotional and real. His choice of in-her-face drama emphasizes the idea of distanced thinking which comes from his epic theatre aiming to make the audience analyze the story instead of passively accepting it. By pointing out the truth about the cost of war, Brecht slams the war and all the systems that help it happen. This book seems to argue that propaganda should be ignored, that we should be aware of all those harmed by war and that we should ask ourselves if the outcome is really justified. It shows that even during war, reminding ourselves of our humanity is still vital.

Conclusion

A German War Primer uses poetic language to oppose war, fascism and the main influences on people’s ideas. He tries to encourage readers to read between the lines and question the information in newspapers and given by governments. His message is clear: war can never be considered heroic because it is mostly used by leaders to oppress and the average people go through the worst.

Many people still find relevance in works created by Brecht. It causes us to doubt leaders’ claims, spot inaccurate information and stand up to unfairness. Rather than just a set of poems, *A German War Primer* asks us to reflect, act against war and ensure we do not forget those who die.

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