Contrasting the Theme of Alienation in the German Poetry of Goethe and Brecht

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Abstract
In my study, I compare two German poets, Bertolt Brecht and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and examine their different techniques of achieving the effect of reader alienation. I analyze three to five poems by Goethe and Brecht and consider the way in which the words cause the reader to feel estranged. Such estrangement can be seen through the use of confusing changes in patterns of a poem or elements within the poem which contradict each other. Many people have analyzed certain pieces of poetry by Goethe and Brecht extensively, but a comparison of the way the two have represented estrangement or alienation has not yet been made. My contention is that alienation in Goethe’s poems is based in the realm of internalized feelings and confusion, which allows the reader to separate her logical mind from that which is innate, and therefore allows the reader to rediscover objects and situations in a new light. The alienation in Brecht’s poetry, however, is based in the realm of cold, hard, facts, allowing no room for internal feelings, but rather forcing the reader to see objects and situations in a new light based on logic and outside criticism of the world.

Goethe
- Estrangement from logic
- Compound nouns
- Contradictory adjectives
- Pronouns that include reader
- Subjective imagery
- Active verbs
- Often breaks perceived structure of poem

Brecht
- Estrangement from emotion
- Simple nouns and verbs
- Almost no adjectives
- Concrete, objective imagery
- Subjective verb form usage
- Clear structure of poem

Conclusion
In Goethe’s alienation of the reader from logic and Brecht’s alienation of the reader from feelings and empathy, we can more easily see the possibilities of understanding the world using solely logic or emotion. By separating logic from emotion and focusing on the world through the vision of one or the other, one can achieve a new and different perception of the world. Thus art, especially in the form of poetry, can be shown to alienate one from the world in order to better connect one with the world and the objects and situations within it.

Acknowledgements & References


Warum gabst du uns die tiefen Blicke
Warum gabst du uns die tiefen Blicke,
unsre Zukunft ahndungsvoll zu schauh,
unsrer Liebe, unserem Erdenglücke
während selig nimmer hinzutraun?

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Der Rauch
Das kleine Haus unter Bäumen am See
Vom Dach steigt Rauch.

- Bertolt Brecht

References


Acknowledgements & References