

# Social criticism



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Literature appeals to the soul.

They have the power of transforming the reader to the world that is portrayed in the writings. Truthful writings set in realistic background give shape to life's experiences and make the readers live and feel with the characters. This paper is about two such works—Luisa Valenzuela's short story, *The Censors* and Berthold Brecht's poem, *A Worker Reads History*—that are profound and truthful portraits of two different men. They provide direct analogies to real life events and teach valuable lessons about life.

Adapting to the Communicative Needs of the Audience Literature of the working class has been on the rise in the last fifty years or so. The working class did not know to read or write earlier to that. Even today, they have to overcome a number of hurdles to gain literacy. This struggle for literacy can be perceived from the works of the working class writers.

A worker wonders about his obscurity in Berthold Brecht's poem, *A Worker Reads History*. He wonders why no page in history has a mention of the people who put their efforts in building structures as massive as the Great Wall of China, the Seven Gates of Thebes, or the beautiful city of Babylon. The speaker is uneducated and he wonders why the warriors who fought with Alexander, Caesar, Phillip of Spain, and Frederick the Greek are never spoken of. The poem addresses every worker who is in a similar position as he is. The poem appeals to the target audience right away, since the language is very simple.

By the use of questions, the writer does not distinguish himself from his audience, but merely shares his thoughts and includes the audience in his

thought process. He makes the audience wonder why it is only a selected few who make it to the pages of history and the others are conveniently forgotten. Juan in Luisa Valenzuela's short story, *The Censors* is an educated person. His situation is different from Brecht's worker. He is a slave of repression.

The story depicts the troubled times in Argentina when everything that the common man did or said was censored. To convey the magnitude of the situation, the substance of the story is very simple where Juan's life changes completely due to a simple love letter that he writes to Marian in France. He responds to a natural impulse and replies to her letter that he secretly obtains from a friend. After posting his letter, Juan worries about the safety of Marian from the hands of the censors.

He hits upon a plan and takes up a job with the censor board. While on the job, his plan is to censor his own letter and escape from the clutches of the censors. Right from the start, the mood of the story is set and the audience is taken to wonder if Juan would indeed lay his hands on the letter that he writes to Marian. As he rises in his position and moves from department to department, the audience feels happy for Juan, along with him. The climax jerks the readers to the harsh reality of real-life existence where people believe that censorship is a way of life.

Juan censors his own letter and the next day, he is executed. Educating the Audience Both the works—*The Censors* and *A Worker Reads History*—set the audience thinking and feeling. Brecht's work leads us to question the facts that we read in history. The audience is made aware of the labor of the

workers and the courage of the unknown warriors who fought and died. It tries to awaken the conscience of the people who create history for rulers.

With the completion of work, the workers seemed to disappear. Brecht asks in the poem, “ In the evening when the Chinese wall was finished Where did the masons go? ” Venezuela’s work throws light on the horrors of censorship and how people get accustomed to it. In fact the story is an experience for people who enjoy freedom in other countries and have only read about censorships in books or papers. Juan captures the hearts of such an audience and takes them on a journey to the terror land. Barnard L.

Collier states that “ Argentines, by and large, accept censorship as a quality of Argentine life” in his article that deals with the terrors of military rule. The Purpose of the Works The structure and vocabulary of both the works seek to educate, rather than entertain the reading audience. Neither the poem nor the short story use any profound form of structure or words. They are crude, similar to the characters portrayed in them. The poem questions reality in a very profound manner.

When the worker wants to know if it was the “ the kings who hauled the craggy blocks of stone” in building Thebes, who built the magnificent city of Babylon, and where did the masons who built the Chinese wall go after it was constructed we can actually feel and wonder with him. He asks if each page of victory is recorded in history by “ a great man, Who paid the piper? ” Even if the reader is not a historian, it still stimulates the conscience and opens our eyes to the unsung heroes of not just the past, but also of the

present. The story transforms us to the world of military rule. A simple happening that any one of us can associate with is presented in the story.

With this personal allusion, it smoothly transforms the reader to the world of despotism. The background and setting are quite gripping and the denouement sets the mind afire. It tells us how any of us can fall victim to authoritarianism and can even go to the extent of accepting it as a way of life. The story, in a way, alerts us to stay awake to the system around us. .