

# Socially responsible literature: reflections on "silence"

Literature



Both Tadeusz Borowski's chapter " Silence" and Bertold Brecht's poem " A Worker Reads History" are socially responsible pieces of literature and poetry, respectively, as the authors seem to capture the untold aspects of history that need to be understood. Both works are intended to educate the audience by countering propaganda type pieces that portray a common hero or victim. As it has been said, life does imitate art and life is not common nor filled with characters of complete morality.

It should be said, as well, that many literary works do pose questions in themes of morality, public issues, or private problems endemic to society, however these themes and questions are usually answered. Common art is filled with dissonance and consonance while extraordinary art is only dissonant, as is life. There are only questions in this type of art and for this reason, the writers chosen do entertain their audiences by compelling them to think beyond the literature and look at life in a different way.

Bertold Brecht's poem " A Worker Reads History" is filled with questions and is meant to cause the audience to contemplate the unsung and ordinary heroes of history that do not receive attention. He asks " Phillip of Spain wept as his fleet was sunk and destroyed. Were there no other tears? Frederick the Greek triumphed in the Seven Years War. Who triumphed with him? " This social criticism in the form of questions is socially responsible to audiences in that the myth of the fallen or triumphant hero is merely a nationalistic and propaganda type tool used to glorify and glamorize war and political progress.

Brecht, also wonders about Caesar's victory and "was there not even a cook in his army"? Of course, tales of cooks and other workers would not be so romantic and patriotic. The title is very telling then of the point of view of the poem and the intention of the regular person or regular audience to comprehend their lack of place in history as unacceptable or, at the very least, questionable.

Similarly, Tadeusz Borowski's "Silence" is very telling in the title as to the intention of his story and the socially irresponsible action of being silent to the truth. Here again, we do not see characters portrayed in heroic terms, we see, as an audience, gritty reality. As Holocaust survivors, having been silent, these men had pent up rage against their oppressors and just as they suffered in silence for so many years, they murdered one oppressor, who was gagged in silence and then trampled to death.

The importance of noting that the American officer, who promised justice, and was ignored is important, as well. He was not viewed as a hero and the oppressed men were not meant to be portrayed as victims. The theme to note is the importance of actions versus words, as the American's promise was not as satisfying as the silent, secret murder. But, as socially responsible art the action taken was written and, therefore taken out of the darkness of secrecy to its own action.

In closing, both works attempt to persuade audiences to think differently about the portrayal of history and the grittiness of the real silent heroes and victims. There is no simple dichotomies in these pieces nor is there a resolving conflict. The beauty is in the questions posed. Therefore, in this way these works do serve as entertainment that prompts the audience to <https://assignbuster.com/socially-responsible-literature-reflections-on-silence/>

question themselves, their world, the works they have read, and their responsibility of knowing the truth.