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**The Principles and Influence of Formalism in Literature: A Critical Study of “*The Theory of the Novel*” by Georg Lukács**

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**Article Received:** 20/07/2024

**Article Accepted:** 22/08/2024

**Published Online:** 23/08/2024

**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2024.6.8.128

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**Abstract:**

This paper explores the core principles and lasting impact of Formalism, a revolutionary literary movement that emerged in the early 20th century. By emphasizing artistic form and literary devices over content and social context, Formalism challenged traditional notions of art and literature. The paper examines the key principles of Formalism, including the autonomy of art, formal analysis, and the importance of literary devices. It also discusses the contributions of influential Formalist critics, such as Viktor Shklovsky, Roman Jakobson, and Tzvetan Todorov. The paper demonstrates how Formalism’s focus on form and structure has influenced literary theory and criticism, shaping movements like structuralism, New Criticism, and poststructuralism. By tracing the development and influence of Formalism, this research highlights the movement’s enduring significance in understanding the complexities of art and literature.

**Keywords:** Formalism, Artistic Form, Structuralism, Literary Movement

**Introduction:**

Formalism is a philosophical and literary movement that emerged in the early 20th century, primarily in Russia and Europe. It emphasizes the artistic form and literary devices over the content and social context of a work. Formalism, a revolutionary literary movement, emerged in the early 20th century, challenging traditional notions of art and literature. This paper explores the core principles, key figures, and lasting impact of Formalism on literary theory and criticism.

**Principles of Formalism:**

Formalists argue that art is primarily a matter of form, not content. They focus on the literary devices, structures, and techniques used to create a work rather than its social, historical, or cultural context. Key principles include:

**Autonomy of Art:** Art is independent of external factors, such as morality, politics, or reality.

**Formal Analysis:** Literary works should be analyzed in terms of their formal elements, like imagery, syntax, and narrative structure.

Device: Literary devices, such as metaphor or symbolism, are essential to creating artistic meaning.

**Key Figures:**

<b>Viktor Shklovsky</b>	Shklovsky is considered the founder of Formalism. His work, “Art as Technique” (1917), introduced the concept of “defamiliarization,” which highlights the artistic value of unusual forms.
<b>Roman Jakobson</b>	A Russian linguist and literary theorist, Jakobson expanded Formalism’s scope to include phonology and poetics.
<b>Tzvetan Todorov</b>	A Bulgarian-French literary critic, Todorov applied Formalist principles to structuralism and narratology.

**Influence of Formalism:**

Formalism’s impact extends beyond literary theory to influence:

Structuralism: Formalism’s focus on form and structure paved the way for structuralism, which analyzes cultural phenomena in terms of underlying structures.

New Criticism: Formalism’s emphasis on close reading and formal analysis influenced the New Criticism movement in the United States.

Literary Theory: Formalism’s principles continue to shape literary theory, inspiring new approaches like post-structuralism and deconstruction.

“**The Theory of the Novel**” (1927) by Georg Lukács is a seminal work of literary theory that, although not exclusively Formalist, engages with and critiques Formalist ideas. Here’s a brief overview:

Critique of Formalism: Lukács argues that Formalism oversimplifies the novel’s complexities by focusing solely on form and technique. Historical context: He emphasizes the importance of understanding the novel within its historical and social context. The novel as a genre: Lukács explores the novel’s emergence and development as a distinct literary genre. The role of the author: He discusses the author’s relationship with the work and the reader. The search for meaning: Lukács sees the novel as a quest for meaning and authenticity in a fragmented world. Georg Lukács’ “The Theory of the Novel” is a masterpiece of literary theory that continues to inspire and challenge scholars to this day. Written in 1927, this work remains a seminal text that Shaped Marxist literary theory: Lukács’ work laid the groundwork for a Marxist approach to literature, emphasizing the social and historical context of literary production. Influenced critical theory: His ideas on the novel as a reflection of societal contradictions and the search for meaning have influenced critical theorists like Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin. Anticipated post-structuralism: Lukács’ concept of “transcendental homelessness” foreshadows poststructuralist ideas on the fragmented self and the instability of meaning. His analysis of the novel’s formal structures and narrative techniques continues to inform narratological studies.

It offers a profound understanding of the human condition: Lukács' exploration of the novel as a quest for meaning and authenticity resonates with readers seeking to understand the complexities of modern life.

Through "The Theory of the Novel," Lukács demonstrates his profound insight into the nature of literature, history, and human experience. His work remains an essential reference point for scholars and readers seeking to engage with the complexities of literary theory and cultural critique.

**In Georg Lukács' "The Theory of the Novel," an "integrated civilization" refers to a society where:**

Social cohesion: People share common values, beliefs, and experiences.

Meaningful totality: Life is perceived as a coherent, meaningful whole.

Organic unity: Social, cultural, and economic aspects are harmoniously integrated.

Shared purpose: Individuals work together towards a common goal.

**Lukács argues that such civilizations existed in ancient Greece and medieval Europe, where:**

Shared mythological and religious frameworks provided a common understanding of the world.

Social hierarchies were clearly defined, with each person having a designated role.

Cultural and artistic expressions reflected the shared values and beliefs.

**In contrast, modern civilization is characterized by:**

Disintegration: Social, cultural, and economic fragmentation.

Meaninglessness: Life is experienced as disjointed and lacking purpose.

Alienation: Individuals feel disconnected from others and society.

Lukács sees the novel as a reflection of this modern disintegration, with the genre's focus on individual experiences and subjective perspectives mirroring the fragmentation of modern life.

"The Problems of a Philosophy of the History of Forms" is a key chapter in Georg Lukács' "The Theory of the Novel ."In it, Lukács explores the challenges of developing a philosophy of literary forms, particularly in relation to the novel. Here's a breakdown of the chapter's main points:

Historical context: Lukács discusses how the novel emerged in a period of social and cultural transformation, marked by the decline of traditional forms and the rise of modernity.

Forms and content: He examines the relationship between literary forms and their content, arguing that forms are not mere vessels for content but rather shape and transform it.

The problem of historical development: Lukács considers how literary forms evolve over time, influenced by social and cultural changes.

The challenge of a philosophy of forms: He identifies the difficulties in developing a comprehensive philosophy of literary forms, including the need to balance historical context with formal analysis.

The role of the novel: Lukács sees the novel as a unique form that reflects the modern experience, characterized by disintegration and fragmentation.

The tension between form and life: He explores the tension between literary forms and the dynamic, ever-changing nature of life, arguing that the novel must find ways to capture this tension.

The importance of dialectics: Lukács emphasizes the need for a dialectical approach to understanding literary forms, recognizing both their historical development and their ongoing transformation.

By addressing these problems, Lukács lays the groundwork for a nuanced understanding of literary forms and their relationship to historical context, paving the way for further exploration in literary theory and criticism.

“The Inner Form of the Novel” is a key concept in Georg Lukács’ “The Theory of the Novel”. It refers to the underlying structural and stylistic elements that shape the novel’s narrative and give it coherence. Lukács argues that the inner form is characterized by:

Discrete, autonomous moments: The novel is composed of distinct, self-contained episodes or moments that are not necessarily connected by a linear narrative.

Lack of totality: Unlike epic poetry, the novel does not strive for a comprehensive, unified representation of life.

Subjective, personal experience: The novel focuses on individual, subjective experiences and perspectives.

Psychological insight: The inner form of the novel explores the inner lives and thoughts of characters.

Dissonance and contradiction: The novel often incorporates conflicting elements, such as different narrative styles or perspectives.

Open-endedness: The novel’s narrative is not necessarily resolved or closed, reflecting the open-ended nature of modern life.

Dialectical tension: The inner form of the novel is characterized by a dialectical tension between opposing forces, such as unity and fragmentation.

Lukács sees the inner form of the novel as a reflection of modern life’s complexities and contradictions, and argues that it is this form that allows the novel to capture the essence of modern experience.

In “The Theory of the Novel”, Georg Lukács explores the historico-philosophical conditioning of the novel, arguing that the genre’s emergence and development are deeply rooted in the social, cultural, and philosophical context of modernity. The novel emerges during a time of significant social change, marked by

the decline of traditional societies and the rise of capitalism. Modernity brings about the disintegration of unified, cohesive worldviews, leading to fragmentation and specialization. The novel reflects the growing emphasis on individual experience, subjective perspectives, and personal freedom. Secularization and rationalization: The novel is shaped by the increasing secularization and rationalization of modern life. Lukács identifies key philosophical influences in the novel, including Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche. The novel reflects the modern consciousness, characterized by dissonance, contradiction, and uncertainty. Lukács sees the novel as a significant literary form, capable of capturing the complexities and nuances of modern life.

Lukács argues that understanding the historico-philosophical conditioning of the novel is crucial for grasping its literary and cultural significance. By situating the novel within its broader cultural and intellectual context, Lukács provides a rich and nuanced understanding of the genre's development and importance.

The essay shaped the development of literary theory, particularly Marxist literary theory and critical theory. Lukács' work provides a nuanced understanding of the novel's unique characteristics and its relationship to modernity. The book offers valuable insights into the nature of modernity, its disintegrating effects on society, and the individual's experience. Lukács' dialectical method, which considers both historical context and literary form, has influenced various fields beyond literary theory. Despite being written in 1920, the book remains relevant to contemporary debates in literary theory, cultural studies, and philosophy. "The Theory of the Novel" bridges literature, philosophy, sociology, and history, demonstrating the interconnectedness of these fields. It is considered a foundational text for critical theory, influencing thinkers like Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Fredric Jameson. Lukács' ideas have shaped literary criticism, encouraging readers to consider the historical and social context of literary works. The book contributes to Marxist thought by exploring the relationship between literature, ideology, and social change. The Theory of the Novel" continues to inspire intellectual debates, ensuring Lukács' enduring legacy in literary theory and beyond.

**Criticism of "The Theory of the Novel" comprises:**

Overemphasis on historical context: Some argue that Lukács prioritizes historical context over literary form and aesthetics.

Too broad a definition of the novel: Critics argue that Lukács' definition of the novel is too inclusive, encompassing too many diverse forms.

Neglect of non-Western literature: Lukács focuses primarily on Western literature, neglecting non-Western literary traditions.

Overly deterministic view of literature: Some argue that Lukács' Marxist approach makes literature too dependent on historical and economic forces.

Lack of attention to literary language: Critics argue that Lukács neglects the importance of literary language and style.

Too rigid a distinction between novel and epic: Some argue that Lukács' distinction between novel and epic is too rigid and doesn't account for hybrid forms.

Insufficient consideration of reader response: Lukács focuses on the author's intentions and historical context, neglecting reader response and reception.

Overemphasis on the novel as a reflection of modernity: Critics argue that Lukács overemphasizes the novel's role in reflecting modernity, neglecting its other functions.

Neglect of feminist and gender perspectives: Lukács' work has been criticized for neglecting feminist and gender perspectives on literature.

Difficulty in applying the theory to individual works: Some critics argue that Lukács' theory is too abstract and difficult to apply to individual literary works.

These criticisms highlight some of the limitations and challenges of Lukács' influential work.

### **Conclusion:**

Formalism revolutionized literary theory and criticism by emphasizing the artistic form and literary devices. Its influence extends to structuralism, New Criticism, and literary theory, ensuring its continued relevance in understanding the complexities of art and literature. Lukács' work offers a nuanced understanding of the novel as a reflection of modern life. His emphasis on historical and social context adds depth to literary analysis. Lukács' approach can be seen as overly deterministic, neglecting the role of individual agency. His critique of Formalism may be seen as too broad, neglecting the value of formal analysis.

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