Classic Poetry Series

Bertolt Brecht

- poems -

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Bertolt Brecht (10 February 1898 – 14 August 1956)

Eugen Berthold Friedrich Brecht; was a German poet, playwright, and theatre director.

An influential theatre practitioner of the 20th century, Brecht made equally significant contributions to dramaturgy and theatrical production, the latter particularly through the seismic impact of the tours undertaken by the Berliner Ensemble — the post-war theatre company operated by Brecht and his wife, long-time collaborator and actress Helene Weigel.

Life and Career

Bavaria (1898–1924)

Bertolt Brecht was born in Augsburg, Bavaria, (about 50 miles (80 km) north-west of Munich) to a conventionally-devout Protestant mother and a Catholic father (who had been persuaded to have a Protestant wedding). His father worked for a paper mill, becoming its managing director in 1914. Thanks to his mother's influence, Brecht knew the Bible, a familiarity that would impact on his writing throughout his life. From her, too, came the "dangerous image of the self-denying woman" that recurs in his drama. Brecht's home life was comfortably middle class, despite what his occasional attempt to claim peasant origins implied. At school in Augsburg he met Caspar Neher, with whom he formed a lifelong creative partnership, Neher designing many of the sets for Brecht's dramas and helping to forge the distinctive visual iconography of their epic theatre.

When he was 16, the First World War broke out. Initially enthusiastic, Brecht soon changed his mind on seeing his classmates "swallowed by the army". On his father's recommendation, Brecht sought a loophole by registering for an additional medical course at Munich University, where he enrolled in 1917. There he studied drama with Arthur Kutscher, who inspired in the young Brecht an admiration for the iconoclastic dramatist and cabaret-star Wedekind.

From July 1916, Brecht's newspaper articles began appearing under the new name "Bert Brecht" (his first theatre criticism for the Augsburger Volkswille appeared in October 1919). Brecht was drafted into military service in the autumn of 1918, only to be posted back to Augsburg as a medical orderly in a military VD clinic; the war ended a month later.

In July 1919, Brecht and Paula Banholzer (who had begun a relationship in 1917) had a son, Frank. In 1920 Brecht's mother died.

Some time in either 1920 or 1921, Brecht took a small part in the political cabaret of the Munich comedian Karl Valentin. Brecht's diaries for the next few years record numerous visits to see Valentin perform. Brecht compared Valentin to Chaplin, for his "virtually complete rejection of mimicry and cheap psychology". Writing in his Messingkauf Dialogues years later, Brecht identified Valentin, along with Wedekind and Büchner, as his "chief influences" at that time:

But the man he [Brecht writes of himself in the third person] learnt most from was the clown Valentin, who performed in a beer-hall. He did short sketches in which he played refractory employees, orchestral musicians or photographers, who hated their employers and made them look ridiculous. The employer was played by his partner, a popular woman comedian who used to pad herself out and speak in a deep bass voice.

Brecht's first full-length play, Baal (written 1918), arose in response to an argument in one of Kutscher's drama seminars, initiating a trend that persisted throughout his career of creative activity that was generated by a desire to counter another work (both others' and his own, as his many adaptations and re-writes attest). "Anyone can be creative," he quipped, "it's rewriting other people that's a challenge." Brecht completed his second major play, Drums in the Night, in February 1919.

In 1922 while still living in Munich, Brecht came to the attention of an influential Berlin critic, Herbert Ihering: "At 24 the writer Bert Brecht has changed Germany's literary complexion overnight"—he enthused in his review of Brecht's first play to be produced, Drums in the Night—"[he] has given our time a new tone, a new melody, a new vision. [...] It is a language you can feel on your tongue, in your gums, your ear, your spinal column." In November it was announced that Brecht had been awarded the prestigious Kleist Prize (intended for unestablished writers and probably Germany's most significant literary award, until it was abolished in 1932) for his first three plays (Baal, Drums in the Night, and In the Jungle, although at that point only Drums had been produced). The citation for the award insisted that:

"[Brecht's] language is vivid without being deliberately poetic, symbolical without being over literary. Brecht is a dramatist because his language is felt physically and in the round."

That year he married the Viennese opera-singer Marianne Zoff. Their daughter—Hanne Hiob (1923–2009)—was a successful German actress.

In 1923, Brecht wrote a scenario for what was to become a short slapstick film, Mysteries of a Barbershop, directed by Erich Engel and starring Karl Valentin. Despite a lack of success at the time, its experimental inventiveness and the subsequent success of many of its contributors have meant that it is now considered one of the most important films in German film history. In May of that year, Brecht's In the Jungle premiered in Munich, also directed by Engel. Opening night proved to be a "scandal"—a phenomenon that would characterize many of his later productions during the Weimar Republic—in which Nazis blew whistles and threw stink bombs at the actors on the stage.

In 1924 Brecht worked with the novelist and playwright Lion Feuchtwanger (whom he had met in 1919) on an adaptation of Christopher Marlowe's Edward II that proved to be a milestone in Brecht's early theatrical and dramaturgical development. Brecht's Edward II constituted his first attempt at collaborative writing and was the first of many classic texts he was to adapt. As his first solo directorial début, he later credited it as the germ of his conception of "epic theatre". That September, a job as assistant dramaturg at Max Reinhardt's Deutsches Theater—at the time one of the leading three or four theatres in the world—brought him to Berlin.

Weimar Republic Berlin (1925–33)

In 1923 Brecht's marriage to Zoff began to break down (though they did not divorce until 1927). Brecht had become involved with both Elisabeth

Hauptmann and Helene Weigel. Brecht and Weigel's son, Stefan, was born in October 1924.

In his role as dramaturg, Brecht had much to stimulate him but little work of his own. Reinhardt staged Shaw's Saint Joan, Goldoni's Servant of Two Masters (with the improvisational approach of the commedia dell'arte in which the actors chatted with the prompter about their roles), and Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author in his group of Berlin theatres. A new version of Brecht's third play, now entitled Jungle: Decline of a Family, opened at the Deutsches Theater in October 1924, but was not a success.

At this time Brecht revised his important "transitional poem", "Of Poor BB". In 1925, his publishers provided him with Elisabeth Hauptmann as an assistant for the completion of his collection of poems, Devotions for the Home (Hauspostille, eventually published in January 1927). She continued to work with him after the publisher's commission ran out.

In 1925 in Mannheim the artistic exhibition Neue Sachlichkeit ("new objectivity") had given its name to the new post-Expressionist movement in the German arts. With little to do at the Deutsches Theater, Brecht began to develop his Man Equals Man project, which was to become the first product of "the 'Brecht collective'—that shifting group of friends and collaborators on whom he henceforward depended." This collaborative approach to artistic production, together with aspects of Brecht's writing and style of theatrical production, mark Brecht's work from this period as part of the Neue Sachlichkeit movement. The collective's work "mirrored the artistic climate of the middle 1920s," Willett and Manheim argue:

with their attitude of 'Neue Sachlichkeit' (or New Matter-of-Factness), their stressing of the collectivity and downplaying of the individual, and their new cult of Anglo-Saxon imagery and sport. Together the "collective" would go to fights, not only absorbing their terminology and ethos (which permeates Man Equals Man) but also drawing those conclusions for the theatre as a whole which Brecht set down in his theoretical essay "Emphasis on Sport" and tried to realise by means of the harsh lighting, the boxing-ring stage and other anti-illusionistic devices that henceforward appeared in his own productions.

In 1925, Brecht also saw two films that had a significant influence on him: Chaplin's The Gold Rush and Eisenstein's Battleship Potemkin. Brecht had compared Valentin to Chaplin, and the two of them provided models for Galy Gay in Man Equals Man. Brecht later wrote that Chaplin "would in many ways come closer to the epic than to the dramatic theatre's requirements." They met several times during Brecht's time in the United States, and discussed Chaplin's Monsieur Verdoux project, which it is possible Brecht influenced.

In 1926 a series of short stories was published under Brecht's name, though Hauptmann was closely associated with writing them. Following the production of Man Equals Man in Darmstadt that year, Brecht began studying Marxism and socialism in earnest, under the supervision of Hauptmann. "When I read Marx's Capital", a note by Brecht reveals, "I understood my plays." Marx was, it continues, "the only spectator for my plays I'd ever come across."

In 1927 Brecht became part of the "dramaturgical collective" of Erwin Piscator's first company, which was designed to tackle the problem of finding new plays for its "epic, political, confrontational, documentary theatre". Brecht collaborated with Piscator during the period of the latter's landmark productions, Hoppla, We're Alive! by Toller, Rasputin, The Adventures of the Good Soldier Schweik, and Konjunktur by Lania. Brecht's most significant contribution was to the adaptation of the unfinished episodic comic novel Schweik, which he later described as a "montage from the novel". The Piscator productions influenced Brecht's ideas about staging and design, and alerted him to the radical potentials offered to the "epic" playwright by the development of stage technology (particularly projections). What Brecht took from Piscator "is fairly plain, and he acknowledged it" Willett suggests:

The emphasis on Reason and didacticism, the sense that the new subject matter demanded a new dramatic form, the use of songs to interrupt and comment: all these are found in his notes and essays of the 1920s, and he bolstered them by citing such Piscatorial examples as the step-by-step narrative technique of Schweik and the oil interests handled in Konjunktur ('Petroleum resists the five-act form').

Brecht was struggling at the time with the question of how to dramatize the complex economic relationships of modern capitalism in his unfinished project Joe P. Fleischhacker (which Piscator's theatre announced in its programme for the 1927–28 season). It wasn't until his Saint Joan of the Stockyards (written between 1929–1931) that Brecht solved it. In 1928 he discussed with Piscator plans to stage Shakespeare's Julius Caesar and Brecht's own Drums in the Night, but the productions did not materialize.

1927 also saw the first collaboration between Brecht and the young composer Kurt Weill. Together they began to develop Brecht's Mahagonny project, along thematic lines of the biblical Cities of the Plain but rendered in terms of the Neue Sachlichkeit's Amerikanismus, which had informed Brecht's previous work. They produced The Little Mahagonny for a music festival in July, as what Weill called a "stylistic exercise" in preparation for the large-scale piece. From that point on Caspar Neher became an integral part of the collaborative effort, with words, music and visuals conceived in relation to one another from the start. The model for their mutual articulation lay in Brecht's newly-formulated principle of the "separation of the elements", which he first outlined in "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre" (1930). The principle, a variety of montage, proposed by-passing the "great struggle for supremacy between words, music and production" as Brecht put it, by showing each as self-contained, independent works of art that adopt attitudes towards one another.

In 1930 Brecht married Weigel; their daughter Barbara Brecht was born soon after the wedding. She also became an actress and currently holds the copyrights to all of Brecht's work.

Brecht formed a writing collective which became prolific and very influential. Elisabeth Hauptmann, Margarete Steffin, Emil Burri, Ruth Berlau and others worked with Brecht and produced the multiple teaching plays, which attempted to create a new dramaturgy for participants rather than passive audiences. These addressed themselves to the massive worker arts organisation that existed in Germany and Austria in the 1920s. So did Brecht's first great play, Saint Joan of the Stockyards, which attempted to portray the drama in financial transactions.

This collective adapted John Gay's The Beggar's Opera, with Brecht's lyrics set to music by Kurt Weill. Retitled The Threepenny Opera (Die Dreigroschenoper) it was the biggest hit in Berlin of the 1920s and a renewing influence on the musical worldwide. One of its most famous lines underscored the hypocrisy of conventional morality imposed by the Church, working in conjunction with the established order, in the face of working-class hunger and deprivation:

Erst kommt das Fressen

Dann kommt die Moral.

First the grub (lit. "eating like animals, gorging")

Then the morality.

The success of The Threepenny Opera was followed by the quickly thrown together Happy End. It was a personal and a commercial failure. At the time the book was purported to be by the mysterious Dorothy Lane (now known to be Elisabeth Hauptmann, Brecht's secretary and close collaborator). Brecht only claimed authorship of the song texts. Brecht would later use elements of Happy End as the germ for his Saint Joan of the Stockyards, a play that would never see the stage in Brecht's lifetime. Happy End's score

by Weill produced many Brecht/Weill hits like "Der Bilbao-Song" and "Surabaya-Jonny".

The masterpiece of the Brecht/Weill collaborations, Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny (Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny), caused an uproar when it premiered in 1930 in Leipzig, with Nazis in the audience protesting. The Mahagonny opera would premier later in Berlin in 1931 as a triumphant sensation.

Brecht spent his last years in the Weimar-era Berlin (1930–1933) working with his "collective" on the Lehrstücke. These were a group of plays driven by morals, music and Brecht's budding epic theatre. The Lehrstücke often aimed at educating workers on Socialist issues. The Measures Taken (Die Massnahme) was scored by Hanns Eisler. In addition, Brecht worked on a script for a semi-documentary feature film about the human impact of mass unemployment, Kuhle Wampe (1932), which was directed by Slatan Dudow. This striking film is notable for its subversive humour, outstanding cinematography by Günther Krampf, and Hanns Eisler's dynamic musical contribution. It still provides a vivid insight into Berlin during the last years of the Weimar Republic. The so-called "Westend Berlin Scene" in the 1930 was an important influencing factor on Brecht, playing in a milieu around Ulmenallee in Westend with artists like Richard Strauss, Marlene Dietrich and Herbert Ihering.

By February 1933, Brecht’s work was eclipsed by the rise of Nazi rule in Germany. (Brecht would also have his work challenged again in later life by the U.S. House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which believed he was under the influence of communism.)

Nazi Germany and World War II (1933–1945)

Fearing persecution, Brecht left Germany in February 1933, when Hitler took power. He went to Denmark, but when war seemed imminent in April 1939, he moved to Stockholm, Sweden, where he remained for a year. Then Hitler invaded Norway and Denmark, and Brecht was forced to leave Sweden for Helsinki in Finland where he waited for his visa for the United States until 3 May 1941.

During the war years, Brecht became a prominent writer of the Exilliteratur. He expressed his opposition to the National Socialist and Fascist movements in his most famous plays: Life of Galileo, Mother Courage and Her Children, The Good Person of Szechwan, The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, The Caucasian Chalk Circle, Fear and Misery of the Third Reich, and many others.

Brecht also wrote the screenplay for the Fritz Lang-directed film Hangmen Also Die! which was loosely based on the 1942 assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, the Nazi Reich Protector of German-occupied Prague, number-two man in the SS, and a chief architect of the Holocaust, who was known as "The Hangman of Prague." It was Brecht's only script for a Hollywood film: the money he earned from the project enabled him to write The Visions of Simone Machard, Schweik in the Second World War and an adaptation of Webster's The Duchess of Malfi. Hanns Eisler was nominated for an Academy Award for his musical score. The collaboration of three prominent refugees from Nazi Germany –Lang, Brecht and Eisler – is an example of the influence this generation of German exiles had in American culture.

Cold War and final years in East Germany (1945–1956)

In the years of the Cold War and "Red Scare", Brecht was blacklisted by movie studio bosses and interrogated by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Along with about 41 other Hollywood writers, directors, actors and producers, he was subpoenaed to appear before the HUAC in September 1947. Although he was one of 19 witnesses who declared that they would refuse to appear, Brecht eventually decided to testify. He later explained that he had followed the advice of attorneys and had not wanted to delay a planned trip to Europe. Dressed in overalls and smoking an acrid cigar that made some of the committee members feel slightly ill, on 30 October 1947

Brecht testified that he had never been a member of the Communist Party. He made wry jokes throughout the proceedings, punctuating his inability to speak English well with continuous references to the translators present, who transformed his German statements into English ones unintelligible to himself. HUAC Vice Chairman Karl Mundt thanked Brecht for his co-operation. The remaining witnesses, the so called Hollywood Ten, refused to testify and were cited for contempt. Brecht's decision to appear before the committee led to criticism, including accusations of betrayal. The day after his testimony, on 31 October, Brecht returned to Europe.

In Chur in Switzerland, Brecht staged an adaptation of Sophocles' Antigone, based on a translation by Hölderlin. It was published under the title Antigonemodell 1948, accompanied by an essay on the importance of creating a "non-Aristotelian" form of theatre. An offer of his own theatre (completed in 1954) and theatre company (the Berliner Ensemble) encouraged Brecht to return to Berlin in 1949. He retained his Austrian nationality (granted in 1950) and overseas bank accounts from which he received valuable hard currency remittances. The copyrights on his writings were held by a Swiss company. At the time he drove a pre-war DKW car—a rare luxury in the austere divided capital.

Though he was never a member of the Communist Party, Brecht had been deeply schooled in Marxism by the dissident communist Karl Korsch. Korsch's version of the Marxist dialectic influenced Brecht greatly, both his aesthetic theory and theatrical practice. Brecht received the Stalin Peace Prize in 1954.

Brecht wrote very few plays in his final years in East Berlin, none of them as famous as his previous works. He dedicated himself to directing plays and developing the talents of the next generation of young directors and dramaturgs, such as Manfred Wekwerth, Benno Besson and Carl Weber. Some of his most famous poems, including the "Buckow Elegies", were written at this time.

At first Brecht supported the measures taken by the East German government against the Uprising of 1953 in East Germany, which included the use of Soviet military force. In a letter from the day of the uprising to SED First Secretary Walter Ulbricht, Brecht wrote that: "History will pay its respects to the revolutionary impatience of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany. The great discussion [exchange] with the masses about the speed of socialist construction will lead to a viewing and safeguarding of the socialist achievements. At this moment I must assure you of my allegiance to the Socialist Unity Party of Germany."

Brecht's subsequent commentary on those events, however, offered a different assessment—in one of the poems in the Elegies, "Die Lösung" (The Solution), Brecht writes:

After the uprising of the 17th of June

The Secretary of the Writers Union

Had leaflets distributed in the Stalinallee

Stating that the people

Had forfeited the confidence of the government

And could win it back only

By redoubled efforts. Would it not be easier

In that case for the government

To dissolve the people

And elect another?

Death

Brecht died on 14 August 1956 of a heart attack at the age of 58. He is buried in the Dorotheenstädtischer cemetery on Chausseestraße in the Mitte neighbourhood of Berlin, overlooked by the residence he shared with Helene Weigel.

Theory and Practice of Theatre

From his late twenties Brecht remained a lifelong committed Marxist who, in developing the combined theory and practice of his "epic theatre", synthesized and extended the experiments of Erwin Piscator and Vsevolod Meyerhold to explore the theatre as a forum for political ideas and the creation of a critical aesthetics of dialectical materialism.

Epic Theatre proposed that a play should not cause the spectator to identify emotionally with the characters or action before him or her, but should instead provoke rational self-reflection and a critical view of the action on the stage. Brecht thought that the experience of a climactic catharsis of emotion left an audience complacent. Instead, he wanted his audiences to adopt a critical perspective in order to recognise social injustice and exploitation and to be moved to go forth from the theatre and effect change in the world outside. For this purpose, Brecht employed the use of techniques that remind the spectator that the play is a representation of reality and not reality itself. By highlighting the constructed nature of the theatrical event, Brecht hoped to communicate that the audience's reality was equally constructed and, as such, was changeable.

Brecht's modernist concern with drama-as-a-medium led to his refinement of the "epic form" of the drama. This dramatic form is related to similar modernist innovations in other arts, including the strategy of divergent chapters in James Joyce's novel Ulysses, Sergei Eisenstein's evolution of a constructivist "montage" in the cinema, and Picasso's introduction of cubist "collage" in the visual arts.

One of Brecht's most important principles was what he called the Verfremdungseffekt (translated as "defamiliarization effect", "distancing effect", or "estrangement effect", and often mistranslated as "alienation effect"). This involved, Brecht wrote, "stripping the event of its self-evident, familiar, obvious quality and creating a sense of astonishment and curiosity about them". To this end, Brecht employed techniques such as the actor's direct address to the audience, harsh and bright stage lighting, the use of songs to interrupt the action, explanatory placards, and, in rehearsals, the transposition of text to the third person or past tense, and speaking the stage directions out loud.

In contrast to many other avant-garde approaches, however, Brecht had no desire to destroy art as an institution; rather, he hoped to "re-function" the theatre to a new social use. In this regard he was a vital participant in the aesthetic debates of his era—particularly over the "high art/popular culture" dichotomy—vying with the likes of Adorno, Lukács, Ernst Bloch, and developing a close friendship with Benjamin. Brechtian theatre articulated popular themes and forms with avant-garde formal experimentation to create a modernist realism that stood in sharp contrast both to its psychological and socialist varieties. "Brecht's work is the most important and original in European drama since Ibsen and Strindberg," Raymond Williams argues, while Peter Bürger dubs him "the most important materialist writer of our time."

Brecht was also influenced by Chinese theatre, and used its aesthetic as an argument for Verfremdungseffekt. Brecht believed, "Traditional Chinese acting also knows the alienation effect, and applies it most subtly. ... The [Chinese] performer portrays incidents of utmost passion, but without his delivery becoming heated." Brecht attended a Chinese opera performance and was introduced to the famous Chinese opera performer Mei LanFang in 1935. However, Brecht was sure to distinguish between Epic and Chinese theatre. He recognized that the Chinese style was not a "transportable piece

of technique," and that Epic theatre sought to historicize and address social and political issues.

Impact

Brecht left the Berliner Ensemble to his wife, the actress Helene Weigel, which she ran until her death in 1971. Perhaps the most famous German touring theatre of the postwar era, it was primarily devoted to performing Brecht's plays. His son, Stefan Brecht, became a poet and theatre critic interested in New York's avant-garde theatre. Brecht has been a controversial figure in Germany, and in his native city of Augsburg there were objections to creating a birthplace museum. By the 1970s, however, Brecht's plays had surpassed Shakespeare's in the number of annual performances in Germany.

There are few areas of modern theatrical culture that have not felt the impact or influence of Brecht's ideas and practices; dramatists and directors in whom one may trace a clear Brechtian legacy include: Dario Fo, Augusto Boal, Joan Littlewood, Peter Brook, Peter Weiss, Heiner Müller, Pina Bausch, Tony Kushner, Robert Bolt and Caryl Churchill.

In addition to the theatre, Brechtian theories and techniques have exerted considerable sway over certain strands of film theory and cinematic practice; Brecht's influence may be detected in the films of Jean-Luc Godard, Lindsay Anderson, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Joseph Losey, Nagisa Oshima, Ritwik Ghatak, Lars von Trier, Jan Bucquoy and Hal Hartley.

Brecht in Fiction

In the 1930 novel Success, Brecht's mentor Lion Feuchtwanger immortalized Brecht as the character Kaspar Pröckl.

In the 2006 film The Lives of Others, a Stasi agent is partially inspired to save a playwright he has been spying on by reading a book of Brecht poetry that he had stolen from the artist's apartment.

Brecht at Night by Mati Unt, transl. Eric Dickens (Dalkey Archive Press, 2009)

Collaborators and Associates

Collective and collaborative working methods were inherent to Brecht's approach, as Fredric Jameson (among others) stresses. Jameson describes the creator of the work not as Brecht the individual, but rather as 'Brecht': a collective subject that "certainly seemed to have a distinctive style (the one we now call 'Brechtian') but was no longer personal in the bourgeois or individualistic sense." During the course of his career, Brecht sustained many long-lasting creative relationships with other writers, composers, scenographers, directors, dramaturgs and actors; the list includes: Elisabeth Hauptmann, Margarete Steffin, Ruth Berlau, Slatan Dudow, Kurt Weill, Hanns Eisler, Paul Dessau, Caspar Neher, Teo Otto, Karl von Appen, Ernst Busch, Lotte Lenya, Peter Lorre, Therese Giehse, Angelika Hurwicz, Carola Neher and Helene Weigel herself. This is "theatre as collective experiment [...] as something radically different from theatre as expression or as experience."

Eserleri:

Dramatic Works

Entries show: English-language translation of title (German-language title) [year written] / [year first produced]
Baal 1918/1923

Drums in the Night (Trommeln in der Nacht) 1918–20/1922

The Beggar (Der Bettler oder Der tote Hund) 1919/?

A Respectable Wedding (Die Kleinbürgerhochzeit) 1919/1926

Driving Out a Devil (Er treibt einen Teufel aus) 1919/?

Lux in Tenebris 1919/?

The Catch (Der Fischzug) 1919?/?

Mysteries of a Barbershop (Mysterien eines Friseursalons) (screenplay) 1923

In the Jungle of Cities (Im Dickicht der Städte) 1921–24/1923

The Life of Edward II of England (Leben Eduards des Zweiten von England) 1924/1924

Downfall of the Egotist Johann Fatzer (Der Untergang des Egoisten Johnann Fatzer) (fragments) 1926–30/1974

Man Equals Man (Mann ist Mann) 1924–26/1926

The Elephant Calf (Das Elefantenkalb) 1924–26/1926

Little Mahagonny (Mahagonny-Songspiel) 1927/1927

The Threepenny Opera (Die Dreigroschenoper) 1928/1928

The Flight across the Ocean (Der Ozeanflug); originally Lindbergh's Flight (Lindberghflug) 1928–29/1929

The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent (Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis) 1929/1929

Happy End (Happy End) 1929/1929

The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny (Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny) 1927–29/1930

He Said Yes / He Said No (Der Jasager; Der Neinsager) 1929–30/1930–?

The Decision (Die Maßnahme) 1930/1930

Saint Joan of the Stockyards (Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe) 1929–31/1959

The Exception and the Rule (Die Ausnahme und die Regel) 1930/1938

The Mother (Die Mutter) 1930–31/1932

Kuhle Wampe (screenplay) 1931/1932

The Seven Deadly Sins (Die sieben Todsünden der Kleinbürger) 1933/1933

Round Heads and Pointed Heads (Die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe) 1931–34/1936

The Horatians and the Curiatians (Die Horatier und die Kuriatier) 1933–34/1958

Fear and Misery of the Third Reich (Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches) 1935–38/1938

Señora Carrar's Rifles (Die Gewehre der Frau Carrar) 1937/1937

Life of Galileo (Leben des Galilei) 1937–39/1943

How Much Is Your Iron? (Was kostet das Eisen?) 1939/1939

Dansen (Dansen) 1939/?

Mother Courage and Her Children (Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder) 1938–39/1941

The Trial of Lucullus (Das Verhör des Lukullus) 1938–39/1940

Mr Puntila and his Man Matti (Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti) 1940/1948

The Good Person of Szechwan (Der gute Mensch von Sezuan) 1939–42/1943

The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui (Der aufhaltsame Aufstieg des Arturo Ui) 1941/1958

Hangmen Also Die! (screenplay) 1942/1943

The Visions of Simone Machard (Die Gesichte der Simone Machard) 1942–43/1957

The Duchess of Malfi 1943/1943

Schweik in the Second World War (Schweyk im Zweiten Weltkrieg) 1941–43/1957

The Caucasian Chalk Circle (Der kaukasische Kreidekreis) 1943–45/1948

Antigone (Die Antigone des Sophokles) 1947/1948

The Days of the Commune (Die Tage der Commune) 1948–49/1956

The Tutor (Der Hofmeister) 1950/1950

The Condemnation of Lucullus (Die Verurteilung des Lukullus) 1938–39/1951

Report from Herrnburg (Herrnburger Bericht) 1951/1951

Coriolanus (Coriolan) 1951–53/1962

The Trial of Joan of Arc of Proven, 1431 (Der Prozess der Jeanne D'Arc zu Rouen, 1431) 1952/1952

Turandot (Turandot oder Der Kongreß der Weißwäscher) 1953–54/1969

Don Juan (Don Juan) 1952/1954

Trumpets and Drums (Pauken und Trompeten) 1955/1955

Non-dramatic Works

Stories of Mr. Keuner (Geschichten vom Herrn Keuner)

Theoretical Works

"The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre" (1930)

"The Threepenny Lawsuit" ("Der Dreigroschenprozess") (written 1931; published 1932)

"The Book of Changes" (fragment also known as Me-Ti; written 1935–1939)

"The Street Scene" (written 1938; published 1950)

"The Popular and the Realistic" (written 1938; published 1958)

"Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect" (written 1940; published 1951)

"A Short Organum for the Theatre" ("Kleines Organon für das Theater",

written
1948; published 1949)

The Messingkauf Dialogues (Dialogue aus dem Messingkauf, published 1963)

A Worker Reads History

Who built the seven gates of Thebes?
The books are filled with names of kings.
Was it the kings who hauled the craggy blocks of stone?
And Babylon, so many times destroyed.
Who built the city up each time? In which of Lima's houses,
That city glittering with gold, lived those who built it?
In the evening when the Chinese wall was finished
Where did the masons go? Imperial Rome
Is full of arcs of triumph. Who reared them up? Over whom
Did the Caesars triumph? Byzantium lives in song.
Were all her dwellings palaces? And even in Atlantis of the legend
The night the seas rushed in,
The drowning men still bellowed for their slaves.

Young Alexander conquered India.
He alone?
Caesar beat the Gauls.
Was there not even a cook in his army?
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?

Each page a victory
At whose expense the victory ball?
Every ten years a great man,
Who paid the piper?

So many particulars.
So many questions.

Bertolt Brecht

Alabama Song

Show me the way to the next whisky bar
Oh, don't ask why, oh, don't ask why
Show me the way to the next whisky bar
Oh, don't ask why, oh, don't ask why
For if we don't find the next whisky bar
I tell you we must die
I tell you we must die
I tell you
I tell you
I tell you we must die

Oh, moon of Alabama
We now must say say good-bye
We've lost our good old mamma
And must have whisky
Oh, you know why.

Show me the way to the next pretty girl
Oh, don't ask why, oh, don't ask why
Show me the way to the next pretty girl
Oh don't ask why, oh, don't ask why
For if we don't find the next pretty girl
I tell you we must die
I tell you we must die
I tell you
I tell you
I tell you we must die

Oh, moon of Alabama
We now must say good-bye
We've lost our good old mamma
And must have a girl
Oh, you know why.

Show me the way to the next little dollar
Oh, don't ask why, oh, don't ask why
Show me the way to the next little dollar
Oh, don't ask why, oh, don't ask why
For if we don't find the next little dollar
I tell you we must die
I tell you we must die
I tell you
I tell you
I tell you we must die

Oh, moon of Alabama
We now must say good-bye
We've lost our good old mamma
And must have dollars
Oh, you know why.

Bertolt Brecht

Contemplating Hell

Contemplating Hell, as I once heard it,
My brother Shelley found it to be a place
Much like the city of London. I,
Who do not live in London, but in Los Angeles,
Find, contemplating Hell, that it
Must be even more like Los Angeles.

Also in Hell,
I do not doubt it, there exist these opulent gardens
With flowers as large as trees, wilting, of course,
Very quickly, if they are not watered with very expensive water. And fruit markets
With great leaps of fruit, which nonetheless

Possess neither scent nor taste. And endless trains of autos,
Lighter than their own shadows, swifter than
Foolish thoughts, shimmering vehicles, in which
Rosy people, coming from nowhere, go nowhere.
And houses, designed for happiness, standing empty,
Even when inhabited.

Even the houses in Hell are not all ugly.
But concern about being thrown into the street
Consumes the inhabitants of the villas no less
Than the inhabitants of the barracks.

Bertolt Brecht

Der Pflaumenbaum (The Plum Tree, translation)

Im Hofe steht ein Pflaumenbaum,
Der ist so klein, man glaubt es kaum.
Er hat ein Gitter drum,
So tritt ihn keiner um.
Der Kleine kann nicht größer wer'n,
Ja - größer wer'n, das möcht' er gern!
's ist keine Red davon:
Er hat zu wenig Sonn'.

Dem Pflaumenbaum, man glaubt ihm kaum,
Weil er nie eine Pflaume hat.
Doch er ist ein Pflaumenbaum:
Man kennt es an dem Blatt.

The Plum Tree

In the courtyard stands a plum tree,
It's so small, no one believes it.
It has a fence around it,
So no one can stomp on it.
The little tree can't grow,
Yes – it wants to grow!
No one talks about it;
It gets too little sun.

No one believes it's a plum tree
Because it doesn't have a single plum.
But it is a plum tree;
You can tell by its leaf.

The Plum Tree

A plum tree in the courtyard stands
so small no one believes it can.
There is a fence surrounds
so no one stomps it down.
The little tree can't grow
although it wants to so!
There is no talk thereon
and much too little sun.

No one believes in the tree
because no plums do they see.
But it's a plum tree;
you can tell by its leaf.

Bertolt Brecht

Elogio al Aprendizaje

¡Aprende las cosas elementarias!
¡Para aquellos a quienes les ha llegado la hora nunca es demasadio tarde!
Aprende el abecedario. No bastará,
¡pero apréndolo! ¡No dejes que te desanimen!
¡Comienza! Debes saber todo.
Tienes que ser dirigente.
¡Aprende, hombre en el asilo!
¡Aprende, hombre en la prisión!
¡Aprende, mujer en la cocina!
¡Aprende, tú que tienes 60 años!
Tienes que ser dirigente.
¡Busca la esquela, tú que no tienes casa!

¡No tengas miedo de preguntar, camarada!
No dejes que te induzcan a nada.
¡Investiga por ti mismo!
Lo que no sepas tú mismo no lo conoces.
Examina los detalles a fondo;
eres tú él que paga las consequencias.
Pon tu dedo en cada detalle, pregunta: ¿Cómo llegó esto aqui?
Tienes que ser dirigente.

Bertolt Brecht

Fragen

Schreib mir, was du anhast! Ist es warm?
Schreib mir, wie du liegst! Liegst du auch weich?
Schreib mir, wie du aussiehst! Ist´s noch gleich?
Schreib mir, was dir fehlt! Ist es mein Arm?

Schreib mir, wie´s dir geht! Verschont man dich?
Schreib mir, was sie treiben! Reicht dein Mut?
Schreib mir, was du tust! Ist es auch gut?
Schreib mir, woran denkst du? Bin es ich?

Freilich hab ich dir nur meine Fragen!
Und die Antwort hör ich, wie sie fällt!
Wenn du müd bist, kann ich dir nichts tragen.

Hungerst du, hab ich dir nichts zu Essen.
Und so bin ich grad wie aus der Welt
Nicht mehr da, als hätt ich dich vergessen.

Bertolt Brecht

From A German War Primer

AMONGST THE HIGHLY PLACED
It is considered low to talk about food.
The fact is: they have
Already eaten.

The lowly must leave this earth
Without having tasted
Any good meat.

For wondering where they come from and
Where they are going
The fine evenings find them
Too exhausted.

They have not yet seen
The mountains and the great sea
When their time is already up.

If the lowly do not
Think about what's low
They will never rise.

THE BREAD OF THE HUNGRY HAS
ALL BEEN EATEN
Meat has become unknown. Useless
The pouring out of the people's sweat.
The laurel groves have been
Lopped down.
From the chimneys of the arms factories
Rises smoke.

THE HOUSE-PAINTER SPEAKS OF
GREAT TIMES TO COME
The forests still grow.
The fields still bear
The cities still stand.
The people still breathe.

ON THE CALENDAR THE DAY IS NOT
YET SHOWN
Every month, every day
Lies open still. One of those days
Is going to be marked with a cross.

THE WORKERS CRY OUT FOR BREAD
The merchants cry out for markets.
The unemployed were hungry. The employed
Are hungry now.
The hands that lay folded are busy again.
They are making shells.

THOSE WHO TAKE THE MEAT FROM THE TABLE

Teach contentment.
Those for whom the contribution is destined
Demand sacrifice.
Those who eat their fill speak to the hungry
Of wonderful times to come.
Those who lead the country into the abyss
Call ruling too difficult
For ordinary men.

WHEN THE LEADERS SPEAK OF PEACE
The common folk know
That war is coming.
When the leaders curse war
The mobilization order is already written out.

THOSE AT THE TOP SAY: PEACE
AND WAR
Are of different substance.
But their peace and their war
Are like wind and storm.

War grows from their peace
Like son from his mother
He bears
Her frightful features.

Their war kills
Whatever their peace
Has left over.

ON THE WALL WAS CHALKED:
They want war.
The man who wrote it
Has already fallen.

THOSE AT THE TOP SAY:
This way to glory.
Those down below say:
This way to the grave.

THE WAR WHICH IS COMING
Is not the first one. There were
Other wars before it.
When the last one came to an end
There were conquerors and conquered.
Among the conquered the common people
Starved. Among the conquerors
The common people starved too.

THOSE AT THE TOP SAY COMRADESHIP
Reigns in the army.
The truth of this is seen

In the cookhouse.
In their hearts should be
The selfsame courage. But
On their plates
Are two kinds of rations.

WHEN IT COMES TO MARCHING MANY DO NOT
KNOW
That their enemy is marching at their head.
The voice which gives them their orders
Is their enemy's voice and
The man who speaks of the enemy
Is the enemy himself.

IT IS NIGHT
The married couples
Lie in their beds. The young women
Will bear orphans.

GENERAL, YOUR TANK IS A POWERFUL VEHICLE
It smashes down forests and crushes a hundred men.
But it has one defect:
It needs a driver.

General, your bomber is powerful.
It flies faster than a storm and carries more than an elephant.
But it has one defect:
It needs a mechanic.

General, man is very useful.
He can fly and he can kill.
But he has one defect:
He can think.

Bertolt Brecht

Future Generations (Translation of

I confess this:
I have no hope.
The blind talk about an escape.
I see.
When the errors are consumed
The nothing will sit next to us
as our last companion.

Den Nachgeborenen

Ich gestehe es:
Ich habe keine Hoffnung.
Die Blinden reden von einem Ausweg.
Ich sehe.
Wenn die Irrtümer verbraucht sind
Sitzt als letzter Gesellschafter
Uns das Nichts gegenüber.

Bertolt Brecht

How Fortunate the Man with None

From the play "Mother Courage"

You saw sagacious Solomon
You know what came of him,
To him complexities seemed plain.
He cursed the hour that gave birth to him
And saw that everything was vain.
How great and wise was Solomon.
The world however did not wait
But soon observed what followed on.
It's wisdom that had brought him to this state.
How fortunate the man with none.

You saw courageous Caesar next
You know what he became.
They deified him in his life
Then had him murdered just the same.
And as they raised the fatal knife
How loud he cried: you too my son!
The world however did not wait
But soon observed what followed on.
It's courage that had brought him to that state.
How fortunate the man with none.

You heard of honest Socrates
The man who never lied:
They weren't so grateful as you'd think
Instead the rulers fixed to have him tried
And handed him the poisoned drink.
How honest was the people's noble son.
The world however did not wait
But soon observed what followed on.
It's honesty that brought him to that state.
How fortunate the man with none.

Here you can see respectable folk
Keeping to God's own laws.
So far he hasn't taken heed.
You who sit safe and warm indoors
Help to relieve our bitter need.
How virtuously we had begun.
The world however did not wait
But soon observed what followed on.
It's fear of god that brought us to that state.
How fortunate the man with none.

Bertolt Brecht

I Never Loved You More

I never loved you more, ma soeur
Than as I walked away from you that evening.
The forest swallowed me, the blue forest, ma soeur
The blue forest and above it pale stars in the west.

I did not laugh, not one little bit, ma soeur
As I playfully walked towards a dark fate –
While the faces behind me
Slowly paled in the evening of the blue forest.

Everything was grand that one night, ma soeur
Never thereafter and never before –
I admit it: I was left with nothing but the big birds
And their hungry cries in the dark evening sky.

Bertolt Brecht

I Want To Go With The One I Love

[Original]

Ich will mit dem gehen, den ich liebe.
Ich will nicht ausrechnen, was es kostet.
Ich will nicht nachdenken, ob es gut ist.
Ich will nicht wissen, ob er mich liebt.
Ich will mit ihm gehen, den ich liebe.

[Translation]

I want to go with the one I love.
I do not want to calculate the cost.
I do not want to think about whether it's good.
I do not want to know whether he loves me.
I want to go with whom I love.

Bertolt Brecht

Ich habe dich nie je so geliebt...

[Original]

Ich habe dich nie je so geliebt, ma soeur
Als wie ich fortging von dir in jenem Abendrot.
Der Wald schluckte mich, der blaue Wald, ma soeur
Über dem immer schon die bleichen Gestirne im Westen standen.

Ich lachte kein klein wenig, gar nicht, ma soeur
Der ich spielend dunklem Schicksal entgegenging --
Während schon die Gesichter hinter mir
Langsam im Abend des blauen Walds verblaßten.

Alles war schön an diesem einzigen Abend, ma soeur
Nachher nie wieder und nie zuvor --
Freilich: mir blieben nur mehr die großen Vögel
Die abends im dunklen Himmel Hunger haben.

[Translation]

I never loved you more, ma soeur
Than as I walked away from you that evening.
The forest swallowed me, the blue forest, ma soeur
The blue forest and above it pale stars in the west.

I did not laugh, not one little bit, ma soeur
As I playfully walked towards a dark fate --
While the faces behind me
Slowly paled in the evening of the blue forest.

Everything was grand that one night, ma soeur
Never thereafter and never before --
I admit it: I was left with nothing but the big birds
And their hungry cries in the dark evening sky.

Bertolt Brecht

I'm not saying anything against Alexander

Timur, I hear, took the trouble to conquer the earth.
I don't understand him.
With a bit of hard liquor you can forget the earth.

I'm not saying anything against Alexander,
Only I have seen people who were remarkable,
Highly deserving of your admiration
For the fact that they were alive at all.

Great men generate too much sweat.
In all of this I see just a proof that
They couldn't stand being on their own
And smoking and drinking and the like.
And they must be too mean-spirited to get
Contentment from sitting by a woman.

Bertolt Brecht

Mack the Knife

Oh, the shark has pretty teeth, dear
And he shows them pearly white.
Just a jack knife has Macheath, dear
And he keeps it out of sight.

When the shark bites with his teeth, dear
Scarlet billows start to spread.
Fancy gloves, though, wears Macheath, dear
So there's not a trace of red.

On the side-walk Sunday morning
Lies a body oozing life;
Someone's sneaking 'round the corner.
Is that someone Mack the Knife?

From a tugboat by the river
A cement bag's dropping down;
The cement's just for the weight, dear.
Bet you Mackie's back in town.

Louie Miller disappeared, dear
After drawing out his cash;
And Macheath spends like a sailor.
Did our boy do something rash?

Sukey Tawdry, Jenny Diver,
Polly Peachum, Lucy Brown
Oh, the line forms on the right, dear
Now that Mackie's back in town.

Bertolt Brecht

My young son asks me...

My young son asks me: Must I learn mathematics?
What is the use, I feel like saying. That two pieces
Of bread are more than one's about all you'll end up with.
My young son asks me: Must I learn French?
What is the use, I feel like saying. This State's collapsing.
And if you just rub your belly with your hand and
Groan, you'll be understood with little trouble.
My young son asks me: Must I learn history?
What is the use, I feel like saying. Learn to stick
Your head in the earth, and maybe you'll still survive.

Yes, learn mathematics, I tell him.
Learn your French, learn your history!

Bertolt Brecht

Not What Was Meant

When the Academy of Arts demanded freedom
Of artistic expression from narrow-minded bureaucrats
There was a howl and a clamour in its immediate vicinity
But roaring above everything
Came a deafening thunder of applause
From beyond the Sector boundary.
Freedom! it roared. Freedom for the artists!
Freedom all round! Freedom for all!
Freedom for the exploiters! Freedom for the warmongers!
Freedom for the Ruhr cartels! Freedom for Hitler's generals!
Softly, my dear fellows...
The Judas kiss for the artists follows
Hard on the Judas kiss for the workers.
The arsonist with his bottle of petrol
Sneaks up grinning to
The Academy of Arts.
But it was not to embrace him, just
To knock the bottle out of his dirty hand that
We asked for elbow room.
Even the narrowest minds
In which peace is harboured
Are more welcome to the arts than the art lover

Who is also a lover of the art of war.

Bertolt Brecht

O Germany, Pale Mother!

Let others speak of her shame,
I speak of my own.

O Germany, pale mother!
How soiled you are
As you sit among the peoples.
You flaunt yourself
Among the besmirched.

The poorest of your sons
Lies struck down.
When his hunger was great.
Your other sons
Raised their hands against him.
This is notorious.

With their hands thus raised,
Raised against their brother,
They march insolently around you
And laugh in your face.
This is well known.

In your house
Lies are roared aloud.
But the truth
Must be silent.
Is it so?

Why do the oppressors praise you everywhere,
The oppressed accuse you?
The plundered
Point to you with their fingers, but
The plunderer praises the system
That was invented in your house!

Whereupon everyone sees you
Hiding the hem of your mantle which is bloody
With the blood
Of your best sons.

Hearing the harangues which echo from your house,
men laugh.
But whoever sees you reaches for a knife
As at the approach of a robber.

O Germany, pale mother!
How have your sons arrayed you
That you sit among the peoples
A thing of scorn and fear!

Bertolt Brecht

On Reading a Recent Greek Poet

After the wailing had already begun
along the walls, their ruin certain,
the Trojans fidgeted with bits of wood
in the three-ply doors, itsy-bitsy
pieces of wood, fussing with them.
And began to get their nerve back and feel hopeful.

Bertolt Brecht

On the Critical Attitude

The critical attitude
Strikes many people as unfruitful
That is because they find the state
Impervious to their criticism
But what in this case is an unfruitful attitude
Is merely a feeble attitude. Give criticism arms
And states can be demolished by it.

Canalising a river
Grafting a fruit tree
Educating a person
Transforming a state
These are instances of fruitful criticism
And at the same time instances of art.

Bertolt Brecht

Parting

We embrace.
Rich cloth under my fingers
While yours touch poor fabric.
A quick embrace
You were invited for dinner
While the minions of law are after me.
We talk about the weather and our
Lasting friendship. Anything else
Would be too bitter.

Bertolt Brecht

Pleasures (Translation with the original German,

First look from morning's window
The rediscovered book
Fascinated faces
Snow, the change of the seasons
The newspaper
The dog
Dialectics
Showering, swimming
Old music
Comfortable shoes
Comprehension
New music
Writing, planting
Traveling
Singing
Being friendly

Vergnügungen

Der erste Blick aus dem Fenster am Morgen
Das wiedergefundene Buch
Begeisterte Gesichter
Schnee, der Wechsel der Jahreszeiten
Die Zeitung
Der Hund
Die Dialektik
Duschen, Schwimmen
Alte Musik
Bequeme Schuhe
Begreifen
Neue Musik
Schreiben, Pflanzen
Reisen
Singen
Freundlich sei

Bertolt Brecht

Questions

Write me what you're wearing! Is it warm?
Write me how you lie! Do you lie there softly?
Write me how you look! Is it still the same?
Write me what you're missing! Is it my arm?

Write me how you are! Have you been spared?
Write me what they're doing! Do you have enough courage?
Write me what you're doing! Is it good?
Write me, who are you thinking of? Is it me?

Freely, I've given you only my questions.
And I hear the answers, how they fall.
When you're tired, I can't carry it for you.

If you're hungry, I have nothing for you to eat.
And so now I leave the world
No longer there, as if I've forgotten you.

Bertolt Brecht

Questions From a Worker Who Reads

Who built Thebes of the seven gates?
In the books you will find the names of kings.
Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?
And Babylon, many times demolished
Who raised it up so many times? In what houses
of gold-glittering Lima did the builders live?
Where, the evening that the Wall of China was finished
Did the masons go? Great Rome
Is full of triumphal arches. Who erected them? Over whom
Did the Caesars triumph? Had Byzantium, much praised in song
Only palaces for its inhabitants? Even in fabled Atlantis
The night the ocean engulfed it
The drowning still bawled for their slaves.

The young Alexander conquered India.
Was he alone?
Caesar beat the Gauls.
Did he not have even a cook with him?

Philip of Spain wept when his armada
Went down. Was he the only one to weep?
Frederick the Second won the Seven Year's War. Who
Else won it?

Every page a victory.
Who cooked the feast for the victors?
Every ten years a great man?
Who paid the bill?

So many reports.
So many questions.

Bertolt Brecht

Radio Poem

You little box, held to me escaping
So that your valves should not break
Carried from house to house to ship from sail to train,
So that my enemies might go on talking to me,
Near my bed, to my pain
The last thing at night, the first thing in the morning,
Of their victories and of my cares,
Promise me not to go silent all of a sudden.

Bertolt Brecht

Send Me a Leaf

Send me a leaf, but from a bush
That grows at least one half hour
Away from your house, then
You must go and will be strong, and I
Thank you for the pretty leaf.

Bertolt Brecht

Solidarity Song

Peoples of the world, together
Join to serve the common cause!
So it feeds us all for ever
See to it that it's now yours.

Forward, without forgetting
Where our strength can be seen now to be!
When starving or when eating
Forward, not forgetting
Our solidarity!

Black or white or brown or yellow
Leave your old disputes behind.
Once start talking with your fellow
Men, you'll soon be of one mind.

Forward, without forgetting
Where our strength can be seen now to be!
When starving or when eating
Forward, not forgetting
Our solidarity!

If we want to make this certain
We'll need you and your support.
It's yourselves you'll be deserting
if you rat your own sort.

Forward, without forgetting
Where our strength can be seen now to be!
When starving or when eating
Forward, not forgetting
Our solidarity!

All the gang of those who rule us
Hope our quarrels never stop
Helping them to split and fool us
So they can remain on top.

Forward, without forgetting
Where our strength can be seen now to be!
When starving or when eating
Forward, not forgetting
Our solidarity!

Workers of the world, uniting
Thats the way to lose your chains.
Mighty regiments now are fighting
That no tyrrany remains!

Forward, without forgetting
Till the concrete question is hurled
When starving or when eating:

Whose tomorrow is tomorrow?
And whose world is the world?

Bertolt Brecht

The Mask Of Evil

On my wall hangs a Japanese carving,
The mask of an evil demon, decorated with gold lacquer.
Sympathetically I observe
The swollen veins of the forehead, indicating
What a strain it is to be evil.

Bertolt Brecht

The Solution

After the uprising of the 17th June
The Secretary of the Writers Union
Had leaflets distributed in the Stalinallee
Stating that the people
Had forfeited the confidence of the government
And could win it back only
By redoubled efforts. Would it not be easier
In that case for the government
To dissolve the people
And elect another?

Bertolt Brecht

The Tattered Cord (Der Abgerissen Strick, translation with original German)

The Tattered Cord

The tattered cord
can again become knotted.
It holds
but it is torn.

Perhaps we'll face
each other again
but there,
where you left me,
you'll not meet me
again.

Der Abgerissen Strick

Der abgerissene Strick
kann wieder geknotet werden
er hält wieder, aber
er ist zerrissen.

Vielleicht begegnen
wir uns wieder,
aber da,
wo du mich verlassen hast
triffst du mich
nicht wieder.

Bertolt Brecht

To Be Read in the Morning and at Night

[Original]

Morgens und abends zu lesen
Der, den ich liebe
Hat mir gesagt
Daß er mich braucht.

Darum
Gebe ich auf mich acht
Sehe auf meinen Weg und
Fürchte von jedem Regentropfen
Daß er mich erschlagen könnte.

[Translation]

To read in the morning and at night
My love
Has told me
That he needs me.

That's why
I take good care of myself
Watch out where I'm going and
Fear that any drop of rain
Might kill me.

Bertolt Brecht

To Posterity

1.

Indeed I live in the dark ages!
A guileless word is an absurdity. A smooth forehead betokens
A hard heart. He who laughs
Has not yet heard
The terrible tidings.

Ah, what an age it is
When to speak of trees is almost a crime
For it is a kind of silence about injustice!
And he who walks calmly across the street,
Is he not out of reach of his friends
In trouble?

It is true: I earn my living
But, believe me, it is only an accident.
Nothing that I do entitles me to eat my fill.
By chance I was spared. (If my luck leaves me
I am lost.)

They tell me: eat and drink. Be glad you have it!
But how can I eat and drink
When my food is snatched from the hungry
And my glass of water belongs to the thirsty?
And yet I eat and drink.

I would gladly be wise.
The old books tell us what wisdom is:
Avoid the strife of the world
Live out your little time
Fearing no one
Using no violence
Returning good for evil --
Not fulfillment of desire but forgetfulness
Passes for wisdom.
I can do none of this:
Indeed I live in the dark ages!

2.

I came to the cities in a time of disorder
When hunger ruled.
I came among men in a time of uprising
And I revolted with them.
So the time passed away
Which on earth was given me.

I ate my food between massacres.
The shadow of murder lay upon my sleep.
And when I loved, I loved with indifference.
I looked upon nature with impatience.

So the time passed away
Which on earth was given me.

In my time streets led to the quicksand.
Speech betrayed me to the slaughterer.
There was little I could do. But without me
The rulers would have been more secure. This was my hope.
So the time passed away
Which on earth was given me.

3.

You, who shall emerge from the flood
In which we are sinking,
Think --
When you speak of our weaknesses,
Also of the dark time
That brought them forth.

For we went,changing our country more often than our shoes.
In the class war, despairing
When there was only injustice and no resistance.

For we knew only too well:
Even the hatred of squalor
Makes the brow grow stern.
Even anger against injustice
Makes the voice grow harsh. Alas, we
Who wished to lay the foundations of kindness
Could not ourselves be kind.

But you, when at last it comes to pass
That man can help his fellow man,
Do no judge us
Too harshly.

translated by H. R. Hays

Bertolt Brecht

To the Students of the Workers' and Peasants' Faculty

So there you sit. And how much blood was shed
That you might sit there. Do such stories bore you?
Well, don't forget that others sat before you
who later sat on people. Keep your head!
Your science will be valueless, you'll find
And learning will be sterile, if inviting
Unless you pledge your intellect to fighting
Against all enemies of all mankind.
Never forget that men like you got hurt
That you might sit here, not the other lot.
And now don't shut your eyes, and don't desert
But learn to learn, and try to learn for what.

Bertolt Brecht

To Those Born After

I

To the cities I came in a time of disorder
That was ruled by hunger.
I sheltered with the people in a time of uproar
And then I joined in their rebellion.
That's how I passed my time that was given to me on this Earth.

I ate my dinners between the battles,
I lay down to sleep among the murderers,
I didn't care for much for love
And for nature's beauties I had little patience.
That's how I passed my time that was given to me on this Earth.

The city streets all led to foul swamps in my time,
My speech betrayed me to the butchers.
I could do only little
But without me those that ruled could not sleep so easily:
That's what I hoped.
That's how I passed my time that was given to me on this Earth.

Our forces were slight and small,
Our goal lay in the far distance
Clearly in our sights,
If for me myself beyond my reaching.
That's how I passed my time that was given to me on this Earth.

II

You who will come to the surface
From the flood that's overwhelmed us and drowned us all
Must think, when you speak of our weakness in times of darkness
That you've not had to face:

Days when we were used to changing countries
More often than shoes,
Through the war of the classes despairing
That there was only injustice and no outrage.

Even so we realised
Hatred of oppression still distorts the features,
Anger at injustice still makes voices raised and ugly.
Oh we, who wished to lay for the foundations for peace and friendliness,
Could never be friendly ourselves.

And in the future when no longer
Do human beings still treat themselves as animals,
Look back on us with indulgence.

Bertolt Brecht

United Front Song

And because a man is human
He'll want to eat, and thanks a lot
But talk can't take the place of meat
or fill an empty pot.

So left, two, three!
So left, two, three!
Comrade, there's a place for you.
Take your stand in the workers united front
For you are a worker too.

And because a man is human
he won't care for a kick in the face.
He doesn't want slaves under him
Or above him a ruling class.

So left, two, three!
So left, two, three!
Comrade, there's a place for you.
Take your stand in the workers united front
For you are a worker too.

And because a worker's a worker
No one else will bring him liberty.
It's nobody's work but the worker' own
To set the worker free.

So left, two, three!
So left, two, three!
Comrade, there's a place for you.
Take your stand in the workers united front
For you are a worker too.

Bertolt Brecht

What Has Happened?

The industrialist is having his aeroplane serviced.
The priest is wondering what he said in his sermon eight weeks ago
about tithes.
The generals are putting on civvies and looking like bank clerks.
Public officials are getting friendly.
The policeman points out the way to the man in the cloth cap.
The landlord comes to see whether the water supply is working.
The journalists write the word People with capital letters.
The singers sing at the opera for nothing.
Ships' captains check the food in the crew's galley,
Car owners get in beside their chauffeurs.
Doctors sue the insurance companies.
Scholars show their discoveries and hide their decorations.
Farmers deliver potatoes to the barracks.
The revolution has won its first battle:
That's what has happened.

Bertolt Brecht