



Poems of Hitler and his war

Bertolt Brecht

This year sees the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Bertolt Brecht, socialist poet and playwright. As a contribution to the commemoration, we publish some of Brecht's poems, translated into English for the first time. 'The song of the painter Hitler' was written in 1933 and published the following year in the collection *Lieder Gedichte Chöre* with a musical arrangement by Hanns Eisler. The ironic reference to Hitler's past as a painter is a common theme of Brecht's poetry. The other poems were written in 1938 and belong to his 'German War Primer'. The first two were published in the collection *Svendborger Gedichte* that year, while the other two remained unpublished during Brecht's lifetime.

The song of the painter Hitler

1

The painter Hitler said:
Let me at it, dear people, for you!
And he took a fresh tub of whitewash
And painted Germany's house anew.
Germany's whole house anew.

2

The painter Hitler said:
It doesn't take long to rebuild!
And the holes and the cracks and the faults
Can all just with paint be filled.
The whole shit with paint is filled.

3

Oh, painter Hitler
A mason is what you should be!
When the rain hits the whitewash on your house
The dirt is there again for all to see.
The whole shithouse is there to see.

4

The painter Hitler never studied colour
It never really gave him a kick
And even as he was let at it
On everything he laid it on thick.
On all Germany he laid it on thick.

Those at the top

Are meeting in a room.
A man on the street
Abandons all hope.

The governments sign
Non-aggression pacts.
Little man
Write your will.

When the war begins

Maybe your brother will change
So that you don't recognise his face
But you should stay the same.

You will go to the war, not
As you would go to a slaughterhouse, but
As you would go to a serious job. You
Will be forgotten by everyone.
But you should forget nothing.

Brandy will be poured down your throat
Like everyone else.
But you should stay sober.

The painter says:

The more artillery that is produced
The longer peace will last.

So that must mean:

The more grains that are planted
The less wheat will grow.
The more cattle that are slaughtered
The less meat there will be.
The more snow that melts on the mountains
The shallower the streams will be.

The young people sit crouched over the books

Why do they learn?
No book explains
How you get water
When you are hanging from barbed wire.

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