

# Bertolt Brecht Selected Poems



# Bertolt Brecht

February 10, 1898 [Augsburg, Germany] –

August 14, 1956 [East Berlin, Germany]

Brecht, one of the most renowned playwrights and poets of the 20th Century, was born in Augsburg, Germany. His first play, *Baal*, was staged in 1919; he went on to write dozens more, including the collaboration with Kurt Weil, *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Threepenny Opera*, 1928), *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* (*Mother Courage and her Children*, 1939) and *Leben des Galilei* (*Life of Galileo*, first staged in Hollywood with Charles Laughton in 1947). Brecht and his family fled Berlin in 1933 after the burning of the Reichstag and settled in Denmark, then moved to Stockholm, Sweden in 1939. He moves to Los Angeles (travelling through Moscow and Vladivostok) in 1941 where he meets other German exiles including Arnold Schönberg, Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Thomas Mann. He works on the screenplay for Fritz Lang's *Hangmen Also Die*. Brecht was subpoenaed to appear before the HUAC in September 1947 and testified in English, making wry jokes, poking fun at his translators, and commenting on his own poor command of English. He left for Europe the next day, setting in East Berlin in 1949.

# Hollywood Elegies

1.

Under the long green hair of pepper trees,  
The writers and composers work the street.  
Bach's new score is crumpled in his pocket,  
Dante sways his ass-cheeks to the beat.

2.

The city is named for the angels,  
And its angels are easy to find.  
They give off a lubricant odor,  
Their eyes are mascara-lined;  
At night you can see them inserting  
Gold-plated diaphragms;  
For breakfast they gather at poolside  
Where screenwriters feed and swim.

3.

Every day, I go to earn my bread  
In the exchange where lies are marketed,  
Hoping my own lies will attract a bid.

4.

It's Hell, it's Heaven: the amount you earn  
Determines if you play the harp or burn.

5.

Gold in their mountains,  
Oil on their coast;  
Dreaming in celluloid  
Profits them most.

# 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 is  
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.

































































































































































































