

1.1 “A Worker Reads History” by Bertolt Brecht

Instructions: Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) was an influential German socialist, political activist, dramatist, stage director, and poet. Read the poem “A Worker Reads History” and answer questions 1-4.

Questions

1. Identify three of the people or places mentioned in the poem.
2. Why do you think the poet refers to them?
3. What is Brecht’s point of view about how history is taught?
4. Do you agree or disagree with Brecht? Explain.

Thebes was a city in ancient Egypt near the Valley of the Kings where the first pyramids were built by

Who built the seven towers of Thebes?

The books are filled with names of kings.

Was it 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 sea rushed in,

The drowning men still bellowed for their slaves.

Young Alexander plundered India.

He alone?

Caesar beat the Gauls.

Was there not even a cook in his army?

Philip of Spain wept as his fleet

Was sunk and destroyed. Were there no other tears?

Frederick the Great 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.

From Bertolt Brecht (1947) *Selected Poems*