Bertolt Brecht
Poems 1913-1956

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HOLLYWOOD ELEGIES

I
The village of Hollywood was planned according to the notion
People in these parts have of heaven. In these parts
They have come to the conclusion that God
Requiring a heaven and a hell, didn’t need to
Plan two establishments but
Just the one: heaven. It
Serves the unprosperous, unsuccessful
As hell.

II
By the sea stand the oil derricks. Up the canyons
The gold prospectors’ booms lie bleaching. Their sons
Built the dream factories of Hollywood.
The four cities
Are filled with the oily smell
Of film.

III
The city is named after the angels
And you meet angels on every hand.
They smell of oil and wear golden pessaries
And, with blue rings round their eyes
Feed the writers in their swimming pools every morning.

IV
Beneath the green pepper trees
The musicians play the pino; two by two
With the writers. Each
Has written a Strumpet Voluntary. Dante wriggles
His shrivelled bottom.

V
The angels of Los Angeles
Are tired out with smiling. Desperately
Behind the fruit stalls of an evening
They buy little bottles
Containing sex odours.

VI
Above the four cities the fighter planes
Of the Defense Department circle at a great height
So that the stink of greed and poverty
Shall not reach them.

THE SWAMP

I saw many friends, and among them the friend I loved most
Helplessly sink into the swamp
I pass by daily.

And a drowning was not over
In a single morning. Often it took
Weeks; this made it more terrible.
And the memory of our long talks together
About the swamp, that already
Had claimed so many.

Helpless I watched him, leaning back
Covered with leeches
In the shimmering
Softly moving slime:
Upon the sinking face
The ghastly
Blissful smile.
Hollywood

Every day, to earn my daily bread
I go to the market where lies are bought
Hopefully
I take up my place among the sellers.

Of Sprinkling the Garden

O sprinkling the garden, to enliven the green!
Watering the thirsty trees. Give them more than enough
And do not forget the bushes
Even those without berries, the exhausted
Niggishly ones. And do not neglect
The weeds growing between the flowers, they too
Are thirsty. Nor water only
The fresh grass or only the scorched.
Even the naked soil you must refresh.

Reading the Paper While Brewing the Tea

In the early hours I read in the paper of epoch-making projects
On the part of popes and sovereigns, bankers and oil barons.
With my other eye I watch
The pot with the water for my tea
The way it clouds and starts to bubble and clears again
And overflowing the pot quenches the fire.

And the Dark Times Now Continue

And the dark times now continue
In the other town
Yet the step is still a light one
The brow without a frown.

American Poems 1943–1947

Hand, humanity, unceasing
Like fishfolk long in ice
Yet the heart's still quick to answer
And a smile melts the face.

California Autumn

I
In my garden
Are nothing but evergreens. If I want to see autumn
I drive to my friend's country house in the hills. There
I can stand for five minutes and see a tree
Stripped of its foliage, and foliage stripped of its trunk.

II
I saw a big autumn leaf which the wind
Was driving along the road, and I thought: tricky
To reckon that leaf's future course.

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.

Hounded Out by Seven Nations

Hounded out by seven nations
Saw old idiocies performed:
Those I praise whose transmutations
Leave their persons undeformed.