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Bertolt Brecht's Radical Contribution to Pacifist Children's Lyrics in Interwar Germany

“Die drei Soldaten” (The three soldiers) and
“Kinderkreuzzug 1939” (Children's crusade 1939)

Abstract: This paper focuses on German poetry for children published during the interwar period and written by left-wing authors such as Bertolt Brecht, Ernst Friedrich, and Edwin Hoernle. Their poems propagated socialist and communist ideals, in line with antifascist and anti-imperialist views that call for class struggle as well as fighting against fascist ideology. Moreover, many poems supported pacifistic ideas which turned against the glorification of war. In this regard, Bertolt Brecht played a significant role. His poems “Die drei Soldaten: Ein Kinderbuch” (The three soldiers: A children's book), with illustrations by George Grosz, and “Kinderkreuzzug 1939” (Children's crusade 1939) present prime examples of radical publishing and aesthetics in the interwar period, since they express a sharp critique of the destructive power of war and its effect on afterwar society.

Keywords: Bertolt Brecht, communist children's literature, George Grosz, Germany, interwar children's literature, lyrics for children, pacifism, radical aesthetics

The interwar period in Germany, often equated with the Weimar Republic, was a turbulent and critical time for manifold reasons. After the end of World War I and the dismissal of the German emperor, the first democratic government and constitution ever were established in Germany. This new development went hand in hand with a highly fruitful period of artistic esprit and cultural endeavor, often referred to as the “Roaring Twenties.” German artists and authors became active members of avant-garde movements, such as Expressionism, Dadaism, and *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Realism). Moreover, the later world-famous *Bauhaus* was founded in Weimar in 1919. Actors, playwrights, and directors contributed to the international impact of German theater and cinema in Europe and beyond. The center of attention was the metropolis of Berlin, with more than four million inhabitants. However, the flourishing of the arts, the modernization of the cities, and the surge of modern technology and industry represented only one part of the process.

At the same time, the Weimar Republic was shaken by political tensions and social shifts, caused by the widening gap between the poor and the rich. Warmongers, monarchists, and other forces impeded the establishment of the democratic system, as did parts of the radical left. Poverty and sickness affected wounded and traumatized war veterans, the unemployed and otherwise socially vulnerable, and people living under precarious conditions. The social situation deteriorated during the Great Depression, which entailed an unpredicted inflation rate. Right-wing and left-wing parties fought each other, leading to uprisings and political murders. The November Revolution in 1918 caused the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of a parliamentary democracy. After the defeat of the January Uprising in Berlin in 1919, members of a right-wing military corps brutally killed the alleged communist ringleaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. Political personalities, such as Kurt Eisner, Matthias Erzberger, Gustav Landauer, and Walther Rathenau, were assassinated (Möller 148–150, 162). Against this background, the concept of being victims of the war dominated the political discourse. This impression was additionally stressed by the high reparation payments demanded by the victorious countries, and the so-called *Dolchstoßlegende* (stab-in-the-back legend) essentially saying that the war was not lost by the frontline fighters but by the civilians (Winkler 87–90).

These conflicting perspectives flowed into contemporary literature and the arts. War novels, autobiographies of World War I veterans, and patriotic lyrics and stories that were linked with pre-war traditions of nationalist and imperialist writings represented a

one-sided image of the war, while still attacking the archenemies France and England. On the other hand, critical authors and artists created artworks that displayed an anti-imperialist and pacifist view, complemented by an international – rather than nationalist – perspective. Erich Maria Remarque's anti-war novel *Im Westen nichts Neues* (*All Quiet on the Western Front*, 1928) was an immediate success, with translations into 26 languages in 1929. In the same manner, artists such as Otto Dix and George Grosz created paintings that exposed the unequal treatment of disabled veterans in post-war society, the devastated areas caused by war, and the horrible deaths of soldiers on the battlefields.

All of these diverse tendencies also influenced children's books produced in the interwar period. They mirrored the wide spectrum of political and cultural debates, ranging from books that propagated an imperialist and patriotic attitude – thus paving the way for the acceptance of Nazi propaganda – to books that circulated left-wing and anti-capitalist ideas (Karrenbrock 248–252; Ketelsen 293–297). Other children's books, however, represented a rather neutral or moderate attitude. Needless to say, many of these works only indirectly referred to actual social and political discussions. Furthermore, many children's books published in the interwar period did not address these discussions at all, instead they represented a rather idyllic, apolitical setting and a backward-looking, pre-war perspective.

This article focuses on pacifist children's lyrics written by authors who sympathized with socialist and communist ideas or even were members of the Communist Party. Socialists and communists represented similar attitudes towards the war but had different opinions on the legitimacy of revolutionary violence, particularly after the Russian Revolution in 1917. Nevertheless, both political groups strived for a peaceful world order by supporting anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist ideas since, from their point of view, it was capitalism that ultimately caused the war. These tendencies also emerged in poems and songs addressed to children. How these ideas are expressed will first be demonstrated by an analysis of communist lyrics in anthologies for children, before turning to two radical children's poems by Bertolt Brecht.

Fighting the Class Enemy: Communist Lyrics in Anthologies for Children

During the interwar period, about a third of German children and youth were members of children's and youth organizations. These

were established by political parties, the Protestant and Catholic Churches, and social groups, such as the *Wandervogelbewegung* (the hikers' movement). These associations and organizations published weeklies, booklets, yearbooks, and anthologies for their intended readership in order to pass on their ideological messages. In this regard, the German Communist Party (KPD), founded in 1919, with forerunners in labor movements from the end of the nineteenth century, played an active role. In order to promote their political program, leaders of the party published educational treatises directed to adult caretakers and founded publishing houses for children's and young adult literature, such as *Verlag der Jugendinternationale* (1919) and *Verlag Junge Garde* (1919). Like other radical publishers for children at that time, the communist publishing houses released picturebooks, storybooks, and collections that advocated left-wing ideas, inspired by ideals of internationalism, solidarity, and peace. In this regard, Edwin Hoernle and Karl Liebknecht, who were among the founders of the KPD, emphasized the educational mission of the Communist Party (Altner, *Kinder- und Jugendliteratur* 16).

In order to appeal to children from the proletarian milieu, who usually did not have access to books, the publishers' strategy was twofold: they produced books with high print runs that were distributed via the communist children's and youth organizations and sold cheaply. Moreover, they published collections that consisted of a mixture of short stories, fairy tales, poems, songs, and excerpts from novels. This juxtaposition of different genres and short texts was attractive to readers, regardless of age and gender. In addition, the emphasis on short texts considered the limited reading capabilities of the audience and the fact that they may have very little time for reading books. Renowned illustrators, such as Käthe Kollwitz, Frans Masereel, and Max Schwimmer, created black-and-white illustrations that enhanced the attractiveness of these collections (see picture 1).

Prototypical examples are four collections that were commissioned by communist publishers: *Proletarischer Kindergarten: Ein Märchen- und Lesebuch für Groß und Klein* (Proletarian kindergarten: A fairy tale book and reader for old and young, 1921) edited by Ernst Friedrich, *Mein Genosse: Ein Buch für die proletarische Jugend* (My comrade: A book for proletarian youth, 1921), *Die Schwelle: Gedichte und Gedanken für die proletarische Jugend* (The threshold: Poems and thoughts for proletarian youth, 1921) edited by Rudolf Schwarzkopf, and *Kampfgenoss: Ein Buch für die proletarische Jugend* (Comrade-in-arm: A book for proletarian youth, 1928) edited by Johannes R. Be-



Picture 1. Cover of *Proletarischer Kindergarten* (1921), edited by Ernst Friedrich. Cover image by Käthe Kollwitz.

cher et al. The four anthologies combine lyrics, ballads, short stories, excerpts of novels, and essays. Some of these works are taken from already known publications by Maxim Gorky, Heinrich Heine, Jack London, Karl Marx, and Leo Tolstoy, whose world views seemed to be closely related to socialist ideas. The editors and publishers also instructed contemporary authors, such as Johannes R. Becher, Kurt Kläber, and Erich Weinert, to write new texts and lyrics (Franz 337–340). To make the ideological message of the books more explicit, the collections have prefaces or mottoes. Herein, the editors explain that the books shall present potential ways out of the embarrassing feelings of hopelessness and inferiority, hence encouraging the readers to take an active role in society. The communist Ernst Friedrich expresses this attitude in the preface to *Proletarian Kindergarten*:

Indeed, life could be so beautiful but it is ugly because human beings are not *human* beings anymore, because they run past each other without love, more ready to hit or even kill each other instead of help and support each other. In order to bring them to their senses again I tried to build a "proletarian kindergarten."

[...] In the proletarian kindergarten, beautiful little flowers are blooming that should delight you and that want to encourage you to fight against this dishonest world, for the truth, freedom, *humanity!* (quoted in Altner, *Das proletarische Kinderbuch* 193; italics in original, our translation)

The other prefaces point into the same direction, as they ask the readers to be proud of being proletarians and hard workers as well as to stand up for their rights. The motto of the collection *Mein Genosse: Ein Buch für die proletarische Jugend* explicitly prompts the readers to join the international proletarian movement in order to fight against capitalism, imperialism, and war:

GEDENKE

Des imperialistischen Krieges!
Lass dich nicht von der Lüge
"nie wieder Krieg" betören.

WISSE

Kapitalismus, also Ausbeutung
ist undenkbar ohne Krieg.
Kriege werden erst dann nicht mehr sein
wenn die Ausgebeuteten aller Länder
den Kapitalismus stürzen
und den Sozialismus aufbauen.

DARUM TRITT EIN

in die Kampfreihen der Geknechteten und Enterbten.

WERDE EIN KLASSENKÄMPFER!

Folge dem Schlachtruf:

PROLETARIER

ALLER LÄNDER

VEREINIGT EUCH!

REMEMBER

the imperialist war!

Don't let yourself be beguiled by the lie

"no more war"!

KNOW

Capitalism, that is, exploitation,
cannot be thought without war.
Only then wars will not be anymore

when the exploited of all countries
overthrow capitalism and
build socialism.
THEREFORE JOIN
the fighting rows of the enslaved and disinherited.
BECOME A CLASS FIGHTER!
Follow the battle cry:
PROLETARIANS
OF ALL COUNTRIES
UNITE!

(*Mein Genosse*; capitalization in original, our translation)¹

The propaganda message is obvious and permeates the four collections, whose individual texts emphasize socialist ideas. Despite the appeal to fight for justice and solidarity, the collections show a pacifist attitude. In *Proletarian Kindergarten*, for instance, the editor Ernst Friedrich (1894–1967) included an essay – *Erziehung zum Antimilitarismus* (Education to anti-militarism) – in which he explicitly asked parents, teachers, and other caretakers to diligently promote an anti-militarist education. In this essay, Friedrich anticipated some ideas which governed his famous book *Krieg dem Kriege! Guerre à la Guerre! War against War! Oorlog aan den Oorlog!* (1924). Here, Friedrich demanded that the proletarian people should take on responsibility in preventing the outbreak of another war:

Educate the children such that they will refuse later
to do military and war services.
How many turn a blind eye to the fact that war is prepared
voluntarily, in one's own house, in the family!
And here is the root of all evil,
here is also the root of war.
The mother singing soldier's songs to the child on her lap
prepares the war!
The father giving soldier's toys to his child as a present,
mobilizes the little one for the idea of war! (Friedrich, *Krieg dem Kriege* 10)

This radical approach increasingly determined literary works written by communist and socialist writers and is also recognizable in the four collections. Interestingly, the earlier collections underscore the class struggle and the fight against capitalism as the main goal. They endorse violence if it serves to prevent a new war. The poem "Die Kommunisten" (The communists) by Edwin Hoernle – first published in *Rote Lieder* (Red songs, 1924), a song book for young people – reflects this attitude:

Die Welt ist schwarz, die Welt ist rot –
Wir knien tief in Blut und Kot,
viel Arbeitsbrüder liegen tot,
Kommunisten.

In schwerem Sturme schwankt die Saat,
Ein kleiner Trupp, bereit zur Tat,
In Haß, Verfolgung und Verrat,
Kommunisten.

Wer löscht uns aus? Wir flammen doch,
Wer tritt uns nieder – immer noch,
die roten Banner tragen hoch
Kommunisten.

Der Morgen graut – dem Ziele treu
Ein wachsend Heer – die Welt wird frei!
Parole dann und Feldgeschrei:
Kommunisten.

The world is black, the world is red –
We are kneeling deeply in blood and dung,
Many comrades lie dead,
Communists.

In heavy storm sway the seeds,
A little troop, ready for action,
In hate, pursuit, and treason,
Communists.

Who wipes us out? We are still flaming,
Who tramples us down – still,
The red banners wear highly
Communists.

Dawn breaks – true to the goal
A growing army – the world becomes free!
Password then and battle cries:
Communists.
(Hoernle 15; our translation)

Due to its brevity and singability, this poem became quite prominent and re-appeared in several anthologies and yearbooks addressed to young people.

Edwin Hoernle (1883–1952), one of the co-founders of the KPD, belonged to the *Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller* (Federation of proletarian-revolutionary writers), which was founded in 1928. This group of authors advocated the further development of *Arbeiterliteratur* (workers' literature), which had reached a peak after World War I. The umbrella term of "workers' literature" encompasses writers from the working class as well as authors who focus on themes related to the labor movements and depictions of the hard labor of the working people. Among the members of this federation were some authors who regularly wrote texts for children, among them Johannes R. Becher, Edwin Hoernle, Kurt Kläber, and Berta Lask. These authors also contributed poems to the above-mentioned collections.

However, a turning point in the growing interest in pacifist and anti-war literature for children was the eleventh Congress of the *Kommunistische Jugendverbände Deutschlands* (Communist youth federations of Germany) that took place in Berlin in September 1929. In light of the increasing military mobilization of the masses, instigated by right-wing parties and the National Socialists, the delegates jointly passed a resolution that emphasized the struggle against war as the prime task of the Communist Party (Spaude-Schulze 90–92; Weinrich 68–74). From then on, communist and left-wing authors increasingly supported this appeal by creating literary works with pacifist topics. With regard to children's literature, Bertolt Brecht stands out for manifold reasons.

Bertolt Brecht: "Die drei Soldaten" (The three soldiers)

Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) was an active promoter of left-wing ideas in the Weimar Republic. In his plays, poems, songs, and theoretical treatises, he propagated an anti-capitalist ideology and advocated a revolutionary approach, which was not always strictly following the communist program. Brecht was a vibrant personality whose political stance is not easy to identify. While he sympathized with left-wing and revolutionary positions, he distanced himself from left-wing parties and manifestos. His interest in Marxist ideas emerged in 1929, when he listened to lectures by Marxist philosopher Karl Korsch. Although Brecht never became member of the Communist Party, he officially supported the communists, particularly after the May Riots in Berlin in 1929, when policemen suppressed demonstrations organized by communist workers and killed more than 30 civilians (Parker 401). Against this background, it is interesting to note

that his songs “Das Solidaritätslied” (The solidarity song, 1932) and “Einheitsfrontlied” (United front song, 1934), with musical scores by Hanns Eisler and translated into many languages, belong to the most famous communist songs ever written.

Like many of his compatriots, Brecht turned towards children as the future generation, creating lyrics, didactic plays, and short stories for children from the early 1920s until the beginning of the 1950s. His commitment to left-wing ideals already shone through his early poems, later collected as *Kinderlieder* (Children’s songs), as part of the anthology *Svendborger Gedichte* (Svendborg poems, 1939). However, his most radical poems for children are “Die drei Soldaten: Ein Kinderbuch” (The three soldiers: A children’s book, 1932) and “Kinderkreuzzug 1939” (Children’s crusade 1939, written in 1939, published in English translation in 1942, first published in German in 1949).

“Die drei Soldaten” is a cycle of poems with more than 700 lines that are grouped in 14 stanzas. The rhymed couplets are doggerel verses in the tradition of popular picture stories for children. George Grosz (1893–1959) created 25 black-and-white ink drawings that congenially match the critical and even polemical tone of Brecht’s verses. Grosz was one of the most radical avant-garde artists of the Weimar Republic, famous for his satirical drawings and paintings that openly addressed the social and political unrest. He often depicted the luxurious life of the war profiteers, industrial magnates, and right-wing politicians, which is contrasted with the suffering of disabled war veterans and the misery of poor and unemployed people.

The main characters in Brecht’s poem are three soldiers who are left on the battlefield in Flanders at the end of World War I. When they finally realize that the war is over, they do not accept the peace agreement but decide to continue the war on their own. The first three stanzas focus on the devastating situation on the battlefield, surrounded by a deserted landscape, thus presenting a realistic setting. However, in the fourth stanza, the soldiers change into allegorical characters who personify hunger, accident (as a cause of fatal working conditions), and cough (as a symbol of tuberculosis). This reference to the horsemen of the Apocalypse intermingles with allusions to actual social problems, thus representing the misery of the working class. As allegorical characters, the soldiers become invisible to other people.

They punish children as well as adults, particularly those who have given up and do not fight against political and social injustice. In contrast to traditional cautionary tales, and against all expecta-

tions, the three soldiers attack the poor, the weak, and the sick, while the rich and the mighty are spared. As a consequence, the individual war of the three soldiers is closely linked to the class struggle, which is caused by famine, child mortality, social oppression, unemployment, and housing shortage. By revealing the infractions caused by institutions such as the state, the industry, and the church, the three soldiers kill all poor people they meet. Finally, they even kill God, because they accuse him of not having prevented the suffering of mankind. After they have killed God, the soldiers become visible again. They then have a vision of a civil war, in which people are fighting each other. Appalled by the realization that this war is pointless, as there are only victims but no winners, the soldiers close their eyes. As a result, quietude returns. The concluding verses state:

Erträgt man nicht die Tatsachen
Dann muss man die Augen zumachen.
Dann sagt man, damit man den Schrecken vergißt
Mitten im Krieg einfach: daß Frieden ist.
Und es brüllen ja auch keine Kanonen
Wo Menschen in nassen Häusern wohnen.
Man schießt nicht hin mit Geschützen
Wo Menschen vor leeren Tellern sitzen.
Man treibt kein Gelbkreuzgas in die Fabriken
Wenn Menschen an der Maschine ersticken.
Sondern man sagt: es ist Frieden.
So wird die Revolution vermieden.

If one cannot bear the facts
One has to close one's eyes.
Then one will say, in order to forget the fright,
Simply amidst the war: now is peace.
And guns do not bellow
Where people live in wet houses
One does not shoot with cannons
Where people sit before empty dishes.
One does not push mustard gas into factories
Where people suffocate at the machinery.
Instead one says: it is peace.
Thus, a revolution is avoided.
(Brecht, "Die drei Soldaten" 61; our translation)

The critical message is crystal-clear: the warmongers talk the population into believing that there is peace, although a horrible war has broken out. By doing so, they do everything in their power to pre-

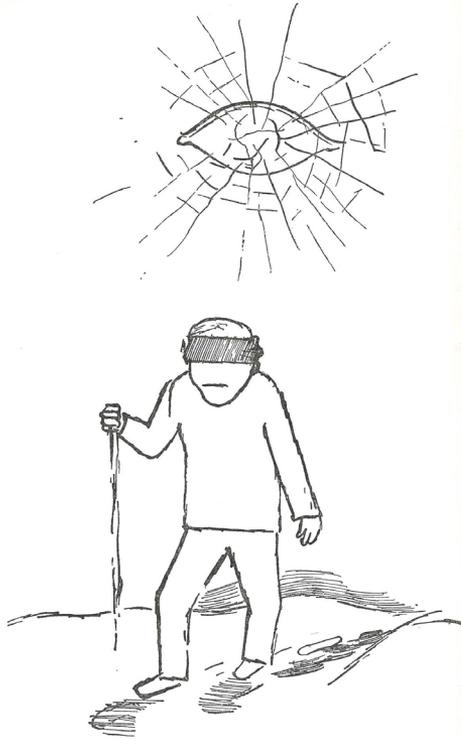
vent a revolution that would completely change the actual political situation.

On their route of destruction, the three soldiers finally arrive in Moscow. They try to continue their shooting but are stopped by the inhabitants who belong to the working class. The soldiers are arrested and accused of being enemies of the new Soviet state. The three soldiers accept their death sentence and laugh for the first time. Escorted by Soviet soldiers and encircled by a cheering crowd, they are shot on the Red Square in Moscow.

The soldier's acceptance of the judgment seems to be astonishing, regarding their previous campaign to defeat the poor and miserable who mostly belong to the working class. However, this change can be better understood if one considers Brecht's theory of consent, which he first developed in *Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis* (Baden didactic play of consent, 1929). Here Brecht positioned the individual in opposition to the community (or collective). In the end, individual characters have to succumb to the demands of the collective, even to the extent of sacrificing their lives (Parker 428).

The poem is distinguished by its anti-pedagogical approach. The first couplets emphasize the callous behavior of the soldiers, while the ensuing couplets matter-of-factly describe the death of children and proletarian people, which is caused by famine, contagious diseases, and poisonous gas. The concluding couplets express moral maxims, printed in italics that blatantly ascertain that those people are to blame who do not fight injustice and poverty. Strikingly, Grosz used the same critical approach in the illustrations he created as a complement to Brecht's poem. Noticeable is the caricaturist depiction of authorities, such as politicians, magistrates, and factory owners, who are represented as heartless, stupid, and cruel. These representations of the capitalists and the bourgeoisie contrast with the stunning images of starving children and dying people (Kümmerling-Meibauer, "Canon and German Avant-garde" 127-129).

Brecht and Grosz adopted an atheistic position, since they openly criticized the Christian belief in an almighty God. During their joint work on the poem, which lasted almost three years, Grosz was tried for blasphemy in 1931 for the illustration "Maul halten und weiter dienen" (Keep one's mouth shut and further serve in the army) that depicts Christ on the cross, wearing a gas mask. Therefore, Brecht trusted in Grosz' capacity to equally capture Brecht's provocative critique in appropriate illustrations. For instance, one illustration shows God depicted as a male human with a walking stick, whose eyes are covered by a shawl (see picture 2). He is walking in a



Picture 2. Illustration by George Grosz in Bertolt Brecht's "Die drei Soldaten" (152).
©George Grosz

desert-like landscape, threatened by a burning sun. The accompanying verses explain that he secretly fled his home and wife, since he is afraid of being charged of enjoying a luxurious life in the folds of the Church. Accused by the three soldiers of squandering the money of poor people, God puts the blame on the Church authorities. Furious about God's cowardice, they shoot him despite his protests.

Brecht was well aware of the provocative content of the poem. Therefore, he wrote a short preliminary note in which he advised that adult mediators should read the book together with children in order to invite them to ask questions (see Brecht, "Die drei Soldaten" 107). Hence, Brecht encouraged children to develop a critical attitude towards authorities by providing an insight into the concealed mechanisms of power. Moreover, the poem quite plainly shows models of wrongful social behavior, meant to instigate a critical insight into political circumstances. By contrasting the invisible soldiers with the clearly marked social scourges, Brecht thus underlined the drawbacks of contemporary society.

Indeed, "Die drei Soldaten" can be regarded as a unique work of radical writing addressed to children. While it is undoubtedly a text that displays political radicalism in which the war is explained as a natural outcome of capitalism and imperialism, it also shows sophisticated traits of what Kimberley Reynolds calls "aesthetic radicalism." In the following, we show how this functions in relation to three dimensions of Brecht's poem, namely (1) "to promote new ways of seeing and thinking about the world" (Reynolds 217), (2) simplicity of form, and (3) the combination of humor and propaganda.

As for (1), there is an ironical or cynical twist built into the poem. We know that deserters – that is, people who object to (capitalist) war – are heavily punished or sentenced to death. Within the fictional world of "Die drei Soldaten," the same thing happens to those who do not fight for their rights. The three soldiers, remains of the war, shamelessly decide to kill those who are victims of the war, because, if they had protested, war could have been prevented in the first place. This is, of course, the motif of class struggle, seen as an obligation by the exploited. Thus, being well aware of injustice, the three soldiers act in an absolutely unjust manner. Only when they arrive in Moscow, they are happy to be shot themselves.

The literary character of the killing band of soldiers is a hybrid one. On the one hand, they are against the things they represent: famine, accident (caused by exploitation) and cough (tuberculosis). They know how and where to find the enemies of the people. Yet, their idea is to wage war against those who do not wage war against war. Instead of spreading anti-capitalist enlightenment, the stupid and brutal soldiers – having learned nothing but to kill – kill those who should be the subjects of the revolution. No wonder then, that the Moscow avant-garde workers kill the soldiers who, while being on the right path, fall back into an attitude that should be banned forever. However, it is not clear whether such a critique could extend to the Moscow workers, too. Did Brecht sacrifice his critical dialectics for the sake of Stalinist dogmatism? Or does he suggest that all violence is silly if compared to aesthetic strategies of arguing for the need of the revolution? The fact that this remains unclear may explain some of the reservations not only Brecht experts, but also children's literature scholars may have about this outstanding poem.

While injustice – as a reason for and consequence of the war – is driven to absurdity, the narrator's voice "explains" the actions of the three soldiers in a kind of dry humorous voice, putting emphasis on the facts that leave no other choice. For instance, in chapter eleven "Die drei Soldaten und das Giftgas" (The three soldiers and the

poisonous gas), the moral comment is: *“Daß die drei Soldaten so etwas machen / Das sind Tatsachen: / Denn das Giftgas, wie man's nimmt / Ist immer für das Proletariat bestimmt”* (That the soldiers do such a thing [that is, killing the workers in the mustard gas factory] / That are facts / Since the poisonous gas / To be accurate / Is always intended for the proletarian people, Brecht, “Die drei Soldaten” 150; italics in original, our translation).

As for (2), we know that Brecht was very concerned with using “simple” forms, such as children’s rhymes, in his writing. To use a simple form to convey sophisticated content can be regarded as a “radical” aesthetic strategy. This could be misunderstood as a sort of parody, yet Brecht wanted to stress that it is not the form *per se* that is associated with “bourgeois” attitudes. In his view, the easier a critical content is expressed, the better this content could be circulated. Grosz’ illustrations perfectly match this ambition, since more complex drawings, like the depiction of the three soldiers, are combined with quite simple, sketchy drawings that echo children’s drawings.

Finally, with respect to (3), we find that the propagandistic appeal of this pacifist poem – peace will not be possible without fighting capitalism – is not only conveyed by a cynical analysis of social “facts” but also by means of humor. For instance, when the three soldiers observe an outstanding case of housing shortage, they do not hesitate to kill all inhabitants:

Und sehen viele Leute drin: Mann, Frau und Kind
Und daß wieder so viele in einem Zimmer sind.
Und werden gleich ganz wutentbrannt
Und stellen gleich die Leute an die Wand
Und schießen schrecklich auf sie ein
Und schießen alles tot und schrein:
“Wer so wohnt, groß oder klein,
Der will anscheinend erschossen sein.”

And they see many people in there: man, woman and child
And that again so many are in one room.
And they get right totally enraged
And put right all people against the wall
And shoot terribly at them
And shoot all dead and scream:
“Who lives likes this, young or old,
Seemingly wants to be shot.”
(Brecht, “Die drei Soldaten” 124; our translation)

The last two lines drive the soldier's dumbness and shamelessness to absurdity, all the more so as their action is presented by the *and*-introduced, preceding lines as necessary and unstoppable. The same sort of humor is present in some of Grosz' illustrations. For instance, when the soldier of the Red Army leads the three soldiers, now prisoners of war, over the Red Place, they are depicted as wearing stigmatizing labels calling them *Husten* (cough), *Hunger* (hunger) and *Unfall* (accident) (see picture 3). Again, this echoes pictures of deserters publicly displayed and humiliated by the imperialist officers.

This radical poem does not seem to represent a pacifist attitude, considering the fatal violence exercised by the three soldiers and their final execution. On closer consideration, Brecht applied the concept of communist pacifism, but in a dialectic manner. While it is the aim of communist politics to fight against capitalism and imperialism, the soldiers do not kill the representatives of these ideologies, but rather the people who suffer oppression and exploitation. By turning

normal expectations topsy-turvy, Brecht puts the blame for the current social and political situation on the weak and poor, since they do not stand up for their rights. By means of this unexpected confrontation Brecht intended to mobilize the readers to reflect on the causes of social injustice and war-mongering.



Picture 3. Illustration by George Grosz in Bertolt Brecht's "Die drei Soldaten" (162). ©George Grosz

Bertolt Brecht:
"Kinderkreuzzug 1939"
(Children's crusade 1939)

During his exile, Brecht carried on expressing an anti-war attitude and fighting for peace. This comes to the fore in another pacifist poem for children: "Kinderkreuzzug 1939" (Children's crusade 1939). Brecht drafted this poem in 1939, after the *Wehrmacht* occupied Poland, and completed it in 1941. Due to

the political circumstances, this poem first appeared after the end of the war, in the collection *Kalendergeschichten* (Calendar stories) in 1949, which was Brecht's first publication in post-war Germany.

As the title indicates, Brecht interpolates the Children's Crusade of 1212 with the suffering of Polish war orphans, who have lost their families and homes and roam about a country covered in snow. Threatened by famine and the bitter cold, they are heartlessly chased by cruel adults. The group of 55 children share their few belongings and little food regardless of race, class, and gender. Their innocence and helplessness thus build a stark contrast to adult people who commit crimes in order to survive. The children care for a wounded soldier who advises them to go to the town of Bilgoray, but the signpost has fallen down and misleads them. Like their ancestors, the children of the Crusade of 1212, the Polish children cannot escape their fate, as they finally die of starvation. The final three stanzas state:

In Polen, in jenem Januar Wurde ein Hund gefangen Der hatte um seinen mageren Hals Eine Tafel aus Pappe hangen.	In Poland that same January They caught a dog half strangled: A cord was hung round his scraggy neck And from it a notice dangled.
Darauf stand: Bitte um Hilfe! Wir wissen den Weg nicht mehr. Wir sind fünfundfünfzig Der Hund führt euch her.	Saying this: please come and help us! Where we are we cannot say. We're the five-and-fifty The dog knows the way.
Die Schrift war eine Kinderhand. Bauern haben sie gelesen. Seitdem sind eineinhalb Jahre um. Der Hund ist verhungert gewesen. (Brecht, "Kinderkreuzzug 1939" 59)	The writing was in a childish hand. Peasants had read it over. Since then more than a year has gone by. The dog starved: he didn't recover. (Britten, translation by Hans Keller)

Based on contemporary documents and newspaper articles – Brecht enclosed a photo of Polish children found dead, which was taken by soldiers of the Red Army, in the typescript – this ballad-like poem follows the rhythm of the Chevy Chase verse, a strophic form established in Germany in the 18th century. It consists of four lines in alternate rhymes with four exercises in the first and third verses and three exercises in the second and fourth verses (Barbon 352). In contrast to the political leaders of the time, the child leader of the group has no sense of mission and does not know the way at all, leading the children astray. Their death from starvation and cold is just indirectly indicated in the dog's final death. The dominant motif of the snow as a metaphor for misery, cold, and despair is juxtaposed to the sun

as a motif of longing. The children's hope to find warmth and peace somewhere in the South is not fulfilled, instead they are increasingly threatened by the snow that blinds their eyes and changes the landscape into a vast and hostile territory.

Compared to "Die drei Soldaten," this poem seems to be less radical. On closer inspection however, "Kinderkreuzzug 1939" captivates the readers by its unsparing truthfulness in relation to the suffering of children during wartime. Since the children are left on their own, the poem relentlessly reveals the atrocities of war, which finally leads to a feeling of grief-stricken hopelessness. While "Die drei Soldaten" shows traits of satirical representations, even humor, and even indicates that there are potential solutions – clearly presented in the establishment of a worker's state in the USSR – "Kinderkreuzzug 1939" distinctly shows that there is no way to escape. Seen in this light, this exile poem is radical, albeit in a different manner, as it pushes the suffering of children into the forefront but refuses to present any rays of hope. The idea to represent children as the main victims of a terrible war that even turns potential caretakers into ruthless characters is radical, all the more so as the children are sacrificed for the sake of nationalism and political power.

Aftermath: What Happened after 1933?

After the Nazis came to power in May 1933, many communist and left-wing authors and artists went into exile, among them the poets and illustrators discussed in this article. Otherwise they would have faced being arrested. Their main works were placed on the "Liste des schädlichen und unerwünschten Schrifttums" (list of harmful and unwanted literature),² banned from official libraries and bookshops, and even destroyed in book burnings. Today, the anthologies and books presented here are mostly forgotten. Since just a few copies have survived, the remaining books have become rare collectibles.

A case in point is Brecht's "Die drei Soldaten": Printed as part of a booklet with the title *Versuche* (Attempts), it was published at the end of 1932. Just a few copies have been sold in bookshops. After the Nazis seized power in May 1933, the book was forbidden at once. Brecht left Germany in February 1933, one day after the Reichstag fire, and fled to Prague. After intermediate stops in Vienna, Zurich, Paris, and Amsterdam, he found exile in Denmark. Brecht was deprived of his German citizenship in 1935. He moved to Sweden in 1939 and one year later to Helsinki, where he stayed until he finally got an entry visa for the USA in 1941. Although some renowned crit-

ics recommended “Die drei Soldaten,” Brecht could not persuade exile publishers to release a new edition. They shied away from the risk to publish such a provocative children’s book. Despite a new edition that came out in 1959 and the insertion of the poem into the complete edition (1988–2000) of Brecht’s works, “Die drei Soldaten” still belongs to the unknown works of Brecht. Hence, one of the most radical and experimental children’s books that appeared in the inter-war period fell into complete oblivion and is not even on the radar of children’s literature scholars today.³

The reception of Brecht’s “Kinderkreuzzug 1939” has been very different. This anti-war poem for children circulated among exiled people in the United States and elsewhere – the German actor and director Peter Lorre even considered turning it into a movie (Knopf 235) – and was occasionally included in German school books after World War II (Sauer 116–122). In 1968, Benjamin Britten composed a libretto to Brecht’s poem. The first performance premiered at St. Paul’s Cathedral in May 1969 – in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of “Save the Children Fund.” Consequently, “Kinderkreuzzug 1939” seems to be the only radical poem among our corpus that has survived and is still present in contemporary cultural memory.

Finally, after the end of World War II and the constitution of two German states – the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) – in 1949, many communist and socialist authors and illustrators returned to East Germany. They regarded the GDR as a state whose governmental program followed communist and socialist ideas, while they considered the FRG a state governed by capitalist and Western ideologies. Moreover, they actively engaged in supporting the new socialist state and took on prestigious positions in the GDR. Johannes R. Becher, for instance, became the first minister of culture of the GDR in 1954, a position he held until his death in 1958. Edwin Hoernle, who like Becher found exile in the Soviet Union, engaged in the agrarian reform and later became a professor and director of the Faculty of Agricultural Policy at the Academy of Forst Zinna. Bertolt Brecht, finally, founded the prestigious *Berliner Ensemble* in East Berlin in 1954. His famous “Kinderhymne” (Children’s hymn, 1950), with a musical score by Hanns Eisler, was inaugurated as official children’s song of the GDR in 1951.⁴ This poem expresses the hope that a future socialist Germany, despite its present international condemnation, would be accepted and respected by the international community, as is verbalized in the first stanza:

Anmut sparet nicht noch Mühe
Leidenschaft nicht noch Verstand
Dass ein gutes Deutschland blühe
Wie ein andres gutes Land.
(Brecht, "Kinderhymne" 303)

Grace spare not and spare no labour
Passion nor intelligence
That a decent German nation
Flourish as do other lands.
(English transl. in Brockmann 14)

Let us take stock: Highlighting two underestimated works of Bertolt Brecht, we have shown that his pacifist lyrics addressed to children show radical literary forms as well as radical content. In contrast, other pacifist lyrics of the interwar period relied more on traditional form and content prevalent in the worker's movement. It is obvious that being too radical always entails the risk of not being easily understood and appreciated by the "masses" as the main target group. The dialectics of being a role model for other artists on the one hand, and being rejected for being too "formalist" – a typical dogmatic reproach to avant-garde art – on the other, is a key topic inviting more in-depth studies.

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Notes

1 No pagination.

2 This refers to a list of forbidden books which was distributed by the Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda since 1935. This list included roughly 12,400 book titles and the complete works of 149 authors.

3 Exceptions to this rule are the articles by Kaulen (“Zwischen Affirmation”; “Bertolt Brecht und die Kinderliteratur”), Kümmerling-Meibauer (“Bertolt Brecht”), and Peltsch that pay tribute to Brecht’s poetry for children but do not analyze “Die drei Soldaten” extensively.

4 “Kinderhymne” is a creative reaction to the national anthems of both German states. The three poems have the same verse meter, the musical score by Eisler refers to the original scores of the West German anthem, composed by Josef Haydn, and the East German anthem, also composed by Eisler. The national anthem of the GDR was written by Johannes R. Becher in 1950. He drafted “Auferstanden aus Ruinen” (Erected from the ruins) as a complement to the national anthem of the Federal Republic of Germany, which consists of the third stanza of “Das Lied der Deutschen” (The song of the Germans, 1841) by Romantic author August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben.