

A Worker Reads History

- Bertolt Brecht

*Who built the seven gates of Thebes?
The books are filled with names of kings.
Was it the 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 seas rushed in,
The drowning men still bellowed for their slaves.
Young Alexander conquered India.
He alone?
Caesar beat the Gauls.
Was there not even a cook in his army?
Phillip 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.*