

Rudyard Kipling

Screw-Guns

da: Rudyard Kipling, *Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses*, London, Methuen, 1892

1. Smokin' my pipe on the mountings, sniffin' the mornin' cool,
I walks in my old brown gaiters along o' my old brown mule,
With seventy gunners be'ind me, an' never a beggar forgets
It's only the pick of the Army that handles the dear little pets -- 'Tss! 'Tss!
For you all love the screw-guns -- the screw-guns they all love you!
So when we call round with a few guns, o' course you will know what to do -- hoo! hoo!
Jest send in your Chief an' surrender -- it's worse if you fights or you runs:
You can go where you please, you can skid up the trees, but you don't get away from the guns!

2. They sends us along where the roads are, but mostly we goes where they ain't:
We'd climb up the side of a sign-board an' trust to the stick o' the paint:
We've chivied the Naga an' Looshai, we've give the Afreedee-man fits,
For we fancies ourselves at two thousand, we guns that are built in two bits -- 'Tss! 'Tss!
For you all love the screw-guns . . .

3. If a man doesn't work, why, we drills 'im an' teaches 'im 'ow to behave;
If a beggar can't march, why, we kills 'im an' rattles 'im into 'is grave.
You've got to stand up to our business an' spring without snatchin' or fuss.
D'you say that you sweat with the field-guns? By God, you must lather with us -- 'Tss! 'Tss!
For you all love the screw-guns . . .

4. The eagles is screamin' around us, the river's a-moanin' below,
We're clear o' the pine an' the oak-scrub, we're out on the rocks an' the snow,
An' the wind is as thin as a whip-lash what carries away to the plains
The rattle an' stamp o' the lead-mules -- the jinglety-jink o' the chains -- 'Tss! 'Tss!
For you all love the screw-guns . . .

5. There's a wheel on the Horns o' the Mornin', an' a wheel on the edge o' the Pit,
An' a drop into nothin' beneath you as straight as a beggar can spit:
With the sweat runnin' out o' your shirt-sleeves, an' the sun off the snow in your face,
An' 'arf o' the men on the drag-ropes to hold the old gun in 'er place -- 'Tss! 'Tss!
For you all love the screw-guns . . .

6. Smokin' my pipe on the mountings, sniffin' the mornin' cool,
I climbs in my old brown gaiters along o' my old brown mule.
The monkey can say what our road was -- the wild-goat 'e knows where we passed.
Stand easy, you long-eared old darlin'! Out drag-ropes! With shrapnel! Hold fast -- 'Tss! 'Tss!
For you all love the screw-guns -- the screw-guns they all love you!
So when we take tea with a few guns, o' course you will know what to do -- hoo! hoo!
Jest send in your Chief an' surrender -- it's worse if you fights or you runs:
You may hide in the caves, they'll be only your graves, but you can't get away from the guns!

Rudyard Kipling

Kanonen

da: Rudyard Kipling, *Balladen aus dem Bivak*, Deutsch von Marx Möller, Berlin, Vita, 1911

1. Mit der kurzen Pfeife im Munde
Zieh ich in braunen Gamaschen daher
Durch frostige Frühmorgenstunde;
Neben mir keucht mein Maulesel schwer.
Hinter mir siebzig Artilleristen
Steigen bergan mit stampfendem Fuß
Und das wissen ja Heiden und Christen,
Bestes Soldatenvolk nur kommt zum Schuß!

2. Wo nur irgendein Waldweg geht,
Oder auch wo die Wege versagen
Wo nur irgendein Wegweiser steht
Wollen durch Dickicht und Dorn wir uns schlagen!
Übel kamen bei uns immer an
Alle die Kerls hier, wo sie auch wohnen!
Denn wir rechnen als zweitausend Mann!
Wir, die siebzig und unsre Kanonen!

3. Wenn so ein Kerl hier nicht ordentlich schafft,
Wollen wir ihn zu Manieren schon zwingen!
Fehlt so 'nem Lumpen zum Laufen die Kraft,
Wollen wir ihn zur Strecke schon bringen!
Frisch! An die Arbeit! Wir kennen kein Schonen!
Ohne mit der Wimper zu zucken!
Was? Heiss machten euch unsre Kanonen?
Gnade Euch Gott, Kerls, Blut soll ihr spucken!

[...]

Rudyard
Kipling's



Balladen
aus dem Biwak

— VITA —
Deutsches Verlagshaus
Berlin-Chbg.

The specific source for “Der Kanonensong”, is, however, none of the above, but Kipling’s poem “Screw-Guns” which Brecht knew from Marx Möller’s translation of the “Barrack-Room Ballads”. That translator had come to the assistance of his German readers by interpreting the somewhat obscure title dealing with these two-piece cannons that are screwed together and used in rocky terrain. He rendered the title simply as “Kanonen”. The connection between this and Brecht’s title represents a logical extension – a song about cannons by the soldiers who used them against the heathen. A cover illustration on Möller’s translation also portrayed two former Indian Army soldiers singing together. One with a mustache wearing a pith helmet and a tropical uniform has his arm slung around the shoulder of another dressed in the uniform of a Buckingham Palace guard. Judging by the title printed on the cover (*Balladen aus dem Biwak*), one would assume they were reminiscing on their military experiences in India. This drawing, coupled with a ballad about cannons within the book, provided the essential ingredients Brecht needed for one of his most rousing songs.

Another point offers further confirmatory evidence. This involves the nature of Möller’s translation. By taking considerable liberties with the original, he managed to make his ballad more bloodthirsty than Kipling did, thereby setting the stage for the direction it took in Brecht’s hands. Comparison of the third stanza illustrates how Möller brutalizes the tone when compared with the original:

Kipling:

If a man doesn’t work, why, we drills ‘im an’ teaches ‘im ‘ow
to behave

If a beggar can't march, why, we kills 'im an' rattles 'im into
'is grave.
You've got to stand up to our business an' spring without
snatchin' or fuss.
D'you say that you sweat with the field guns? By God, you
must lather with us – 'Tss! 'Tss!

Möller:

Wenn so ein Kerl hier nicht ordentlich schafft,
Wollen wir ihn zu Manieren schon zwingen!
Fehlt so'nem Lumpen zum Laufen die Kraft,
Wollen wir ihn zur Strecke schon bringen!
Frisch! An die Arbeit! Wir kennen kein Schonen!
Ohne mit der Wimper zu zucken!
Was? Heiß machten euch unsre Kanonen?
Gnade euch Gott, Kerls, Blut sollt ihr spucken! (p. 108)

Kipling's poetic voice addresses the soldiers who man the guns. It tells them what discipline and hard work are involved for those serving on a screw-gun crew opposed to the easier field guns. But Möller has introduced an ambiguity that makes it possible to read it as a threat directed against the heathen whom the soldiers are fighting. Even this is secondary to an innovation Möller made that is duplicated in Brecht's song – the rhythm as determined by the meter he selects. If one sings the first four lines of Möller's stanza above to the tempo of the Kurt Weill music using the Brecht text of the "Kanonensong" for comparison, the similarity is striking:

John was darunter und Jim war dabei
Und Georgie ist Sergeant geworden
Doch die Armee, sie fragt keinen, wer er sei
Und sie marschierte hinauf nach dem Norden.

(*GW II*, 419)

Rhythmically the passages are virtually interchangeable. It is Kipling's translator, not Kipling himself to whom Brecht is indebted here.