

Poem by Johannes R. Becher on the Death of Stalin (1953)

Abstract

Johannes R. Becher was a member of the SED Party Executive Committee and the SED Central Committee from 1946 on; he served as GDR Minister of Culture from 1954 until his death in 1958. He composed the text of the East German national anthem, and, in recognition of that effort, was awarded the National Prize of the GDR in 1950. In 1953, the year in which the following ode to Stalin was written, he received the International Stalin Prize in Moscow in 1953. Becher's poem is a testimony to the official cult of personality surrounding the Soviet leader and party chief.

Source

Giving thanks

I
In his works he holds out his hand to us,
Volume by volume arrayed in the libraries,
And his likeness looks down from the wall.
He is present even in the remotest village.

With Marx and Engels he walks through Stralsund,
Near Rostock he checks the tractors,
And over the dark background of a meadow,
He looks off into the distance, as though lost in a dream.

He walks through the factories along the Ruhr,
And on the fields he steps up to the farmers.
The tank furrow – a trail of suffering.
And Stalin says: "It won't be long now."

In Dresden he visits the gallery,
And all the paintings bow to him.
The colors shine more beautifully than ever,
And dance a colorful dance of life.

With Lenin he sits on a bench in the evening,
Ernst Thälmann sits down beside them.
And an accordion sings thanks,
They smile, grateful and humble.

The youth shows you its mastery
In sport and games – and you hand out the prizes.
Then you hum along the words "learn and create,"
When in farewell it sings the new song.

II

There he will be, where the waters
Of the Rhine and the cathedral of Cologne tell of him.
There he will be in everything beautiful, good,
On every mountain, in every German stream.

There you will stand, Stalin, in the full bloom
Of the apple trees at Lake Constance,
And through the Black Forest wanders his kindness,
And beckons to itself a skittish doe.

Already he lives and wanders forth in all,
And his name is carried by the spring wind,
And in the castle ruins is his echo,
And the child is spelling Stalin's name.

Your name sounds out in the waterfall
And the rustling of the leaves, and your step
Moves onward quietly. We stop and listen
And follow him and go along silently.

Remember, Germany, your friend, the best one.
Oh, thank you, Stalin, no one was like him
So deeply kindred to you. East and West
In him are united. He crosses the sea,

And no mountain throws up a barrier,
No enemy is strong enough to resist
The man called Stalin, for his thought
Become deed, and the will of Stalin will be done.

Source: *Sinn und Form*, 5/2 (1953), p. 8 ff.

Translation: Thomas Dunlap

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