

# Gustav Hochstetter Translates “Poets and Thinkers” as “Judges and Executioners” (1914)

## Abstract

Gustav Hochstetter (1873–1944) was the editor of the magazine *Lustige Blätter* and served in the First World War. In this poem, written in the fall of 1914, he extolled the nation’s “poets and thinkers” as “judges and executioners.” Featuring heroes such as Goethe, Moltke, Bismarck, and Wagner, Hochstetter’s collection of poems *Wir sind wir* [*We Are We*] offered all German soldiers a symbolically illustrious family portrait gallery. Hochstetter himself was of Jewish ancestry; he was deported to Theresienstadt in 1942 and died there in 1944.

## Source

### A Nation of Poets and Thinkers

Are we a nation of poets and thinkers?  
Indeed! And yet another word is also true:  
We are a nation of brave battle commanders,  
The boldest the universe has ever produced.

Are we nation of poets and thinkers?  
So long as we remained at peace, we were so.  
We are a nation of guards, of destroyers,  
That carves its path with furious blows.

What in the forty-four years since we last took the field,  
The “poets” of the general staff have devised –  
Shall to our foe soon be revealed,  
By the rhymes they have spun he’ll be truly surprised!

And we, the nation of poets and thinkers,  
Shall write it all down in a strong, steady hand:  
We, the heroic people of the battle commander,  
That knows but one highest good: the fatherland!

The fists of the thinkers now shoulder their arms,  
The eye of the poet aims with steady gaze,  
It glows brightly—like all Germany’s honor,  
So the poet creates his masterpiece. . .

This we poets know above all,  
That all at length to fate must bend:  
The foe is ripe, and what has ripened must fall.  
This is the great drama’s rightful end.

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We are the nation of poets and thinkers;  
Yes, friends, everything in its rightful place:  
We are the land of judges and executioners,  
For every scoundrel who disturbs the peace.

Source: Gustav Hochstetter, *Wir sind wir. Ernstes und Frohes aus der Weltkriegszeit*. Berlin: Concordia Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, G.m.b.H, 1914, pp. 15–16.

Translation: Deborah Cohen

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