

THAT BOOK SHOULD BE BURNED: THE CONTESTED AFTERLIFE
OF BERTOLT BRECHT
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*There can't be any doubt about it any longer:
the struggle against ideology has become a new ideology.*
—Bertolt Brecht, 1938¹

In 1994 John Fuegi, a career Brecht scholar and founder of the International Brecht Society, published his biography of Bertolt Brecht, entitled *Brecht & Co: Sex, Politics, and the Making of the Modern Drama*. The first biography of Brecht written with such a high level of access to unpublished materials and, more importantly, the first written since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the book was anticipated as a breakthrough. What it broke through, however, failed to please most Brecht scholars. The book shattered a mythology of Brecht as an icon and a genius, painting instead a picture of a heartless sociopath who drew talent around him by force of charisma, a political hero whose only political interest was in self-preservation, a rich man who masqueraded as poor and, above all, an exploiter of his female collaborator/mistresses to the point that his authorship of key works is called into question.

Within a year of *Brecht & Co's* publication, the International Brecht Society, now under new leadership, published in its *Brecht Yearbook 20* a list of 452 errors, distortions, and omissions in Fuegi's text. The authors of this report included a number of the most widely known Brecht scholars: John Willett, James K. Lyon, Siegfried Mews, and Hans Christian Nørregaard. Lyon's introduction offers a damning summary of "carelessness, inaccuracy, wild speculation, distortion of evidence, and the striking number of factual errors, mistranslations, misrepresentations, careless or irresponsible use of sources, and claims not supported by any source at all."² Willett's conclusion places the list, which runs to 90 pages, into categories: mistranslations from the German, misquotations and unacknowledged omissions which affect meaning, vague exaggerations, ignorant mistakes and misreadings of the plays, and repetition of fact or assertion (suggesting a propagandistic agenda on Fuegi's part).³ These flaws, many of them simple linguistic errors with German translations, names, and place-names, fall "so short of minimum standards of serious scholarship" that "the book cannot stand up to careful scrutiny."⁴ Nearly a third of the *Yearbook*, the "jubilee" edition, was dedicated to the uniformly negative response to Fuegi's book. It was an attempt from one side of the debate to end the argument, discredit the book, and banish the author from the pantheon of serious Brecht scholars. It stooped at times to a level of character assassination matched only by Fuegi's own excesses in his book; as is common in argument and war, the depths plumbed on one side tended to mirror those on the

other.

In the second edition of *Brecht & Co*, released in 2002, Fuegi agreed in his introduction that twelve of the hundreds of mistakes identified in the *Yearbook* list were substantive, and made corrections in this edition; for the rest, he wrote somewhat dismissively that he is “always grateful for the efforts of proofreaders.”⁷⁵ The debate over Brecht’s authorship, after a brief resurgence surrounding the numerous conferences and retrospective articles of 1998—the centenary of Brecht’s birth—largely disappeared from view. Today a student of drama is more likely to hear that Brecht may not have been the author of *The Threepenny Opera* at a dinner party than in a classroom or theatre. As one critic of Fuegi’s book put it, “for all its scholarly paraphernalia, this angry biography, which could have been definitive, will probably find less prominence on the shelves of theatre scholars than on the coffee tables of politically correct revisionists.”⁷⁶ Theatre practice, aside from a few new plays about Elisabeth Hauptmann (Brecht’s most prolific and well-documented female collaborator) and an occasional new citation in playbills and programme notes, has been altered hardly at all.⁷

In spite of such widespread dismissal, no specific refutation aside from the “list of errors” has yet been published which provides contradictory evidence to Fuegi’s central thesis: that Bertolt Brecht was a masterful exploiter of the collaborative situation of theatre, taking the credit and the money for intellectual property that was almost never wholly his own, to such a great extent that he could not in fairness be called the sole “author” of a number of core works in his oeuvre. A revision of Brecht’s use in the context of theatrical theory, political art, and socialist history might also seem to be a logical aftershock of Fuegi’s work, but Brecht continues to be treated academically and practically as a revolutionary Marxist; in theatre classrooms, his name seems to be mentioned in connection with any remotely political, activist, or ensemble performance. Criticisms have nearly always failed to focus on core arguments by Fuegi, instead discrediting the details; Willett, best known for his seminal compendium *Brecht on Theatre*, wrote in a letter to the *New York Review of Books* that “there could be a lesson here in the relationship between scholarly scruples and a care for words ... be a little less trusting, prod this book’s vast assemblage of notes, and it crumbles.”⁷⁸ This scholastic attack on Fuegi, buttressed by the *Yearbook* list which Willett co-authored, offers variations on this theme: incautious translation and citation, or a lack of attention to scholastic details, undermines the superstructure of the argument in its entirety.

Other criticisms of Fuegi’s work abound, each illuminating valid problems in his methods without managing fully to tear down his conclusions, many of which are not new. A fascinating feminist critique of Fuegi (who often assumes the feminist mantle himself) has emerged, saying that in using the women he claims to defend as victims of Brecht, he has “silenced” them and turned them toward his own patriarchal agenda. Much of the German and broader European criticism of the book has focused, with varying degrees of virulence, on his capitalist, conservative, and “Puritanical” American reading of a socialist hero. Additionally, a postmodernist school of Brecht scholarship denies the significance of authorship altogether, and the

related Marxist critique celebrates theatrical collaboration and collective ownership as part of its *a priori* denial of intellectual property.

This paper will not mire itself in an argument over the validity of Mr. Fuegi's thesis, or indeed of his scholarship. It is not the authorship of the plays attributed to Brecht which is under examination here, nor even the more theoretical question of whether authorship matters. It is, rather, the assorted reactions of scholars and theatre practitioners to the controversy—the scholastic, feminist, anti-American, and postmodern critiques—which are deserving of some deconstruction. In the brouhaha of the past decade, the politics of what will be referred to as Brecht's "afterlife" and the emotions Fuegi unleashed in the academic community have been in many ways the book's most telling outcome. This paper will reveal how much, and in what way, the landscape of Brechtian aesthetics and politics has been altered by Fuegi and his critics, and will attempt to lay out a balanced and contemporary approach to Brecht in theatrical practice and pedagogy. This analysis will point the way toward greater questions, namely the significance of authorship in the theatre and the politics of academia.

The Scholastic Critique

Perhaps due to the fundamentals of Brecht's theatre theory—foremost among them his adaptation of the Hegelian/Marxian dialectic, in which an often aggressive confrontation with the audience is implied—neutrality is in short supply in Brecht studies. Some would argue that neutrality is not desirable, particularly in the face of gross injustice; in such cases neutrality bears an uncanny resemblance to complicity. This is Fuegi's basic argument to explain why his portrait is not remotely balanced. His bias develops from a fascination that brought him to the Berliner Ensemble in 1965 for postgraduate work, through thirty years of scholarly dedication to the Brecht industry, and ultimately leads to a lengthy and heavily researched book which seethes with a personal loathing for its subject. In psychoanalytic terms, such a transition seems to emerge partially, though not entirely, from an individual sense of betrayal; this combines with a broad moral vendetta which is claimed on behalf of suppressed (mainly female) voices. The voice that Fuegi adopts to tell his story, perhaps unintentionally, is so intensely emotional that his actual argument is frequently overshadowed. It might be said that an unscholarly *ethos*—that of attack and attrition—has undermined a powerful *pathos* (his sense of righteousness) supported by barely adequate *logos* (a dense but problematic scholarly and textual apparatus). In these three Aristotelian categories of argument, it is the problematic *ethos* of the book which is raised most often in the published rebuttals. Most damaging to Fuegi's assertions, many of which merit close attention on the grounds of common sense alone, is that this *ethos* made his work easy to dismiss by journalistic and scholarly reviewers as mere polemic, quixotic ravings, or a capitalist ploy (to sell books).

To acknowledge the flaws in Fuegi's *ethos*, however, should not require that one commit the same errors as does Fuegi. The level of emotion that enabled him frequently to condemn Hitler, Stalin, and Brecht on equal footing, a patently ridiculous

move which was justly lambasted in nearly every review of the book, is evident just beneath the surface of a glossy but curiously desperate campaign to discredit and ultimately silence Fuegi on academically justified grounds. Willett's conclusion to the *Yearbook* list ends by listing the "respectable institutions" that supported Fuegi's research, asking:

what were your referees up to? Who were the publishers' readers who approved this icon-busting work? Why were some of its critics so gullible? Why did reputable papers and broadcasting organizations give so much space to it, its syndication, and its author's opinions? ... Do you think the results in this case can be reconciled with the purposes your institutions were set up to serve?⁹

This line of questioning fails to conceal its alarming core concern: how Fuegi was *allowed* to proceed with a line of inquiry, and how his voice was *allowed* to be heard. The concern about how much space had been given it could as easily reflect back on the author; Willett was the guest editor of this volume, which gave the Fuegi rebuttal 131 of its 435 pages. Willett's questions posit an orthodoxy of Brecht studies, as well as an implied lack of free speech, which strengthens, not weakens, Fuegi's case.

Even more vitriolic responses have been expressed off the printed record, in classrooms and academic conversation. In a guest lecture given at Northwestern University in 2005, in one of the major theatre programs in the United States, I referenced the authorship controversy to a Brecht class composed of fourth-year and graduate students. Fuegi's work was not on the reading list and had not been mentioned; the students were unaware that such issues existed. Following the lecture, one of the professors for the class asked me whether he had understood correctly, and whether I was on "the right side of this debate." The Brecht scholar went on to say that Fuegi's book was both "indefensible" and "garbage," an accurate précis of much of its critical reception. When I suggested that the professor publish his definitive refutation of Fuegi to settle the debate, he responded without hesitation, "that book should be burned."¹⁰

Fuegi often cites Martin Esslin's comment, written in 1974, that "Brechtian criticism seems to me to be one of the last remaining areas of pure medieval scholasticism, where statements in classical texts have a higher evidentiary value than experimental proof."¹¹ The critical response to Fuegi's work seems largely to substantiate this claim. The popular biographies, which still appear on most Brecht course syllabi and are recommended in most negative reviews of Fuegi's book, are those by Frederic Ewen (1967), Klaus Völker (1976 German; 1979 English), and Werner Mittenzwei (1979 German). Ronald Hayman's 1983 biography is described as "hostile," and is grouped with Fuegi's as a reflection of "every American conservative accusation against Brecht" from the Cold War era.¹² What the "preferred" books have

in common is that they were written at a time when access to the Brecht Archive in East Berlin was rigidly controlled; many records that were marked *politisch* or *privat* were off-limits, and the cultural apparatus of the state had a clear stake in how Brecht, the Berliner Ensemble, and the government itself were portrayed. The traditional biographical pitfall of hagiography was virtually impossible to eliminate in such a climate; Brecht studies operated for many years without benefit of free speech from many of its sources and, in some cases, functioned perhaps unwittingly as an actual appendage of East German (DDR) cultural propaganda. Völker's biography contains gems such as this: "it was not strange, but obvious, for Brecht to live in the part of Germany in which the fight for a new and better way of life had begun and was continuing."¹³ The ideology underlying this statement, supporting the project of the DDR, is as blatant as Fuegi's reaction against it. To uphold the early works on Brecht to the exclusion of works researched post-1989 is to be truly "medieval" in the study of a modern writer. New information, such as that which comes to light in Fuegi's hagiography-in-reverse, may not uphold the scholarly values embraced in the older works, but this does not mean its findings are wholly inadmissible in a discussion, any more than the pre-1989 works need to be abandoned completely on account of their historiographic flaws.

In one review of Fuegi's work published online, scholar Bob Wake makes the claim that "when the evidence suggests more than one interpretation, *Brecht and Company* without fail chooses whatever is most damning."¹⁴ This comment is a fair one, but again it ultimately helps Fuegi's case; it shows that the evidence, repeatedly asserted by his critics to be unequivocal and clear, does remain open to debate. It could as easily be said that Brecht's defenders, without fail, choose whatever is least damning. Wake's turn in this article is astonishing, giving consecutive sentences which capture the disingenuousness of his critique: "[Brecht's] stature is such that no single biography, whether hagiographic or insulting, is going to be the last word on his life and art. John Fuegi's *Brecht and Company* is worth no one's time. Virtually any other Brecht biography is preferable."¹⁵ If no one has the last word, should the public not at least hear what Fuegi has to say? The critical responses to Fuegi which come freighted with this *ethos* seem to reveal a defensive impulse in his critics which renders them, not him, suspect.

The Feminist Critique

Erika Munk, the critic who spearheaded the *Yearbook* assault on Fuegi, credits Eric Bentley (a great friend of Brecht, and Fuegi's mentor) with noticing that:

in America, the positive and negative reviews do not line up in any neat right-left configuration with conservatives defending Fuegi's point of view, liberals and radicals deploring it ... Indeed, conservatives seem to praise the book for its generic Brecht-bashing or condemn it as "feminist," while more leftist types praise it for its

“feminism” or condemn it for its political and aesthetic anti-radicalism.¹⁶

The ostensible “feminism” of Fuegi, however, is a hotly contested topic. A number of critics mention that Brecht’s worker-women are cast in an all-too-standard role of “victim,” and are thus silenced. Wake is uncompromising in his denial of credence, saying that “ironically, it is Fuegi himself who seems to be exploiting Hauptmann, Steffin, and Berlau in his sinister efforts to malign Brecht.”¹⁷ This line of thinking registered with the critics, emerging several years later in a review by Gitta Honegger of Sabine Kebir’s 1997 study *Ich fragte nicht nach meinem Anteil: Elisabeth Hauptmann’s Arbeit mit Bertolt Brecht* (“I didn’t ask for my share: Elisabeth Hauptmann’s Work with Bertolt Brecht”). This work, which bears out a number of Fuegi’s assertions about co-authorship of the plays and would seem on the surface to dovetail nicely with *Brecht & Co*, is pitched by Honegger as a polemic against him, decrying Fuegi’s “quasi-feminist grandstanding” and “drowning out their voices,” whereas “Kebir lets Hauptmann speak for herself.”¹⁸ Filtered in with awkward digs at Fuegi’s “Ken Starrish moral politics,” the core point that Honegger ascribes to Kebir is that “to portray them solely as tragic victims of sexual exploitation is to deny them the autonomy they strove for and belittle the process of change they sought to set in motion.”¹⁹ That they sought and failed to set this process in motion—or that they were specifically stymied in their efforts to break free by Brecht, according to Fuegi’s plot—is neatly side-stepped by this argument. Honegger even manages to criticize Kebir for the same “trap” that catches Fuegi, which is to define Hauptmann ultimately in terms of Brecht.²⁰ It would seem that this discredits her own argument entirely, as it demonstrates how inescapably Hauptmann *was* in fact defined by Brecht, while suggesting that any exploitation was undertaken *voluntarily*, on ideological grounds. This feminist argument, couched between two exclusive alternatives going under the same name, leads to absurd contortions of logic, such as Gudrun Tabbert-Jones’s formulation: “by current standards Brecht was an ‘equal opportunity employer’ at a time when such an attitude was uncommon.”²¹

The Nationalist Critique

Tabbert-Jones reveals more of the nationalist dimensions of the debate than most other critics, when she avers that “participating in the deconstruction of genius has been a favourite sport among American critics for a long time.”²² No reference or context for this remark is given. Tabbert-Jones quotes the reviews of Fuegi’s book in major German publications, which she says “poke fun” at the “*Gartenzwergperspektive amerikanischer Germanisten*”²³—a phrase she leaves untranslated, which means the “garden-gnome perspective of American German scholars”—a reference to the garden ornaments typical of the stuffy, provincial bourgeois in Germany. As for her own perspective on American German scholars, Tabbert-Jones explains that “they have had great difficulties understanding the concept of *Verfremdung* and *Gestus*,”

apparently because they are “accustomed to psychological realism and naturalistic acting.”²⁴ Honegger’s Fuegi is “a good citizen of PC, global capitalist America,”²⁵ and variations of the word “Puritan” come up in nearly every overseas review of the book, not to mention conversations had in Germany about it.

Frequently overlooked in the debate over Fuegi’s supposed conservatism, Puritanism, and American capitalism is the fact that he is Swiss. He was raised in London in a working-class family and himself faced unemployment before coming to America.²⁶ When interviewed about his book by *German Life* in 1995, he discussed his vilification in a review in *Die Zeit* by Willi Winkler:

I consider that [article] to be a scandalous reappearance of nationalism in a major German newspaper ... to have a reviewer say in as many words that, because this is an American, the book is all about money ... Try substituting *Jude* (Jew) for *Amerikaner* and you come up with a review that is not distinguishable from writing in 1933.²⁷

While this massive escalation of the rhetoric—again invoking the Holocaust—is characteristic of Fuegi’s troubling *ethos*, his point clearly illustrates the problem with such critics even if their assessment of his identity were accurate. Such critiques approach outright racism and are not worthy of consideration, except to reveal their bankruptcy.

The Postmodern Responses

The critiques which could be grouped loosely under the rubric of “postmodernism” cut to the core of Fuegi’s project, as they predominantly explore the question of what authorship means and whether it matters. If the “Death of the Author” put forward in Roland Barthes’ book of that title were an actual event, then Brecht may have wielded the knife. No one in modern literary history, with the possible exception of James Joyce, ever cut, pasted, recast, recombined, adapted, or outright stole the work of so many diverse writers. Taken as a whole, before even examining the contributions of direct collaborators, Brecht’s work looks like an ultimate bricolage, gleefully juxtaposing elements of ancient Chinese, Japanese, and Greek forms, mixed in with William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, John Gay, George Bernard Shaw, Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Verlaine, François Villon, Rudyard Kipling, Upton Sinclair, Walt Whitman, Frank Wedekind, Maxim Gorky, Jaroslav Hasek, Luther Bibel, Jack London, and Robert Service, to name a few. The “collective” credit for this massive recombination of thought and word, gathered under the aegis of “epic theatre,” goes to Brecht and Company: Elisabeth Hauptmann, Margarete Steffin, Ruth Berlau, Hans Eisler, Kurt Weill, Paul Dessau, Paul Hindemith, Erwin Piscator, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Ottwalt, Martin Pohl, Slatan Dudow, Emil Burrow, Bernhard Reich, Asja Lazis, Benno Besson, and Otto Zarek, to name only the most influential.²⁸ It is not that

Brecht never wrote anything original; it is that Brecht did not even believe in the original. James K. Lyon, later a harsh critic of Fuegi, wrote in 1975 that Brecht was “contemptuous of ‘original creativity’ ... the notion of plagiarism was an outgrowth of bourgeois property concepts that arose in the late Middle Ages ... he boldly announced that he intended to re-establish plagiarism in its ‘ancient inherent rights’ by restoring it to social acceptability.”²⁹ Even Willett’s account in *Brecht on Theatre* strongly emphasizes the collective; in his own note, after Brecht refers to “our plays”³⁰ in his 1927 radio speech, Willett says that it marks “the first stage in Brecht’s social view of the arts, and of the idea of the comparative unimportance of individual identity, which underlay much of his work up till 1933 together with his collective method of working.”³¹

It is through the idea of the collective that the case for Brecht as a postmodern author can best be argued, and this same argument can be deployed to render Fuegi not exactly wrong, but obsolete. In his 1998 work *Brecht and Method*, Frederic Jameson mentions Fuegi exactly once, as Jameson’s core concerns are virtually unrelated to any obsessive pursuit of the past: “we do not have to be antiquarian or nostalgic to appreciate the ways in which Brecht is still alive for us: indeed, it is this very plurality of the actual and possible, virtual ‘Brechts’ that will begin to show us how.”³² Jameson’s Brecht is practical, present, and evolving; tied as he is to the moment, he cannot be anchored by any single portrait or method. It is less a critique of Fuegi than a completely new affirmation of praxis, even finding release from Theodor Adorno’s prophecy: “any artwork that supposes it is in possession of its content is plainly naïve in its rationalism; this may define the historically foreseeable limit of Brecht’s work.”³³ Jameson has fully overstepped this theoretical boundary, drawing on the Eastern thought that so appealed to Brecht; he declares that “a Brechtian conception of activity must today go hand in hand with a revival of the older precapitalist sense of time itself, of the change or flowing of all things: for it is the movement of this great river of time or the Tao that will slowly carry us downstream again to the moment of praxis.”³⁴

This vision of Brechtian activity draws on the notion of *Ermattungstaktik* (tactics of attrition), which Brecht explored with Walter Benjamin. *Ermattungstaktik* could be summarised as the thought that “the hard thing gives way,”³⁵ an extension of Lao-Tzu’s philosophy put forward in the *Tao Te Ching*, and an idea which finds manifestation in many Brecht poems and plays. The postmodern discourse surrounding Brecht makes an effort to break free of his motives by examining his tactics. Benjamin himself, writing in 1930, deploys a curious defence against Brecht’s detractors, who had recently brought Brecht to court for copyright violation. He printed this in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*: “there is not one of the gibes levelled against his style of literary activity—plagiarist, trouble-maker, saboteur—that he would not claim as a compliment to his unliterary, anonymous, and yet noticeable activity as educator, thinker, organizer, politician, and theatrical producer.”³⁶ In his absorption of his own strongest critics, Brecht deploys what is effectively a tool of

marketing, used equally well in Stalin-era DDR as in the current system of late capital. Ultimately, however, truth (in Badiou's sense) intervenes in the postmodern "promise and the example of utopian cooperation"³⁷ offered by Brecht and Company. It is this truth, recognised even by Fuegi's shrillest critics, which galvanises Fuegi's *pathos*: it is the weight of actual injustice, of the extent to which Brecht's women were used and discarded, set against Brecht's own comparative security and success. In its glossing over of real difference, the postmodern critique is, finally, naïve. This does not render it worthless; on the contrary, at its best, in *Brecht and Method*, it points toward the only open pathway for contemporary Brechtian theatrical aesthetics.

Trajectories: Politics and Pedagogy

Fuegi's work may reflect nothing of the subtle *Erstattungstaktik* of Benjamin, but it certainly represents his *Jetztzeit*, the Now, the "ability to intervene in events, whether as politician or intellectual, to 'blast open the continuum of history.'"³⁸ Anyone familiar with Badiou's thought will immediately recognise in this formulation the conditions of the *event*, "which brings to pass 'something other' than the situation, opinions, instituted knowledges; the event is a hazardous, unpredictable supplement, which vanishes as soon as it appears."³⁹ Fuegi's act was, finally, the most Brechtian act in Brecht scholarship in recent memory: his book disrupted the knowledge, just as Brecht once was "evental" to his time (though Fuegi's level of disruption is distinct from his accuracy). Two questions remain unanswered: first, what is to be made of Brecht's contested authorship in contemporary practice? Second, what is to be done with Brecht's politics? Incomplete answers of these will extend from the readings of Fuegi and his critics above, first in the theatrical realm (politics) and then in the academic (pedagogy).

Fuegi's thesis regarding authorship has yet to be convincingly and thoroughly disproved. Even Fuegi's harshest critics uphold his most fundamental points, most of which have been recognized lines of inquiry in Brecht scholarship for decades. Tabbert-Jones concedes even the title of the book:

as Brecht saw it, "Brecht" was a company label, which stood for a new concept of dramatic art. Elisabeth Hauptmann, Brecht's first collaborator, recognized that selling a piece under the "Brecht" label was more successful and profitable than insisting on signing her own name. In view of the status of women in the society of that time, Hauptmann's decision was sensible. Not Brecht but his heirs ultimately are responsible for fabricating the myth of single authorship, a myth which was in their own financial interest.⁴⁰

That this quotation appears inside an article which serves, through its condemnation of Fuegi, to sustain that myth of single authorship, makes it all the more telling. Munk also makes it clear at the outset that she is not attacking Fuegi in Brecht's defence:

“Brecht’s financial slipperiness, sexual duplicity, and political temporizing are certainly not news ... He was a misogynist in his youth and always a deceiver; he sold his soul for a theater; he was sometimes a terrible man.”⁴¹ Such readings of Brecht have been part of the mainstream since the field of study first came to be. That they have failed to percolate fully throughout the theatrical and thereby into the public consciousness is a sign of Brecht’s theories being incompletely and inconsistently applied. The mode of protection which so many critics have chosen to defend against Fuegi’s revelations stands in opposition to a stated commitment to the dialectic. Brecht’s heirs are guilty of the same contradictions every time they seek to suppress alternative performances, translations, or historical narratives. It is ultimately harmful to forbid the questioning of this writer whose central philosophy was founded on the ability to question.

But misconceptions of Brecht’s political uses persist. Adorno illustrates it colourfully, saying that his work, which “wanted to provoke social change, was probably socially powerless ... its effect is captured by the English expression of *preaching to the saved*.”⁴² In other words, the marketing of Brecht as a radical or oppositional artist overlooks the fact that he was, in the DDR, presenting audiences with an ideology with which they already agreed. This is the basis of Adorno’s more serious critique of Brecht’s politics: “his didactic style . . . is intolerant of the ambiguity in which thought originates: It is authoritarian.”⁴³ The practical solution is to out-Brecht Brecht; that is, to treat him as he treated the classics. It is a painful and a problematic irony that the only playwright who will not withstand the Brechtian treatment is Brecht himself. The Brecht “exhaustion” must be shaken off to ask: “are genuinely oppositional art forms, or genuinely oppositional forms of culture, still possible?”⁴⁴

The questions which the Fuegi controversy brought up penetrate to the core of modern academia. What constitutes “engagement” with a writer? Where does the personal attachment to a subject of research—whether love or loathing—begin and end? Extending from the political issue, what happens when an iconoclast becomes an icon? The most revealing and frightening aspect of the pedagogical reaction to the Fuegi event is not the lack of agreement between the critics, but the lack of real discussion. In the culture industry, careers can be built on one version of history, and a radical shift in that history can be perceived as a threat, or not perceived at all. The security of such positions amounts to the professionalization of thought, which is antithetical to thought. A contemporary reading of Brecht calls for a re-invigoration of the role of the question, and a different afterlife from the one we have been sold.

NOTES

¹Bertolt Brecht is quoted in Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna

Bostock (London: Verso, 1992), p. 119.

² John Willett, James K. Lyon, Siegfried Mews, and Hans Christian Nørregaard, “A Brechtbuster Goes Bust: Scholarly Mistakes, Misquotes, and Malpractices in John Fuegi’s *Brecht and Company*,” *Brecht Then and Now/ Damals und Heute: The Brecht Yearbook/ Das Brecht Jahrbuch* 20 (1995): 260. (Hereafter *Yearbook*).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 363.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

⁵ John Fuegi, *Brecht & Co.: Sex, Politics, and the Making of the Modern Drama*, 2nd ed. (NY: Grove, 2002), p. xxvii.

⁶ Robert Brustein, review of *Brecht & Co.*, by John Fuegi, *The New Republic* (10 October 1994). Accessed 6 January 2006, available from <http://www.highbeam.com/library/doc3.asp?DOCID=1P1:28558671&num=3&ctrlInfo=Round18%3AProd%3ASR%3AResult&ao=&FreePremium=BOTHBrecht and Company>.

⁷ In one year (September 2003-August 2004) spent attending theatre in Berlin, including a total of eight productions of Brecht plays, not a single “Mitarbeiterin” (usually listed on the inside cover of standard German Suhrkamp editions) was seen mentioned in the dramaturgical material, but I have heard about instances of this in conversation.

⁸ John Willett, letter in response to “Giving the Devil His Due,” by Michael Meyer (1 December 1994), *New York Review of Books* 42, no.1 (12 January 1995).

⁹ Willett et al., *Yearbook*, 367.

¹⁰ As this conversation took place outside a formal interview setting, and as the comments of the professor were casual, unpublished, and open to interpretation, the identity of the professor has been protected. The quotations, however, are direct and unchanged. The guest lecture and the subsequent discussion were on 10 January 2005 at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.

¹¹ Fuegi, *Brecht & Co.*, xx.

¹² Erika Munk, “Brecht & Company: A Review Essay,” *Brecht Then and Now/ Damals und Heute: The Brecht Yearbook/ Das Brecht Jahrbuch* 20 (1995): 237.

¹³ Klaus Völker, *Brecht: A Biography*, trans. John Nowell (London: Marion Boyars, 1979), p. 334.

¹⁴ Bob Wake, review of *Brecht & Co.*, by John Fuegi. Accessed 10 January 2006, available from <http://www.culturevulture.net/books/BrechtandCompany.htm>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Munk, *Brecht & Company*, 245-46.

¹⁷ Wake, *Brecht & Co.*

¹⁸ Gitta Honegger, “Kebir contra Fuegi,” *Theater* 29, no. 2 (1999): 157.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

²¹ Gudrun Tabbert-Jones, “The Construction of the Sexist and Exploiter Bertolt Brecht,” *Brecht Then and Now/ Damals und Heute: The Brecht Yearbook/ Das Brecht Jahrbuch* 20 (1995): 254.

²²Ibid., p. 250.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., p. 251.

²⁵Honegger, *Kebir*, 157.

²⁶Robin Detje, "John Fuegi, der Gottseibeius der Brechtforschung, ist in Berlin," *Berliner Zeitung*, (13 Dezember 1997). Accessed 10 January 2006, available from <http://www.robindetje.de/brecht.html>.

²⁷Megan Ratner, "Whose Work IS It, Anyway? An Interview with John Fuegi," *German Life* (31 March 1995). Accessed 17 January 2006, available from <http://www.highbeam.com/library/doc3.asp?DOCID=1P1:28349095&num=1&ctrlInfo=Round18%3AProd%3ASR%3AResult&ao=&FreePremium=BOTH>.

²⁸Both of the lists of sources for Brecht draw on readings throughout Brecht studies; each name is documented by sources in addition to Fuegi, and most are common knowledge.

²⁹James K. Lyon, *Bertolt Brecht and Rudyard Kipling: A Marxist's Imperialist Mentor* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), p. 2.

³⁰Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. John Willett (NY: Hill and Wang, 1964), p. 18.

³¹Ibid., p. 19.

³²Frederic Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 5.

³³Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 27.

³⁴Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, 4.

³⁵Stanley Mitchell, "Introduction," in *Understanding Brecht*, by Walter Benjamin (London: Verso, 1992), p. xviii.

³⁶Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, 27.

³⁷Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, 10.

³⁸Mitchell, *Understanding Brecht*, xvii.

³⁹Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London: Verso, 2001), p. 67.

⁴⁰Tabbert-Jones, *Construction*, 252.

⁴¹Munk, *Brecht & Company*, 240.

⁴²Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 242.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Nels Jeff Rogers, "The Brecht Industry: Politics and Avant-Garde in a Divided Germany," *Communications* 30, no. 1 & 2 (June 2001): 43-47.