

## **Practicing Authorship: The Case of Brecht's Plays**

Monika Krause

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Bertolt Brecht collaborated with partners and friends throughout his life. Almost all his plays – including *The Threepenny Opera*, *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, *Galileo* and *Mother Courage* – are the product of a close cooperation between Brecht and a set of his colleagues. They shared in collecting material, translating sources, putting text into verse and editing and reediting after rehearsals. Among forms of literary partnerships, the Brecht circle is an extreme case of sustained collective production. Public recognition, however, has been focused on the individual Brecht, and “Brecht” has come to denote an author like many others. What explains this discrepancy between the process of producing these plays and public recognition? How have these texts become associated with one individual? In my analysis, I draw on letters by Brecht and his collaborators, memoirs, biographical research and the reception of Brecht's life and work.<sup>1</sup> Most prominent among his co-authors are writer Elisabeth Hauptmann, actress Grete Steffin and the Danish journalist Ruth Berlau.

It is tempting to focus on Brecht the person in trying to understand what is specific about the Brecht circle. Brecht is often said to be exceptionally charismatic and thus able to

attract collaborators. He is sometimes portrayed as exceptionally ruthless in exploiting those around him. Sexist ideology is also suggested as a factor: Many of Brecht's collaborators were women and some of them were his partners as well as his collaborators. The difficulties women faced in the literary field at that time need to be considered if we want to understand why that form of workshop emerged at that particular time.

Brecht's personality, however, is not enough to understand the elision of the contribution of his collaborators. Neither is gendered ideology alone – if understood as a set of free-floating meanings. Rather, it is the institution of authorship as a real abstraction from the practices of production, which obliterates the role of the collaborators and hurts the women of the circle. The institutions of publishing, literary scholarship, biography and journalism all have stakes in producing “Brecht” as the sole author of the work.

Receiving Brecht as an “author” equivalent to other authors helps solve their particular practical problems of coordination and strategies of reproduction. I begin by reviewing work on authorship and collaboration, then analyze the collaborative practices that produced Brecht's plays.

### ***Approaches to Authorship***

What does it mean to talk about “an author”? Or, as Foucault (1977) urged us to consider, how is an author produced? After the post-structuralist critiques of the 1960s and 1970s,

we can no longer take the naïve view that there is a simple relationship between the proper name, the person, the work, and its meaning. The author is a historically specific phenomenon and it is a specifically modern phenomenon. Much has been said about the elective affinity of the concept of the author with modern, western individualism; feminists in particular have criticized the masculinist connotations of the concept (Moi 1985).<sup>2</sup>

Authorship can be traced to the late eighteenth century. Across genres, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries mark a transition from art produced in direct relationships of patronage to art produced more directly for an expanding public (Elias 1991, Bourdieu 1996). The legal form of authorship responds to the needs of a group of writers who sought to make a living by writing under these conditions (Vogel 1973, Woodmansee 1984). These shifts coincided with a shift in writers' self-understandings and in readers' expectations. Yet the author is not produced once and for all. For it to continue to exist, it needs to be reproduced again and again, in every generation, but also on a daily basis. Rather than analyze authorship only as a structural or legal reality, I analyze it from the bottom up as it is reproduced. From a producer's perspective the contradictions of authorship can become visible. The case of Brecht's plays allows us to look at the institution of authorship at its most unstable and potentially at its most violent.

### *Collaboration and Authorship*

Students of literature have been interested in the idea of collaboration for some time.

Traditionally, the aim of scholars studying collaboration was to understand exactly who wrote what and to correct attributions accordingly. Some scholars treated collaborations as a pollution of pure writing and tried to cleanse an author's work from inauthentic materials.

Others set out to establish collaborators as authors in their own right. This strategy has yielded some insights into the previously unacknowledged contribution of collaborators. Some of this work has been limited, however, by a tendency to take the category of authorship for granted: the aim has often been to establish the true authors of the texts in question, making authorship the starting point rather than the target of the investigation. In the wake of structuralist and post-structuralist critiques of authorship, collaboration became interesting as a potential challenge to the ideology of individual authorship. A strand of recent work celebrates collaboration as a form of resistance against hegemonic conceptions of subjectivity and scholars have begun to reflect on the transgressive potential of collaboration in their own practices of writing and teaching (Peck/Mink 1998, Ede/Lunsford 1990, Leonard et al. 1994).

Scholars have also begun to empirically analyze collaborative practices across literary history.<sup>3</sup> On a general level, Becker (1982) and other sociologists have long maintained

that the production of art is a collective process. For the more specific case of writing together literary scholars have examined various forms of co-writing and asked why and how writers collaborate, what its meanings are for the participants and how it affects the texts in question. Scholars have recovered the forgotten forms of collaboration before “authorship” became institutionalized (Masten 1994). Jack Stillinger (1991) and others have collected evidence that various forms of co-writing have been quite common throughout literary history, even at the height of the cult of the solitary genius in romanticism. Stillinger also revealed the different forms multiple authorship can take: “[T]he young Keats being refined, polished and restrained by well-intentioned friends and publishers; the middle-aged Mill being spruced up by his wife for attractive autobiographical presentation; Coleridge constructing his philosophy with lengthy extracts taken over verbatim without acknowledgment from the Germans; Eliot seizing on the revisions and excisions of his mentor” (Stillinger 1991: 182).

Given these findings, the question arises: If art is a collective process and if co-writing more specifically is such a common phenomenon, why do we continue to think of art work in terms of individual authors? Why does collaboration have to be discovered and rediscovered by scholars and other critics? How are these collective processes obliterated?

### *The Making of Epic Drama*

From the beginning of his career, Brecht worked very closely with others. One of his first collaborators was Lion Feuchtwanger, who helped him revise *The Life of Edward II of England* (Brecht 1966). In 1924, when the play *Man Equals Man* was produced, Brecht was living in Berlin in an apartment that his girlfriend, actress Helene Weigel, had rented to him. Elisabeth Hauptmann would visit in the morning, bringing some of her own translations of Kipling. They would edit and write together. At lunchtime, Brecht would go out to eat with Weigel and their son, Stefan, while Hauptmann would continue writing.

Hauptmann came to Berlin when she was in her early twenties to study, write and to escape the confines of her role as a private teacher in the country. She met Brecht at a party and soon became his secretary and closest collaborator. Hauptmann contributed to almost all of Brecht's works between 1925 and 1933, most notably the plays, including *Man Equals Man*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, and *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*. Grete Steffin, a working class actress and writer, worked with Brecht among others on *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*, *Galileo*, *Mother Courage*, *The Good Person of Szechwan*, and *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*. Ruth Berlau, a Danish journalist and actress, would later work on *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Over the years, his collaborators would also include writers Emil Hesse-Burri, Hermann Borchart, and Hella Wuolijoki, composer Hanns Eisler and Kurt Weill, and directors Bernard Reich and Slatan Dudow, to name but a few.

These works are today known as Brecht's and as his dramatic oeuvre they are key to what we understand Brecht to be about. There have recently been challenges to this attribution, led most provocatively by John Fuegi. Fuegi has incurred the wrath of Brecht's heirs and devotees by setting out to debunk the genius Brecht. Fuegi's and others' recent research seeks to measure the respective input of Brecht and his co-workers and thus establish true authorship (Fuegi 2002, Horst 1992, Hanssen 1995). In so doing, these scholars take for granted the concept of authorship and overlook the truly collaborative nature of producing these works. The collaborators all came from the same milieu, which provided shared orientations and artistic ambitions. The inner circle shared an ideological position and a vision of a larger political contribution. The "third cause" came to be the label for the cause of the workers' movement and these artists saw themselves as contributing to that movement within the realm of art. Weigel introduced Brecht to communism, Hauptmann joined the Communist Party in 1929 and Steffin had been active in the labor movement since her teenage years. To Hauptmann, Brecht, and Steffin sheer productivity was a value in and of itself, regardless of the concrete publishing arrangement. They disciplined each other to increase the output of the workshop. They were used to working on a variety of projects at the same time and the process of collecting ideas and using and re-using them was a collective one. Many of the Brecht-Hauptmann plays – and some of their poems – were based on translations of foreign sources; sometimes, as in the case of the Chinese poems, on translations of translations. Hauptmann translated Kipling and got Brecht interested in Japanese No theatre. Translation is by its very nature collaborative –

it is collaboration with the writer of the original. But in their routines, Brecht and Hauptmann made the back-and-forth process of writing and editing integral to their work. Hauptmann would provide a first draft of a translation, Brecht would edit it, they would discuss the piece, edit it again, and Hauptmann would finally prepare it for publication. The plays and some of the short stories draw on diverse sources such as newspaper clipping and popular songs. Hauptmann contributed sources based on her knowledge of English and interest in American popular culture. After Brecht's death, Hauptmann recalled: "The ideas for a play came easy [to Brecht] – 10 to 20 pages – but then to work it through dramaturgically – that was hard" (quoted in Hannsen 1995: 19).<sup>4</sup> Episodes and fables had to be turned into dialogue, the material needed to be structured, songs and choir passages had to be written.

*Man Equals Man* existed as a rough draft when Hauptmann joined Brecht. She found a solution to a central problem of the plot: how to motivate the main character's getting involved with three soldiers (Hannsen 1995: 21-22). Hauptmann suggested they could tempt him with a proposed deal regarding an elephant. Consequently Brecht had her hired by Kiepenheuer to help him with this play. Hauptmann worked with Brecht at his family's home in Augsburg and at hers in Westphalia (Hannsen 1995: 23). She contributed translations of Kipling (Lyon 1975). *The Threepenny Opera*, the biggest success of the circle, is based on Hauptmann's translation of John Gay's eighteenth-century play *The Beggar's Opera*. She suggested the project to Brecht, who suggested it to Ernst Aufricht, the manager of the *Theatre am Schiffbauerdamm*. Hauptmann also

contributed passages from *Happy End*. It was Weill's music that made the play so memorable to many. On *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, Brecht wrote: "The play is based on the play *Happy End* by Elisabeth Hauptmann in collaboration with Borchardt, Burri and Hauptmann" (quoted in Hannsen 1995: 50). The theme of a young girl trying to do good first appears in Hauptmann's story "Bessie Soundso" about the Salvation Army. There are strong parallels between *Happy End* and *Saint Joan* and the latter contains songs from the former (Hannsen 1995: 58). Knopf writes, "One can conclude from the material that Emil Hesse-Burri and Elisabeth Hauptmann did most of the initial work, including the writing and they provided the structure of the fable; Brecht's work consisted mostly in checking the proposals, editing the texts and expanding them" (Knopf 1986: 107). Mittenzwei suggests that Brecht, Hauptmann and Burri would meet regularly in Brecht's apartment and work on the play together, while Hans Borchardt, Bernhard Reich and Walter Benjamin consulted on the project (Mittenzwei 1987: 329).

Commentators have noted that the female characters in Brecht plays became deeper once Hauptmann started working for him (Fuegi 2002). The dialogue in the play is enhanced by the different voices of the collaborators and the co-writing underscores the pastiche element of epic drama (Kebir 2002). The plays were also written with a view to their performance. *Happy End* was initially conceived around operetta singer Fritzi Massary – Brecht originally called it the "Massary Project." Work on a play continued during rehearsals, including the actors in the production process. As Hauptmann notes in her diary, "B[recht] is in the middle of rehearsals for *Baal* ... casting is finalized ...

Afterwards worked on *Baal*” (quoted in Hansen 1995: 28). *The Threepenny Opera* was not finished until days before it premiered and *Happy End* premiered as a draft.

Collaborators shared editorial authority. In 1946 Eric Bentley worked closely with Brecht in Berlin and it was Hauptmann who supervised his work translating the dramas of the workshop. In his memoirs he recalled how Hauptmann wrote texts published as Brecht’s that were never presented to Brecht for approval. “Brecht’s lines were sometimes corrected by Frau Hauptmann and it was fine with him. ‘Yes, yes,’ he would tell me, ‘let that stand’” (Bentley 1991: 25).

### ***A Workshop in Context***

Workshops have a long history – the painters’ workshops of the Renaissance are perhaps the best-known example. A workshop led by a man staffed by his lovers is a more historically specific phenomenon – but it is not unique to the Brecht case. What made this workshop possible at this point in time? It is tempting to attribute it to Brecht’s exceptional charisma. In many accounts, it is Brecht’s personal ability to make people work for him that explains the workshop. Others say Brecht needed more help than other writers. Still others emphasize the actors’ intentions to break with bourgeois forms of living. There are other factors to consider, however. The womanizing genius type does not emerge before the end of the nineteenth century when women gradually gained formal equality. The formal liberation of women since the turn of the century was not matched by positive equality, especially within the arts. Publishing with a male author marked a transitional phase of women’s incorporation into the field.

The women in Brecht's circle were part of the generation of "new women" who gained visibility after the First World War. After centuries of systematic exclusion from the public sphere, women had benefited from a series of legal reforms: As of 1909 women could attend universities in Germany; in 1918 the Republican revolution gave them the vote. During and after the war they moved into the cities to work, replacing soldiers and men who had died in the war. It was under these conditions that Marie-Luise Fleisser moved from a girls' school in provincial Ingoldstadt to Munich to take up literary studies. During her first year she left the Catholic girls' dorm to live in her own apartment and joined the Bohemians in Munich and the circle around Lion Feuchtwanger. Though Elisabeth Hauptmann was forbidden by her wealthy parents to attend university, she was able to defy her parents' will, partly because she could move to Berlin with a reasonable hope of obtaining one of the secretarial positions opening up for women there.

Hauptmann worked as a secretary and translator before she joined Brecht's team in late 1924. She had started writing well before that and she continued to write on her own, even if her work with Brecht often left her little time for her own work. "Worked only a little because I was at Brecht's. Translated Kipling. Some beautiful things," she notes in her diary on 13 March 1926 (quoted in Kebir 1997: 44). Several of her stories were published in *Uhu* magazine and the *Berliner Börsenkurier* newspaper during the 1920s. With another author, Emil Hesse-Burri, Hauptmann wrote for radio productions. The young worker Grete Steffin met Weigel and Brecht in a communist theatre group. The contact to the Brechts afforded her a chance to pursue her literary ambitions.

Hauptmann, Steffin and Berlau found both meaning and resources in their work with Brecht. Paying publication opportunities were scarce and even when Brecht was already well established, his pieces were not always easy to sell. Hauptmann's diaries attest to the difficulties she encountered in her role as Brecht's agent. The number of target journals was small, and sometimes neither the *Uhu* nor the *Vossche Zeitung* nor *Scherl's Magazine* wanted a piece. When the National Socialists took power in Germany, many of these sources of income dried up; like other writers Hauptmann, Brecht and Steffin went into exile and wrote for the drawer.

Women's writing had traditionally been accorded low value and associated with specific forms such as letters and the novel. In poetry and drama women were extremely under-represented. For a playwright to be noticed plays need to be produced; and having a play produced requires access to directors and stages. Drama was public in its content, and Brecht reflected literary conventions when he said, "It has not been possible for me to find a vision strong enough in the relationship of a man to a woman that would be able to sustain an entire play" (quoted in Fuegi 2002: 172). Within drama, women were associated with the low status genres such as children's theatre and romantic comedies. The literary field continued to erect barriers against female writers in the 1920s. Between 1918 and 1933, 68 plays by women premiered at one of the 218 main German theatres listed in Willett's *Theatre in the Weimar Republic*. Out of 476 first-time productions that Willett lists as noteworthy, only six are by female authors.<sup>5</sup> It is clear that both

Hauptmann and Steffin agreed to publish their own work under Brecht's name. When Hauptmann was asked for her reasons, she said: "His name would carry more weight." Steffin would later say, "It made more money." Because he was well-known, Brecht was often offered projects and handed them on to his associates. When writer Martin Anderson Nexø asked Brecht to translate his autobiography from Danish into German, Grete Steffin accepted the job.

Publishing under the name of a well-known man was not an uncommon strategy at that time. We know for example that Zelda Fitzgerald published short stories under her husband's name because it would earn more money. Like Fitzgerald, as a well-known author Brecht had contractual obligations to deliver certain types of new writing regularly to his publishing houses. The writing of female associates could be published easily this way and could help fulfill these obligations.

### ***Authorship as a Real Abstraction***

In his book *Brecht and Company*, John Fuegi portrays Brecht as someone who has no respect for his co-workers, friends, or lovers and who seeks to exploit them at every opportunity. This is at best an incomplete account and distorts systematically by attributing complex social outcomes to individual desire or intent. It is the institution of authorship itself, which systematically abstracts the work from the practices of its production and obliterates the collaborative nature of the work – and therewith his

partners' contribution. The formal designation of authorship in the legal sense is only one anchor of this abstraction from the context of production. The "author" as an established and familiar "thing" also provides a coordinating function and solves many other people's practical needs. The real abstraction from practice is amplified by the social organization of the publishing industry, the press, and of literary scholarship. Each of these institutions has its own stakes in making "Brecht" an author like other authors. In this process, actors' meanings are appropriated and come to confront them as external forces. In the case of Brecht, in private there seems to have been little disagreement between parties about who wrote what. We have already discussed some of the shared meanings and decisions among the collaborators. Brecht also often acknowledged the contributions of his collaborators. As Brecht said in a private dedication of the manuscript *Man Equals Man* to Hauptmann: "It was a troublesome play and even compiling the manuscript out of 20 pounds of paper was heavy work. It took me two days, half a bottle of Cognac, four bottles of seltzer, eight to ten cigars and all my patience and it was the only thing I did by myself" (quoted in Häntzschel 2002a: 162). To Steffin, he wrote about the Threepenny Novel after celebratory reviews following joint writing and editing: "Generally, you seem to have written a masterpiece, old muck. They especially celebrate your pure language. No kidding: it is good, to have the most demanding reader at home" (quoted in Häntzschel 2002a: 218).

From early on, the plays written by Hauptmann, Brecht and co. were primarily received as Brecht's and the recognition was associated with his person alone. Brecht had

celebrated some early successes in Munich as a protégé of Lion Feuchtwanger along with his then-collaborator stage-designer Caspar Neher. He had made his name as a prospect and this proved to have an avalanche effect. Critics began to take a stand for or against him; they reviewed “Brecht” and consistently personalized their attention, creating an individual behind the text. The battle between Brecht and the leading critic of the time, Alfred Kerr, took on a dynamic of its own (Wyss 1977). In the public’s perception, everything work-related became labeled as “Brecht” and the women became invisible as writers. Bavarian writer Marie-Luise Fleisser’s play *Fegefeuer in Ingolstadt (Purgatory in Ingolstadt)*, the most celebrated production of a female-authored play in the Weimar Republic, demonstrates this tendency to the extreme. Fleisser worked on this play in Munich when Brecht was in Berlin and there is little evidence of any contact between the two at that time. Despite this, in a generally enthusiastic review of the play, Kerr playfully repeated the line, “if Fleisser exists.” “Fleisser,” Kerr wrote, “is a gifted naturalist – if she exists ... and if she is not a pseudonym for Brecht” (Häntzschel 2002a: 75).

The collaborative work becomes at best an afterthought – as when the contribution of one of the women to Brecht’s work is emphasized – against the existing icon Brecht.

Professional readers infer the positions of an individual from the work and expect a certain consistency. Where it is lacking they produce that consistency, as that of an artist but also often as that of the person Brecht (Barthes 1977). The convention in journalism to use personal birthdays and other anniversaries to catch readers’ attention further

personalizes authorship. General readers are also expected to be receptive to the individualization of the author. Single authorship solves a coordination problem for them as well: It reproduces the way they are taught to think of themselves. A variety of practices have drawn on the value of the brand, have reproduced it and have enhanced it by their investments. Its value grows and with that the work is more and more removed from the context of its production.

Literary scholars establish their careers by becoming authorities on one of the canonical authors. Evoking a big name confers status. The most careful interpretive work is often done on the basis of a single text, treating each play in its own right. Yet in the case of Brecht, the most influential works of interpretation focus on “Brecht’s” work as a whole. The plays are grouped with a variety of other texts as Brecht’s work – including the poems and his letters, yet excluding the work of his collaborators published under their own names. For the various institutions of reception and their interests of valuation, comparability is important. Labeling Brecht the author of the workshop’s products makes Brecht comparable to other authors; comparing “Brecht” to other authors obliterates the specificities of production for the case of Brecht.

Brecht and Piscator came to stand for two different projects that competed closely within the theater scene in the 1920s in the Weimar Republic. The logic of that competition encouraged an equivalency of both names – a game in which Brecht actively participated.

Later these comparisons became the basis of dissertations and books. Scholars have compared “Brecht” in book-length treatises to Lessing, Heine, Büchner, Shaw and Adamov among others. As early as the 1920s Hauptmann was looking to establish a car sponsorship deal for Brecht. She sought to find out what he would have to do to get a free car. Her attempts failed. His name has since been used for various other institutions, some of them closely concerned with his person or the texts associated with him such as the International Brecht Society, or the Brecht *Jahrbuch*. Memoirs of Brecht have become a genre in themselves. His ex-partners Paula Banholzer and Ruth Berlau have published books on their lives with Brecht, as have his apprentice directors Manfred Wekwerth and Werner Hecht and the British-American critic Eric Bentley (Banholzer/Poldner/Eser 1981, Berlau/Bunge 1985, Bentley 1991, Hecht 1978, Wekwerth 1978).

Others draw more broadly on the associations of the name such as the Brecht-Forum, a cultural center in New York City and the Brecht School, a public high school in his hometown of Augsburg. The song “ICE Bertolt Brecht” by the punk band Goldene Zitronen satirizes these appropriations – its title suggesting a high-speed train in West Germany named after the supposedly revolutionary artist.

## *Differential Alienation*

The author is beyond the control of any individual – including Brecht himself.

Authorship confronts him as something external as well and the abstraction of meanings does a certain amount of violence to his experience. Foucault was to protest the violence involved in the expectation of consistency when he replied to an interviewer: “Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order” (Foucault 1977: 17). For Brecht the person, however, authorship also brings considerable power – a power he also often used on behalf of his team, for example when he organized the move to exile and when he was able to set up shop in the GDR with considerable privileges after the Second World War. Yet he can command the most authentic use of his name and can draw on other people’s investments when doing so. The collaborators are alienated from themselves and each other, from their texts and the material and symbolic recognition for those texts.

Authorship comes to stand between them and between Brecht and them. Hauptmann sometimes received credit as a translator – she received 12.5 per cent of proceeds from *The Threepenny Opera*. Her name appears as a co-author on several of the plays – partly because Brecht had excluded co-authored plays from his contract with Ullstein. Most of the time, though, once a piece was published under Brecht’s name – even as the result of a consensual strategy – the royalties would automatically go to Brecht’s account. Brecht could afford to wait and see; the default worked in his favor. The contributors had to ask for their share if only to help pay their living expenses. Hauptmann in particular acquired a reputation for her constant negotiating and “petty nagging.” After Brecht left

Kiepenheuer in 1925, she lost her salary as his secretary and was dependent on income from her writings. In a letter to Lotte Lenya, Kurt Weill references Hauptmann's nickname, "Tantiemensadie" ("Royaltiessadie") and reports that dramaturges would shout "hide the plays, Hauptmann is coming to edit" (Häntzschel 2002a: 164). Separated from the group in exile, Hauptmann wrote to Brecht, asking for compensation for her work on the play *Roundheads and Pointed Heads*, somewhat embarrassed and belittling her own contribution: "Even though I was not important in the further course of writing except for one basic idea – the horses – which I am truly ashamed to write about, I would like to claim my share of the earnings like in *The Threepenny Opera*." Shortly before his death, Brecht did assign the rights of *The Threepenny Opera* to Elisabeth Hauptmann, and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* to Ruth Berlau but his wife Helene Weigel successfully challenged the validity of the will and secured most of the proceeds for herself and her children (Hayman 1983, Völker 1976).

After Brecht's death, the "work" came to confront those who survived him in an even more reified manner. Hauptmann, who played a leading role in publishing Brecht's collected works, was heavily criticized for not justifying her editorial decisions in great detail. This contrasts strongly with the independent role she had played in writing and editing these texts in the first place. But Brecht "the person" could no longer counteract Brecht "the author" and the various interests that have been attached to it.

### *The Invention of Brecht's Private Life*

As everything work-related is labeled Brecht, the work is taken out of the context of its production and re-attached to Brecht as an individualized person. The context of his life in turn is separated from the work and construed as private. This individual is the starting point for biographers and others who are in the business of mining letters and anecdotes for revealing details. Brecht's relationships to his collaborators and especially the women have been read as primarily personal and sexual relationships. Brecht's biographer Klaus Völker is often quoted remarking that Brecht "changed his women like a shirt." Poet Robert Gernhardt has professed that one would like to know "womit und wodurch und weshalb ihm die Frauen derart" – "how and with what and why women fell for him this way" – expressing the hope "to learn from the classics" (Gernhardt 1996: 261).

Even though the letters between Brecht and his female co-workers speak as often about joint projects, publication possibilities and contracts as they speak about love, the interpretations of the lives of the women stress their private troubles as lovers of the unreliable genius. Not just his letters but also his work is mined for direct evidence of his cruelty towards them. Of the surviving letters by these women, the most longing and desperate are typically cited and re-cited. All women associated with Brecht are retrospectively attributed a secret desire to make him marry them – even in cases where evidence for a romantic relationship is very thin. Marie-Luise Fleisser – like Brecht a protégé of Lion Feuchtwanger – is counted again and again among Brecht's lovers. Even though there is little contemporary evidence for such a relationship, Brecht's biographers

are ready to interpret her life throughout the 1920s accordingly. Hayman claims that Fleisser was so disappointed to hear about Brecht's marriage that she immediately got engaged to another poet (Hayman 1983). Fuegi (2002) reports her suicide attempt after Brecht's marriage, for which there is no evidence.<sup>6</sup> It is unclear whether Hauptmann and Brecht were ever lovers, yet commentators typically repeat that she tried to commit suicide in 1929, when she learned that Brecht and Weigel had married.

The predominant image of the Brecht circle is today one of a genius and a harem of lovers rather than of a workshop for writing. To correct this portrayal is not to say there was nothing sexual about these relationships – in many cases there was. Yet even the sexual and emotional aspects of these relationships are poorly understood when isolated from the practices of the participants and their social context. These misrepresentations are, however, not easy to counter in a lasting way – they are a consequence of the gendered logic of authorship.

### ***Conclusion***

The defining works of Brechtian epic theater – such as *The Threepenny Opera*, *Mother Courage* and the *Lehrstücke*, among others – are collective productions; yet these texts have been subsumed into the life work of one person and “Brecht” has come to stand in for an author like many others. Even against considerable active and passive resistance from subjects' own attempts to create meaning and a narrative and their writing practices,

individual authorship is reproduced. The institutions of publishing, literary scholarship, biography and journalism all have stakes in producing Brecht as an author like other authors to solve their particular problems of coordination and strategies of reproduction. For the collaborators this contributed to their alienation. Their work came to confront them as something external and their recognition by others was mediated through the construction of “Brecht.”

Is this alienation inevitable? How could authorship be more in tune with actual writing practices? Authorship is institutionally firmly entrenched and in order to formulate and identify oppositional projects, it is not enough to simply deconstruct authorship or try to undo it by unconventional writing or reading practices. It is worth investigating more closely in these terms how the relationship between practices and authorship has changed historically and in particular in the last decades. Has authorship become more democratic? Here, I can only hint at some of the developments worth considering. The gender inequalities in the literary field that have made possible the Brechtian workshop seem to have lessened. Women today find it easier to publish on their own and access to stages may be more open to female playwrights. The prominence of Sarah Kane, Carol Churchill and Elisabeth Jelinek bear witness to the new possibilities that have opened up for female playwrights.

Have the technological innovations of the last decades – most notably the internet – lessened the separation of authorship from writing practices for men and women? The internet has made available broader opportunities for publishing. Blogging has often been hailed as a vehicle of the democratization of authorship. Some groups such as the breast cancer patients studied by Orgad (2005) have used the internet to share their experience and create public narratives. Certain experiments notwithstanding, however, the impact on the literary scene of web-only publishing has been less dramatic than in other genres such as journalism,<sup>7</sup> and the impact on the performing arts has been minimal. We also know that attention to websites is highly concentrated and it is important to distinguish between the opportunity to publish and the opportunity to reach broader audiences and have an impact in the world.

Other developments may also have heightened rather than alleviated the tensions between writing practices and effective authorship: increasing concentration in the publishing industry and cuts in public funding for the performing arts may have made authorship less democratic. Producers concentrate their budget for promotion to very few candidates. This might bring the alienation of unprecedented fame to the very few, and the alienation of obscurity or niche success to the many.

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## **Notes**

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<sup>1</sup> A series of recent biographies have made new material on the women around Brecht (specifically Weigel, Berlau, and Hauptmann) available to the German-reading public. See Häntzschel (2002a), Horst (1992),

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Kebir (1997, 2000, 2002), Stern (2000), Hanssen (1995), Hauck (forthcoming). Letters and diaries are published as Brecht (1973, 1992), Fleisser (2001), Steffin (1999). On the problem of *Mitarbeit* see also Willett (1983) and Wiedenmann (1988).

<sup>2</sup> Some feminists have expressed concerns about the political consequences of such abstract critiques and have sought to recover the concept in the name of a concern with “agency,” and in particular feminine or other previously marginalized “agencies” (Christian 1988, Miller 1986).

<sup>3</sup> On collaborations see among others Laird (1994-95; 2000) Köstenbaum (1989) Stillinger (1991), London (1999), Woodmansee and Jaszi (1994), Hahn (1991), Horst (1992), Pethica (1988), Mudge (1989).

<sup>4</sup> Translations from sources in German are mine.

<sup>5</sup> Compiled from Willett (1988), Stürzer (1993).

<sup>6</sup> The legend of an affair between Fleisser and Brecht was reinforced by Fleisser’s short story *Avant-garde*, in which a provincial female writer gets drawn into and destroyed by the urban *Bohème* around a famous male poet. Häntzschel (2000b) argues that for Fleisser the story of being Brecht's victim presented on *Avant-garde* was an opportune explanation for her disappearance from the literary scene in the 1930s.

<sup>7</sup> But see McGann (2001).