

Aberystwyth University

Brecht and the writer's workshop – Fatzer and other dramatic projects

Kipp, Lara

Published in:

Studies in Theatre and Performance

DOI:

[10.1080/14682761.2019.1606980](https://doi.org/10.1080/14682761.2019.1606980)

Publication date:

2019

Citation for published version (APA):

Kipp, L. (2019). Brecht and the writer's workshop – Fatzer and other dramatic projects: Edited by Tom Kuhn and Charlotte Ryland, London, Methuen Drama, 2019, 391 pp., £23.39 (paperback), ISBN: 978-1-4742-7328-2. *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 43(1), 120-121. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682761.2019.1606980>

Document License

CC BY-NC

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Aberystwyth Research Portal (the Institutional Repository) are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Aberystwyth Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Aberystwyth Research Portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

tel: +44 1970 62 2400
email: is@aber.ac.uk

Brecht and the Writer's Workshop – Fatzer and Other Dramatic Projects, edited by Tom Kuhn and Charlotte Ryland, London, Methuen Drama, 391 pp., £23.39 (paperback), ISBN: 9781474273282

Tom Kuhn and Charlotte Reyland present a collection of fragmented play texts by Bertholt Brecht, each offered with its own introduction for better contextualisation and orientation. These framings, each by a 'team of experienced writers, scholars and translators' (back cover), enable the reader to understand the texts that follow in terms of Brecht's overall oeuvre, but more importantly offer clarity about the constructed and fragmented nature of each. These contextual precursors, which discuss the 'texture of the material and the processes' (3) of its development, also ground each play in terms of national and international political events of the time. Further, each text's individual introduction offers insights into Brecht's substantial collaborative processes. This is clearly apparent in this collection: of the six fragments contained in this collection, four were conceived in direct collaboration with others.

In the main introduction, Kuhn and Ryland argue that Brecht's process of continuous reworking and appreciation for incompleteness sets a sound precedent for presenting these play texts as part of a genre of 'masterly fragment[s]' (6). They clearly set out the difficult editing processes, as the timeline for Brecht's various projects is unclear. In addition, authorship of parts of the fragments may also be in question. The collection therefore constitutes materials of 'often contested status' (4). In order to present the materials in a way that renders them 'to some degree at least, readable and useable' (9), the editors employ a style of marginal annotations as they are edited in the *Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, referred to as *BFA* throughout the book. Not only does this allow the reader to understand the configuration of the collection's play texts, but should enable them to 'easily find the German originals' (9), if desired. However, each fragment, depending on the state in which the

original material is available, is edited in a slightly different way. This is in order to account for the variety of formats and to make sense of it ‘without falsifying the record and simply fabricating’ (9). While this may easily have resulted in an inconsistent and confusing presentation of materials, it largely works as intended, making clear the process of assembly and editing in each case.

The main body offers a selection of six play text fragments, which span three decades of Brecht’s life, from the 1920s until the 1950s: *Fleischhacker*, *Fatzer*, *The Bread Store*, *The Real Life of Jacob Trotalong*, *The Judith of Shimoda*, and *Garbe/Büsching*. In each instance, the dedicated introductions provide a summary of the plot – as far as deductible – and trace the material’s development over time, noting changes and revisions in response to political and personal events in Brecht’s life. Each also offers an overview of the constellation of the original material, which differs drastically from case to case: *Fatzer* only presents ‘three or four more or less worked out scenes’ (72) but ‘over 500 archived sheets’ (72), which can be ascribed to the project to varying extents of certainty. On the other hand, *The Bread Store* and *The Judith of Shimoda* are both “‘almost” complete’ (183).

Phoebe von Held and Matthias Rothe, who provide the introduction to *Fleischhacker*, usefully note some ‘blind spots in Brecht’s reception of American society’ (15) with regard to race that are evident in the play, which might stand out to a contemporary reader. Similar qualifications regarding the reception and presentation of Japanese society and culture would have been welcome in the introduction to *The Judith of Shimoda*. However, the multiple layers of this text, which is the ‘first English translation of [...] Neureuter’s German-language reconstruction (2006) of [Brecht and Wuolijoki’s] respective adaptation(s) (1940) of [...] Shaw’s English rendering (1935) of Yamamoto Yūzō’s 1929 play’ (295), make the attribution of any potentially problematic attitudes to any one Western author practically impossible.

Marc Silberman, who translated and edited *Garbe/Büsching*, presents the final fragment of the collection in a facing-page layout. While he gives his reasoning for this choice, namely the extremely fragmented nature of the material, this particular layout makes both editorial commentary and play fragment significantly harder to read than the rest of the collection. The various translations in the collection clearly demonstrate different aspects of the range of non-naturalistic, rhythmical and elevated styles of Brecht's language.

Kuhn and Ryland's edited collection aims to expand their readers' understanding of Bertholt Brecht's creative process, and succeeds in doing so. The book manages to leave enough gaps for the reader to draw their own conclusions on each fragment, while generating a greater understanding and appreciation for Brecht's prolific productivity and ongoing innovation. Further, the clarity with which the collaborative nature of Brecht's approach is detailed in each case provides useful insights into his working methods and principles. Each contribution is accessible in tone, though all require sound basic knowledge of Brecht's life, work, legacy and the political events of the early to mid-20th century. As the collection presumes somewhat substantial pre-existing knowledge, its readership would most likely be comprised of undergraduate students in the later stages of their degree, postgraduates, and scholars with an interest in Brecht. This book presents an inviting extension of English-language materials on one of the most well-known theatre-makers of the 20th century.

Lara Maleen Kipp

laramaleenkipp@googlemail.com

© 2019, Lara Maleen Kipp