

<b>Institution:</b> The University of Manchester		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 26 (Modern Languages and Linguistics)		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Bertolt Brecht's Legacy: Enhancing Understanding, Stimulating Debate and Influencing Creative Practice		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2000-2017		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Stephen Parker	Henry Simon Professor of German	2008-2018
	Professor of German	2002-2008
	Senior Lecturer in German	1994-2002
	Lecturer in German	1984-1994
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Stephen Parker's research generated a fresh interpretation of Bertolt Brecht's life and work, founded upon a new understanding of Brecht's idiosyncratic artistic sensibility. The research supplanted his categorisation as a 'socialist classic' and provided a novel reading of the works. The research findings, published in Parker's acclaimed biography <i>Bertolt Brecht: A Literary Life</i> (2014), its translations and related publications, have enhanced understanding, stimulated debate and informed new creative outputs centred on one of the twentieth century's most iconic and significant European writers, as a dramatist, director, cultural theorist and poet. The reach and significance of the impact is evidenced through: (1) the biography's commercial, critical and public acclaim; and (2) the influence of the biography and related research on creative practice, including artistic interpretation and performance.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>Brecht's life and works have featured in Parker's research since 2000. Undertaken against the backdrop of the Cold War, the German Democratic Republic's SED (the East German Communist Party) regime fashioned Brecht posthumously into a 'socialist classic'. Parker engaged in archival work into the history of <i>Sinn und Form</i>, formerly the journal of the East Berlin Academy of Arts. Brecht was instrumentally involved in both institutions. The research was carried out initially through the AHRC-funded project 'The Modern Restoration' (2000-2004; PI Parker, Co-PI Davies, Post Doc Philpotts), which included Brecht and <i>Sinn und Form</i> as case studies (cf. Parker, Davies, Philpotts, <i>The Modern Restoration: The Discourses of Style in German Literature 1930-60</i>, (2004)). The later archival research for <i>Bertolt Brecht: A Literary Life</i> [1] was funded by the Leverhulme Trust (2009-2012).</p>		
<p>These projects yielded a fresh perspective on Brecht's life and work concerning key existential, aesthetic and political questions. The SED's 'canonisation' of Brecht masked major differences politically and aesthetically between Brecht and official German communism from the 1920s until his death in 1956. Parker's research, culminating in <i>Bertolt Brecht: A Literary Life</i> [1], substantiates an earlier official communist categorisation of Brecht as a 'deviant' (Lukács), even as a Troztkist (NKVD Archive, Moscow), which mirrors Brecht's own self-understanding as a heretic, born of major confrontations with Stalinist KPD/SED figures in 1938 and 1951-3. On both occasions Stalinists subjected Brecht to enormous pressure to recant his artistic stance, in a clear parallel to his dramatic creation of 1938, the great scientist Galileo. The biography challenges existing scholarship (cf. John Fuegi's biography, <i>Brecht and Co</i> (1994)) and the widespread view of Brecht as the 'double-dealing' 'socialist classic', opening up the way for a new appreciation of Brecht the artist figure. The research entailed returning to Brecht's beginnings and consulting sources dealing with his earliest years, among them archival holdings at the City of Augsburg's Brecht Research Centre.</p>		
<p>Brecht's medical history, never examined systematically despite awareness of a heart condition, was a key focus of research in Berlin's Brecht Archive, yielding publications by</p>		

Parker in the *Brecht Yearbook* (2010) [2] and *The Lancet* (2011) [3]. This new knowledge of Brecht's serious, life-long cardiac, motor and urological complaints, the last-named seriously impairing his appetite for food and drink, paved the way for a revised understanding of Brecht's distinctive behaviours, centrally of (1) his highly idiosyncratic artistic sensibility, including his penchant for dramatic characters with truly enormous appetites such as Baal and Galileo; and (2) the, in fact, compensatory macho image, hitherto taken at face value, which Brecht projected from early adulthood. In contrast to the separately constructed, prevailing images of the 'socialist classic' and the macho artist, the biography sought to present the artist figure, the works and the relationship between them in all their layered complexity, unpredictability and sheer contradictoriness.

A later paper (2017) [4] explored for the first time the reference to Socrates in the preface to the first version of *Baal*, identifying Plato's *Symposium*, alongside Nietzsche's *Götzendämmerung*, as a key source for the portrayal of the satyr-like Baal and the young Brecht's dramatic concerns, showing that at the outset Brechtian non-Aristotelianism is informed by a quasi-Socratic scepticism towards the tragic mode, the pre-eminence of which Plato's pupil Aristotle had re-asserted.

### 3. References to the research

1. Stephen **Parker**, *Bertolt Brecht: A Literary Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 704. Available from HEI on request.

The hardback edition and e-book were followed by a paperback edition in 2015. A German edition of 1,030 pages appeared with Brecht's publisher Suhrkamp in 2018 and a Czech edition of 714 pages with AMU Press in 2019.

*The archival research for the biography was funded by the Leverhulme Trust through a Major Research Fellowship award: 'Bertolt Brecht: A Literary Life', 2009-2012, PI Stephen Parker, GBP119,618.*

2. Stephen **Parker**, 'What was the Cause of Brecht's Death? Towards a Medical History', in *Brecht Yearbook*, 35 (2010), edited by Friedemann Weidauer and Dorothee Ostheimer (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), pp. 291-307. Available at:

<https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/ALRX3VNUFHBMLD9E>

3. Stephen **Parker**, 'Diagnosing Bertolt Brecht', *The Lancet*, 377 (2 April 2011), pp. 1146-7. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(11\)60453-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(11)60453-4)

*This summary of [2] was commissioned by The Lancet.*

4. Stephen **Parker**, "Erinnert ihr euch der peinlichen Schädel des Sokrates und Verlaine?" Bertolt Brechts *Baal* als Satyrspiel', in *Bertolt Brecht: Zwischen Tradition und Moderne*, edited by Jürgen Hillesheim (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2018), pp. 111-28. Available from HEI on request.

*This was delivered as a paper at the Brecht-Haus in 2017 during the 25<sup>th</sup>-anniversary conference of the Brecht Research Centre, Augsburg.*

### 4. Details of the impact

Brecht is one of the world's most performed dramatists. The abiding power of his works across all literary genres rests on its combination of innovative aesthetic techniques with challenging socio-political analysis. He is also an iconic figure for the revolutionary Left. Parker's research findings have attracted substantial attention internationally from communities interested in Brecht, and those working with his oeuvre. The research has achieved impact through two main routes. First, Bloomsbury's marketing and sale of foreign rights of *Bertolt Brecht: A Literary Life* [1] enabled the biography to reach a significant general readership worldwide. Second, Parker enhanced the impact of the research via public engagement and collaborations with cultural institutions and creative practitioners, including a series of public lectures at the City of Augsburg's Brecht-Haus.

The reach and significance of the impact is evident through: (1) the biography's commercial, critical and public acclaim; and (2) the influence of the research on creative practice, including artistic interpretation and performance.

### 1. Commercial, critical and public acclaim: publishers, literary critics and readers

The biography represents a significant commercial success for the publishers. *Bertolt Brecht: A Literary Life* has also been published in German (Suhrkamp, 2018) and Czech (AMU Press, 2019) editions during the assessment period. Bloomsbury marketed a separate edition in India in 2017. [text removed for publication]

The importance of Parker's original interpretation of Brecht's life and work has been noted and described with near unanimity by critics in prominent international publications, including in *The Sunday Times*, *Sydney Review of Books*, *Die Welt* and the *Washington Post* [B]. Michael Hofmann's review in the *TLS* was so unusually appreciative of the achievement – “*not only the biography of a genius, but itself a biography of genius*” - that the review was itself the subject of an editorial in the *TLS*, accompanied by a cover spread titled ‘New Brecht’ [B]. According to Hofmann, “*we get a wholly fresh and absorbing sense of what it might have been like to be Brecht, from the sickly child to the prematurely old, dismally undiagnosed heart patient*” [B].

These new perspectives have enabled deeper and enhanced understandings of Brecht's life and work, by a range of publics. For example, [text removed for publication] comments online: “*I have read nearly every book about Brecht there is - academic and popular - so I delayed reading this until now[,] worried it would be the same old stuff - and there is not only much entirely new material that adds immeasurably to reaction to Brecht's work [...] I cannot put it down - what it gets too is the flavour of the man and why he was irresistible*” [C]. In *The Guardian*, novelist Gavin McCrea included [1] in his selection of best books of 2015, describing it as “*a feat of scholarship that kept me busy for much of the year*” [C].

The research underpinned a series of public events organised to accompany the publication of the biography. In the UK, these included an ‘in conversation’ about Brecht in light of the research in the biography with Tom Kuhn at the Birmingham Rep during its Brecht season in April 2014. The event attracted 40 people and included a Q&A. A recording has 227 views on YouTube [D.i]. Suhrkamp launched the book at the Berlin Academy of Arts, and Konstanze Becker of the Berliner Ensemble read extracts at the event before an audience of approximately 150 people (963 YouTube views by July 2020) [D.ii]. The launch of the Czech edition of the biography took place at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague in November 2019.

During the review period the author appeared three times (2016, 2017 and 2018) as an expert speaker at public events at the Brecht-Haus organised by the City of Augsburg's Brecht Research Centre and Brecht Festival. Together, the Research Centre, Brecht-Haus and Festival promote academic and public understanding of Brecht's life and work. The public event in 2018 was a presentation of the German edition of [1], following its launch in Berlin. Jürgen Hillesheim, Director of the Brecht Research Centre, commented that “[t]he Augsburg public were able to participate in a guided tour through the biographer's workshop, gaining unique insights into what it meant to write Brecht's life.” [E.i] Each public event typically attracts between 40 and 80 people [E.i]. Hillesheim notes that “[i]nterest in Parker's innovative approach to Brecht's life and works has ensured that audiences at his talks are always at the high end and stimulate lively debate and press coverage.” [E.i] This new understanding of Brecht has been conveyed in a sequence of media articles following the events, published in the *Augsburger Allgemeine* [E.i]. A further output of the collaboration with Augsburg's City's Theatre was the publication of an extract from Parker's research about *Baal* [4] in the Theatre's programme advertising its new production for the Brecht Festival 2019 [E.ii]. Summarising the longstanding work with Parker, Hillesheim states that his contribution “*has been exemplary in enabling the Brecht Research Centre to fulfil its mission to mediate between the academic and the broader public realm. Certainly, no speaker during the past*

*decade has impacted more successfully in transforming public awareness of Brecht, both here in Augsburg and more generally in the German-speaking world.” [E.i]*

The book has stimulated debate among political activists and commentators about Brecht’s relationship with official Communism during the Stalinist era and the legacy of European Communism, demonstrating clearly for the first time that Brecht was torn between loyalty to ‘real-existing’ Communist states and Trotsky’s critique of the USSR. For example, the research, as delineated in the book, was the subject of a discussion at the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation Saxony (a major political foundation engaged in education and critical analysis of contemporary capitalism) in October 2018 [F.i]. It was showcased in publications by the International Committee of the Trotskyist Fourth International, who described the book as “a highly readable and stimulating opener to the debate.” [F.ii] The Committee published an interview with Parker in which they probed the relationship of Brecht and his works to Stalinism [F.iii]. Political activist, journalist and member of the editorial board of the *New Left Review*, Tariq Ali, also broadcast an interview with Parker in his weekly spot ‘The World Today’ (June 2015), which had 2,287 YouTube views by September 2020 [F.iv].

## **2. Artistic interpretation and performance: directors, performers and artists**

The research has informed new creative work about Brecht’s life, particularly the work of directors and actors. Heinrich Breloer’s two-part TV film *Brecht* (2019), broadcast in Germany by ARD in March 2019 (2,110,000 and 1,600,000 viewers) [G.i] and subsequently in Denmark, Finland and Spain, was significantly informed by Parker’s exchanges with the director and a reading of [1]. Burghart Klaussner, the great actor (cf. as Kurt Hahn, headmaster of Gordonstoun in season 2 of *The Crown* in 2016) who played the ageing Brecht in the film, explains how he prepared for the role: “Through the new book by Stephen Parker Bertolt Brecht: Eine Biographie, Parker shows him to be someone in a very fragile state of health, beset from the outset by heart and kidney problems.” [G.ii] [text removed for publication] In his review of the film in *Der Spiegel*, critic Volker Weidermann uses [1] as his key point of reference [G.iv].

Following an approach from the Berlin artist Florian Auer, winner of the 2017 Nordhorn Prize with a series of ‘Brecht’ pieces in which he explored the significance of Brecht’s tailored garments discussed in the biography, Parker and Auer engaged in a lengthy exchange of ideas. The discussions developed into Parker’s 1,000-word text ‘The Jacket’ for *Virtual Poetry* [H.i], a new book by Auer and editor Asya Yaghmurian. The book was commissioned as part of the prize and will be published by DISTANZ (Berlin) in April 2021. Text and images are combined using an overlay technique. The collaboration has, in turn, inspired Auer to produce a piece of Brecht-garment art for Parker. Auer writes: “your biography helped me a lot to define my ideas and to move on in deeper understanding of new way to look at Brecht.” [H.ii]

Neil Harris, dramatist and director with the Hong Kong Players community theatre group, has produced a radio play about Brecht in Danish exile, *The Plum Tree*, inspired by [1]. Harris wrote in 2019 of “reading [the] biography of Brecht with such excitement” and planning as a result to “create a stage play of some of what [the] book evokes, namely [Brecht’s] experiences in the various countries of his exile from Germany” [I.i]. Parker met Harris in Hong Kong and advised on aspects of the play, which led to the specifically Danish setting, the shaping of Brecht’s stage mannerisms and the individual characterisation of the four women in Brecht’s life at the time, Helen Weigel, Margarethe Steffin, Ruth Berlau and Elisabeth Hauptmann. A live reading of the play, directed by Jodi Gilchrist, was broadcast from Hong Kong’s Aftermath Bar on 2 August 2020 [I.ii]. Further performances are planned.

## **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

A. [text removed for publication]

B. Collated critical reviews and press coverage of [1]: *TLS*; *The Sunday Times*; *Sydney Review of Books*; *Washington Post*; *Die Welt*.

- C. Reader comments from [text removed for publication] [https://www.amazon.com/Bertolt-Brecht-Literary-Stephen-Parker/dp/1474240003/ref=cm\\_cr\\_arp\\_d\\_product\\_top?ie=UTF8](https://www.amazon.com/Bertolt-Brecht-Literary-Stephen-Parker/dp/1474240003/ref=cm_cr_arp_d_product_top?ie=UTF8) and Gavin McCrea <https://www.theguardian.com/books/ng-interactive/2015/nov/28/best-books-of-2015-part-one>.
- D. Public events: (i) Parker with Tom Kuhn at the Birmingham Rep during its Brecht season in 2014: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ma54W-9EfcQ>; (ii) Launch of the German edition of [1] at the Berlin Academy of Arts: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZy8yhvqOqc>.
- E. The City of Augsburg's Brecht Research Centre and Brecht Festival: (i) Testimonial from the Director of the Brecht Research Centre (20 June 2020); (ii) Augsburg's City's Theatre programme for *Baal*, including research from [4]: <https://staatstheater-augsburg.de/baal>.
- F. Political activists and commentators: (i) Discussion of the research at the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Sachsen in Leipzig (11 October 2018): [https://sachsen.rosalux.de/veranstaltung/es\\_detail/AJ693/neues-von-arthur-koestler-und-ueber-bertolt-brecht/](https://sachsen.rosalux.de/veranstaltung/es_detail/AJ693/neues-von-arthur-koestler-und-ueber-bertolt-brecht/); (ii) Review by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI): <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2016/04/18/brec-a18.html>; (iii) The ICFI published an interview with Parker in addition to the review of [1]: <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2016/04/19/inte-a18.html>; (iv) Tariq Ali, interview with Parker on 'The World Today' (2015): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=levxQxOYuBQ>.
- G. Breloer's TV film: (i) Audience figures reported at: <https://meedia.de/2019/03/28/brecht-zweiteiler-der-ard-stoesst-auf-sehr-geringes-interesse-betrug-special-von-aktenzeichen-xy-auf-sehr-grosses/>; (ii) Interviews with Burghart Klaussner in *Mannheimer Morgen* (21 March 2019) [https://www.morgenweb.de/mannheimer-morgen\\_artikel,-seite-1-mm-erotik-hat-unendlich-viele-facetten-arid,1420867.html](https://www.morgenweb.de/mannheimer-morgen_artikel,-seite-1-mm-erotik-hat-unendlich-viele-facetten-arid,1420867.html) and at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=588&v=IbxDkAHhW8U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=588&v=IbxDkAHhW8U) [*In German; translation in section 4 by The University of Manchester (UoM)*]; (iii) [text removed for publication]; (iv) Review in *Der Spiegel*, citing Parker's research (2 March 2019).
- H. Collaboration with Florian Auer, artist: (i) *Virtual Poetry*: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Virtual-Poetry-Asya-Yaghmurian/dp/3954763532>; (ii) Comments from Auer in email correspondence (25 March 2019).
- I. Collaboration with Neil Harris, dramatist and director: (i) Email comments from Harris (3 June 2019); (ii) Recording of *The Plum Tree* (2020): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXKXe\\_AjPCQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXKXe_AjPCQ).