

## Chapter Two

### The European Exile and the Danish Version

#### I. Brecht's exile from Hitler's Germany to Denmark

On January 30, 1933, the Nazi party successfully seized the power of the parliament and Hitler was appointed chancellor. Brecht himself was against the Nazi regime, for he was convinced that anti-Semitism and racism were only politically directed policies campaigned by the capitalists to divert the public attention on class struggle. Hitler in Brecht's opinion was merely a puppet in the hands of industrialists and Nazism itself was the end product of capitalism since German industrialists were the main supporters of the Nazi party (Gray 90-91, Hayman 164-65).<sup>19</sup> On February 27, the communist party was held responsible for burning down the Reichstag, but according to later investigations, it was probably the SA or the SS who set the fire to give the Nazi party a pretext to arrest Communist party members.<sup>20</sup> Four thousand people associated with the communist party, including writers and intellectuals were persecuted and imprisoned during that night.<sup>21</sup>

Although Brecht was never a member of the communist party, he knew that he was in danger for writing "The Legend of the Dead Soldier", an anti-war poem that put his name on the Nazi's black list.<sup>22</sup> Brecht would have been one of the captives

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<sup>22</sup>Daimler Benz was one among other major corporations that were funding the National Socialist regime. In *Mercedes in War and Peace*, Bernard P. Bellon states that Daimler-Benz was in favor of the military buildup under National Socialism. During that period, the company became the leading armaments maker in Nazi Germany, in charge of building airplane motors, tanks and other armored vehicles. Bellon also wrote that the company threw tens of thousands of men and women into concentration camps to work on plane engines (Mitgang 1-2).

<sup>20</sup>SA stands for Sturm Abteilung, or Storm Brigade. It is a division of the Nazi party that was in charge of destroying or sabotaging the campaigns of other parties. SS stands for Schutz Staffel, or Security Brigade. It is another division of the Nazi Party that was in charge of the security of high ranking members of the party.

<sup>21</sup>4000 communist officials and party members together with writers and intellectuals were arrested (Hayman 170).

<sup>22</sup>According to Esslin, Brecht has joined the communist party in 1930 based on the statement of

if he had not hidden himself in a friend's clinic. He later turned to a publisher friend, Peter Suhrkamp, who helped him and his family to flee to Prague, where they could enter without a visa. From then on, Brecht began his exile until his return to East Germany in 1948.

Martin Esslin, in Brecht: A Choice of Evils, states that it has often been argued why Brecht, as an advocator and loyal supporter of Marxism did not immigrate to the Soviet Union during the period before WWII. In fact Brecht made a visit to Russia in 1935 to decide whether he should stay there permanently. According to Esslin, he has stayed around Moscow for a couple of days but then left. When Brecht was asked why he did not stay in Russia, he answered that he 'could not get enough sugar for his tea and coffee' (148). Esslin, points out that actually, Brecht had his doubt whether he wanted to stay in a country run by the socialist standards and rules. According to Esslin, the Galileo in Brecht's play faces the same dilemma. In the play, the issue is brought up during a conversation of his pupils while Galileo is facing the inquisition:

THE LITTLE MONK. Last night I couldn't get rid of the thought that he should never have left the Republic of Venice.

ANDREA. He couldn't write his book there.

FEDERZONI. And in Florence he couldn't publish it. (G3 104)

Galileo has the choice to stay in Venice, where freedom of speech but less money awaited him, or to go to Florence, where he will have more money and more time for his research. But if he chooses to stay in Florence he will have to work under the watchful eyes of the church, and his many controversial studies will be

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Brecht's close friend Hans Eisler. However, Brecht has denied his membership during the Un-American Activities Committee hearing in 1947. (137) Another reason why Brecht had to leave Germany was that his wife Helene Weigel was Jew (Hayman 96).

evaluated under the standards of the church. Galileo in the play makes the decision to go to Florence, the totalitarian country, where he is later forced to recant his teachings.

Brecht himself, however, made the choice to stay in Denmark, where he had to work harder for a living but where he was able to produce the plays he wanted (148). The choice, according to Esslin proved out to be right, since many German Communist intellectuals who immigrated to the Soviet Union were persecuted during the Great Purge from 1930's to 1950's (148).

Esslin argues that Brecht had to face the dilemma again in the 1950's when he left America for Europe. This time Brecht had to decide whether he should stay in Switzerland to work as an independent artist or to go to East Germany to have the chance to run his own theater provided by the government. Finally, Brecht chose to return to his home country. According to Klaus Völker, the decision was based on Brecht's belief that East Germany represented a state that valued both peace and socialism. The critic also notes that Brecht thought he would be "able to preserve his independence and artistry integrity" (426) in GDR.

In October 28, 1938, six years since Brecht's exodus from Germany, while he and his family were residing in Denmark, an American scriptwriter Ferdinand Reyher encouraged him to finish the writing of the Galileo play and could try to sell it in Hollywood. According to Shoeps, Brecht has been planning the Galileo play since 1933 (233). And according to Esslin, the Russian critic Sergei Tretyakov stated that Brecht intended in 1933 to stage a series of plays that exhibits several famous trials in human history including for example Socrates' trial and Marx's trial. The trial plays, according to Esslin, should be presented on a stage that looks like a courtroom; two trials should be presented in one evening, each lasting an hour and a

quarter (52-3). Galileo's trial was supposedly developed here in the first place. Ten days after Reyher's visit, on November 17, Brecht already wrote nine of the fourteen scenes of the play. He finished the writing on November 23, and gave it the title of The Earth Moves (Die Erde Bewegt Sich).<sup>23</sup>

Before writing the play, Brecht not only studied intensively the astronomical works of Galileo, Henri Mineur, but also consulted Christian Møller, a Danish physicist professor who was an assistant of Niels Bohr<sup>24</sup> (G3 vii). In addition, according to Keith Dickson, he might have picked up extensive background ideas from Leonardo Olschki's (1885-1961) Galileo and His Time (Galileo und Seine Zeit), in which Galileo was praised for his moral courage: "He was the first model of the moral courage that overcomes the dread of profound mysteries and has recognized in the discovered truth the object of adoration and the goal of infinite striving" (Dickson 82, Hayman 213).

Brecht deliberately chose to base the play on a scientist for a reason: he recognized and strongly believed in science's ability to change the life and society of humans, and he believed that his time was the beginning of a new scientific era (Dickson 80). In Brecht on Theater, he stated that hundred years ago, it was a handful of craftsmen who with their inventions and discoveries have changed the world. According to Brecht, the scientists have reached the common folk, and distributed their new instruments among them, with which to make the earth a better place to live in (BoT 184). Brecht then argued that art is similar to science, in that

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<sup>23</sup>The title The Earth Moves stems from the Latin phrase 'Eppur Si Muove', that was supposedly uttered by Galileo after the inquisition, stating his resonance about his studies (Dickson 81). There are various translations of the original title, in Ewen's Bertolt Brecht: His Life, His Art and His Time, the title is And Yet It Moves!; in Shoeps' Bertolt Brecht, the title is The Earth Moves, and in Fuegi's TEB, the work is called The Earth is Moving. But the work that was first translated into English by Desmond V. Vesey already carried the newest title, Life of Galileo (Shoeps 235).

<sup>24</sup>Niels Bohr was one of the physicists who worked on the Manhattan Project, the project that worked on the development of the atomic bomb.

they both set out to make life easier but they approach the matter from a different angle. Art's main purpose lies in a truthful representation of the world, a world that the audience can feel fit to change. Thus science, in other words, meant for Brecht the apparatus to change the world humans live in. That is one of the main reasons why he went back the stream of history to search for the origin of science in human society, and it was Galileo Galilei and his historical background that Brecht found most suitable to represent all the scientists and the difficulties they met on the way to change the world, just as Brecht who has met obstacles to change the world through his art and plays.

Another reason why Brecht chose to write about the Seventeenth Century scientist was according to Keith Dickson, that Brecht "doubtless saw resemblances between the historical Galileo and himself" (79). Dickson stated that they both were teachers who taught their students through witty conversations; both were rationalists and "sensuous men of the flesh" (79-80), and last, both experienced a direct conflict with the authority and both retreated from the conflicts. However, Dickson noted that the similarities between Brecht himself and Galileo were not Brecht's primary concern; instead, the "immediate social relevance" (80) was what interested Brecht. According to Dickson, the period in which Galileo lived was partially identical to Brecht's own time: In 1938, many intellectuals who remained in Germany have given in and sold themselves out to the Nazi regime, just as Galileo who gave in to the inquisition (80). Brecht was able to see the resemblance, and he used that particular case in history to reflect it on the issues of his own time.

In 1939, it became increasingly dangerous for Brecht to stay in Denmark since the German army could invade Denmark at any time. In order to secure himself financially, the Galileo play was written for a staging in America. Therefore the

style of the Danish version was according to Shoeps, between epic and Aristotelian theater to fit the general audience of America.

Although the Danish version was written in 1939, it was staged for the first time five years later in 1943 in Zurich, while Brecht was already residing in America. According to Shoeps, the play was applauded by the many refugees from Germany, who recognized the inquisition as the Gestapo<sup>25</sup>, and Galileo as a fighter for the resistance. The recantation itself was seen as a necessary act to outsmart the inquisition, in order to continue the fight for freedom of thought (240).



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<sup>25</sup>Gestapo is the acronym of “Geheime Staats Polizei”, meaning secret state police.

## II. Galileo in the Danish Version

Galileo is the only famous historical character as the center of Brecht's plays. In any case, what Brecht wanted to emphasize is that in complicated situations a man should be able to take sides, and to make his choice. Over a period of 19 years, Brecht wrote three versions of the Galileo play. The first Danish Version (early title was The Earth Moves) was written in Denmark in 1938-1939. The second American Version (titled Galileo) was written in 1945-1946 and the third version, retitled The Life of Galileo in 1956. In the eighth scene of the play, Galileo tells a story of a Greek philosopher named Keunos, who has lived under totalitarian reign for seven years, and remained faithful to his belief till the regime broke down. According to Hayman, Brecht's original Galileo might serve as a reminder for those intellectuals staying behind in Germany, under the control of the authority to remain faithful to their beliefs in order to pursue their ends, which is the main reason why he pondered to call the play The Cunning of Survival (Die Schlaueheit des Überlebens) in the first place (Hayman 213).

The old earth-centered Ptolemaic system, which became dogmatically asserted in Western Christendom, might give a hierarchical order to the social structure that prevented people to think and to know the truth, while Galileo's assertion of the sun-centered Copernican system put him at odds with the church. The dangers and complications that might rise up during the fight for impelling a new truth were the original subjects that the play discusses, and therefore the historical truths of the actual Galileo story might be set aside to give the artist more freedom to concentrate on the themes he wants to discuss in his play. Hence while the historical Galileo could only be convicted by the inquisition through forgery of false documents, the literary Galileo was convicted without showing the process of the trial to the

audience at all.<sup>26</sup> According to Dickson, the omission was to have “the Church . . . condemned as a powerful instrument of class domination, not as a devious petty bureaucracy” (Dickson 85). And as Cohen has stated in “History and Moral in Brecht’s The Life of Galileo”, the omission of the forgery part was in order “not to divert attention from present-day authority (4). Dickson believed that by leaving out the forgery part, it would allow Brecht to have the church of his play become a general symbol of authority. And in Cohen’s view, the omission was in order to focus on the main character and his choice alone instead of shifting it towards a malicious church. John Willett holds the same opinion as Cohen, when he stated that it could be dangerous if one treated Galileo’s fight for freedom as a religious matter, for it could deflect the attention from “present-day reactionary authorities” that have nothing in common with celestial ones (G3 217). What is left are two scenes that show the process before the trial, first we could see that Galileo is abandoned by his most powerful supporter, Pope Urban VIII.<sup>27</sup> The pope knows Galileo personally and is himself a friend of science; he even allows Galileo to publish a book called Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems.<sup>28</sup> The book should have included arguments for and against the Copernican theory and

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<sup>26</sup>Galileo received in 1616 a document from Cardinal Bellarmine that Galileo can still work on the Copernican system as long as he treated it as hypothetical and not as a fact. Galileo hoped to escape punishment from the inquisition through this document. But in 1633 during the inquisition, the prosecutors presented a special injunction dated from 1616, saying that Cardinal Barberini has explicitly forbidden Galileo to work on the erroneous star system, no matter if he treated it as hypothetical or as a fact. This document was later believed to be a forgery designed to cancel out Galileo’s document.

<sup>27</sup>Pope Urban VIII, born Maffeo Barberini was elected pope in 1623. He was an admirer of Galileo, and helped him defend on the subject on floating bodies when he was still cardinal. Galileo was allowed to publish Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems after he met the Pope for six times. When the work turned out to be a mockery of the church, their relationship took a drastic decline.

<sup>28</sup>Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems was published in 1632; it is a work that summarized Galileo’s view concerning astronomy. The book past the censorship at first place by intending to be a neutral debate about the two different models of the solar system, however the book turned out to be clearly in favor of the Copernican system, which is the main reason why the book was banned and Galileo was summoned in front of the inquisition.



should also have included opinions of the Pope himself. However the Pope feels betrayed by Galileo when he finds out that Galileo's work is mocking the church and is presenting the speaker of the church as a fool. While the historical Urban VIII felt a personal resentment against Galileo, the literary Urban VIII is more concerned with the social and religious impact of the Galileo issue as is shown in the eleventh scene of the play. In Dickson's opinion, Brecht "was careful to subordinate the private grudge to strictly socio-political considerations" (86), but as shown in the play:

THE POPE. But I will not allow a verdict on the physical facts. I don't want to divide church and reason into two opposing camps. I've allowed that man to publish his book if his conclusion is in favor not of science but of belief. And he has kept the agreement.

THE INQUISITOR. Has he? In his book, a dumb person is representing the ideas of Aristotle, and a smart person the ideas of Copernicus and Galileo. And who represents the agreement, which you insisted?

THE POPE. Where is this leading? Who represents the agreement?

THE INQUISITOR. Not the smart one.

THE POPE. This is outrageous. I will tell him that. I can't stand the tramping anymore. Is the whole world outside? (G1 96-97)

Pope Urban VIII was defending the greatness of Galileo at the beginning of the dialogue but when he was aware of Galileo's betrayal, he made his decision to condemn him. There is certainly a downplay of their personal discords, and negligence of historical facts, but it is still noticeable that Galileo's betrayal had its impact on the pope's decision. Hence, while Brecht had tried to concentrate the conflicts between the two oppositions on authority versus freedom of knowledge, he

had to turn to historical facts to complete his play and thus shifted his focus to personal grudge for a brief moment. One artistic method Brecht applied was to make the matter insignificant by undermining the subject, thus Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems became “the book”, and Simplicius became “the dumb person,” two relatively harmless terms that the ordinary audience would not be able to recognize of its significance.

In the play, Brecht shows Galileo’s followers waiting for the outcome of the inquisition while hoping for different results: Galileo’s daughter, Virginia, hopes her father to recant so that he will be spared from capital punishment; and Galileo’s pupils who firmly believe in Galileo’s idea of reason and truth, hope that he will not recant even if he will be punished or sacrificed for it:

THE LITTLE MONK. The pope refused to see him. It’s over.

THE OLD SCHOLAR. He was his last hope. It was right what he told

Galileo years before in Rome, when he was still Cardinal Barberini:

We need you.

ANDREA. They will kill him.

THE OLD SCHOLAR *looks at him startled*. You think so?

ANDREA. Because he will never recant. (G1 104)

When the outcome is announced through the dramatic ringing of bells, Galileo chooses to live on instead of dying as a martyr. His pupils are demoralized and feel that they are betrayed:

*He [Galileo] waits by the entrance, hoping to receive greetings. No greetings can be heard; his students are turning away from him. He goes into the room slowly, unsure of his walk due to his bad eyesight. He finds a chair and sits down.*

ANDREA. I can't look him into the eyes. Please make him leave. (G1 105)

When Andrea proclaims: "Unhappy the land that has no hero" (105), Galileo replies: "Unhappy the land that needs a hero." He has failed to be a hero and he denounces the situation and the whole unthinking society for only requiring a hero to save them. In the thirteenth scene, Galileo is portrayed as the person of his own story: Keunos, a philosopher who despite being under a totalitarian regime has kept his ideas to the end. However, the cleverness to escape death in order to accomplish one's goal would only be a comforting outcome in contrast to the unconquerable heroism if Galileo has chosen to be a martyr. His book about the truth (Discorsi) has to be smuggled out by Andrea and Galileo gives him his last advice: "Take good care of you when you pass through Germany with the truth under you coat" (G1 118). The message of the story is that truth can prevail, however, the Galileo here is not a hero of the Greek plays, but despite his noble ideas he is still a human being. Brecht does not show us a great climax or a heroic death that would make the audience overwhelmed with pity and fear, but a man who's trying to redeem his guilt by continuing with his work to benefit the people he has let down.

In 1934, Brecht defined in the article "Poets are to tell the truth" ("Dichter sollen die Wahrheit schreiben") for the Parisian German Daily, the three difficulties for writing the truth. In 1935, in a later version of the article, the list was extended to five difficulties. The five difficulties for writing the truth are: 1. The courage to write the truth. 2. The keenness to recognize the truth. 3. The skill to manipulate the truth as a weapon. 4. The judgment to select those in whose hands the truth will be effective. 5. The cunning to spread the truth among many (G2 133-50). In Brecht's Writing The Truth: Five Difficulties he concludes his fifth point about the

hardships of spreading truth with the sentence “cunning is needed to spread the truth” (G2 149). Brecht mentioned Confucius who chose different words in his interpretation of a work to escape persecution (G2 142). And Lenin, who wanted to criticize the Russian government on their exploitation of an island, substituted Russia with Japan and the island with Korea. Lenin did not get arrested for his criticism since he was cunning enough to hide the truth (G2 143). Galileo is almost the exact model of Brecht’s ideal choice to have truth prevail in the world. Galileo was clever enough to discover the truth through his many experiments and unstoppable zeal to do his research. Galileo possesses the courage to spread out truth by secretly finishing the Discorsi, and to stand up against the theologians and clerics. However, he lacks the judgment to select a person in whose hand the truth will be most effective. In the play he has tried to convince Cardinal Bellarmine and Cardinal Barberini to acknowledge his studies but he has failed his mission. In addition, Galileo has conspired himself with the potter to smuggle the work out to the public when he is under house arrest, but the plan has also utterly failed. For three times do they attempt to smuggle the work across the border, but each time the potter has to take The Discorsi back to Galileo without any success. Although Galileo managed to persuade Andrea at the end to help him smuggle out The Discorsi, but the process was lacking any sort of cunningness proposed by Brecht since Andrea’s visit happened on sheer coincidence.

Galileo in the 1938 version is at first an idealist; to his assistant Sagredo he claims that he “believes in its [humanity’s] ability to reason” and that without the belief he “can’t even get out of bed in the mornings” (G1 28). He has stated more than once that he believed in the human race and in its intelligence to learn. But he is constantly disappointed when the people he tries to convince refuse to look into

his work. His sole victory appears when the church's appointed astronomer Christoph Clavius confirms Galileo's findings. But years later the church would refuse to take his evidence into account and Galileo is once again summoned to Rome to face the inquisition. It is possibly one of the reasons why he refuses to die as a martyr, because he has lost his faith in humanity-- the faith that has pushed him in the beginning to conduct his research and to show the people the light, just as Andrea states: "You didn't stand up solely for some particular thoughts, but you stood up for the right to think" (G1 114). According to Andrea, the goal of Galileo's fight has never been to prove the correctness of the Copernican system, but to lay the foundation for reason to prevail before superstition and the authority that benefits from it. However, Galileo's fight is over with the final verdict of the inquisition, which turns him "almost unrecognizable" (G1 105). Galileo surrenders to authority and gives up on humanity when he says: "Unhappy the land that needs heroes" (G1 105). Galileo has stopped wanting to be the hero of the world that refuses to reason. At the near end of the play, Galileo says to Andrea: "But of course, an individual can't bring it [reason] to the world alone. It is too big an affair. Reason is something that should be spread among men. It's the search that whole humanity is after. However, the urge to search is too weak . . . ." (G1 118) This statement makes clear that Galileo still believes in reason itself, but he doubts that the human's ability and will to search is enough. Brecht noted in his Journals (Arbeitsjournal) that he found it the hardest to write the last scene, since he had to keep the audience's emotional distance from his character and avoid any empathy. Truth is that in the thirteenth scene, Galileo's dialogue with Andrea is as plain as it can be, reasons for writing the new scientific work in Discorsi are given, and it is handed over to Andrea so that he can carry the torch and spread truth among the

world. There is no great call of victory over authority and there is no bright future promised as Galileo states in his last confession:

GALILEO. Even a man like myself can see that the age of reason is at its beginning. If it needs to look like a blood-spattered whore, than so it must be. The dawning of the new age comes after the darkest night. When great discoveries are made in some parts of the world, others lie in complete darkness. The darkness has even grown in those places! (G1 120)

The authority represented in the inquisition has terrorized Galileo and he recants out of fear of death and of loss of hope, but there is no need for him to apologize for being human, nor for saving his own life when it is at stake. His reason for recantation is as human as possible, and he has redeemed himself by writing a masterpiece that will be brought out to daylight.

The question has been aroused whether Galileo recanted in order to cheat the inquisition so that he could finish his work, and the answer is a denial. The fear of death is what made Galileo recant in the 1938 version and his old habits of doing research are the reasons that impelled him to finish the Discorsi under a dangerous condition. However, why should Galileo who has continued with his research despite the deadly plague, be afraid of the inquisition? One reason is that Galileo's faith in humanity has been constantly diminished throughout the play: Scholars refused to look into his telescope, people that used to adulate him have turned their backs on him, and above all he was under trial for doing his research. The plague is something that is out of Galileo's control, but the inquisition is the ultimate human act against reason that has become the last straw to break his back. As a scientist, he has proven his determination to die for science, as we can see the way he handles

the plague. And as stated above, he researches in order to educate the people, to make them realize the true nature of the authority, in other words as a humanitarian idealist, Galileo finds it also worth to die for his ideas. But as his disappointment in humanity grows, he finds his own life more valuable than to give it up for a humanity that is unable to reason with. And that is why he said “the plague is not so deadly in comparison. It is easier to cheat death from the plague” (G1 113).

From another point of view, the two threats that Galileo had to face were for him different, he could outsmart the plague and survive from it, because emotionally he is ready to sacrifice himself for his research thus he is not afraid of the plague but when it comes to authority, he had to give in to escape death, since he is not emotionally prepared to die for humanity and thus he recanted. The cleverness to outwit the inquisition in order to resume his research does not exist, and the heroic act is thus diminished to the lowest degree. Galileo remains human when he shows his fear of death, however, he remains being a hero when he secretly tries to smuggle out his work with the help of the potter. Thus Brecht has avoided creating a hero of the superlative, but has given the human race a glimpse of hope.