

Chapter Three

The Atomic Bomb and the American Version

I. Brecht in the United States of America

In 1940, Brecht and his family were first residing in Sweden, but on April 9, the German army invaded Denmark and Norway, and it was time for the Brechts to move to Finland. Eight days later, with the help of a Finland writer, Hella Wuolijoki, they traveled by boat to Helsinki. In August of the same year, Brecht was offered a position to teach at the New School for Social Research and hence received an entry visa to the United States. Brecht decided, however, to stay in Finland when Wuolijoki prepared a villa for the family to stay in.

On May 3, 1941, the American visas arrived for the Brechts and they were urged to leave Finland since the German army was making its way into the country. They left Finland on the May 16, traveled by a trans-Siberian railway and arrived in Moscow. On June 13, Tickets for a cargo steamer to sail from Vladivostok were booked and the family traveled across the Atlantic Ocean. On July 21, after a 5 days stop in Manila, the Brechts arrived in Los Angeles.

Brecht and his family, together with other German refugees, were under the care of a German film director, William Dieterle. At that time Brecht had some financial difficulties since he was not yet well known in the States, he had to spend more effort to sell his plays. Although he had made his debut in the American theatrical circle with The Threepenny Opera (Dreigroschenoper) as early as 1933, it appeared only for two weeks in the Broadway before its replacement.²⁹ Before their arrival in America, Brecht wrote The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, a gangster

²⁹ On 13 April, 1933, The Threepenny Opera had its American debut in New York's Empire Theater. The Musical was met with mixed reactions from the critics and it did not become successful until 1954, when it became immensely popular and ran for six straight years (Shoeps 125-27)

play set in Chicago with an implication on the rise of Hitler.³⁰ However, this play did not bring Brecht the fame he hoped for and his financial status was even worse than his past European exile years.

In 1944, Brecht collaborated with Feuchtwanger on the play The Visions of Simone Machard whereby Brecht acquired the rights of staging, and Feuchtwanger the right of turning it into a novel.³¹ Although Brecht did not put the play on the stage, Feuchtwanger not only successfully turned it into a novel, but also sold it for a later movie adaptation. However, Brecht received twenty thousand dollars from this agreement, and his financial problems were somehow eased.



Fig. 3. Charles Laughton as Galileo Galilei in the American version.

At that time, Brecht met the famous English actor Charles Laughton.³² Brecht realized that he could get a breakthrough in America with Laughton's popularity.

³⁰The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, completed by Brecht in April 29 in Finland was originally titled as Der Aufhaltsame Aufstieg des Arturo Ui. The play was designed to strip Arturo/Hitler off his "gangster-hero" image and to expose him as the criminal he was. However, the play did not become successful since the gangster theme according to Ewen was an accepted social phenomenon and could not be related to the crimes that Hitler was charged of (Ewen 372-74).

³¹Ewen regards The Visions of Simone Machard as unordinary for Brecht because its plot is unified unlike Brecht's epic plays. There is also "no attempt to avoid 'Einfühlung' (empathy)" (399), and the audience is not hindered to sympathize with Simone, the play's protagonist. Brecht's influence on the play can be seen when economical and social issues are brought up (397-400).

³²Charles Laughton (1899-1962) was an English stage and film actor. He expatriated to the USA during WWII.

At the same time, Laughton also found out the fact that the playwright understood more of theatrical performance than anyone he knew. In April 1944, Brecht invited Laughton to collaborate on and to play the name roll in the American version of the play, The Life of Galileo, and from December on, the two worked on the play on regular basis. Although there already existed an English translation made by Desmond Vesey, Laughton and Brecht chose to translate and rewrite part of the play again by themselves (Esslin 68). In Brecht's view, the new version of the Galileo play should focus on the difference between "a pure scientific development" and "society's development that is influenced by a scientific development" (Journals 350). According to Brecht, Galileo's recantation has "sterilized" science because the authority was given the freedom to apply the social impact of science to their needs. In other words, the authority can use science as their tool to dictate the social influence. And the fact that the scientists at the front line have failed to stand up against the authority is what the new version is concentrating on.

On August 6, 1945, the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima by the U.S. army when Brecht and Laughton were still working on the play. Laughton began to have his doubt whether the public would be appalled by the role of the scientist, and whether the newly aroused attention on the morality of scientists would be bad publicity (Hayman 297).

In A Short Organum for the Theater, Brecht noted that the scientists with their creations and scientific developments have brought the bourgeoisie to power. But instead of using the new sciences to change the world to a better place, the bourgeoisie have stopped the developments in the places where "darkness still reigns" (BoT 184), and have used it to serve their own purposes. Brecht concluded that "progress for all then becomes advancement for a few, and an ever-increasing

part of the productive process gets applied to creating means of destruction for mighty wars” (BoT 184), which means that the benefit which the progress of science will bring, cannot reach out to everyone, but is only enjoyed by a few, namely the dominating class. And what is even worse is that the dominating class uses the new inventions to apply them in wars. In Brecht’s opinion, the bourgeoisie is the only class that has benefited from the fruits of science, and that they have transformed it into a tool for domination. According to Brecht, the new sciences are now torn between the rulers and the ruled, but the new generation of workers is aware of the new sciences, and they are aware of the method of the dominating class (BoT 185).

Brecht’s new Galileo was to show the audience that the ruling class is fully aware of the gravity of the situation. They knew that the totalitarian ideology, which is the chain to bind their subjects is just as weak as their subject’s “weakest link” (Journals 350).³³ Brecht implied that by robbing the subject’s opportunity to learn about the new sciences would strengthen the control of their ideology. Thus Brecht’s goal of his second version was to show the audience that the authority understands the power of knowledge with which their subjects could break through their chains of obedience.

In the Danish version, the intention of the scientist was to be a ‘beacon’, to show the people the light during the dark times and to encourage them to hold their ideas to the end. Although Galileo in both Danish and American versions has submitted and recanted to the inquisition out of fear, but in the first version he conspires himself with a potter to smuggle out the Discorsi and thus has redeemed

³³“Wie die herrschende Klasse sich die Totalität ihrer Ideologie bewußt ist: Sie weiß, die Kette, mit der sie die Unterdrückten fesselt, ist nicht stärker als ihr schwächstes Glied” (Arbeitsjournal 465)

his sins. Despite his cowardice he is still regarded as a hero for he has tried to make up for his crime.

However, in the second version, Brecht omitted the conspiracy scene in order to question Galileo's reason and motive for writing the Discorsi. In addition, without the conspiracy, a chance for Galileo to alleviate his sin is taken away and the writing of the Discorsi can be interpreted as to fulfill a self-serving purpose of one's own interest for knowledge and not for educating people. This motive, despite the fact that both characters have finished a scientific work after their recantations, is the main difference between the two Galileos. The first Galileo was to show confidence in those who are able to convey knowledge, and to tell them that their mission is to stay alive and finish their work, just as Brecht himself who has fled from Nazi persecution, left his homeland, to work on his didactic theater, which purpose is to educate its audience. In the second version, Galileo says to Andrea: "Should you, then, in time, discover all there is to be discovered, your progress must become a progress away from the bulk of humanity," a scientist's role is not to discover things for science sake but also to "ease human existence" (G2 124). Therein lies the crime of Galileo's, to surrender his knowledge to the powers that abuse it, to suit their ends (G2 124). The drop of the atomic bomb can be interpreted as a wide gulf, in which the sound of the scientist's cheer of a new invention is "echoed by a universal howl of horror" (G2 124). Brecht's new design was for Galileo to surrender to authority, to 'become death, the destroyer of worlds' as the inventor of the atomic bomb Oppenheimer has cited from an ancient Indian epic to describe himself.³⁴

³⁴In an interview done by NBC in 1965, Robert Oppenheimer, one of the leading scientists who was in charge of building the atomic bomb cited the line: "I am become Death, Destroyer of Worlds" from an Indian epic (Hijia 123). The quotation derived from the eleventh chapter, verse 32 of Bhagavad

Brecht noted in his Journals that the Danish version was “technically a large step backwards” (Arbeitsjournal 32), since he wanted the play to be acceptable for the American audience, and the by the production of the American Galileo, Fuegi noted that “instead of making the new version more ‘epic’, Brecht seems partially to have bowed to the realities of American commercial theater and to have tightened and condensed the play” (TEB 163). Another critic, however, noted that the play was “loose” and “episodic” and that it has “put form ahead of content” (Shoeps 245), according to Shoeps, this criticism points out that despite Brecht’s own statement of having the play produced in a more conventional way, was still epic.



Ghita: //The Blessed Lord spoke: I am time/ the mighty lord of world destruction/ Here come forth to annihilate the worlds/ Even without any reaction of thine/ All the warriors/ Who are arrayed in the opposing ranks/ shall cease to exist// (Sargeant 484).

II. A Changed Galileo in the American Version

Galileo of the American Version is a whole different character with different thoughts in mind from the one in the Danish version. Both Galileos have made their first statements about their goals at the beginning of the play. The first Galileo, as an idealist in the Danish version, makes clear in his lengthy speech that his study is to provoke changes, changes which should have an effect on the whole society:

GALILEO. The old teachings that we believed in for thousands of years are crumbling away. . . . The things written in the old scriptures do not satisfy the people anymore. Where once belief has sit for thousand years, now doubt has taken its place. All the world says: yes, this is written in the pages, but now let us see for ourselves. The celebrated truths will be questioned; what has never been doubted, will be doubted now. (G1 2-3)

His studies set out to break the chains that have tied up every individual to a set place, and to welcome a multi-centered society. He also proclaims that “the old age is gone and now comes the new age” (G1 3), even before he can provide a telescope to prove his theory. The Galileo in the American version, however, has lost this touch of naïve sureness. As a realist he focuses in a much shorter speech mainly on what astronomy might achieve in one of these days, and hopefully each member of society will learn about the new science.

GALILEO. The sayings of the wise men won't wash anymore.

Everybody, at last is getting nosy. I predict that in our time astronomy will become the gossip of the market place and the sons of fishwives will pack the schools. (G2 49)

The new Galileo recognizes the dawning of a new scientific age that according to his observation began with the discovery of new territories by ships. He hails to the new age of doubt that will replace the age of faith, and he predicts that even the common people will know astronomy. He does not mention the possibility of what reason and knowledge can do to society but only focuses on science itself.

Again in the American version, after Galileo has made up his mind to apply for a position in the Florentine court, his friend Sagredo warns him of the possible danger of leaving Venice, Galileo simply replies: "I am going to Florence." And the legend shows:

By setting the name of Medici in the sky, I am bestowing immortality upon the stars. I commend myself to you as your most faithful and devoted servant, whose sole desire is to reside in your Highness' presence, the rising sun of our great age. Galileo Galilei (G2 65).

Without saying it out loud, Brecht placed the image of Galileo's adulation of the aristocracy words into the mind of the audience. However, the Danish version handles the affair with a complete different approach. When Sagredo says that Galileo's research will require the sanction of the church, Galileo replies: "I believe in the human race and it means that I believe in its ability to reason. Without this believe I can't even get out of bed in the mornings." And he further states: "Only the dead can't be reasoned with," and in the following dialogue he has stated again that: "No man can withstand the charm of sweet evidence laid before him. Over time, everyone gives in" (G1 29). The difference between the two versions is this: In the Danish version, Galileo's logic is that all men are capable of reason, including the authority represented by the church and aristocracy (G1 29). His primary concern is how this ability to reason can do good to the world. But in the American

version, Galileo does not have this confidence in man, thus Brecht's admiration for Galileo is altered to a maneuvering, self-serving and unethical intellectual who wants only to have more time for his research than to have a sense of social responsibility.

How Galileo has been depicted differently can also be seen in the following incidents: When Prince Cosimo De Medici and an assortment of university professors go to see Galileo's demonstration of his telescope, they enter into a debate about Galileo's findings. In both versions, Galileo is eager to convince the scholars to look into his tube and see the stars for their own eyes. But in the American version, Galileo appears to be quite helpless during the crossfire and only manages to utter a few words of pleading: "I can only beg you to look through my eyeglass" (G2 68). In addition, he only mentions that there exists no telescope in Ptolemy's time and that they should give it a try. But in the Danish version, Galileo enters a fiercer debate. After he has failed to persuade the scholars to look through the telescope first and make a judgment later, he turns toward his most trusted weapon, logic:

GALILEO *almost begging*. Gentlemen, it is one thing to believe in the authority of Aristotle, it is another to see the facts that are before you. You say that according to Aristotle, there is a crystal shell up there, hence some movements of the stars are hold to be impossible to perform, since they would break the shell. But what if these movements exist, wouldn't that mean that there is no crystal shell at all? Gentlemen, I beg you to trust your own eyes. (G1 45)

Galileo argues eloquently that all authorities could and should be questioned and that his goal is not to live by rules dictated by an authority but to seek the truth

behind it. Also, he appeals strongly to their reason, to trust their own eyes and make their own logical judgment. Although both Galileos fail in their mission of persuasion, but in the Danish version, Galileo has put up a much greater fight, and has made a clear statement about his trust in man's ability to reason and to seek the truth. On the other hand, in the American version, Galileo looks miserable after his defeat, and he could cling only to his research and his telescope, missing out the great ideas behind them.

In the plague scene of the Danish version, Galileo is given the opportunity to prove his devotion by continuing his work despite the deadly plague. This scene is an exhibition of Galileo's courage and resolution of doing his research, but it also carries a message that on the road to accomplish a great cause, courage knows no obstacles. However, the whole plague scene is completely cut from the American version.

After Galileo's recantation, he is put under a house arrest. In the Danish version, Galileo conspires himself with a stove fitter to smuggle out his Discorsi, which can be seen as an act of redemption. However, in the American version, when Andrea visits Galileo, he hands over the Discorsi to Andrea to smuggle out without preplanning and reveals his reason of recantation, which was out of fear and loss of hope. However, when Andrea is aware of the existence of the Discorsi, he immediately regards Galileo's recantation as a maneuver to gain more time to finish a vital scientific work, one that can easily cleanse his mentor of his indignity, however, Galileo in the second version, coldly explains that he "had to employ his time somehow," and that his "habits of a lifetime cannot be broken abruptly" (G2 121). In the Danish version, Galileo has not given up on reason, and he still believes that the world's salvation depends on it. However, the Galileo in the

American version not only reacts completely different but also the stove fitter scenario was completely cut: Again, Brecht denies Galileo a chance to redeem himself. His final speech is not about reason and humanities' salvation; instead it is about the scientist's role in the greater environment and the consequences of their submission to the authority.

Hence, Galileo's failure to withstand the inquisition leading to his recantation can be concluded in the surrendering of Galileo's knowledge "to the powers that be, to use, no, not use it, abuse it, as it suits their ends" (G2 124), which means that the authority has gained control of the scientists, to command them as it suits them, and to abuse their inventions for their purpose. According to Dickson's Towards Utopia, the single greatest influence to the second version was the Americans dropping the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 15, 1945, causing the instant death of sixty thousand civilians and wounding tens of thousands. After this incident, the play changed its course, and this awful truth has made a new meaning dawn on Brecht about "the original sin of modern science" (91). Since it has become possible for the scientists to build weapons to destroy humanity overnight, the focus of the second version no longer lies on the scientist's responsibility to convey knowledge to the people, but also to the preservation of their professional integrity, not to be manipulated by authority.

In 1954, Brecht wrote about his reaction after reading Oppenheimer's defense on building the first atomic bomb. According to the defense, Oppenheimer and his team built the bomb only to counter Hitler's scientists. Brecht noted that Oppenheimer was astonished when the bomb had been dropped on the Japanese instead on the Germans. Brecht satirically compared to Oppenheimer to someone who is being accused by a cannibal tribe for refusing to supply human flesh, and in

his defense all he could come up with was he could not provide the meat for he was heating up the water for the cauldron during the manhunt (Journals 459). Brecht regarded Oppenheimer's defense as an act of cowardice since no matter where the bomb was dropped, Oppenheimer was the one who made it. And although Oppenheimer did not make the decision of dropping the bomb himself, but as the one who heated up the water for cooking human flesh, he was still an accomplice. And such was Brecht's intention for the Galileo in the American version to become: An accomplice of the authority to strengthen its dominance of the people.

The shifting of focuses can be seen clearly, that in the Danish version, Galileo is an idealist, who holds reason to be his tool to bring truth to humanity, as his ultimate goal. The recantation means that he cannot hold on to his ideas under the pressure of the authority and thus the day to emancipate humanity is delayed. However, in the American version, Galileo is a pure scientist who researches for the sake of research and the noble cause that exists in the previous version is lost. Hence in the American version, Galileo's recantation is seen by Brecht as a scientists' failure to maintain his professional ethics without conscience and without social responsibilities.

In the Danish version, according to Brecht, a scientist should convey knowledge to the people to fight against an oppressive authority and in the second version, Brecht has turned to blame a single historical character, Galileo, to represent all scientists that lack social and moral obligation to the world. The first Galileo is posing as an example for the oppressed intellectuals to remain faithful to their beliefs, and the second Galileo has turned into the villain. He has turned into the Adam of the scientific world, to commit the first sin to corrupt its followers. Galileo confesses: "As a scientist, I had and almost unique opportunity. In my day

astronomy emerged into the market place. At that particular time, had one man put up a fight, it could have had wide repercussions” (G2 124). He admits he was given the great chance to set an example early when science was as its dawn, but his cowardice has hindered the birth of a Hippocratic Oath for later scientists to follow.

In Dickson’s opinion, Brecht has not been shifting the point of view successfully, since the audience could not overlook the fact that an old, imprisoned man who has nearly blinded himself by working on a scientific work that is beneficiary to humanity could be the sinner who has doomed the whole humanity. In fact, Brecht has tried to emphasize the mischievous part of Galileo by pointing out his various flaws such as: Plagiarism of the telescope to sell it for money, his insistence of doing his research although it jeopardizes his daughter’s marriage and his exploitation of Andrea as his servant and Ludovico as his financial reliever. Despite all the effort, Galileo has remained the human character as the one in the first version, only that he has been stripped off the idealistic attitude by Brecht, to become more practical and self-serving, but nevertheless still a human with his fears and loves, that has prohibited him from acting against his nature when he was facing the inquisition.

In BoT, Brecht noted: “During these wars the mothers of every nation, with their children pressed to them, scan the skies in horror for the deadly inventions of science” (184-85). Brecht wanted to show the audience the horrors of science and to point out the fact that the scientists have become prostitutes of the authority. However, no matter what words Brecht has put into his mouth during Galileo’s last lengthy confession, his actions have spoken louder than words, and the fact that he has made mistakes but is still contributing to humanity by writing the Discorsi has made Galileo a hero after all (G2 631). Despite the fact that later scientists have

created the atomic bomb, it is hard to imagine that Galileo at his time could see that day coming. Galileo in the American version is a scientist whose main goal is to prove stellar phenomena, instead of changing the society through his research. Hence when he recanted, his main concern about the consequences should be the postponing of new scientific discoveries, since other scientists might hesitate to publish or conduct their research due to the oppressive authority. However, Brecht is trying to state that Galileo's recantation will be regarded as the submission of the scientists to the authority, which will lead to the building of the atomic bomb that will cause "a universal howl of horror". Brecht does not see that in Galileo's time, the church or the authority that it represents was prohibiting scientific findings that contradict the context of the Bible, which is the main reason why Galileo's research was banned. The fact that his recantation is the direct prove that the authority suppresses his freedom of research does not immediately lead to the scientist's building an atomic bomb under the instruction of authority. Eric Bentley states that Brecht has decided to revise the play after Hiroshima, to condemn Galileo more strongly, but he perceives the final verdict as Brecht's "arbitrary declaration in order to make a point" (G2 21). Bentley further states: "One cannot find, within the boundaries of the play itself, a full justification for the virulence of the final condemnation" (21). Which means that Bentley also perceived Galileo's crime as unjustified.

According to Shoeps, most critics saw the play as one about the historical Galileo, but failed to recognize that the play was designed to relate to the contemporary world (245). Gladwin Hill of The New York Times, for example, saw Laughton's performance as making "the scientist an appealing human figure," (Shoeps 243) something that was the exact opposite of what Brecht wanted his new

Galileo to be. However, Irwin Shaw was one of the few critics who saw the play drawing a parallel to the communist witch-hunt in the late 1940s in America. The audience according to Esslin was not prepared for Brecht's play that was "without mounting climaxes" and lacked "well-constructed scenes". The "loosely strung together sequences of dialogues" and the simple stage design was not what the audience expected according to Esslin (69). And according to Brecht himself, he found the reaction of the audience and the reviews of the critics simply as "bad" (Shoeps 245).

