

## Chapter Four

### The Berlin Version and Brecht's Returning Home

#### I. The Creation of the Berlin Version

On October 31, 1947, one day after Brecht was excused from the House Committee of Un-American Activities, he left America and flew to Europe. The quick departure was planned out in advance, according to Bruce Cook, who noted that Brecht has sold his house in California, and taken all his manuscripts with him. After his arrival in Paris, he headed to Zurich, where he has already during wartime established a theater to produce his plays. But in the end, it was Germany where Brecht wished to return, and he knew that he had better chances of having his own theater in East Germany, but since he did not want to lose the chance of having his plays produced in West Germany, he needed to establish himself as an independent Marxist dramatist first (Cook 205).

On 1948, Brecht returned to Berlin, and produced Mother Courage and her Children in the Soviet governed section of the city.<sup>35</sup> After a successful performance, Brecht negotiated with the Mayor of East Berlin of the establishment of his own theater and rehearsal facilities, a discussion that later led to the founding of the Berliner Ensemble. On June 1930, Brecht settled himself in East Berlin for good, but before he made the choice to reside in a country run by a communist government, he secured his financial autonomy by giving the copyright of his works to the West German Publisher, Peter Suhrkamp (Esslin 79, Cook 206). Before the establishment of the Berliner Ensemble in East Germany in 1950, Brecht sought for a way to establish his autonomy under the communist regime by applying for an

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<sup>35</sup>Berlin was divided after WWII by England, France USA and the Soviet Union. The sections that were governed by England, France and the US were referred to as West Berlin. The section that was governed by the Soviet Union was referred to as East Berlin.

Austrian passport in 1949, one that was granted to him finally in 1950. Esslin noted that the Austrian passport would grant him access to the countries that did not recognize the East German government and that he would be able to travel freely across Western Europe (Esslin 81).

Martin Esslin decried Brecht as “the eternal rebel [who] became the member of the ruling class of a rigidly organized, hierarchical society, the eternal outsider a member of the establishment” (Esslin 149), when Brecht has decided to leave Switzerland where he has struggled to put his plays on stage as an independent dramatist, to live in East Germany and to become the voice for a totalitarian country. Actually, Brecht’s “prestige as an internationally famous figure who had thrown in his lot with the regime, the very fact that his presence was being used for purposes of propaganda, seemed to give him an opportunity to make his views count,” according to Esslin, Brecht in East Germany had “access to the authorities” (Esslin 82), and had powers that he would not have enjoyed if he chose to live in the West. In fact, Brecht became the most popular dramatist of East Germany, with the four million copies of books that he sold and the fifty titles in the editions of his works on record or tape (Silberman 95).

According to Speirs, Brecht’s influence in East Germany can be seen by his participation in many propaganda exercises and public discussions where he supported the GDR government (Speirs 176). For example in 1953 he made a public statement that he was against free elections throughout the country, for he believed that elections are meaningless when the general voter is under-informed, which situation can only be changed if “the electorate has received the necessary Marxist-Leninist schooling (Speirs 177). Speirs also noted that despite the fact that Brecht has made a reputation of being “a champion of the man in the street” (Speirs

177), he has not made any observations about the difficulties of life in East Germany after 1953. The criticism on Brecht took a drastic climb during the worker's uprising in 16 and 17 June 1953. The demonstration was violently put down by the Soviet army that intervened by using tanks on the demonstrators. Brecht first reacted to the situation by sending a public letter to the GDR<sup>36</sup> leader, which stated his support for the party (Speirs 178). However, when he was later criticized of patronizing the GDR government, he explained that he only supported the use of Soviet tanks against the fascist members that have infiltrated the worker's riot, and that he believed that the armed forces were not used against a workers' demonstration (Speirs 178).

Brecht started to work on the third version of Life of Galileo in 1953 when he was residing in Berlin. He was already in charge of his own theater company, the Berliner Ensemble, which is a group of actors, composers, and dramatists, who are devoted to put Brecht's plays on stage. And above all, he had his own theater, the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm. The Berliner Ensemble staged at first his previously written plays on the stage, such as Mother Courage, and Brecht did not write any new plays for the Ensemble except for Turandot and The Congress of Whitewashers (Cook 210).

According to Dickson, Brecht noted during a rehearsal of the Berlin version of Galileo that his protagonist is "earthy, sinful and carnal" (Dickson 96). It is obvious that for the third and last time, Brecht was determined to turn his once role model for the intellectuals to a social traitor. Brecht has also noted that he wanted to bring out the criminal in the hero, and stated that Galileo, is a hero, who becomes a villain. When Brecht was working on the staging of Galileo in 1955, he was

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<sup>36</sup> GDR abbr. German Democratic Republic.

already a sick man, and could not attend to every rehearsal. Brecht directed the play together with Erich Engel, with whom he also co-directed Mother Courage. Together they attended 59 stagings but when Brecht's health condition drastically declined in March, he was never able to attend to another staging until he died in August 1956 at the age of 58 (BBCAP 180-81).

Brecht insisted to "bring out the criminal in the hero" when he was working on the third version. He stated once: "If my class, the bourgeoisie, could have possibly solved the problems arising, I am sure I would not have wasted my time with the proletariat. But in my time, it had already lost the ability to pose even the right question" (Schwarcz 299). Thus the reason for Brecht's own class betrayal was explained and due to this insight, he points out that his Galileo's sin lies in not having committed the class betrayal and not having turned his back on the ruling authority and their ideologies to join the common folk. Instead Galileo's recantation delayed the end of the class struggle and hence he was a criminal according to Brecht's view.

According to Paul Kroker, Brecht worked on the class betrayal theme with such intensity because he believed that Brecht was feeling guilty himself and that he has failed just like Galileo. It is commonly acknowledged that the Galileo play is quite autobiographical, and that Brecht sees himself as his protagonist. Brecht even had his own trial in 1947 when he was subpoenaed to the American congress to defend his Marxist tendency. During the hearing, Brecht was introduced as a witness, and faced some of his earlier plays that were clearly pointing towards a Marxist belief; however, Brecht talked himself out of it by diverting the issue to bad translation and misreading of his work.<sup>37</sup> He denied all evidences that were laid before him and

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<sup>37</sup>The investigator of the House Un-American Activity Committee, Mr. Robert E. Stripling cited a

also denied any relationship towards National Socialism and Marxism. When the hearing was over, he was excused by the committee and immediately left the USA to travel back to Europe (Esslin 69-76). This incident, according to Kroker has influenced Brecht on his character building of Galileo. In the third version, Brecht has taken away Galileo's right to make a final apology of his recantation and thus taken away his chance to redeem himself as a scientist and as an intellectual.



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passage from Brecht's play The Measure and asks Brecht whether the person in the play was killed for the benefit of the communist party. Brecht, knowingly interprets this passage wrongly by using another play to confuse it with The Measure. The new interpretation would help Brecht to talk himself out of the accusation. In addition, when an interview of Brecht conducted by a Russian periodical was brought up, the content suggested Brecht of being a sympathizer of the communist party. Brecht in his defense denied any memory of such interview. When the Committee asked if Brecht's plays were influenced by Marxism, he replied that he, as a dramatist of historical plays, needed to conduct certain studies, one of which happens to be on Marxism (Esslin 71-72).



Fig. 5. Picture of Ernst Busch as Galileo Galilei in the Berlin version.

## II. Galileo in the Berlin Version

What differences did Brecht and his collaborators make when they worked on the Berlin version? First, they reintroduced the lengthy opening speech by Galileo, which is an introduction of Galileo's main goals that he wants to accomplish throughout his life. His sets a high value on reason and a will to educate the common folk, two ideas that are absent from the American version are reinserted into the speech. The meaning of this change is to make Galileo's goal more significant than the pure pursuit of scientific knowledge in the American version, and the magnitude of the whole affair can thus be reestablished. Galileo, the authority manipulated scientist in the American version has been replaced by Galileo the traitor of his people. The hero has to climb up a ladder of higher morals so that he can fall harder to the ground, and this might be the reason why Galileo's idealism was reintroduced from the Danish version, to make him appear more noble in the first glance, but to strip him off his idealism and to lay him bare with his unforgivable sin by the end of the play.

In the Danish version, the conflict between the working class and the upper class has not been emphasized. Although there was a trace of it when Ludovico,

son of an aristocrat has refused to marry Virginia because of her father's work and the same issue was pointed out and magnified in the American and Berlin version. Ludovico in the Danish version does not make a comment on how Galileo's work would have effect on his peasants, but he simply declares his unwillingness to marry Virginia whilst her father is working on the sunspots which will bring him at odds with the church. In the American and Berlin version, however, Ludovico refers to his peasants as animals, brutes, dogs that have to be whipped in order to function well (G2 94-95, G3 68). His work is to administer the common folks, and Galileo's study poses to be a threatening menace to his family's domination. Galileo can be interpreted in this scene as a hero, who is able to set the people free by shaking the very grounds under their feet. He believes that his work is not only scientific and idealistic, but also can help the exploited and oppressed. And above all, Galileo is aware of the influence of his work and determines to continue with it, even if his daughter's marriage is in jeopardy. This might exhibit Brecht under Marxist influence, that Galileo's role of a scientist has been developed into the role as a revolutionist of the proletariat. His science and the knowledge are a reminder to the common people that the world is changing. This idea is hinted in the Danish Version, and the vague implication has been replaced by a powerful statement of possible revolution when Galileo loudly proclaims to "stir up" (G3 69) Ludovico's peasants, to make his servants and overseers learn new thoughts by writing in the vernacular.

Matti in the American version and Vanni in the Berlin version both represent powerful people who support Galileo's cause. Matti ensures Galileo that: "If they ever try anything, Mr. Galilei, remember you have friends in all walks of life" (G2 105), which upon Galileo replies coldly after Mattis' exit that he does not see

himself as their leader, but only as a scientist. In the Berlin version, Vanni represents the working class who assures Galileo that “the manufacturers are on his side” (G3 75). He states that: “I swim or sink with men like you, Mr. Galilei! If ever they try to harm you, please remember that you have friends in every branch of industry” (G3 75). In addition Vanni is ready to offer Galileo a possibility to escape from the inquisition in order to continue the fight against authority. However, in this version, Galileo clings to the authority and is ready for his submission when he replies to Vanni: “I'm able to distinguish power from lack of power” (G3 76). This scenario is used to further condemn Galileo as a traitor of the proletariat, for he chooses to alliance himself with the hierarchic order when he states:” Nonsense, the grand duke is a pupil of mine, not to mention the fact that if anyone tries to trip me up the pope himself will tell him where to get off” (G3 76).

Galileo’s recantation of his science and new thoughts became a greater setback to the other intellectuals of his time, and the new age that could have its birth during Galileo’s time has taken a large step back. Although Galileo finished Discorsi, his recantation has already damaged the moral of the scientists. At the end, Andrea has become a scientist himself, but he still believes that a scientists’ role is only to create new inventions and to make new discoveries. Galileo in his house arrest, however, has realized his place in society is not only to pursue science for science’s sake, but to use it to free the people from their chains. In his opinion, the purpose of science “is to lighten the toil of human existence” (G3 94). He begins to see that he could have made a difference if only he had not recanted. The writing of Discorsi, in Andrea’s opinion, is the atonement of Galileo’s betrayal; but Galileo admits to Andrea that Discorsi is created due to old habits of writing and thinking, and he confesses that the writings of it does not serve to make up for his sin, Galileo states:



“I have betrayed my calling. A man who does what I have done, cannot be tolerated in the ranks of science” (G3 94). He now believes that since the recantation has already done too much damage that cannot be reversed, he can no longer see himself as a scientist anymore.

Fuegi states that the Life of Galileo performed in Paris by the Berlin Ensemble was criticized since the critics believed that the Ensemble had made false interpretations of Brecht’s ideas, namely to prevent any emotional attachment of the audience to the characters of the play (BBCAP 181). Fuegi quotes from Fritz Erpenbeck, a critic who has studied the theory on epic theater and its distancing effect, his reaction after seeing The Life of Galileo performed by the Berliner Ensemble in France:

But besides all this theory, what do I actually see on stage during this intellectual battle? I see a man who has weakened his eyes at the telescope and who is now almost blind as a result of working, illegally, by moonlight, in order to make a copy of a work extremely useful to mankind. This is not merely spoken; this is demonstrated . . . , while, all the time, he is being spied upon by his stupid and shrewish daughter. And I am supposed to hate this man? I don’t care how many directives are issued demanding that I do so, I simply cannot. (183)

Brecht has tried two times already to make his protagonist a villain, however he has made the same mistake as he did in the American version: he thought by putting a confession into the mouth of the protagonist would be instantly believed by the audience. The fact is that a character’s action cannot be reversed and downplayed by one speech alone, and that his actions throughout the play will inevitably play a very important part of the judgment making of the audience. Galileo is a complex

character, and the audience sympathizes his predicament that Brecht could not mold him into a villain, as he wanted to. In Brecht and Method, Frederic Jameson points out that “a thing can either mean itself or the opposite” (124), which means that every object can be seen from two sides, what it is and what it is not, hence everything is the opposite of itself. Jameson proposes that since Galileo’s recantation can be either seen as heroic (he stays alive and finish the Discorsi) or as cowardice (he recants to save own live), the purpose of this character has been fulfilled, because no matter to which side the audience leans to, both options will be considered. According to Jameson the recognition of the issue itself is what matters and Brecht has successfully created a character that impels the audience to learn and think.

