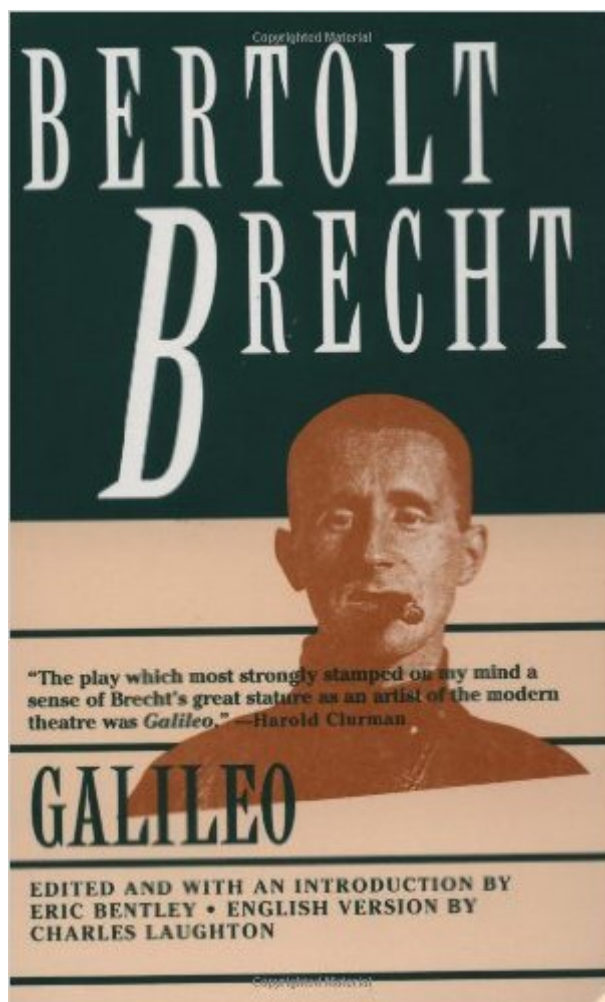


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Galileo



Synopsis

Considered by many to be one of Brecht's masterpieces, *Galileo* explores the question of a scientist's social and ethical responsibility, as the brilliant Galileo must choose between his life and his life's work when confronted with the demands of the Inquisition. Through the dramatic characterization of the famous physicist, Brecht examines the issues of scientific morality and the difficult relationship between the intellectual and authority. This version of the play is the famous one that was brought to completion by Brecht himself, working with Charles Laughton, who played Galileo in the first two American productions (Hollywood and New York, 1947). Since then the play has become a classic in the world repertoire. "The play which most strongly stamped on my mind a sense of Brecht's great stature as an artist of the modern theatre was *Galileo*." - Harold Clurman; "Thoughtful and profoundly sensitive." - Newsweek.

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Customer Reviews

Recently, the American Psychological Association discovered, to its general embarrassment, that a good number its members had collaborated with Pentagon- and CIA-sponsored torturers--or practitioners of "enhanced interrogation." The psychologists had provided expert advice about levels of endurance, psychological techniques for cracking resistance, and so on. To its credit, the APA formally condemned such collaboration. But the whole sordid incident reminds us (as if we need reminding) that when men and women of science allow their knowledge to be misused, either out of cowardice or misguided patriotism, science can become a horrible tool for exploitation and destruction. This, in a nutshell, is the central theme of Brecht's second version of "*Galileo*." The play

is one of Brecht's best. Written with a nondidactic hand, the play is anything but dreary socialist realism. At times funny and at other times incredibly sad, the sober message that it is the scientist's responsibility to make sure that his or her discoveries are used properly runs throughout. In abjuring his physics under threats from the Inquisition, Brecht's Galileo displays moral cowardice: first, because he allows established power to usurp his discoveries, and second because he lets down the people who could most profit from his specific discoveries as well as the spirit of unfettered inquiry that generated them. As Galileo says at one point in the play, "The practice of science would seem to call for valor." Several reviewers have remarked that the introduction by Eric Bentley is long-winded and have accordingly reduced their rating for the book. This strikes me as odd for two reasons. First, presumably one purchases "Galileo" to read Brecht, not attached commentary.

This is an excellent play which can be read quickly in a few hours. The play is preceded by an introduction by Eric Bentley which I will also review. Following the play is an appendix where Brecht elaborates on five aspects of telling the truth which are relevant to the play and make an interesting commentary following the play. Bertolt Brecht uses the life of Galileo to comment upon his own times and conditions but it is the strength of the play that it would and could reflect upon the entire human condition and situations where a new truth challenges a well established ideology. The story is well established in history that Galileo discovered various aspects around the movement of the planets and the moon which challenged Christian orthodoxy, he is allowed some flexibility by the church in recognition of his status, but eventually he is forced to recount his writings as fictitious and not reflective of the larger truth taught by Christianity. It is to Brecht's great credit that the Cardinals, Pope, Bishop, and inquisitors are for the most part portrayed as highly educated, sophisticated men who greatly appreciated how a challenge to Christian orthodoxy could be the first step in undermining the entire conceptual faith model that Christianity had built over a period of 1000 years. To allow that the earth revolves around the sun opens up the possibility that there was not a virgin birth or a resurrection, concepts on which Christianity hangs. Galileo was up against wise men, not fools, and they were strong defenders of the Christian conceptual model and the infrastructure of the church which is built upon that conceptual foundation.

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