



*Ideology in Bertolt Brecht's Life of Galileo*

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الايديولوجيا في حياة غاليليو لبرتولت بريخت

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## Abstract:

*Life of Galileo by Bertolt Brecht is a reflection on the concept/relation of freedom with 'truth/s'. The play depicts the representation of 'truth' and how it sets free the oppressed (at least in ideological sense if not regarding the control of power system/state) and how an unjust social structure is supported by a "false ideology", (ideas believed to be true but are not). The play focusses on the struggle of Galileo to establish the Heliocentric theory proposed by Copernican, as well as the struggle between science and dogmatism during that era. It also explores important themes of courage, religion, science, betrayal, and truth. In terms of viewpoints, the play can be analyzed through different focal points, like for example: a Marxist scholarly hypothesis can be utilized to look at how the play studies capitalism and its effect on society. The researcher in this paper has worked on the concept of belief system, after that explained, and pointed out important points from the play Life of Galileo to get it the specificities and subtleties. The paper is implied to get it how belief system works both obviously and latently inside a structure whether recognized or obviously worked for. Life of Galileo is a thought-provoking play that invites investigations regarding different topics such as truth, flexibility, science, religion etc. Here in this paper, it has been analyzed through a general philosophical point of view and Marxist theory for a profound understanding of its meaning and centrality, which is not constrained to the Marxist tradition only.*

**Key Words:** Ideology, Marxism, culture, religion, dogmatism

## المخلص:

"حياة غاليليو" بقلم برتولت بريخت هي انعكاس لمفهوم/علاقة الحرية بـ "الحقيقة/الحقائق". تصور المسرحية تمثيل "الحقيقة" وكيف تحرر المضطهدين (على الأقل بالمعنى الأيديولوجي إن لم يكن فيما يتعلق بالسيطرة على نظام السلطة / الدولة) وكيف يتم دعم البنية الاجتماعية غير العادلة من خلال "أيديولوجية زائفة" (أفكار). (يُعتقد أنها صحيحة ولكنها ليست كذلك). تركز المسرحية على كفاح غاليليو لتأسيس نظرية مركزية الشمس التي اقترحها كوبرنيكوس، بالإضافة إلى الصراع بين العلم والعقيدة خلال تلك الحقبة، كما تستكشف موضوعات مهمة مثل الشجاعة والدين والعلم ومن حيث وجهات النظر يمكن تحليل المسرحية من خلال محاور مختلفة، على سبيل المثال: يمكن الاستفادة من فرضية علمية ماركسية للنظر في كيفية دراسة المسرحية للرأسمالية وتأثيرها على المجتمع وقد تناول البحث مفهوم النظام الاعتقادي، بعد أن أوضحت وأبرزت نقاطاً مهمة من مسرحية حياة غاليليو للتعرف على خصوصياتها ودقائقها، وتهدف الدراسة إلى التعرف على كيفية عمل النظام الاعتقادي بشكل واضح وخفي داخله هيكل سواء تم التعرف عليه أو من الواضح أنه يعمل من أجله. حياة غاليليو هي مسرحية مثيرة للتفكير وتدعو إلى إجراء تحقيقات بشأن موضوعات مختلفة مثل الحقيقة والمرونة والعلم والدين وما إلى ذلك. وفي هذا البحث، تم تحليلها من خلال وجهة نظر فلسفية عامة ونظرية ماركسية لفهم عميق لـ معناها ومركزيتها، والتي لا تقتصر على التقليد الماركسي فقط.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأيديولوجيا، الماركسية، الثقافة، الدين، العقيدة

## **Introduction**

Bertolt Brecht is considered an important figure in the field of contemporary drama, creating a critical moment at which the trajectory of theatre development had to be paused for improvement. His immense contributions to dramatic methods, theatrical standards and the concept of epic theatre gave him enormous stature. Among his many successful works, the play *Life of Galileo* occupies a special place. The influence of this work goes far beyond its reflection on the sufferings of Galileo Galilei, the philosopher who had a significant influence on the scientific revolution that followed. It also represents the constant struggle between authoritarian religious pragmatism and scientific freedom of belief. This article therefore aims to examine the complex relationship religion and science as depicted by Brecht's description of Galileo, in the context of the dominant ideology of his time. Arekar in "The Post-Marxist Relevance of Bertolt Brecht's 'The Life of Galileo'" writes:

Marxism, as Brecht understood it provided a framework where all the attitudes were allowed to crystallize into a positive pattern. What was more important to Brecht, it was aesthetically satisfying. What attracted him more was the dramatic quality of the Hegelian dialectic. Marxism adopted many concepts from Hegel - the necessity to curb individualism, and the necessity of education for making choices in life. The idea that an individual is part of the whole and that it plays a role in society is the starting point of Marxist belief. However, he departed from Hegel in the concept of the economic factor as the determining one. (327)

In this paper, the play is acknowledged for its remarkable and insightful exploration of ideology and its significant relevance to the contemporary era. In theory, this article primarily draws upon Althusser's ideology and art theory which is applied to Brecht's *Life of Galileo*. Within Althusser's works "Marxism and Humanism" (1963) and "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus" (1969), Althusser defined ideology as a system encompassing myths, images, and ideas that fulfil political and

economic roles within society. Ideology is not a collection of abstract academic theories but signifies "our lived relationship to historical reality, our 'world' itself," as portrayed in popular culture. Althusser asserted that Marxism, specifically *Historical Materialism*, stands as a scientific interpretation rather than an ideology, offering genuine insights into societal structures. On the other hand, in Capitalism and other similar social systems, ideologies serve distinct functions that are not consciously chosen by individuals and may not necessarily constitute rational or deliberate components of their cognition or personality.

Pictures from motion pictures, promoting, and TV are portion of existence , and indeed in spite of the fact that they bear small likeness to the genuine world that most individuals encounter, clothing, ways of life, bodies, and homes have gotten to be portion of well-known culture. I am drawing a demonstrate of Marxist science appeared that "in reality, our lives are decided in each regard by the capitalist framework of generation relations in which we live." Pictures from movies, promoting, and TV are part of

existence , and indeed in spite of the fact that they bear small likeness to the genuine world that most individuals encounter, clothing, ways of life, bodies, and homes have gotten to be portion of prevalent culture.

Althusser argued that the state and its state apparatus serve the function of maintaining the ruling class. The Repressive State Appliances (RSA), which include courts, the military, the prisons, and the police, serve the purpose of protecting capitalist interests.

The Ideological State Appliances (ISA) which include religion, the political parties, education, and the media, serve the function of shaping minds and personality, creating consent, manipulating and propagandizing the masses.

Class-based ideologies will always control the arts, the education system, the political system, and the media. However, as Gramsci once said, “the arts, culture and the education system are arenas for class struggle, where the ideology of opposition and resistance finds expression.”

Marxist theorists such as Gramsci and Althusser primarily focused on the cultural, ideological, and social aspects of urban, industrial capitalism during the 20th Century, a period that post-dated Galileo's era. The Renaissance, Protestant Reformation, and Scientific Revolution occurred during the early modern period, marking the advent of capitalism. This was a time when banking and manufacturing were nascent, and nation-states were just beginning to form. In these states, absolute monarchs ruled in partnership with state-sponsored churches. However, early liberal and radical thinkers representing the growing bourgeoisie in England and Holland, as well as other northern European countries, began to question these institutions. They saw Copernican, Galilean, and Newton New Science as a progressive movement against the old regime's reactionary institutions such as the Catholic Church before capitalism and the nation-state came into being. In the pre-capitalistic world, the church dominated cultural, religious, and ideological life. As a result, ideological

struggle “in the pre-capitalist world” took place primarily at the “level of political and religious discourse” of the educated elite.

This transpired prior to the bourgeoisie's acquisition of political power, as the state was under the control of monarchs, aristocrats, and bishops. Althusser proposed that in the context of modern capitalism, the education system had emerged as the primary arena for class struggle. As Marx and Engels famously stated in *The Communist Manifesto*, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (Marx and Engels 79). This underscores the transformative potential of ideologies and their role in shaping societal structures. Church authorities wielded significant influence during this period, reflecting Marx's assertion that "Religion... is the opium of the people" (Marx 131).

### **Brecht and Althusser's Philosophy of Ideology**

Brecht, a revolutionary Marxist playwright, was a main influence for Althusser. Through works like *Life of Galileo*, he confronted as well as challenged capitalist ideology through theatre. It is important to highlight that both Althusser and Brecht argued that



in a capitalist society, theatre was just another commodity alongside film, TV, and radio. Despite this, they recognized the potential for subversion. Traditional theatre, they believed, reinforced authoritarianism and upheld prevailing societal ideologies. In classical and melodramatic forms, the hero's death or sacrifice provided a fictitious and ideal resolution to societal conflicts and contradictions.

In these states, absolute monarchs ruled in partnership with state-sponsored churches. However, early liberal and radical thinkers representing the growing bourgeoisie in England and Holland, as well as other northern European countries, began to question these institutions. They saw Copernican, Galilean, and Newton New Science as a progressive movement against the old regime's reactionary institutions such as the Catholic Church before capitalism and the nation-state came into being. In the pre-capitalistic world, the church dominated cultural, religious, and ideological life. As a result, ideological struggle “in the pre-

capitalist world” took place primarily at the “level of political and religious discourse” of the educated elite.

In his essay “On Brecht and Marx” (1968), Althusser praised Brecht as a theatrical revolutionary, placing him on the same level as Marx's political and philosophical revolution. Althusser argued that both men recognized the objective and historical existence of the region they were trying to influence. Like other major works of art and literature, their works departed from prevailing ideological assumptions and sought to challenge and dismantle the myths and idols worshiped by society. As a result, Althusser assumed that great works of art have a progressive rather than a reactionary or bourgeois character.

Althusser and Brecht both saw ‘ideology’ as partly dramatic in a way that it succeeds in portraying the audience in a dialectical relationship with the work. Brecht’s view is that spectators/viewers should not be ‘passive’ spectators simply seeking entertainment or escape. Rather, they were encouraged to actively participate through their minds/consciousness regarding

questioning the social, political, and economic situations as well as ideas portrayed on stage. This 'ideology' was perceived as an indicator of state power which is itself controlled and in this 'created reality' individuals play a role (whether they know or surrender to it voluntarily) without contributing to its creation, allowing audiences to empathize with the play's characters facing similar situations.

In Brecht's theatrical works, the actors were engaged in a collaborative endeavour with the director and playwright to bring the drama to life on stage. His play *Life of Galileo* underwent numerous revisions from 1938 to 1945 before it was finally staged in the United States by renowned British actor-director Charles Laughton. Brecht's plays deviated from traditional norms by not featuring heroes in the classical sense and eschewing tidy resolutions or conclusions. As Marx and Engels noted, "The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living" (Marx and Engels 146). This sentiment underscores Brecht's innovative approach to theatre, which sought

to challenge traditional narratives and stimulate critical thinking among the audience.

### **Brecht's Life of Galileo**

Bertolt Brecht, a prominent playwright of the Weimar Republic, sought refuge in the United States after the Nazis seized power in 1933. Upon returning to Europe in 1947, he settled in East Germany, facing a Stalinist regime that allowed less dissent than the Catholic Church in earlier times. Despite his private opposition to the Soviet suppression of the working-class rebellion in 1953, he remained in East Germany until his death. During his voluntary exile in Denmark, Brecht wrote "Life of Galileo," a departure from his earlier openly Communist or Marxist works. Crafted during the Popular Front era, a coalition combating fascism, the play minimized political messages and overt Marxist elements.

Over two decades, Brecht worked on three versions of "Life of Galileo." In the 1938-39 version, Galileo was not wholly antagonistic toward the Church and aristocracy but was portrayed as corrupt and cynical. The 1945-47 version, written after the

bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, reflected a more pessimistic outlook, depicting an older Galileo admitting fear of torture and coercion by the Church authorities. Brecht, through Galileo, expressed self-reproach for perceived betrayal of the cause of science.

Despite the undeniable truth of Galileo's theories, the church and nobility resisted change, maintaining their control by withholding crucial information and perpetuating ignorance among the lower classes. Galileo, recognizing this resistance, metaphorically viewed his environment as a "rain gutter," where rulers exploited science for selfish ends while suppressing knowledge among the masses.

## **Conclusion**

Brecht's depiction of Galileo differs greatly from the traditional hero archetype, instead portraying him as a moral failure and betrayer. In fact, he goes as far as suggesting that Galileo may even be seen as an Antichrist for the modern era. Brecht highlights Galileo's self-centered desires and egotistical drives, which inadvertently provide ammunition for humanity's adversaries to subjugate, manipulate, and annihilate the masses. The play implies that Galileo's scientific advancements paradoxically lay the groundwork for future militarism, totalitarianism, capitalist exploitation, and anarchy.

Galileo becomes a prototype for the citizens of this dystopian world, as the play vividly illustrates the constant struggle between self-condemnation and self-assertion experienced by those living under oppressive regimes, such as Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union. The character of the Little Monk is portrayed sympathetically, as he agrees with Galileo's theories but fears that they will strip his parents of their faith and convert them into

atheists. This fear resonates with the concerns of the Catholic Church.

The ruling elites controlled the 'New Science' were not interested to improve the lives of the common people, but to increase their own wealth and power. Galileo here falls far short of being the ideal ground breaking influence or hero that Brecht and Althusser would have preferred. Instead, he resembles one of Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian greed or simply utilitarian calculator that is constantly seeking ways and calculating to maximize one's own pleasure and avoid pain. In essence, Galileo embodies the bourgeois ideology and culture that Brecht and Althusser aimed to overthrow, but ultimately failed to do so.

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