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# Revolutionary Artistry-- Brecht, Marx, and the Evolution of Epic Theatre

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REVOLUTIONARY ARTISTRY  
BRECHT, MARX, AND THE EVOLUTION OF EPIC THEATRE

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Aristotle, considered to be one of the great classical political theorists and thinkers of his time, pondered questions of humanity, nature, and everything that lay in between and beyond. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle claims that there are six elements of tragedy – plot, character, thought, diction, song, and spectacle (1450a 8-10). He prioritizes them in the order above, deeming plot as the most important element to any dramatic piece of theatre (*Poetics* 1450a 38). While theatre, drama, and performance have evolved since Aristotle’s early thoughts on them, these six elements form the basis for understanding drama in perhaps its most distilled form. Though dramatists and playwrights differ in their inspirations and muses, Aristotle’s writings serve as the framework to understanding theatre as a “imitation, not of men, but of an action and life” (*Poetics* 1450a 16-17).

As in political theory and, more broadly, philosophy, theatrical frameworks and understandings can come about as a rejection of previously held beliefs. As in the case of German playwright Bertolt Brecht, we see a complete rejection of the aesthetic that Aristotle developed for dramatics in favor of developing a new aesthetic – one that truly allows for the audience to reflect “critically on the social causes of human suffering” (Curran 2001, 167). Specifically, Brecht rejected Aristotle’s view of catharsis, the purgation of pity or fear through art, as antithetical to a true understanding of a play (see *Poetics*, Chs. 13-16). With this as his goal, Brecht established what he dubbed “epic theatre” – a genre that rejected prior aesthetics and confronted deeply political issues within society as he saw them. Requiring audiences to critically reflect on the topics they saw on stage, Brecht wanted his audiences to be intellectually engaged, for discussions to continue beyond the theater, and for social change to occur as a result. To create epic theatre, Brecht, like Aristotle, drew from his interpretation of human nature and previous philosophical and political thought – specifically in the writings of Karl Marx.

The goal of this research is to examine how Brecht used the political writings of Marx to develop his own ideas to create the genre of epic theatre. Despite not appearing in the canon of political theorists, Brecht's essays on theatre and his plays depict an application of Marxist ideas and a progression of those ideas similar to the dialectics that Marx himself practiced. While both men used dialectical materialism as a way to understand the history of the world, Brecht brought complex theoretical concepts to the stage while Marx wrote essays and books dissecting theory and philosophical thought. Each man operated within his own time and across various countries, exiled under various circumstances and for a variety of reasons. For Marx, he lived as a pariah in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, exiled from Germany and France for his radical ideas and espousing of social revolution; he spent the rest of his life in poverty in London until his death in 1883 (Blumenberg 1972, 173). As for Brecht, he challenged previous notions of theatre at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, living through both World War I and World War II, as well as fleeing Nazi Germany in the aftermath of the Reichstag fires in 1933 (Unwin 2012, 15).

Previous studies of Brecht and Marx have centered on various themes, from analyzing Brecht's aesthetic and how to stage it to the theoretical underpinnings of Brecht's social politics and his tenuous relationship with the communist party of post-World War II East Germany (see Esslin 1961, Chs. 6 and 7). This study will explore how Brecht operates as a political thinker and how he applied Marx's theories to fit the stage. In other words, how can one use political theory to direct a work by Brecht? I answer this question by examining three of Brecht's plays (*The Three Penny Opera*; *Mother Courage and her Children*; and *Life of Galileo*) and his essays on theatre through the theoretical framework of Marxist theory from both literary and political theories (see Barry 2017, Ch. 8 for a concise history of Marxist literary criticism). I then present a proposal for directing a production of *Life of Galileo* based on this analysis.

Through this research, light is shed on how political theory can be used to advance creative thought and the development of an aesthetic. Although Brecht calls for a rejection of traditional aesthetics in his essay, “Shouldn’t we Abolish Aesthetics” (originally published June 2, 1927 in the *Berliner Börsen-Courier*), I argue that epic theatre presents a new aesthetic – one that is best brought to light through analyzing the theory behind the theatrical works of Brecht. I find key Marxist concepts such as class struggle and alienation within Brecht’s body of work (the former especially in *Three-Penny Opera* and the latter in *Mother Courage*), similar to prior research that has been conducted (Squiers 2014; Barry 2017; Sokel 1971; and Unwin 2012). This project is significant as many plays and dramatic works are made in response to key events in history, intertwining politics with creative expression. This research furthers this understanding by drawing upon the research methods of political theory, literary analysis, and theatre history to illustrate how political thought changes when applied with dramatic practice.

## **Marx**

To properly direct a production of any of Brecht’s plays, it is necessary to begin with one of his greatest sources of inspiration – Karl Marx. Born in Trier, Germany on May 5, 1818, Marx is viewed as the great contributor who unified scattered trains of socialist thought into a coherent ideology (Baradat 2009, 165-166). Although originally sent to study law by his father, Marx eventually graduated with a Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Jena (Blumenberg 1972, 18). Condemned for his “radical political ideas,” Marx lived in exile all across Europe, with one country after the other forcing him into exile for his beliefs (Baradat 2009, 166). As he was expelled from country after country, Marx met Friedrich Engels, an heir to his family’s business in the textile industry (Baradat 2009, 166). Engels would later become Marx’s benefactor and friend, supporting

him financially and enabling Marx to work on his research rather than finding a means of income (Blumenberg 1972, 64; Rius 1976, 30).

Whereas Marx “could only express himself creatively after detailed study and systematic examination of the material and after a long struggle, Engels had an astonishing gift for speedy orientation” (Blumenberg 1972, 64). Through their lifelong collaboration, Engels was able to distill Marx’s ideas and aided him in creating *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) – a critical moment in the history of the world as Marx and Engels felt as though the socialist revolution would occur at any moment. In creating the manifesto, Marx and Engels were able to create a doctrine for the revolutionaries to follow, thereby asserting control over the revolution and guiding it in a favorable direction for the Communist League (Baradat 2009, 166).

While it would be impossible to conduct a full summary of Marx’s work in this research project, the two most important works read by Brecht were *The Communist Manifesto* and *Capital* (Esslin 1961, 32). As *Capital* itself is a behemoth of reading and its full analysis could take years of work, it will not be the primary focus of this essay. Rather, the views expressed by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* serve as an overview of communism. Although primarily limiting the focus to the more propagandic *Communist Manifesto* will inevitably lead to some loss in the depth of analysis of these plays, it is necessary in order to maintain a reasonable project scope consistent with an honors capstone. Nonetheless, the theories and ideas expressed by Marx in *Capital* will still be briefly explored as many of Brecht’s works explored these very concepts.

Regardless of the text, Marx’s historical theory of the world serves as a means to begin to explore his complex theories. Of the various works written by Marx, one can find a central tenet within the first sentence of *The Communist Manifesto*: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” (Marx and Engels 1888, 3). With this declaration, the

philosophical underpinnings of Marxist thought are revealed – historical dialectical materialism. As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, dialectical materialism is “the theory that political and historical events result from the conflict of social forces (seen as caused by material needs) and are interpretable as a series of contradictions and their solutions.”

Breaking this theory into its two parts – the Oxford English Dictionary defines dialectics as “logic, reasoning; critical investigation of truth through reasoned argument, often by means of dialogue or discussion.” Georg Hegel, a German philosopher, was the first to employ dialectics to develop a “theory of history in which change...was the central theme” (Baradat 2009, 172). Dialectics can be synthesized into three main stages – thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. The thesis is the primary idea that is being questioned or discussed. The antithesis comes as a response to the thesis, usually standing in a stark rejection of the thesis. Following thesis comes synthesis, or a combination of ideas taken from both the thesis and antithesis, which ultimately becomes the new thesis, from which the cycle starts again. Hegel’s dialectical process was grounded in idealism rather than Marx’s materialism – a key distinction that radically changes how one understands the world around oneself. Materialism, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, is “the theory or belief that nothing exists except matter and its movements and modifications.” In opposition to idealism, materialism according to Marx is dependent on our economic resources rather than an answer found in a higher power (often God) to create our beliefs and ideologies. While both philosophers agree that history is driven by change, the origin of our beliefs for Marx is found in the economic structure of society.

Marx viewed society as being comprised of two parts – the foundation and the superstructure. The foundation of society is an economic system that informs how all of society runs, comprised of the means of production (material resources) and the relations of production

(what economic class one is a part of) (Baradat 2009, 170). Those that own the means of production become a part of the ruling class or bourgeoisie which wields significant social influence and power. The superstructure, which is comprised of all of the nonmaterial components (such as art, law, government, religion, etc.), has the sole aim of reinforcing the control of the bourgeoisie. The working class, also known as the proletariat, serves as the antithesis against capitalism, creating an inevitable struggle that would eventually result in socialism, or the dictatorship of the proletariat (Baradat 2009, 181). After a period of time, the need for social classes would end, resulting in a communistic utopia without social classes and the final synthesis of the dialectical process.

With the theoretical framework of historical dialectical materialism established, the arguments proposed by *The Communist Manifesto* can be understood through a series of terms commonly heard when discussing Marxist theory – namely proletariat, bourgeoisie, socialism, and communism. These terms can be understood through the lens of Brecht's plays, as various characters, plot points, and situations illustrate these rather complex terms. In addition, Brecht's interpretation of Marx's ideas resulted in his own theories and insights in how to best engage audiences and to create meaningful discussions on a variety of subjects. While not wholly identical in their content, Marx's influence on Brecht is undeniable. To plumb the depths of this relationship, one must turn to the playwright himself.

## **Brecht**

Born on February 10, 1898 in Augsburg, Germany, Bertolt Brecht travelled to Munich to study medicine and science before being called to be a medical orderly during World War I (Esslin 1961, 7). Altered by images of forced amputations and the horrors of war, Brecht returned to Munich in 1918 but split his attention between his medical studies and becoming a playwright. By



1923, Brecht had seen one of his early plays, *Drums in the Night*, produced by in Munich for a theatre festival. Its success garnered the attention of the top theatre in Berlin, Max Reinhardt's Deutsches Theater and it produced its own version of the play, straying from Brecht's own vision and disappointing both the playwright and the public.

Despite this disappointing premiere, Brecht moved to Berlin in 1924, his creative identity already forming and beginning to hit its stride (Esslin 1961, 20). Brecht would find a world of theatre dominated by three great producers: Max Reinhardt, Leopold Jessner, and Erwin Piscator (Esslin 196, 23). Piscator's early thoughts on creating a new genre of theatre would contrast greatly with Brecht's own – principally in the stress placed on the poetic aspects of drama. Indeed, much of German theatre up until the World War I was dominated by expressionism, a tradition in theatre that sought to “dramatize the inner life” (Unwin 2012, 8). German theatre, primed by Expressionism perhaps to explore later revolutions in theatre, was altogether different than the realism and naturalism preferred by playwrights such as Henrik Ibsen and Antonin Chekhov. While Piscator and, later, Brecht thought that theatre could become a tool of political critique, they disagreed on how to articulate their visions in order to reach the widest audience possible.

While in Berlin, Brecht explored his aesthetic, turning to other writers such as Reinhardt and Piscator before reigniting his interest in the so-called German Revolution of 1918 through his first readings of Marx in 1926 (Unwin 2012, 15). Brecht's study of Marx pushed his flirtation with left-wing politics to a new level of engagement, one that caused him to integrate his Marxist beliefs into his plays. In 1928, he created his adaption of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) – *The Threepenny Opera* – which was well-received by audiences and critics alike. Despite this successful period in which Brecht's work was regularly produced in Berlin, the rise of the Nazi Party and the burning of the Reichstag forced Brecht and his family into exile (Unwin 2012, 15).

He would remain in exile in various countries, including the United States, until 1948, writing the first version of *Life of Galileo* in Denmark in 1938 and *Mother Courage and her Children* in just under a month in the following year (Willett and Manheim 1994, xxxv-xxxvi). By the time he returned to Berlin, Brecht had found success in New York with several of his plays, but nonetheless struggled for the audiences that he had prior to his exile similar to other German artists (Unwin 2012, 12). For the final eight years of Brecht's life, he struggled to fit in with the East German Communist Party, but was able to continue his theatrical work with his Berliner Ensemble, a theatrical company that came about due to the international success of *Mother Courage and Her Children*. Brecht died on August 14, 1956 and was buried in Berlin near the grave of Hegel, who inspired both Marx and Brecht with his advances in dialectical thought (Unwin 2012, 16). Despite Marx's heavy influence on Brecht's work, the playwright placed Hegel as his favorite philosopher not for his use of idealism, but for Hegel's commitment to the dialectical process.

### **Epic Theatre**

During his lifetime, Brecht wrote extensively on theoretical approaches to theatre and had many of his essays published in local papers. Willett's translation of these essays in *Brecht on Theatre* (1974) serves as an important resource to understand many of Brecht's theories in his own words. In addition, both Unwin (2012) and Squiers (2014) detail Brecht's influences and theories through the lens of his plays and political leanings, respectively. Martin Esslin's 1961 biography of Brecht delves into the importance of his unique language in both his plays and poetry. All of these sources indicate a level of nuance to Brecht's inner workings as he set out to create a new approach to theatre, one that was "classical in its ambition but resolutely modern in its form and content" (Unwin 2012, 42). The result was epic theatre.

Epic theatre is comprised of various theatrical techniques, cultural elements, and Marxist theory with the goal of making audiences engage intellectually with what they are seeing onstage in order to cause social change. As Unwin explains in *A Guide to the Plays of Bertolt Brecht* (2012, Ch. 5), Brecht drew inspiration from Shakespeare, the working class, folk arts and peasants, Chinese theatre, and anti-Aristotelian theatre in order to create his vision of a Marxist theatre, just to name a few of his many muses. Brecht's advocacy against the *Poetics*, specifically with the idea of catharsis and the theatrical techniques that Aristotle had argued for, places traditional, dramatic theatre as the thesis and Brecht's epic theatre the antithesis. From this dialectical understanding, it is clear that epic theatre is a reaction against traditional drama. The dichotomy between these two theatrical traditions can be found in Table 1.1 below, taken from Brecht's own essays on theatre as shown in *Brecht on Theatre* (1974).

Table 1.1 – Differences between dramatic and epic theatre created by Bertolt Brecht

Dramatic Theatre	Epic Theatre
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plot</li> <li>• Implicates the spectator in a stage situation</li> <li>• Wears down his capacity for action</li> <li>• Provides him with sensations</li> <li>• Experience</li> <li>• The spectator is involved in something</li> <li>• Suggestion</li> <li>• Instinctive feelings are preserved</li> <li>• The spectator is in the thick of it, shares the experience</li> <li>• The human being is taken for granted</li> <li>• He is unalterable</li> <li>• Eyes on the finish</li> <li>• One scene makes another</li> <li>• Growth</li> <li>• Linear development</li> <li>• Evolutionary determinism</li> <li>• Man as a fixed point</li> <li>• Thought determines being</li> <li>• Feeling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narrative</li> <li>• Turns the spectator into an observer, but</li> <li>• Arouses his capacity for action</li> <li>• Forces him to take decisions</li> <li>• Picture of the world</li> <li>• He is made to face something</li> <li>• Argument</li> <li>• Brought to the point of recognition</li> <li>• The spectator stands outside, studies</li> <li>• The human being is the object of the inquiry</li> <li>• He is alterable and able to alter</li> <li>• Eyes on the course</li> <li>• Each scene for itself</li> <li>• Montage</li> <li>• In curves</li> <li>• Jumps</li> <li>• Man as a process</li> <li>• Social being determines thought</li> <li>• Reason</li> </ul>

Table created by Brecht and reprinted in the essay "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre," found on p. 37 of *Brecht on Theatre* (1974), translated by John Willett.

What this table demonstrates, in Brecht's own words, are the key tenets of epic theatre. Rather than providing the reader or viewer with a clear, linear plot, Brecht sought to create a narrative in which each scene could stand alone and the audience would be aware that the events that they were watching on the stage were a reflection on the time period that they lived in (Unwin 2012, 52). To bring this vision to life, Brecht utilized his rebellious nature to rail against what he perceived as the ordinary, challenging theatrical conventions through language and techniques and at times contradicting himself (see Esslin 1961, Ch. 6). In his youth, Brecht would give several names to the work that he was putting onstage and his process of doing it – epic theatre, non-Aristotelian drama, the alienation effect – but in reality, they dealt with the same end goal: to make the audiences think (Esslin 1961, 120). Epic theatre would be the name used to describe his theory and staging techniques; non-Aristotelian drama meant that it did not depend on the emotional catharsis found in Greek tragedies that Aristotle wrote about in the *Poetics*; and the alienation effect is a style of acting in which the audience is forced to be reminded that they are viewing a play with people pretending to be the characters instead of believing that these actors are the characters. Brecht would go on to attempt to dispel the confusion that he created in his notes on how to act and direct his plays through his essays. He elaborated on his theoretical ideas regarding theatre, trying to clarify and unify his eclectic thoughts and creative visions into a somewhat more comprehensive approach (Esslin 1961, 120-122).

One of his earlier attempts to clarify his various writings came in the form of *A Short Organum for Theatre*, an essay that Brecht wrote while in Zurich, Switzerland awaiting his return to Berlin. In it, Brecht refutes the traditions of naturalism and the aesthetics developed from Aristotle and expands upon the five key components of his theory – the role of alienation, staging and directing techniques for epic theatre, the importance of contradictions, the role of *gestus* (a

modified form of recognizable gestures), and the idea of playing one thing after the other (taking time for each beat of a scene or line to land before moving to the next). These five components create the basis for Brechtian theory and thereby inform our understanding of how epic theatre operates.

First, alienation, according to Brecht, comes from the tradition of Chinese theatre. Brecht argues that the actors are aware that they are being watched and that there is no “fourth wall” separating the stage from the audience (1974, 92). In many ways, though it was primarily used as an acting technique, it permeated to all facets of theatre from direction to design. Brecht encouraged everything to be viewed as though it took place within quotation marks, as though everything was presented from an objective, third-person point of view (Unwin 2012, 58). Brecht did this so that his audiences would begin to think dialectically or in opposites, becoming intellectually engaged as opposed to responding to the events onstage emotionally (or cathartically, as Aristotle suggests). This led to his staging and directing techniques of epic theatre, the second key component, which were noted in Table 1.1. It is important to note that epic theatre itself is a technique, a goal to make sense of the disjointedness of modern life, and can be further understood as dialectics in practice. The disjointedness of modern life makes it so that we see the contradictions within ourselves when the spectacle of the theatre is stripped away through the technique of epic theatre. Just as the ideas established by Aristotle regarding what constitutes drama, epic theatre stands as a result of the contradictions within dramatic tradition and thereby creates a new approach to theatre as its synthesis through the conflict epic theatre and traditional drama have with one another.

Third, Brecht viewed contradictions as essential to drama as well as dialectics, further cementing his theory of theatre within the same realm as the political theory of Marx. The fourth

component of Brechtian theory comes from his use of the term *gestus*, “a physical embodiment of the relationships between people in society” (Unwin 2012, 61). Similar to the English word gesticulation, this physical action aids in the audience’s understanding of the relationships of the characters within the society which is highlighted by alienation techniques. Brecht described *gest* (and *gestus*, more broadly) as “not a matter of explanatory or emphatic movements of the hands, but of overall attitudes” (1974, 104). *Gest* can go beyond mere physicality – extending into language as Brecht points out in one of Shakespeare’s most famous lines: “If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out.” As Brecht describes it, this sentence “starts by presenting the eye, and the first clause has the definite *gest* of making an assumption; the main clause then comes as a surprise, a piece of advice, and a relief” (1974, 104). Brecht uses *gest* as a representation of the effects of society on individuals, exploring relationships on stage and remarking that “the social *gest* is the *gest* relevant to society, the *gest* that allows conclusions to be drawn about the social circumstances” (1974, 104-105). Finally, in order to tell the story effectively, Brecht felt that each moment had to be understood for what it was worth. The company must play one thing after another in order to give the audience enough time to recognize what the moment meant (Unwin 2012, 63). Together, these elements allow us to understand what Brechtian theory means, and how this theory was used to create the epic theatre that we know today.

Certainly, Brecht struggled for his theatrical style to be accepted amongst those that created works for the so-called “Marxist Theatre” (Esslin 1961, 144). In his final collection of essays entitled *Dialectics in the Theatre* published after his death, Brecht seemingly “foreshadow[ed] its [epic theatre’s] substitution by the term ‘dialectical’ theatre” (Esslin 1961, 144). The introductory note to this collection reads,

The essays that follow suggest that the term “epic theatre” may be too formal for the theatre we mean (and practice – up to a point). The epic theatre may be the underlying basis of

these presentations, but it does not fully account for the way they show the productivity and malleability of society, which is the source of most of the enjoyment they provide. The term “epic theatre” must therefore be regarded as inadequate, without our being able to offer a new one. (Brecht qtd. in Esslin 1961, 144)

This quote suggests that even Brecht doubted to what extent his own theatre served as a proper antithesis to Aristotelian theatre more broadly. While the name given to his theoretical approaches to theatre may be disputed, Brecht’s use of the word dialectical rather than epic indicates that the playwright would support the use of dialectics in order to analyze his plays. Epic theatre, as explained above, becomes a much more all-encompassing term rather than the use of dialectics in writing a play. Setting aside, for a moment, the connections and references to Marxist theory present within the selected plays, the very concept of Brecht’s theatre comes from the same dialectical model used by Marx and Hegel. While the dialectical model may not always be able to apply to every situation perfectly, the use of dialectics to analyze Brechtian theatre and as a tool for understanding how to direct his plays is certainly acceptable. Therefore, while the dispute as to what name best encompasses Brechtian theory will continue, the principles remain largely the same.

### **Application of Marx to Brecht**

While the influence of Marxist thought permeates Brecht’s work, this influence extends beyond just the content of the story. As a whole, the concept of epic theatre can be easily understood through the framing of dialectical materialism – extending the influence of Marxist thought that is already present in Brecht’s plays. The concepts of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis can be used to further one’s understanding of how epic theatre as a genre can operate, yielding insight into how to direct one of Brecht’s works. Much like how political thought has been built upon centuries of thought and theory, from authors responding to or reacting against each other’s

ideas and arguments, distinct genres of theatre have formed as responses to or reacting against historical events and other genres within theatre. Akin to how Marx responded to Hegel's own theories considering the history of the world, epic theatre came about as the rejection of traditional aesthetics of Western theatre as first proposed by Aristotle in *Poetics*.

Brecht's response to Aristotelian drama was epic theatre. Aristotle's writings in the *Poetics* is the thesis, with epic theatre the antithesis. The conflict that Brecht found between his ideas and the theatre that surrounded him led to the solution of epic theatre. While Brecht began to clarify his complex theories and opinions surrounding theatrical practice towards the end of his life, there remains the question of what is the synthesis between Aristotle's vision for theatre and Brecht's own vision. As he aged, Brecht's vehement defense of his epic theatre lessened, gradually resulting in a tempered view of what his epic theatre truly accomplished. Despite this uncertainty of what becomes the synthesis of these contrasting traditions, the application of Marxist thought to Brecht's body of work does not simply begin and end with his theory of historical dialectical materialism. Specifically, within three of Brecht's plays we see theories created by Marx in both *The Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital* – *The Threepenny Opera* (1928), *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939), and *Life of Galileo* (1937-1939, 1945-1947).

### *The Threepenny Opera*

Brecht's adaptation of the *Beggar's Opera* in 1928 was widely acclaimed and remains one of his best-known early works. *The Threepenny Opera* critiques bourgeois society and is delivered through the medium of opera, a staple of the German bourgeoisie (Unwin 2012, 114). It is important to note that the opera was, much like the original, based upon popular music at the time each opera was written. If you were to listen to recordings of Brecht and Kurt Weill's score, you



would hear jazz influences rather than the soaring scores of composers like Verdi. This parody of opera then points to the depth in which Brecht sought to critique bourgeois society and theatre. Taking place in the neighborhood of Soho in Victorian London, the play follows the story of Macheath, also known as Mac the Knife, as well as the Peachum family's interactions with him as they try to keep their business (of employing beggars and taking a profit from their begging) afloat. The story ends after Mac the Knife is betrayed to the police three times before being pardoned by the royal family. Although the story itself remains the same, Brecht's retelling of John Gay's original work incorporates stinging critiques of how bourgeois society was corrupt leading up to and during Hitler's rise to power (Unwin 2012, 114).

Despite retaining the same narrative, Brecht highlights two key elements of Marxist theory through the opera – a materialist understanding of human history and class struggle. First, Brecht demonstrates the idea of dialectical materialism. Turning to the finale of act two, the song “What keeps mankind alive?” sung by Mac the Knife and Low-Dive Jenny is a perfect representation of dialectical materialism and a sharp confrontation of bourgeois society (see Appendix for full lyrics):

You gentlemen who think you have a mission  
 To purge us of the seven deadly sins  
 Should first sort out the basic food position  
 Then start your preaching: that's where it begins  
 You lot, who preach restraint and watch your waist as well  
 Should learn for all time how the world is run:  
 However much you twist, whatever lies you tell  
 Food is the first thing. Morals follow on.  
 So first make sure that those who now are starving  
 Get proper helpings when we do the carving.  
     What keeps mankind alive? The fact that millions  
     Are daily tortured, stifled, punished, silenced, oppressed.  
     Mankind can keep alive thanks to its brilliance  
     In keeping its humanity repressed.  
     For once you must try not to shirk the facts:  
     Mankind is kept alive by bestial acts. (145)

The chorus of the song poses the question of what indeed keeps us alive. Above all, Brecht displays a materialistic understanding of how society operates. The lyrics “Food is the first thing. Morals follow on,” highlight the idea that material needs are often placed before ideas. Reflecting upon key concepts in Marx’s works, Brecht shows how the working class struggles for food while the bourgeoisie, who does not have to struggle for material needs, has the time to hand down moral or idealistic judgements. In line with Marxist thought, Brecht’s characters point out that it is through “bestial acts” such as eating are what “keeps mankind alive” (1928, 145). Moral judgments and recommendations do not fulfill the material needs of the proletariat, and are used as a tool in order to keep the bourgeois society in power. Through the lens of the song, the callous act of not providing food for others then becomes an act of violence against the proletariat.

This leads to the second key Marxist concept present in *The Threepenny Opera*, class struggle. Class struggle is defined as a conflict of interest between lower- or working-class citizens and the bourgeois ruling class within a capitalist society (Baradat 2009, 141). The bourgeois society, according to the song, preaches and hands down advice without knowing the actual struggle that the proletariat goes through. Class struggle is often violent, though it would not have to resort to violence in order for a situation to qualify as such. This being said, violence does appear in *The Threepenny Opera* as we see Mac the Knife detained by police and barely escaping the gallows at the end of act three, thanks to the *deus ex machina* of a royal pardon. Jonathan Jeramiah Peachum’s morals suggest that killing Mac the Knife is the only “Christian thing to do,” echoing back to the song in which morals follow food (Brecht 1928, 168 and 145 respectively). The “preaching” that the bourgeoisie is doing to the proletariat when the bourgeois are able to “watch [their] waist as well” implies that the hypocrisy lies within the idealism of religion, a lie told to the proletariat to keep its members content with their lower place in life (Brecht 1928, 145). This

violence in the name of God represents the use of religion to keep the bourgeois in power, another key principle of Marxist thought. Therefore, it seems as though the inevitable end of class struggle results in violence or fatalities of those that constitute the working class (almost always at the hands of the bourgeoisie).

Brecht further displays Marx's idea of class struggle through the enterprises of both Peachum and Mac the Knife. Both men are businessmen, but the differences between both men are critical in understanding power within society according to Marx. Peachum represents the bourgeoisie's ownership of the means of production whereas Mac the Knife falls victim to trying to climb up the social ranks in a capitalistic society. The opening scene demonstrates this as Peachum's insistence that beggars must give money to him in order to be helped (Brecht 1928, 97). This oppressive capitalist exchange ensures that Peachum will continue to receive money at the expense of his workers' labor, a business that reinforces the inequality in London's poorest districts during the Victorian period. Further, Peachum's daughter's marriage to Mac the Knife in the second scene of the first act demonstrates his capitalistic mindset even further. Rather than be alarmed that his daughter has decided to marry a criminal, Peachum becomes preoccupied at the thought of having lost a commodity, dehumanizing his own daughter by regarding her as a commodity to barter over as well as an instrument of his wealth and power. Peachum perceiving himself to be ruined by so much as giving his "sole prop" away for marriage demonstrates another Marxist concept, that of alienation from humanity (Brecht 1928, 118). By Peachum regarding his daughter as a piece of his property, she is being treated as nothing more than an instrument as wealth.

A recurring motif in his works, money and enterprise serve as the main focus for Brecht in many of his early works, and the blatant political overtones that come from *The Threepenny Opera*

reinforce the portrayal of the effects of capitalism on society (Lyon 1987, 487-489). Capitalistic pursuits lead all of the chorus members, from the whores to the beggars, into following Peachum's attempt to kill Mac the Knife rather than working together to dismantle the systems of oppression within society itself. As such, *The Threepenny Opera* represents an attempt by Brecht to lampoon the bourgeois society of Germany at the time through a beloved medium – opera. His collaboration with composer Kurt Weill led to more sophisticated critiques of German society through opera and musicals, including *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahoganny* (1927) which, although performed prior to *The Threepenny Opera*, delivers a definitive link to Berlin as Brecht's nickname for the city was Mahoganny (Esslin 1961, 22).

### *Mother Courage and Her Children*

Originally written in less than one month while in exile, *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939) premiered in Zurich in April of 1941 (Willett and Manheim 1995, *xlvi-xlviii*). A testament to the theories of epic theatre that Brecht advocated for, *Mother Courage and Her Children's* representation of the Thirty Years War offers a sharp condemnation of war and capitalism through the titular character's devastating losses as she struggles for survival. Perhaps more explicitly than in some of his other plays, Brecht's masterpiece aim is to demonstrate what happens to the “real people” during war and why observing is not merely enough – one must necessarily change the world (Unwin 2012, 214). While the overtones of societal revolution due to the presentation of a suffering, contradictory character are blatant in *Mother Courage and Her Children*, the play offers an exemplary demonstration of the Marxist idea of alienation. While many other examples of Marxist principles can be found in the play, the concept of alienation, as understood by Marx,

serves as the most all-encompassing for the titular character (her real name is Anna Fierling, but her nickname lends itself to the title of the play).

Marx's definition of alienation comes from the idea that work serves as the essence of human nature (Baradat 2009, 176). Marx believed that who we are stems from what we do. Before capitalism, a person who was good at making bread and enjoyed the process became a baker – setting his own hours and selling the product of his labor. To the baker, this labor is the manifestation of his creativity and ingenuity, the product being a physical representation of techniques he learned. Under capitalism, however, Marx argued that workers were exploited, effectively separated from their labor and alienated from the physical representation of creativity in the form of work. The four primary aspects of alienation are as follows: first, alienation from the product of labor; second, alienation from the activity of labor; third, alienation from one's own humanity; and fourth, alienation from society (Horowitz 2011).

Alienation from the product begins through the introduction of the assembly line and the specialization of repetitive, tedious tasks. To continue with the example of baking, rather than being involved through the whole process of mixing ingredients, kneading the dough, proofing it, baking it, and finally selling it, a worker would be assigned to one step only (i.e. only adding a bag of flour at standard intervals into a mixer, which then moves to the next worker). As the worker exercises labor for a low wage paid by an owner via a discrete task, she would never see the final product – a loaf of bread. She does not control what type of bread is made or how much of it is produced; she has no input under a capitalistic system. From this repetitive task comes alienation from the activity of labor. Rather than being involved in the full task of baking, the worker is forced into specializing in only one task that she spends hours doing, thereby becoming a cog in a machine.

These two types of alienation then lead to the inability for the worker to buy the product of her own labor due to a low wage being paid for her labor – the only thing which she is able to over under a capitalistic society. She is not alone in this. All workers compete for the best wages and benefits in a capitalistic system, leading to alienation from others. The worker becomes alienated from others as she is forced to only look out for herself just as others only look out for themselves. In such an individualistic society, no collective common good is present as there is motivation other than the competition for wages, making every other worker a threat to the other. This cumulates in what Marx defines as the alienation from oneself. Due to our alienation from the product that is produced, our own labor, and our fellow workers, our work is transformed from a manifestation of creativity and self-expression into a necessity, wages, that are used in order to support ourselves so that we do not starve. As a result, Marx says that we end up living only to work rather than our work being an extension of ourselves, as our creativity “is taken out of work, making it impossible for people ever to develop their humanity fully” (Baradat 2009, 177).

The aim of Scene Three of *Mother Courage* is to demonstrate the alienation of Mother Courage, ultimately showcasing how she is alienated from herself. In *Mother Courage* as a whole, we find Mother Courage’s struggle to survive as a representation of her alienation from the products which she sells. Despite her customers benefiting from the wares that she sells, she herself must continuously travel into dangerous territories in order to continue to make a living (Brecht 1939, 111). In fact, she chooses to continuously work as she fears what will happen if she were to “go broke.” She does not make the products that she sells. Rather, she scavenges for these products in the midst of war so that she may sell them, effectively placing her in the role of a merchant buying from others or finding new products to sell. This specialization is what defines her and ultimately alienates her from the products that she sells. She has no other input other than what she

can find to sell so that she may turn a profit, often seen haggling for a better deal as seen at the beginning of Scene Three (Brecht 1939, 126-127).

We see Mother Courage's alienation also in the alienation from the activity of labor. Labor is the only thing that she is able to do during war, and indeed it is the sole motivation that she has in life. Her constant struggle in life determines that she must always work, never finding a moment to express her own desires, which points to her alienation from herself, the final type of Marx's alienation. Returning to the alienation from the labor process, her repetitive task is selling products to make enough money to pay for food and other goods to sell, creating a malicious cycle. Her alienation from the process of labor extends so far as to bargain over the life of her son, seeking a cheaper price to prevent his execution at the hands of the Swedish army so that she'd eventually be able to buy back her cart. After all, her gamble depends on it solely being "a matter of money," selling her cart in favor of earning enough to save her son (Brecht 1939, 141). However, Mother Courage balks at the thought of receiving less than two hundred florins for her cart, only to have it go to pay for the life of her son. She values the cart so heavily because it is the source of her income. She ultimately keeps the cart, the source of her income and her only labor, but loses her son – fulfilling the third aspect of alienation – alienation from others. She places her son and the cart (an extension of the wages she earns) in competition with one another, which alienates her son to nothing more than another laborer. Despite her attempts to save him, she always thinks about how she can continue to make money.

Though she is upset by the loss of her son, Mother Courage pragmatically announces she does not recognize him as his corpse is brought to her, thereby surviving to make more money and continue to sell her supplies to both sides of the war effort (Brecht 1939, 145). This critical contradiction is what defines her character – the paradox of rejecting her only son in order to live

another day and provide for herself. Yvette, who was attempting to buy the cart in order to give Mother Courage the funds to pay for her son, confronts Mother Courage over her desperation: “Well, you got what you asked for, with your haggling and trying to keep your cart. Eleven bullets they gave him, that’s all” (Brecht 1939, 145). Rather than change her course of action, Mother Courage remains committed to selling her wares, laboring by moving her cart around Europe and selling to both sides of the war. This commitment to labor is showcased as a recurring image in the play after the death of Swiss Cheese is her pulling her cart on a turntable, never stopping unless it is to sell her wares and never losing sight of making more money.

The alienation of Mother Courage serves as a condemnation of the horrors of capitalism and war. The lengths to which Mother Courage goes to in order to keep herself and her children alive during the Thirty Years War is a reflection of the pressures of a capitalistic system. Brecht’s most complex and contradictory characters are set within an unforgiving environment, an allegory for both the dark times in which Brecht wrote the play and as an advisory to others that the only victor in war was capitalism. Mother Courage’s contradictions come as a result of her alienation, her labor being her only defining characteristic. Her motivations are all centered around what could make her the most money or benefit her the most. Even when she should theoretically care for her children and prevent them from dying, rather than mourn for them she continues to work. In this way, we see the perils that befall those that are trapped within the confines of a capitalistic society and an appeal to peace.

### *Life of Galileo*

If *The Threepenny Opera* represents the dangers and confines of capitalism and *Mother Courage and Her Children* serves as a condemnation of war, then *Life of Galileo* (1937-1939,



1945-1947) stands as a warning to the suppression of thought and advancement. Much of the play can be viewed from a dialectical model – the model which both Marx and Brecht use as the foundation for their respective theories. Much like the previous two plays analyzed in this essay, *Life of Galileo* takes inspiration from a different historical time period in order to shed light on issues in society at the time of their publication and performance. Historification, a term used by theatre historians to capture the transformative quality that history enforces upon us when plays are set in a different time period in order to allegorize current events, is prevalent throughout Brecht's works. This is similar to the way in which Shakespeare dramatized historical accounts to reflect politics during the time of Elizabethan England or Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* as an allegory for McCarthyism and the "Red Scare." Indeed, the first version of *Life of Galileo* was quite different to the revisions that Brecht made and presented in 1947. Unwin (2012) remarks on the revisions that Brecht made, pointing to the creation and usage of the first atomic bomb as the source of Brecht's revisions due to his renewed passion for science and the role that it played in society (193-197).

Brecht paints the story of the Italian scientist who, paradoxically, appears yielding and unyielding when confronted by the Catholic Church for his support of Copernicus' theory of a solar-centric universe. Galileo pursues his astronomical research despite the Church's attempts to pressure him in recanting his statement, going so far as to make him a subject of the Inquisition as a means of protecting the authority of the Catholic Church (Scenes 11-13 in *Life of Galileo*). Despite his staunch support of his own research due to being able to find evidence for Copernicus' theory of a solar-centric universe, Galileo recants his statement much to the frustration of Andrea, the son of Mrs. Sarti, Galileo's housekeeper, and one of Galileo's proteges (Scene 13 in *Life of Galileo*). Andrea goes so far as to say, "Unhappy the land that has no heroes," when the bell of

Saint Mark's Cathedral in Venice begins to ring, signaling Galileo's recanting of his life's work (Brecht 1947, 91).

Within these contradictions that Brecht writes into his characters comes the argument that he wants the audience to understand. The play ends with Galileo's work being carried beyond the Italian border by his former student, Andrea, so that it can be read by the world's greatest thinkers beyond the purview of the Catholic Church – all despite Galileo being confined to house arrest and his repentance for his blasphemous thoughts monitored by priests and cardinals. Andrea suggests that Galileo only recanted his statement so that he could back out of “a hopeless political wrangle in order to get on with the real business of science” (Brecht 1947, 99). In reality, Galileo was actually afraid of the physical pain of torture if he did not recant. A man who battled the Catholic Church on what was the true system for the universe wavered in his commitment when faced with bodily harm, yet he still remained committed to the truth despite refusing to become a martyr. Galileo's contradictions are what make him human – they are flaws and transform him from a figurehead of revolutionary scientific thought to an ordinary human being. This transformation was largely successful due to Brecht's incorporation of dialectics within the play itself.

Brecht's employment of dialectics within *Life of Galileo* serves as a transformation of the historical epics that Shakespeare wrote, infusing a new tradition into a relatively familiar medium. As Unwin (2012) suggests, “Brecht drew heavily on the Marxist reading of the Early Modern period as a time of rapid change, in which novel economic conditions revolutionized the structures of society, and new technology transformed the way people lived and thought” (194). Scholars agree that Galileo himself represents a richly compelling character, filled with contradictions and altogether deeply human (see Unwin 2012; Sokel 1971). Beyond this agreement, however, we see

a character struggle against a powerful system, ultimately resulting in his apparent defeat until the end of the play. Epic theatre and Marxist theory agree that contradictions and struggles are crucial to not only dialectics, but one of the fundamental pieces for both theories. What Brecht contributed to *Life of Galileo* was how the titular character lived through dialectics – how contradictions moved him forward in life to a new synthesis.

In a dialectical model, the Catholic Church's refusal to accept Copernican theory serves as the thesis at the beginning of the play. Scene 3 demonstrates the consequence for going against the Catholic Church. Sagredo, a friend of Galileo, tells the scientist that the Church burned a man at the stake for proposing the very same views that Galileo is hypothesizing to him on the rooftop. This rejection of the Ptolemaic system supported by the Church in favor of the Copernican system provides the antithesis, due to the inconsistencies in the former's theory. While Galileo recants his theory, he completes the *Discorsi* in house arrest and it is brought to other scientists in Europe. While the Church still retains its authority over Galileo, it becomes hypocritical due to its commitment to keep using the Ptolemaic system despite confirming Galileo's findings in Scene 6. This flaw in the Church's image then opens the door for a new synthesis – the eventual agreement on the Copernican system.

While not a perfect allegory for Marxist thought, the parallels between Galileo's confrontation against the Catholic Church and Brecht's own experiences with being a Marxist are striking. Galileo himself is a materialistic character, enjoying earthly pleasures and concerned with money as he exists within a capitalistic society (Scene 1 in *Life of Galileo*). Due to this preoccupation, one could argue that his scientific experiments for money are an extension of the alienation found within Marx's arguments. Instead of being able to carry out his experiments for his own pleasure, Galileo must always use his work as his labor. Galileo works for a wage provided

to him by the University, and only works there in order to pay for his expenses. While not fully alienated in the way that workers are on an assembly line, there are similarities in the circumstances between the two. In fact, Galileo's alienation at the beginning of the play is a distinct flaw in the character that highlights Brecht's opinion that science in the period in which he lived struggled to uplift the living conditions of the lower classes and was often used as a tool to continue the bourgeoisie's oppression (Unwin 2012, 196). What Brecht's Galileo did eventually hope for, however, was the ability for the working class (i.e. the peasants in the countryside) to shrug off the superstition that they were bound to through the Catholic Church's doctrine of the Ptolemaic system. In their eyes, refusing the will of the Church was equal to refusing the truth of God, and therefore what Galileo was suggesting was unthinkable.

In Scene 8, Galileo engages in a conversation with a character known as The Little Monk. The monk tells Galileo of his family, hardworking peasants who were content with God's message and worries that Galileo's research would disrupt the pleasure that they have. Galileo points to how ignorance only furthers the rule of the Catholic Church, a parallel to Marx's writings on the use of religion to suppress the proletariat from rising up. While in Scene 10 we find that the common people mock Galileo's ideas, both scenes reflect on key components of Marxist thought. As a result, Brecht's message becomes abundantly clear – he is commenting on the fear of communism in the aftermath of World War II and how certain powers (the House Committee on Un-American Activities) exploited this fear to further their own authority and power. As Galileo's ideas were eventually accepted by society and the power of the Catholic Church lessened due to the Enlightenment and period of scientific revolution, Brecht hoped that Marxist thought could eventually be accepted and would result in the rejection of capitalism. This would open the door

to a new era of thought and of human creativity, one in which old theses could be rejected and syntheses could become the dominant paradigm.

### **Directing Brecht**

Building upon dialectics and applying it to Brecht's body of work, we find that epic theatre is meant to stand as the antithesis to conventional Western drama as outlined by Aristotle. It would be an overstep to assert that Brechtian theory entirely shirks the history of drama, as Brecht's theories were built upon the foundation on German theatre during the time that he lived. He operates within the same parameters of an average theater – utilizing sets, actors, lights, sounds, costumes, and even projections in order to communicate his vision. Because of the conflict that Brecht had with conventional drama at the time, he developed epic theatre as a means to explore aesthetic differences in order to produce a particular effect on his audiences. This difference in aesthetic is what enables epic theatre to serve as the antithesis to the thesis of Western theatre. Brecht writes about new techniques for his actors to follow (see p. 136 in Willett's translation of *Brecht on Theatre* 1964), as well as his overall intent to create “an aesthetic drawn from a particular kind of theatrical performance” (1964, 179). In addition to the text of the play, directors would be remiss to not understand what Brecht writes in his *A Short Organum for the Theatre* and use it for their own direction of one of Brecht's plays.

In particular, the organum that Brecht writes gives substantial insight into how he thought of the theatre in an almost scientific way – exploring how best to communicate and argue to audience members exactly what they should think when confronted by situations involving fairly unique characters. In *Life of Galileo*, this comes as no exception. The play retains its significance, if nothing else but for the grand character that is Galileo. He is driven by a quest for the truth and to share that truth with others. Beyond the obvious allusion to Marx's argument for us to shrug off

the false consciousness that a modern society has, Brecht's *Galileo* operates as a modern-day Prometheus, defying old systems and a cover up from draconic institutions so that all can know the truth – not just those who can afford to learn it. However, this message is not confined to a singular time. The parallel to the suppression of Marxist thought during the Cold War and McCarthyism was the main focus of the play when it was first written. In current-day, this play speaks this same quality and could be extended to treat a variety of ailments present in modern society. While it would be correct to say that, in an era of “fake news” and “alternative facts,” this play could serve as a critique of the Trump presidency, such a staging might run the risk of ignoring the argument that Brecht was making within his own time. It is important to understand how the play operated within the time that it was written, especially as a central argument in *Life of Galileo* is how history shapes each one of us and how the truth changes over time.

In many of Brecht's works we find the use of historification – the technique of deliberately setting a play in the past in order to draw parallels to current events. Brecht is not the first playwright to ever do this. In fact, there is a wealthy tradition of historification in drama ranging from Shakespeare's numerous plays (*Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, and *Romeo and Juliet*) to Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. All of these plays are allegorical in nature, as the intent of historification is to detach audiences from the emotional or cathartic present and instead create a response based on intellectual thought and reflection. In practice, however, audiences must change how they view the plays that they are seeing in order for this intellectual response to occur, as Bradley (2016) suggests. According to Bradley, Brecht viewed spectatorship as active, further suggesting that audiences must be critically engaged with what they see onstage. Brecht was certainly more explicit about his intent for historification than Shakespeare, but both playwrights encourage introspection when viewing their respective works. The techniques within

epic theatre can further this emotional attachment (in fact, the entire goal of epic theatre is to do this), but directors must contend with how the play is framed and what is in the text before attempting to add their own visions and opinions.

In *Life of Galileo*, Galileo's struggle against the Catholic Church is meant to be a reflection of the Red Scare and McCarthyism in the United States. Brecht, having been questioned by the House Un-American Activities Committee, saw the efforts of the Cold War and, specifically, the United States as a continuation for the suppression of thought and apparent truths. What Galileo proposed in his time was radical, despite the overwhelming evidence that he found to support Copernicus' theory. When the Catholic Church forced Galileo to recant his statement, he did so in order to protect his life – he was not a martyr but still found ways to resist the efforts of the Church. In the same vein, Brecht held the communist party at arm's length when he was questioned by the House Un-American Activities Committee, but he was still committed to applying Marx to the theatre (see Esslin 1961, Chs. 6-7). Because of this parallel, political and scientific questions are at the core of the play, making it an excellent play to produce and direct at this point in history.

The major dramatic question of this play is the following – “Will Galileo stand against the Catholic Church to create a new paradigm, or will he conform to the pressures of society?” The narrative that Brecht establishes causes us to question what Galileo will do. Those familiar with history already know the outcome – Galileo recants his statement and remains under house arrest for the rest of his life. Despite knowing how it will end, it does not detract from the way in which we view the play. Akin to how Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* always involves the death of the titular character at the Roman Senate, the plot is not the focus of the play. Rather, the focus of the both plays are in their respective themes. In *Life of Galileo*, Brecht argues that change is inevitable, despite the attempts of certain institutions to prevent progress. Above all, Brecht plays with the

concept of truth within this play. How do individuals react to the truth? Is it morally acceptable for institutional powers, such as the Catholic Church, to deny the truth, even where there is evidence present to suggest that denying it would be unthinkable? These questions are begged from even a cursory reading of *Life of Galileo*, and it is the duty of the director to confront the audience with them. If given the opportunity to direct this play, I would concentrate primarily on these two ideas – progress and truth – in order to make it relevant to a modern audience.

Part of a director's role in the theatrical process is to unify creative vision in order to provide a clear concept. In regards to *Life of Galileo*, I believe that the historification of the play makes its message universal and not dependent on the time period in which it is set. Because of the current political situation with the Trump administration, it could work just as well to portray Galileo as a modern scientist as it would be to have him remain in Padua in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Nothing prevents Shakespeare's works from receiving a modern update. In the fall of 2019, the UMN-Morris Theatre Discipline placed *Julius Caesar* within an anachronistic period – free from the constraints of togas and legions in favor of business suits and armies in bullet-proof vests. I think it would be interesting to apply this same sort of thinking to one of Brecht's works as a way to synthesize Brecht's theoretical rigidity and artistic vision while still not fully embracing Aristotelian dramatic conventions. Some might argue that this ignores Brecht's pre-existing historification within the play itself, but I do not see an adaption as confliction if the central message is the same. Therefore, I would continue to use the text as written, but would adapt the costumes to fit how a scientist during the late 1940s and the early 1950s would dress, the set to remind audiences of Robert Oppenheimer's or Albert Einstein's laboratories, the use of overhead projectors to capture amber lights and standard lectures from this time period.



I am electing to change the setting of this play for two reasons. First, as stated earlier, the historicification of Brecht's plays centers the focus not on the time period itself but on the core message that the play is supposed to have. Second, this time period reflects critical advances and political instability and is the source for why Brecht wrote the play in the first place. If the intent is to critique the direction of the Trump administration's use of "alternative facts" and confront the spread of misinformation by the president's surrogates, then it works to move the setting of the play within a time period that is familiar to a modern audience. While I would hesitate to make these critiques explicit as I believe it detracts from the universality of the play, the application of the theme within *Life of Galileo* reveals this critique of modern politics and poses the question to the audience. This is the significance of this play – it forces audiences to reflect and question what they believe, bringing a typically politically charged message within a medium that could be understood implicitly rather than explicitly.

In line with the second reason for changing the setting of *Life of Galileo*, this time period allows for the introduction of other source material from different disciplines in order to create an interdisciplinary piece of performance art. Within the late 1940s through the 1950s, there was an explosion of human advancement with repercussions in every discipline of study. While many advances continued in the years following this period, we see a wealth of knowledge and economic prosperity within the United States, spurred on by the aftermath of World War II. At the same time, the lingering anxiety latent within American society yielded a confrontation with communism and Marxist thought, otherwise known as the Cold War. With the beginning of ideological confrontations with literally nuclear consequences, it is the perfect time period in which contemporary political theory can be used as a directing tool.

In addition to the work of Marx, another theorist can help us to shed light on the workings of scientific revolution – Thomas S. Kuhn. In his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1996), Kuhn establishes the use of paradigms within the scientific community and theorizes how these paradigms shift. He defines a paradigm as achievements that were (1) “sufficiently unprecedented to attract an enduring group of adherents away from competing modes of scientific activity”; and (2) were “sufficiently open-ended to leave problems for the redefined group of practitioners to resolve” (10). Likening these shifting paradigms to the way in which political revolutions occur, Kuhn opens the door for scientific revolutions to occur. While Kuhn demonstrates a different way of phrasing it, many of his thoughts are indicative of a dialectical way of thinking. Scientific revolutions come from a discrepancy in paradigms, and this discrepancy then creates new methodology within a given scientific discipline. In other words, these paradigms are thesis and antithesis, with the new paradigm opening the door for future discoveries and syntheses within the discipline to be found.

Combining Kuhn’s ideas on scientific revolution with the work outlined by Marx, as well as relying on techniques such as alienation from Brechtian theatrical theory, the direction of a production of *Life of Galileo* becomes much clearer. We see it operate as a testament to how we as a society react to a challenge to a pre-existing paradigm. In addition, the application of scientific or theoretical concepts to theatre is exactly what Brecht did in order to create the aesthetic that epic theatre aspires to. In many ways, Brecht himself was an interdisciplinary thinker, drawing from a multitude of sources and referencing them all in order to break a paradigm that dominated theatre for centuries. Because of this, *Life of Galileo* extends beyond just avid theatre-goers, and for this very reason does it merit a production for a modern audience.

## Conclusion

Exploring the extent to which the relationship between Brecht and Marx extends yields interesting and provocative results. The use of political theory as a tool by directors in order to understand how Brecht could write plays the way that he did creates a deeper understanding of the significance behind his work, rather than just being understood from the words that were written on a page. Although Marxist thought is at the core of Brecht's works, other theorists such as Kuhn (1996) can provide valuable knowledge to Brecht's plays dealing with political or scientific undertones. While concentrating on dialectics, Brecht's work is extremely referential, drawing in a range of disciplines from physics and mathematics, to political science and literature. These documents are living and breathing, accomplishing a goal that all plays aspire to do – connect with the audience and engage them beyond the time in which they are written.

For Brecht, this engagement stems from the tradition of epic theatre – a genre that he created as a reaction to the Aristotelian conventions of dramatic theatre in addition to the genres of realism and naturalism that dominated the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. If the theatre that Aristotle advocates for in his *Poetics* represents the thesis in Marx's dialectical model, then epic theatre serves as the antithesis. While a synthesis may be somewhat mutable and amorphous at the moment, the best answer as to what it could ultimately be relies on engaging an audience both emotionally and intellectually. Though Brecht attempts to have a solely intellectual response to his plays, this rarely occurs in practice. After all, it is almost unthinkable that any parent would not respond emotionally to the death of Mother Courage's children, as the harsh realities communicated onstage weigh heavily upon the character. Brechtian theory always stands as the ideal; its execution is dependent on the director so that it can live up to Brecht's vision.

Current theatre, in my view, relies heavily upon spectacle to bring audiences in, especially when placed against blockbuster films and other forms of entertainment that do not require audiences to leave their homes. We see this spectacle within recent Broadway musicals, with the reimagining and rebooting of Disney movie classics to the mainstage. Large, movable set pieces, projections, and even quick changes can create dazzling effects that wow us, potentially distracting us from flaws within a script or in the performance of an actor. While there is a place for these musicals in the realm of theatre, it seems as though these productions are becoming the dominant theatrical expression within modern society and certainly are the ways in which production companies are able to make money. I do not mean for this to sound pessimistic or as though this is the death of original theatre, but the question remains as to where this type of theatre will lead to. Despite this, the theatre maintains its magical, organic nature – serving as an institution for the cultivation of new thought and daring ideas in the pursuit of art. The lengths to which some go for their art may never be known, but it is the duty of those that study it to tirelessly explore what we view when the curtain comes up.

## Appendix

### Act II finale of *The Threepenny Opera* - "What Keeps Mankind Alive?"

You gentlemen who think you have a mission  
 To purge us of the seven deadly sins  
 Should first sort out the basic food position  
 Then start your preaching: that's where it begins  
 You lot, who preach restraint and watch your waist as well  
 Should learn for all time how the world is run:  
 However much you twist, whatever lies you tell  
 Food is the first thing. Morals follow on.  
 So first make sure that those who now are starving  
 Get proper helpings when we do the carving.  
     What keeps mankind alive? The fact that millions  
     Are daily tortured, stifled, punished, silenced, oppressed.  
     Mankind can keep alive thanks to its brilliance  
     In keeping its humanity repressed.  
     For once you must try not to shirk the facts:  
     Mankind is kept alive by bestial acts.

You say that girls may strip with your permission.  
 You draw the lines dividing art from sin.  
 So first sort out the basic food position  
 Then start your preaching: that's where we begin.  
 You lot, who bank on your desires and our disgust  
 Should learn for all time how the world is run:  
 Whatever lies you tell, however much you twist  
 Food is the first thing. Morals follow on.  
 So first make sure that those who now are starving  
 Get proper helpings when we do the carving.  
     What keeps mankind alive? The fact that millions  
     Are daily tortured, stifled, punished, silenced, oppressed.  
     Mankind can keep alive thanks to its brilliance  
     In keeping its humanity repressed.  
     For once you must try not to shirk the facts:  
     Mankind is kept alive by bestial acts.

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