

ENGLISH: *LIFE OF GALILEO*

Conflict will always occur because people see the world differently

“I oughtn’t recant and neither will I”

These are the daring words uttered by Giordano Bruno in 1600. Bruno was lured back to Rome by an invitation and then captured by the Inquisition. He was tortured and held in a cell, chained to the walls up until his trial. No, Giordano Bruno was not a criminal. Nor was he a blood-thirsty killer, but simply a man who held the unwavering belief in the Copernican system, whereby contrary to the Catholic faith, the Earth revolved around the Sun. Despite the physical and psychological warfare he had endured in the days leading up to the trial, Bruno uttered the words which sealed his fate in the hands of death. He was stripped of his clothes and paraded around the streets with an iron spike through his tongue before being burned at the stake.

An example was made by the Church of those who held opposing ideologies to that of the Catholic faith. However sixteen years later, within the same room stood another man who held similar sentiments towards the Copernican theory as Bruno, yet the outcome of this tale was rather different.

Galileo Galilei’s trial ended to his disciple’s horror, with his public recantation, whereby it was announced to the state that the Sun contrary to his own belief and to the satisfaction of the Roman Catholic Church, moved around the Earth and that the Earth was at the centre of the Universe. Galileo lived after his trial, and in much comfort too, leading a path which at first glance is seemingly preferable to that of Bruno. However through Brecht’s play, *Life of Galileo*, we can gather that he in fact convicted himself to a life of regret, which is clearly witnessed in his statement that ‘(he) had betrayed his profession. A man who had done what (he) has done cannot be tolerated in the ranks of science.’

Although both men have led different lives, and both have resolved their conflict with the Church in differing ways, they have one aspect in common. Both men defied the authority of their time, namely the Catholic Church, by possessing theories which were deemed heretical and ‘contrary to the faith’ of the Church. However this trial of reason as opposed to faith is not as simple as it seems on the surface. In their struggle to seek the truth, Bruno and Galileo have also uncovered another interpretation of man’s existence and thus greatly undermined the Church’s authority over the masses. In fact, the Church’s retaliation had little to do with the theories against God’s word and more to do with the changes and havoc it would cause among the hierarchical system of the time. Brecht, in writing his play, ‘*Life of Galileo*’ had sought to instil a sense of awareness and hoped for his audience to reflect the occurrences within Galileo’s world with their own modern society. It is especially evident even in our daily mundane lives the havoc and disturbances in peace that can arise simply due to differences in opinions, ideologies and beliefs. However even within a world where we have different religions, faiths, skin colours and appearances, peace exists as humans are also capable of executing the invaluable art of compromise, which is key to transcending conflicts.

History at school has served to teach us that where there are differences in opinions and beliefs, there will be conflict. There are individuals and organisations who are unable to reconsider their positions and open their ears to other’s thoughts because they fear that in doing so, they will risk losing a part of themselves. History has also taught us that in most cases, this is the fear of losing that power. In Galileo’s society there always had to be “some at the top, and some at the bottom” In order to maintain this system of order and to secure the privileges, Andrea succinctly remarks that all the higher ups sought to “command the Earth to stand still so their castles shan’t tumble down.” Galileo threatened this order with his own scientific views. Science, all in all, posed a great threat to religion of the time and hence the power in which the manifestation of religion, the Church, held and so had to be constrained and dealt with before further damage to the status quo prevailed. The

Church saw their dealings with Galileo as justified, as they had allowed for “the peace of mind of the less fortunate.” However other have argued that this act has suppressed the truth. Thus even the perception of this situation has given rise to dispute.

Perception is born from individualism. It is like a metaphorical fingerprint which is unique to every human. The same situation may be viewed in a thousand different ways. A child will not view a murder in the same ways as an old woman, just as a cashier worker will not share the same views as a politician or a scientist regarding the issue of global warming. What is indisputable is that sometimes, conflict between individuals, groups and organisations can arise due to these difference perceptions of how things should be, how they are and how they were. Bertolt Brecht was a writer who indirectly fought the authorities of his time by instilling messages within the plays that he had written and hence awareness within his audience. In his speech before the House Unamerican Activities Committee, in America, he asserts the importance for freedom of expression and freedom of art. Many celebrities, directors, screenwriters were also called to testify before the HUAC about communist beliefs. Where the HUAC perceived communism to be the biggest threat to America, Brecht and many other artists alike saw that it was the irresponsible use of science and the suppression of art that most greatly hindered America’s advances. It is this inability to ‘see’ but simply ‘gawp’ that had launched America into a period of hysteria, where they were most reknowned for advocating the ‘reds under the bed’ propaganda –like statement.

Despite the myriad of different opinions and beliefs in our world, we can see that peace is still present. Where there is strong opposition towards a certain faith, there are also silent believers. Because humans are all unique, we each have our own technique in dealing with such occurrences. It is the individuals and organisations in our society who advocate for peace, pacifists, who ensure that with differing opinions, external conflict will not always ensue. The Cold War of the 20th Century is an exemplar of this. Two of the super powers of the time, the United States, and the Soviet Union, embarked on a nuclear arms race which threatened not only the people of both nations but also the entire world. The consequences would have been apocalyptic. Both nations initially were unable to compromise their views. However in 1985, after fifty years of tension, the Soviet Union conceded in order to put a stop to the corruption and damage it was suffering internally. It was the ability to make concessions on the part of the Soviet Union, that ended what could have become a conflict encompassing the entire world. It is these organisations, groups, these type of people in society who although have their own strong opposing opinions, are able to keep to themselves and sacrifice their beliefs, that allow for the eruption of greater conflicts to subside.

Like the stars Galileo observed through his stolen contraption, our different opinions, beliefs and faith are limitless. It is our ability to look through the telescope and see, not ‘gawp’ at this plethora of interpretations and perceptions which allows for us to understand others and transcend conflicts which otherwise could have occurred. It is also important to acknowledge that human conflict is a twin paradox. It is created from differences in beliefs, and yet, differences in attitude allows for it to be subdued.