

# Galileo

by Scott Savitz

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## Notes to the Reader or Director

This is a work of fiction. It is intended to convey a sense of the issues surrounding Galileo's life and trial, although in much abbreviated form for drama's sake. Nonetheless, it is based on a number of sources, which are listed in the bibliography. Some of Galileo's lines, and a few of his persecutors', are taken directly from his writings or from documents concerning the trial itself. A couple of apocryphal and entertaining stories concerning Galileo are also included, in part to connect the play's Galileo with the popular image of the scientist.

In addition, there are innumerable acknowledgements which must be made to the many writers whose words and style contributed to this script. Readers may recognize snippets of Shakespeare's, Plato's, Orwell's, and even Lincoln's phrases invading the play (among others); these elements are, of course, quite intentional.

Finally, although I am not a director, I have a few modest suggestions about how the play might be staged. Compositions from the Counter-Reformation period (such as those by Gesualdo or Monteverdi) would serve as excellent background music. The echoes of medieval injustice that lingered into Galileo's time might be captured by the use of medieval chants, or modern works done in their style (such as *Carmina Burana*). Some Soviet-era modern classical works written as patriotic calls to arms during the Second World War might contribute to the trial scenes—several of these pieces tear at the tissues of the mind with their anger and vitality.

While the costumes and scenery should generally match the setting in seventeenth-century Italy, a creative director might use such tools to attempt to inject the flavor of other eras. The play is not intended to be a criticism of the Catholic Church, but an attack on totalitarian regimes of whatever hue and mask. In some scenes, one might costume all of the characters in Maoist garb, or put the Kremlin in the background, or have the Inquistors greet one another with Nazi salutes. Conversely, the Italianate flavor of the setting and the recurrent presence of Dante in the text may be neatly complemented by echoing the *Divine Comedy* in the scenery; "Abandon All Hope, Ye Who Enter Here" might be posted above a doorway, for example. Naturally, I leave the specifics of such issues to the discretion of the individual director. For the same reason, I have carefully limited the number of explicit stage directions, so that actors and directors have greater latitude to exert their creative talents in transmuting dialogue into theater.

Enjoy the play.

S.A.S.

## Introduction

*(The Narrator is reading a book onstage.)*

**Narrator.** Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, all else follows. *(Looks up, slams the book shut.)* George Orwell's *1984*. That tale is just half a century old, but it resonates powerfully with the history of the ages. In various guises, the boot of tyranny has stamped upon the face of liberty since the dawn of time. Inquisitors and Soviets, Nazis and Maoists, have sought to imprison the human spirit with lies and abuses. Though the costumes and scenery vary, the story is much the same. From the Athenian Socrates to the Soviet Sakharov, noble individuals have resisted tyranny by appealing to the wonders of the human mind. Studying the sky above and the Earth below, they have raised unanswerable challenges, enraging tyrants. They have both strengthened the cause of freedom and made it worth fighting for.

This is the story of one such man, a man named Galileo.

## Recantation

*(In the Vatican, before the Pope and twelve cardinals. Galileo, fearful, is on the floor before his persecutors.)*

**Galileo.** I, Galileo, kneel before you, most Eminent and Reverend Lord Cardinals Inquisitor. I swear that I will believe all that is held, preached, and taught by the Holy Catholic Apostolic Roman Church, from this, the Year of Our Lord Sixteen Hundred and Thirty-Three, onwards for all eternity. I have been pronounced by the Holy Office to be vehemently suspected of heresy, that is to say, of having held and believed that the sun is the center of the world and immovable, and that the the Earth is not the center and moves. With sincere heart and unfeigned faith, I abjure, curse, and detest the aforesaid errors and heresies.

*(Lights go out on tribunal. Galileo swiftly reappears elsewhere on the stage.)*

**Galileo** *(to audience)*. You see me as a coward, a weakling, a man who threw away his most treasured beliefs in order to save his own skin. But had you known me in better days, and how I came to be prostrate before the feet of my adversaries, you would think of me with greater kindness and heightened sympathy. Let me show you what I was—what light and gaiety, what mirth and confidence emanated from my soul. Allow me to share with you—myself.

## Atop the Tower

*(Galileo and friends are atop the Leaning Tower of Pisa.)*

**Galileo.** Who can set bounds to the mind of man? Who dare assert that he knows all that is knowable in the universe?

**Rocco.** Enough with the dramatics, Galileo. Drop your balls and get on with it.

**Galileo.** Very well, then. As you all know, Aristotle claims that heavier objects fall faster than lighter ones. We are here to test that proposition, and whether any hypothesis conceived without the benefit of experiment, can long endure.

**Guido** *(impatient)*. Here, I'll do it for you. *(Grabs at large and small balls.)*

**Galileo** *(grabbing them away)*. No, I'll do it.

*(He drops the balls at the same moment, and they hit at the same time with a single loud thump.)*

**Rocco.** Very impressive. Do this for the professors in Venice and they'll be sure to invite you to join their faculty.

**Guido** *(leaning over side, looking below)*. And don't do it over a finely sculpted gargoyle next time.

## Welcome to Venice

*(Party scene, with lots of people milling around)*

**Dean.** Welcome to Venice, Galileo. I hope that you find our university and our republic to your liking.

**Galileo.** I am very much honored that you organized a party to welcome me to the faculty.

**Dean.** Everyone has heard of the bright young Florentine whom we have been fortunate enough to have join us. All of these people wanted to meet you in person. And the free food and wine didn't hurt, either.

**Professor Tessuto** *(coming over)*. It's an honor to meet you, sir. You have a reputation as a man widely versed in the sciences—who has made original contributions to the studies of geometry, astronomy, and physics.

**Galileo** *(modestly)*. Well, I do what I can. And, please, call me Galileo.

**Tessuto.** You have advanced fields which have scarcely been touched since Aristotle's time. We at the university look forward to hearing your thoughts on projectiles, static supports, and cohesion of ropes.

**Professor Pepare.** Not to mention the speed of falling bodies and the resistance of the media through which they fall.

**Professor Coriderio.** Not since Columbus has any Italian discovered so many new worlds.

**Professor Obrianno.** Come, Galileo, show us your famous experiment with floating ice.

**Crowd.** Yes, yes, show us.

**Galileo** (*hesitantly*). Okay. I'll need some water and some chunks of ice. (*A barrel of water is brought out, as are some pieces of ice from under the food.*)

**Galileo** (*nervous*). The ancients believed that ice floated on water only if you cut the ice into specific shapes. I've tried the experiment, though, and it works regardless of the shape of the ice. Here, break these big pieces into whatever shapes you like, and drop them into the water.

(*Breaking up of ice by throwing on ground, and dropping into water*)

**Crowd.** It works! It's true!

**Dean.** Very impressive. You have a flair for demonstrations, one which I'm sure all of your students will enjoy.

**Galileo.** You're a very good audience. I only hope that others will be as receptive to new ideas as you are.

## A View from Afar

(*In Galileo's home, roughly 1609.*)

**Salvati.** Galileo, thank you for a lovely dinner. Now, may I see these wonderful objects you've been talking about?

(*Wanders over to the telescope, reaches for it.*)

**Galileo.** Careful! I have that set to where Jupiter will appear tonight, and it's hard to get it back into just the right position. (*Glances at the clock.*) We'll have to wait a few minutes before we can see what we want.

**Salvati.** What shall we do in the meantime?

**Galileo.** Fortunately, I have several other telescopes. Let's have a look at the moon. The "man in the moon" turns out to be, under closer scrutiny, a series of mountains and valleys. The moon is not a perfect sphere, but a globe laden with imperfections, just like the Earth.

**Salvati.** The heavens are imperfect?

**Galileo.** Yes—even the sun, which I have found to be covered with dark spots. Moreover, we are part of the heavens. Earth is a part of the universe like any other.

**Salvati.** Surely you do not support the radical theories of that dead Polish astronomer?

**Galileo.** His name was Copernicus, and yes. The Earth and the planets revolve around the sun.

**Salvati.** You will disturb many people if you openly espouse his beliefs. He himself had the wisdom to have his views published only after his death.

**Galileo.** I see no need to delay educating the world until after I am no longer of it. Overturning the established order with new ideas of revolution is a great contribution. I believe that in order to be truly good, a person must do two things. The first is to comfort the afflicted. The second is to afflict the comfortable.

**Salvati.** Enough with your cleverness. Let's have a look through your telescope.

**Galileo.** Yes, let's. First, I would like to show you my latest discovery—four moons which revolve around Jupiter. Not incidentally, their existence strengthens the arguments of the Copernicans, and I've done some calculations to connect the two.

**Salvati.** I'd gladly look at your work, but as you know, I have no head for figures. Can't you explain it without recourse to the use of numbers and variables?

**Galileo.** Philosophy is written in this grand book the universe, which stands continually open to our gaze. But the book cannot be understood unless one first learns to comprehend the language of mathematics. Without the insight that mathematics brings us, discovery is akin to wandering around in a dark labyrinth.

*(Indication of time passing, sunrise beginning)*

**Salvati.** So this is why you stay up all night—it's almost as absorbing as some of the activities that have kept me up all night in the past. May I return to watch the stars with you tomorrow night?

**Galileo.** Certainly.

**Salvati.** I can hardly wait.

**Galileo.** Fortunately, there are other uses for telescopes, now that dawn has arrived.

**Salvati.** Such as?

**Galileo.** I make a little money on the side by my contacts in the merchant community. If you're not in need of rest, we can go out to the pier and point my telescope at the sea. We'll see an incoming ship, and the flag it waves, some time before anyone else does. Depending on where it's coming from, we'll buy up some of the commodity they're most likely to want a few hours before they arrive and the price shoots up. We then sell at a tidy profit.

**Salvati.** That's very clever. Let's go immediately.

**Galileo.** We could, but there are so many interesting sights closer to home. If we turn our eyes to the monastery, Salvati, can you see the procession of monks hurrying out in hooded robes?

**Salvati.** Yes. And the telescope reveals strands of beautiful hair streaming out of those hoods, and that these "monks" are shaped very much like women.

**Galileo.** Yes, it's quite amusing to note the iniquities of others.

**Salvati.** This, from a man who has a not-so-secret girlfriend and three not-so-secret children by her.

**Galileo.** And I love all of them dearly.

**Salvati.** Why don't you marry her and legitimize the whole arrangement?

**Galileo.** Because "happily married" is an oxymoron. Why should I? I have managed to acquire the passion of intimacy and the joys of paternity while maintaining the comforts of bachelorhood in my own spacious home. Marina and the children are only a short walk away—the perfect distance for love to flourish.

**Salvati.** I can't imagine keeping any sort of distance between myself and those I love. It is far easier to imagine the Earth spinning rapidly and migrating great distances through space.

**Galileo.** There are men reputed wise who cannot manage that. Come! Let us depart—there is money to be made, and I'm a little short on cash.

## The Return

*(In Galileo's home, years later)*

**Galileo.** Salvati, you have become a good friend to me. I shall dearly miss you when I return to Florence.

**Salvati.** Return to Florence!

**Galileo.** I have not made this decision lightly, but have given it a great deal of contemplation.

**Salvati.** But why? Have we not welcomed you to our venerable republic?

**Galileo.** There are so many reasons. This alien soil has been kind to me, but alien it remains. Even after eighteen years here, your Venetian dialect grates on my ears like a screeching cat. This corrupted version of my native tongue grows tiresome.

**Salvati.** As though you Tuscans invented Italian.

**Galileo.** We practically did. It was Dante who first put forth that the language of the streets was as beautiful, and as legitimate, as the Latin of the scholar. And it was he who demonstrated this proposition, by writing the most beautiful poetry of all time in the language of the common people of Florence.

**Salvati.** And the legacy of Dante is all the more reason you should stay. Today, he is honored in Florence as its muse. But it was not always so.

**Galileo.** I know well what happened to Dante.

**Salvati.** And that is how Florence always treats its greatest children. It begins by offering the gentle care and nurturing love of a parent, spoiling them with the succulent fruit of its vineyards and its even more delicious stimulants of the mind. And when they are firmly attached to its soil, when they can envision living in no other place but the land of art and poetry, it rends them apart like the traitors in Dante's vision of Hell. Dante himself was banished, his every possession confiscated and enjoyed by his enemies. He lived out his life in the bitterness of exile, swallowing gall with every breath.

**Galileo.** But that was three hundred years ago.

**Salvati.** Then let us proceed to the more recent past. Niccolo Machiavelli served his country well as a diplomat and military commander. How was he rewarded for these invaluable contributions?

**Galileo.** All right, he was relieved of office, thrown into a dungeon, tortured, and sent to eke out a living on his remote farm. But that was over a century ago. Times have changed.

**Salvati.** Whether you stay or go, Florence will honor you posthumously as its native son, the brilliant man who understood the heavens and the world below in which we live. But during your lifetime, it will take away your dignity, your freedom, and perhaps your life itself. The Inquisition is very strong in Florence.

**Galileo.** But I am stronger.

**Salvati.** You are mad, and you return at your own peril.

**Galileo.** I have always respected your opinions in the past. But I will return to Florence, that haven of the mind. There is more intellectual stimulation to be had in the smallest cove of that city than in the very university here in this republic of commerce.

**Salvati.** You taunt my people for becoming rich through the products of our hard labors and cleverness in business. I wish you luck on your return to Florence. You will need it.

## Into the Convent

*(At the entrance of the convent, Galileo and his two daughters, Virginia and Livia, speak to the Abbess)*

**Galileo.** Thank you, Sister, for granting my daughters permission to take up residence in your home.

**Abbess.** The honor is mine, despite the fact that we normally don't allow two sisters to live together, and they're a bit young. For you, all things are possible.

**Galileo.** Yes, thank you for being flexible. *(In a whisper)* And for not mentioning their illegitimacy!

**Abbess.** Please come this way, girls. I'll show you to your room.

**Virginia** *(to the younger, timid Livia)*. Cheer up, this looks like a happy place.

*(Exit Abbess, Virginia, and Livia)*

## Inscribing Revolution

*(In Galileo's home in Florence)*

**Sagredo.** How do your daughters fare?

**Galileo.** They are doing well. Virginia, who now calls herself Suor Maria Celeste, writes to me frequently, and I reply in turn. She also keeps me apprised of her shy sister Livia's situation. Occasionally, I visit them and provide money to the convent to improve their living conditions.

**Sagredo.** Don't you feel as though you're isolating your daughters, from yourself and from the world?

**Galileo.** I have provided my daughters with a secure place in which to repose for all the days of their lives. We see each other, but I have the privacy of my own home. We are quite close, as fathers and daughters go. Virginia so reminds me of myself.

**Sagredo.** She always reflected your light, and her universe revolved around you.

**Galileo.** Which brings me to my current endeavors. I am writing a book about why the Copernican system is superior to the Ptolemaic. That is, why it makes much more sense if the Sun is the immobile center of the universe, with Earth one of the planets encircling it.

**Sagredo** *(glances at page)*. In the form of a fictional dialogue?

**Galileo.** Yes, with my friends as characters who discuss the merits of scientific arguments. Through mutual instruction, they demonstrate the veracity of ideas which are not yet apparent to the masses. The style is a bit novel for scientific writing, but it communicates these ideas in a more interesting and powerful manner than traditional forms do. And there are other benefits, as well.



**Sagredo.** Such as?

**Galileo.** I get to choose the characters' names and identities according to my whim. I have come to understand one of the joys of Dante—placing those whom he loved and hated, both his contemporaries and the ancients, in the appropriate levels of Heaven and Hell. Like Dante, through my writings, I can raise up my friends, put down my enemies, and ridicule those who are both stupid and opinionated. It's actually rather fun.

**Sagredo.** I see. Do you think that the pretentious, self-important academicians who oppose you will simply surrender in the face of a convincing treatise?

**Galileo.** What the Aristotelians lack in rationality, they make up for in vehemence. But my scientific acumen and literary skills will ultimately overturn their convictions.

**Sagredo.** You sound very confident.

**Galileo.** Truth ultimately triumphs over falsehood, light over darkness, intelligent reason over obstructionist ignorance. This is the most noble aspect of science. The ease with which false understanding can be supplanted. My *Dialogue Concerning the Two World Systems* will change the way we look at the universe.

**Sagredo.** Your confidence borders on arrogance.

**Galileo.** Maybe it's because I've succeeded at virtually everything important I've ever tried in my entire life. I truly have come to believe that only the lazy, timid, and ignorant fail.

**Sagredo** (*slightly disgusted*). There may come a day when you, too, will fail, through no fault of your own. Then, perhaps, you will come to have a bit more understanding for the rest of us who are so far beneath you. Goodbye, Galileo.

(*Storms out, slamming the door behind him*)

**Galileo** (*surprised at his friend's reaction, shouting towards the door*). I meant no offense!

## First Encounter

(*In the Grand Duke's palace*)

**Grand Duke.** I'd like to thank you for coming so promptly, Galileo. These leading figures of the church have come and would like to engage you in debate on the subject of the Copernican hypothesis.

**Galileo.** There is no need to debate with ignorance. I have nothing to say beyond what is in my book. (*Turns to leave.*)

**Grand Duke** (*whispers to Galileo*). Please stay and at least make a show of addressing their concerns.

**Milgrammo.** Galileo, we are not your enemies. We seek merely to cure you of the heresy which plagues your mind. You are sick and we wish to make you well.

**Galileo.** I am moved.

**Milgrammo.** Our hope is that we can purify you of this heresy while you live in the comfort of your own home. We do not wish to call you to Rome before the Holy Inquisition unless you make it necessary.

**Galileo.** If your concern is for my welfare, you can cure my arthritis.

**Milgrammo.** We wish to treat you...

**Avianno** (*interrupting*). Solomon, with God's inspiration, wrote that the sun rises and sets and returns to its place. That is, the sun moves, not the earth. Does God not know the nature of the universe He created?

**Galileo.** Surely God expressed these ideas in simple terms that all could understand at the time; these words were not intended to be a categorical statement on the nature of the universe. Scripture also speaks of God's hand, though we know he is incorporeal.

**Avianno.** You think that you are God.

**Galileo.** I am offended as a Catholic at your impiety. I simply do not think it necessary to believe that the same God that gave us our senses, our speech, our intellect, would have us put them aside in discovering the universe He created.

**Avianno.** How dare you insult the Church in the very bosom of Italy, the land of penitence and spiritual redemption.

**Galileo.** There proceed from the lovely clime of Italy not only dogmas for the welfare of the soul, but ingenious discoveries for the delight of the mind as well.

**Ponatucci.** We do not seek to discombobulate your scientology, Galileo, but merely to make you conform with theology.

**Galileo.** What kind of semiliterate is this? He uses big words that he doesn't understand.

**Ponatucci** (*affronted*). I am a spiritual guide for humanity, not a money-grubber like yourself.

**Galileo.** Yes, you have quite a reputation for piety—for you, every day is as holy as Sunday, and you do no work. Yet you are able to afford fine robes such as this one.

**Ponatucci.** I advise people on matters of faith, and they pay me for it.

**Galileo.** I might believe that if I had ever heard that you had advised anyone well. Rumor has it that you blackmail those who come to you for confession.

**Ponatucci.** You bastard! (*Lunges at Galileo, is thrown to the ground by one of the Duke's guards.*)

**Grand Duke** (*disgusted*). I think we've heard both sides of this argument. Fathers, I wish you well on your journey back to Rome.

## Things Fall Apart

*(Rocco and Guido meet one another on the street)*

**Rocco.** How now! What news from the war in Germany?

**Guido.** The Catholic forces in central Europe are in a state of disarray. Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden has pledged to "finish the papists, once and for all." His forces have ravaged Bohemia and reached the river Danube. All central Europe is on the point of collapsing before the Protestant onslaught.

**Rocco.** Will not the French army intercede on the Church's behalf?

**Guido.** Cardinal Richlieu of France has come out in open support of the Protestant cause, to keep Germany divided, weak, and underfoot.

**Rocco.** Indeed, a united Germany would be a great menace to French power. The Germans fight among themselves with great ferocity and savagery. Were they to come together despite their religious differences, they would be the most powerful nation in Europe. Speaking of nations aspiring to rule the continent, how is the news in the Balkans? Have the Turks been repulsed?

**Guido.** Turkish forces are continuing to subdue Hungary and are practically at the borders of Austria. It appears that Vienna will soon be under attack, and even southern Poland is vulnerable. In the worst of all nightmares, the Protestants and the Muslims may soon link arms in the very heartland of Europe.

**Rocco.** The highest councils of the Church must be losing their heads.

**Guido.** I fear for our friend.

**Rocco.** Galileo? He'll be much grieved by the retreat of the Church, but no more so than anyone else in Florence. He has a strong constitution, and is unlikely to react emotionally to bad news.

**Guido.** That is not wherein the danger lies. The Inquisition will be seeking a scapegoat for the collapse of papal power. A witch-hunt against a suspected heretic would be just the thing. They'll rend him limb from limb.

**Rocco.** You're right. We should tell Galileo to go before the Duke to plead for his support in the event of a confrontation with the Church.

**Guido.** Let us go to him with all speed. There is great danger that these Protestant victories will be avenged with the blood of our very Catholic friend.

## Second Encounter

*(In Grand Duke's palace)*

**Grand Duke.** Once again, I thank you, Galileo, for joining me in the presence of these august representatives of the church.

**Capo.** Galileo, you must stop believing in this Copernican nonsense.

**Galileo.** Show me it's wrong, and I will.

**Derlino.** Surely you're joking, Galileo.

**Pellicano.** You are at odds with the intellectual elite of the entire Catholic world.

**Galileo.** Rationality is not statistical.

**Capo.** You deny the wisdom of the ancients.

**Galileo.** They have seen far, but I can see farther still by standing on their shoulders. Moreover, some of the ancient Greeks advocated for an Earth in motion.

**Capo.** You deny the truth of Scripture.

**Galileo.** Though Scripture cannot err, its expounders and interpreters are liable to err in many ways.

**Pellicano.** Then you will not change your mind regarding this stupidity?

**Galileo.** Only in the face of scientific evidence.

**Capo.** We've heard all we need to hear, and will return to Rome. Good day. *(Capo and Pellicano leave)*

**Galileo.** Well, I certainly disposed of them quickly.

**Grand Duke.** I'm not entirely reassured. Their swift departure may be a sign that they're planning an even more rapid return.

**Galileo.** I'm not afraid.

**Grand Duke.** But you should be.

## The Elders Convene

*(In the Vatican in Rome, before Pope Urban)*

**Magdario** *(waving book, to Urban)*. Your Holiness, do you know what this is?

**Urban**. It's a collection of printed pages, bound together so as to be easy to read?

**Capo**. Your Holiness should not joke of such matters. This is Galileo's book, *Dialogues Concerning the Two World Systems*. No more dangerous work exists in the whole of Christendom.

**Urban**. Really. I thought that the diatribes emanating from the far north were worse, considering that they accuse us of every crime from simony to murder.

**Pelicanno**. You do not realize the gravity of this work. *(He drops it onto the floor.)* This book calls into question the very foundations of belief. In the absence of such faith, this seat of power is naked in its struggles with the outside world.

**Urban**. I thought you were only naked in your struggles with young, nubile maidens.

**Pelicanno** *(frustrated)*. You talk to him, Milgrammo!

**Milgrammo** *(picks up book, leafs through it)*. Your Holiness, I believe that this might interest you. There is a character in the book called Simplicio, who is repeatedly made out to be a pedantic, pompous fool. This character is meant to represent Your Holiness.

**Urban**. I think that constitutes an insult.

**Milgrammo** *(missing the double meaning)*. Yes, it does. What do you think the mocking voices of Protestantism will make of this work? Will they not use it as a powerful lever to unseat our power ever more? If the Catholic Church allows itself to be viewed as a repository of error in terms of its understanding of the heavens, how can we claim to know anything of Heaven itself? Catholic princes all across Europe may be moved to disobedience.

**Urban**. Surely this matter is too abstruse to influence anyone except the most learned of our adversaries.

**Milgrammo**. Give them but one firm spot on which to stand, and, like Archimedes, they will move the Earth. Our power is on the verge of collapse. Those who are near the point of breaking with the Church will use this as a pretext for their actions, while more conservative theologians will attack you for not leading the campaign against this book. France, the eldest daughter of the Church, is already poised to thwart papal aims in Germany. The princes of Italy are presently showing a menacing disdain for this office. If we do not forcefully exert our power now, we are likely to lose it altogether.

**Urban**. But I have the greatest admiration for Galileo.

**Alvito**. Jesus loved his enemies, and yet they crucified him.

**Pelicanno**. This Galilean heresy must be stopped.

**Urban.** Perhaps I'll call Galileo to be tried before a council of us here in Rome. Do you think that would sustain my position?

**Alvito.** Like the wind fans the flames.

**Urban.** Very well, then. Write an order to that effect and I'll put my seal on it. And do hurry.

## Why the Princes of Italy Have Lost Their States

*(In the Grand Duke's palace)*

**Grand Duke.** Galileo, thank you for appearing before our majesty.

**Galileo.** I was sent for.

**Grand Duke** (*hesitant*). Yes, you were sent for. But for good reason: the officers of the Holy Church have are accusing you of heresy, and wish to take you elsewhere for judgment in this matter.

**Galileo.** Elsewhere, my lord?

**Grand Duke.** To Rome, where you will be examined by the offices of the Holy Inquisition. Your outspoken belief in the Copernican system has aroused the ire of a great many people.

**Galileo.** Do they even understand the scientific issues at stake?

**Grand Duke.** Perhaps you can clarify these matters for them.

**Galileo.** Surely your majesty can make this journey unnecessary.

**Grand Duke.** I have done all that is in my power. My emissary in Rome has argued vociferously in your favor. But I am not master of my own state. Jesuits and Inquisitors are everywhere in Tuscany, forming a shadow government with the power to overrule me. If I disobey, I will bear the full brunt of the church's wrath. Its mix of worldly power and spiritual authority make it the most powerful, and most dangerous, force in Italy.

**Galileo.** Machiavelli wrote that the princes of Italy had lost their states to the overweening power of the papacy, which created alliances, intrigue, and discord to keep them from becoming strong enough to challenge its authority. Has nothing changed in over a century?

**Grand Duke.** Not in five hundred years. In the year of Our Lord 1076, the Pope excommunicated the Holy Roman Emperor, master of all Europe from the Rhine to the Vistula. The Emperor saved his kingdom only by standing barefoot in the snow for three days outside the castle at Canossa, appealing to the Pope inside for absolution. If I try to shelter you, I too would have to go to Canossa in a state of great penitence, and the outcome would be the same in any case. You must go.

**Galileo.** Will I be tried, at least, by scientists of the first order?

**Grand Duke.** You will not be tried by scientists at all, but by those who have appointed themselves as masters in matters of faith and obedience. They will hear our case and instruct you.

**Galileo.** And who can doubt that it will lead to the worst disorders when minds created free by God are compelled to submit slavishly to an outside will? When we are told to deny our senses and subject them to the whim of others? When people devoid of whatsoever competence are made judges over experts and granted authority to treat them as they please? These are the approaches which are apt to bring about the ruin of commonwealths and the subversion of the state.

**Grand Duke.** Our state is already subverted, and the Inquisition is master here. You must go to Rome, where you will reside with my ambassador while you await trial.

**Galileo.** I am seventy years old and in ill health.

**Grand Duke.** We can use this excuse to delay your journey, but not to prevent it.

**Galileo.** Then I will go to Rome. I appreciate your majesty's efforts on my behalf.

**Grand Duke.** Would that they were more. May God be with you.

## **To Escape, or Not to Escape**

*(Galileo and students in Galileo's home)*

**Galileo.** And so, I have been ordered to appear in Rome before the Holy Inquisition in three weeks' time.

**Rocco.** Perhaps you can change your destination en route?

**Galileo.** Impossible. I will be escorted in my journey by Tuscan officers as well as those of the Inquisition itself.

**Guido.** But, for the moment, you are at liberty. We have friends who can bring you beyond the borders of Florence and to the safety of the north, beyond the reach of the Inquisition.

**Galileo.** No. I will go to Rome and demonstrate my innocence.

**Guido.** The last great man who tried that trick was the Bohemian theologian Jan Hus. He was called before the Council of Constance, and went only because he was guaranteed a safe-conduct by the Holy Roman Emperor. This promise proved to be as empty as the heart of an Inquisitor.

**Galileo.** That was two hundred years ago. And yes, he was arrested upon his arrival and thrown into a wretched cell.

**Guido.** Several months of misery later, he was burned at the stake.

**Galileo.** But that was before the orderly institution of the Inquisition existed. It is brutal, but it exerts some care and selectivity with its brutality.

**Guido.** They are an institution of thugs whose nominal adherence to Christian doctrine regarding the world beyond is only a means of achieving power in the here and now.

**Galileo.** I am a Catholic.

**Guido.** But the Inquisitors, in their brutality, are not worthy to wear the robes of the Church; their motives are as evil as those of a pagan Emperor of Rome. They will throw you to the lions for sport, if not for vengeance. They hate you for introducing doubt into their world of ideological orthodoxy.

**Guido.** We can help you escape while there is still time. We can get you to Wittenberg, long a center of resistance to the power of the Church. You will be safe.

**Galileo.** I will not go to Wittenberg.

**Rocco.** Or to Denmark. It is a land of liberty and of great achievement in the sciences. The students of Tycho Brahe are eager to begin open and free discussion of your ideas in astronomy and other fields.

**Galileo.** Escape would constitute an admission of guilt.

**Guido.** You have already been judged and found guilty of heresy. Florence is a prison in which you remain before your punishment is meted out.

**Galileo.** I am seventy years old, and native to the soil of Tuscany. If I leave here without the Duke's permission, am I not injuring my country? I have been free to leave it at any time since my birth, or not to return to it from Venetian territory. My long, voluntary residence expresses my willingness to abide by its laws, whatever hardships they may impose upon me.

**Rocco.** And what of your friends and students? Will you abandon us by refusing to escape?

**Galileo.** If I flee, I cannot teach you unless you, too, go into exile. My books will serve as teacher enough for you and the young people of the ages. My mind is made up.

**Guido.** And so is the Inquisition's judgment. May God have mercy on your soul.



## Dead Poets and Immovable Scientists

**Galileo** (*reading aloud*). Di Fiorenza partir ti convene. Questo si vuole e questio già si cerca, e tosta verrà fatto.

**Salvati** (*enters, reciting*). And so you must depart from Florence; this is willed already, sought for. You shall leave everything you love most dearly; this is the arrow that the bow of exile shoots first. You are to know the bitter taste of others' bread, how salt it is, and know how hard a path it is for one who goes descending and ascending others' stairs.

**Galileo** (*looking up, surprised*). Salvati, you have an impressive command of Dante's Divine Comedy. Thank you for your kindness in coming to visit me here. I had heard that you had business in Florence, and hoped that we could renew our friendship.

**Salvati** (*continuing*). And what will be most hard for you to bear will be the scheming, senseless company that is to share your fall into this valley. Against you they will be insane, completely ungrateful and profane.

**Galileo** (*reading again*). Ma la vendetta fia testimonio al ver che la dispensa. But just vengeance will serve as witness to the truth that wields it.

**Salvati** (*speaking, not reciting*). But not in our lifetimes. Galileo, I warned you long ago of the hazards that now menace your freedom and even your life.

**Galileo**. Perhaps it is God's will, or my destiny.

**Salvati**. No more than it is God's will that millions die in Germany and the Balkans in the name of religion and the hatred thereof.

**Galileo**. We should humbly accept misfortune and perhaps thank Providence, which by such means detaches us from an excessive love for Eathly things and elevates our minds to the celestial and divine.

**Salvati**. Forget your star-gazing and scientific beliefs for a moment. This is your life that hangs in the balance.

**Galileo**. I do not set my life at a pin's fee.

**Salvati**. Then how can you expect anyone else to care? Farewell, Galileo. I will attend to the amusements of Florence instead of to a man resigned to melancholy and self-pity.  
(*Exits.*)

## Diplomatic Language

*(In the Florentine Embassy at Rome)*

**Ambassador Niccolini.** Galileo, I hope that your quarters are comfortable.

**Galileo.** Considering that I was escorted here by force, through no fault of yours, they are quite comfortable indeed. I am further warmed and soothed by the kind words of my daughter Virginia's letters, which confirm that she and Livia are well.

**Niccolini.** I have appealed to the Pope repeatedly for you to be freed and returned to Florence, citing your age, ill health, and readiness to submit to censure. His Holiness has told me that there is no way out, and may God forgive you for having meddled with these subjects of astronomy and the nature of the universe.

**Galileo.** As always, your efforts are appreciated.

**Niccolini.** Your trial shall begin within a few days.

**Galileo.** Why has it not yet begun?

**Niccolini.** There is another case which precedes yours. A Bohemian heretic named Joseph, with some unpronounceable last name beginning with the strange letter K, is currently the subject of much disputation.

**Galileo.** This delay is no favor to me—anticipation only worsens my plight. What crime has this Joseph K committed?

**Niccolini.** His persecutors cannot agree on this.

**Galileo.** Then they must set him free.

**Niccolini** (*ducking the comment*). My apologies, Galileo, but I must attend to a host of other matters. In the meantime, Francesco will serve you dinner. (*Exits.*)

*(Francesco enters, with platter which he unveils.)*

**Galileo.** Thank you, Francesco. It looks delicious.

**Francesco.** So it is—I sampled a bit as they were making it.

**Galileo.** Francesco, what have you heard about the goings-on about town this week?

**Francesco.** Dottore Galileo, your dinner is getting cold.

**Galileo.** Don't brush me aside—everyone is trying to conceal my fate from me, which only makes my anticipation worse. What have you heard as you amble the streets?

**Francesco** (*reluctantly*). It has gone hard for this Joseph K. His ill-treatment has transformed him so that he is scarcely recognizable as human; he appears more a filthy insect of enormous size. The combination of his injuries and the shock of this alien environment have made his words incomprehensible, and he struggles to defend himself in court while the Inquisitors mock him.

**Galileo** (*aghast*). Good Lord. Francesco, please leave—I need some time alone. Take the food with you; I can't eat.

**Francesco**. But you haven't even....

**Galileo**. Leave me!

(*Francesco exits.*)

## The Trial

(*Inside the Vatican*)

**Urban**. Welcome, cardinals, to the trial of Galileo Galilei.

**Galileo** (*leaping to his feet, the Pope's expression conveying displeasure at this interruption*)  
Before we begin, I have a few words to say. Please, in your judgment, give little thought to the prejudices of your education, or your opinions of me personally, and much to the observations of science. In turn, I will attempt to elucidate my position with as much clarity as possible. It would not be fitting at my age, as it might be for a young man, to toy with words when I appear before you.

**Avianno**. There is no need for you to say anything. Your own book condemns you. You have sought to make a false argument appear plausible, and to teach this argument to others. You are guilty of studying things both in the sky and here on Earth in an inappropriate manner, without the proper guidance of Scripture.

**Galileo**. In discussions of physical problems we ought not to begin from the authority of scriptural passages, but from sense-experiences and necessary demonstrations. God is no less excellently revealed in Nature's actions than in the sacred statements of the Bible.

**Urban**. It would be an extravagant boldness for anyone to limit and confine the Divine power and wisdom to some one particular conjecture of his own.

**Galileo**. I do not claim more than a modest share of wisdom, certainly none in comparison with God's. The most important aspect of that wisdom is a firm recognition of my own ignorance in understanding the divine plans of nature, and of the limitations of today's interpretations of both Scripture and nature.

**Urban**. Galileo, you miss the point. It is not our intellect which makes us human, but our souls, which alone among the creatures are worthy of salvation. When we cease to exalt the divine vision above all others, we are no more than chattering monkeys. Surely you are not an ape?

**Derlino** (*to Gordonna*). Give him five minutes with that misshapen thug Tomasso and he'll gibber like one.

**Galileo**. Can we return to the matter at hand? All you have done is to make it obvious that you have never had any concern about the nature of scientific inquiry. You show your

indifference clearly, and that you have given no thought to the subjects about which you bring me to trial.

**Pellicano.** You do not know with whom you deal.

**Galileo.** I deal with men ensconced in lovely robes, paid for by peasants who live in filth.

**Pellicano.** We are the inheritors of the throne of St. Peter, the rock upon which all faith stands, the vicars of Christ, the representatives of God on Earth.

**Galileo.** For centuries, the vicars of Christ on Earth believed that the Earth was flat.

**Avianno.** And we have since found that the round Earth was predicted by Scripture.

**Ponatucci.** That's right, according to the face of the page, the chapter of destiny, the essence of being.

**Galileo.** The devil can quote Scripture to suit his purpose, and so can this prattling idiot.

**Capo.** I would refrain from such statements in the presence of the highest authority.

**Gordonna.** We were destined to rule the world.

**Magdario.** We are the keepers of the divine light.

**Galileo.** You're not God.

**Gordonna.** We are in here.

**Capo.** Galileo, are there moons around Jupiter?

**Galileo** (*spitting with anger*). Yes.

**Capo.** And if the Church says they do not exist?

**Galileo.** Then the Church is wrong.

**Capo.** But that is impossible. The Church is infallible. So we come to a contradiction.

**Galileo.** Indeed we do.

**Capo.** So you are blind. Your telescope is spotty. You were drunk. But the heavenly firmament, so described by the laws of heaven, must remain unbroken.

**Galileo.** Those ideas aren't even Christian! The Ptolemaic view of the universe was developed by pagan Greeks!

**Milgrammo.** Your problem, Galileo, is that you live in the world of senses, of fleshly weakness, of the temptations of the devil. Within the context of your own world, you may see and hear things which the laws of heaven deem untrue. We, the representatives of Christ on Earth, live in a world beyond, in the world of the spirit.

**Galileo.** The Earth is a small and trifling body in comparison with the universe, and your place within it is narrower still. You live in a world of wealth, lust, sin, and hypocrisy.

**Ponatucci.** He is incorrigible.

**Derlino.** Let's introduce him to Tomasso already.

**Urban.** Quite right—he has mocked us long enough. I suggest we adjourn for lunch while the prisoner makes a new friend.

## **Nasty, Brutish, and Short**

*(Galileo, hands tied behind his back, is thrust into a room containing the troglodyte Tomasso, surrounded on every side by his instruments. The door closes and locks audibly behind him.)*

**Tomasso.** Welcome to my house of horrors.

**Galileo.** Surely it's not as bad as all that?

**Tomasso.** The title of this book may interest you.

**Galileo.** It's Dante's *Inferno*. But you're holding it upside down. *(Momentarily amused at his enemy's ignorance.)* Would you like me to teach you to read?

**Tomasso** *(throwing the book on the floor, stamping on it)*. I don't need to read. Dante's got nothing on me. He only wrote about Hell. I create it.

**Galileo** *(stunned)*. Good God.

**Tomasso.** You are reputed to be knowledgeable in the ways of science. I think that my toys will interest you, or break you. *(Laughs.)* Perhaps I'll show you around my lair. Let us begin with the dancing machine. It's not as modern as some of the devices you work with—this one was used on Machiavelli. These chains are attached to your arms, which we pull up behind your back. We lift you to the ceiling, then let you fall freely until you almost hit the floor. If I stop you in time, it will wrench your arms out of their sockets and tear at your muscles; if not, you'll receive a bang-up job on the floor. *(Laughs.)* It doesn't sound nearly as painful as it feels by the fifteenth or twentieth time. People are heavy, and they fall quickly.

**Galileo.** Perhaps I could help you better understand how your machine works, if you won't use it on me.

**Tomasso.** Or you might wish to play with the rack. I am well versed in this machine. I don't know why, but the ropes are stronger than human flesh—I've ripped people apart with this one. *(Galileo whimpers, aghast.)*

**Tomasso.** Or perhaps we can go for a spin on the wheel. The spinning isn't the worst of it—you don't even notice a constant spin after a while. Mostly, this just provides a convenient platform.

**Galileo.** Platform?

**Tomasso.** The assistant tormentor and I enjoy playing a good game of darts. Neither of us is very good at aiming the darts just where we want, but that adds to the suspense and makes the fun last longer. We make our own darts, the better to rip through human flesh. After each round, we'll pull them out of you. That leads right into the next game.

**Galileo.** Next game?

**Tomasso.** We'll burn your wounds with hot pokers to keep you from bleeding to death and spoiling our fun. After that, we'll turn you upside down and douse your legs in oil we will set alight. In that position, you won't suffocate from the smoke, and we'll put out the fire if we think you're dying or slipping into unconsciousness. I think for now, while my assistant lights the fire, I'll start you on the dancing machine. I have an especially excruciating sequence of games which I like to play which begins with that one.

**Galileo.** You were only supposed to show me the instruments of torture.

**Tomasso.** But I'd like to give a little demonstration of my power. Just a little taste, to start with.

**Galileo** (*shouting towards the door*). I recant! I recant! Get me out of here! I'll say anything! (*Cardinal Milgrammo enters.*)

**Milgrammo.** Very well, given your change of heart, we'd like you to come before our august body once more.

**Tomasso.** But I didn't even have a chance to do anything yet!

**Milgrammo.** Now, now, that's enough, Tomasso. You've done your job.

**Tomasso.** Yes, Cardinal. (*Milgrammo leads Galileo away.*)

**Tomasso** (*to audience*). Damn that Cardinal! He takes away my fun. Maybe I'll start a rumor. If I whisper imagined overhearings into the right ear, maybe I'll get to have some fun with that bastard after all.

## Recantation

(*In the Vatican*)

**Urban.** Galileo, we understand that you have something you wish to share with us.

**Galileo** (*mEEKly, head bowed*). Yes.

**Urban.** What is it, my child? Do you wish to confess your sins before God?

**Galileo.** Yes, father. (*Derlino pokes Galileo from behind to scare him. It works.*)

**Urban.** Then get down on your knees and confess, my son. (*Galileo kneels.*)

**Galileo.** I acknowledge the mercy of my betters, who have shown me the error of my ways.

**Urban.** Very touching. Cardinal Capo, would you please read the pronouncement?

**Capo.** We hereby place the *Dialogues Concerning the Two World Systems* on the Vatican Index of Prohibited Books.

**Urban.** Thank you, Cardinal. At this point, we have a few words to say to you, Galileo. (*Looks around.*) Where is the sentence? I haven't seen a copy of it since we first invited Galileo to join us.

**Pellicano.** Here it is, Your Holiness.

**Urban** (clears his throat menacingly). Invoking the most holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the ever Virgin Mary, with the counsel and advice of the Reverend Masters of sacred theology and Doctors of Laws, we declare that you, the said Galileo, have rendered yourself in the judgement of this Holy Office vehemently suspected of heresy, namely of having believed and held the doctrine—which is false and contrary to the Scriptures—that the Sun is the immobile center of the universe, and that the Earth moves and is not the center of the universe. Consequently, you have incurred all the censures and penalties imposed and promulgated in the sacred canons.

We ordain that the book *The Dialogue on the Great World Systems* be banned by public edict.

We condemn you to the formal prison of this Holy Office during such period as pleases us.

**Gordonna** (*shoving paper into Galileo's hands*). Read this aloud and with sincerity.

**Galileo.** I, Galileo, kneel before you, most Eminent and Reverend Lord Cardinals Inquisitors. I swear that I will believe all that is held, preached, and taught by the Holy Catholic Apostolic Roman Church, from this, the Year of Our Lord Sixteen Hundred and Thirty-Three, onwards for all eternity. I have been pronounced by the Holy Office to be vehemently suspected of heresy, that is to say, of having held and believed that the sun is the center of the world and immovable, and that the the Earth is not the center and moves.

With sincere heart and unfeigned faith, I abjure, curse, and detest the aforesaid errors and heresies. I will never again assert anything that might contribute to such heresies, and should I suspect anyone I know of heresy, I will denounce him to this Holy Office. In the event of my contravening (which God forbid!) any of these promises, I submit myself to all of the pains imposed against such delinquents.

My error, I confess, has been one of vainglorious ambition, and of pure ignorance and inadvertence.

**Gordonna.** Very touching, Galileo. (*Kicks him.*) Just to confirm, dear friend, is the Sun or the Earth the fixed center of the universe?

**Galileo.** The Earth is the fixed center of the universe. (*Stage whisper to audience*) And yet it moves.

**Urban.** Have you anything to add, Galileo?

**Galileo.** I have nothing more to say to you. I am an old man, and wish to rest.

**Milgrammo.** We will provide you with a place in which to repose for the remainder of your days. May God be with you, as He is with us.

*(Galileo is led away.)*

## **The Shades of Night**

*(In Galileo's home)*

**Guido.** So you recanted to save your neck at the advanced age of seventy.

**Galileo.** Death would have been a pleasant alternative to what I faced. There is nothing, nothing worse than physical pain. When you are experiencing it, or about to experience it, the only thing you can hope for is that it will stop. Martyrdom is celebrated by those who live, not those who are subject to it.

**Guido.** And you have managed to escape torture, but are condemned to perpetual house arrest. How do you endure imprisonment?

**Galileo.** In patience, as all prisoners must. My present confinement is to be terminated only by that other one which is common to all, most narrow, and enduring forever.

**Rocco.** But what of our future as scientists?

**Galileo.** Italian science is dead and buried. The Inquisitors have not merely crushed me, they have destroyed the spirit of the Renaissance and the intellectual ferment of an age. Though I am growing blind in body, they perceive far less than I.

**Guido.** Speaking of ferment, would anyone like more wine?

**Rocco.** Then have you no hope for the future?

**Galileo.** Science will continue its inexorable advance, but not here. My beloved daughter Virginia, in one of her last letters before her passing, reminded me that no one is accepted as a prophet in their own country. My thoughts, and those of other great Italian scientists, will be pursued beyond the confines of this peninsula, whose embrace is as warm as it is stultifying. In the north, where the cold winds blow, great scientists are being born who will make vast discoveries, then describe them in harsh, alien tongues.

**Guido.** Perhaps even these climes will not provide the liberty which science requires to flourish. England persecutes its dissenters, Sweden hates its Catholics, and the Germans ravage one another in their quest for religious uniformity.

**Galileo.** True, the liberties of the north are limited, though not so limited as those down here. Perhaps those who love freedom must leave Europe and begin anew, founding



a new world. The process may already have begun—the handful of brave Swedish, Dutch, and English settlers who have journeyed to North America may yet liberate the human mind from its ideological chains. There is a new world dawning, a world in which there may be freedom of thought, and in which my sentence may be seen as the travesty it is. Someday, maybe even the Church will see the error of its ways. Until then, I write, that my words and my ideas may live after me.

## Galileo's Soliloquy

*(Galileo is at home, 1642.)*

**Galileo** (*reciting, with obvious frailty*). As the geometer intently seeks to square the circle, but he cannot reach the principle he needs, so I searched that strange sight. But then my mind was struck by light that flashed, and with this light, received what it had asked. Here force failed my high fantasy; but my desire and will were moved already—like a wheel revolving uniformly—by the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.

Oh, Dante! I will soon join you, I hope in the Paradise you captured so elegantly and not in the Inferno where your epic journey began. Wracked by age and its infirmities, shamed by my own recantation, treated with scorn and brutality by all who proclaim themselves wise in my small corner of the universe, I am ready for my passage beyond. Though I have fared far better than the vast majority subject to the Inquisition—I have not endured the torments that are its hallmark, and the way in which it "purifies" prisoners for weeks or months before their slow and excruciating deaths—I nonetheless have suffered greatly. Now I know why we must believe in an afterlife, one in which noble spirits attain the happiness that is all too often denied them here on Earth, and one in which their oppressors finally face a just court that condemns them for their sins.

I know that my favorite daughter is there, in Paradise. Celestial Virginia, I shall see you soon.

*(Closing of curtains)*

## Conclusion

**Narrator.** Galileo's sentence was ultimately reversed, his memory redeemed by the Church's formal apology. He did not live to see his vindication, which took place in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-two, precisely three and a half centuries after his death.

Galileo and his daughter Virginia are buried beneath Florence's Basilica of Santa Croce, among such luminaries as Dante, Michelangelo, and Machiavelli. His ideas live on above ground, as does one final message for his tormentors. In Florence's science museum, a jar laden with formaldehyde preserves the middle finger of Galileo's right hand, upturned and in full view of the public.

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