Examiner’s comments:
This is a thoughtful piece that explores the ideas of both the prompt and the Context. It is constructed in an interesting manner, and there is a clear voice that contributes to the success of the piece. The use of supporting material is provocative and interesting. It is well written and shows excellent control. It was assessed as an upper-range script. The nominated text is The Life of Galileo.

1942
The Mask of Evil
‘Sympathetically I observe,
The swollen veins of the forehead, indicating
What a strain it is to be evil.’ B.B.

Five years ago, today, I penned it. And yet here I am, in another time, in another country, ‘evil’ as ever. I’ve seen it all before. Back in Munich and Berlin, it was whistles and stink bombs on opening night from the Nazis in the audience – Rise and Fall of Mahogany, apparently, not their favourite opera. Here, it’s all about government lists and HUAC enquiries, though the sentiment remains the same. About to be blacklisted, and about to be expelled, I know what happens next. I’ve seen it all before. To think that the original ‘Galileo’, would pass up a trip home to London! I’m losing my footing amidst this ‘Red Scare’ and they are scared. Loughton, more than most. The show must go on, but the show can’t go on now, without him. It is as if I were Death himself, and any further association a resignation into the blazing underworld’ the ‘Red Hell’.

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It was Bertolt Brecht’s scathing appraisal of the prevailing social and political climate, as conveyed through such poems as ‘The Mask of Evil’, that saw him raise the ire of authorities desperate to preserve their power. Additionally, it was the Marxist sentiment of plays like Rise and Fall of Mahogany that caused him to be blacklisted in both Nazi Germany, and in post-war America by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). This ongoing political pressure in both nations instigated many problems from Brecht, both personal and professional. The man with whom he had translated and scripted the play, Charles Loughton, decided to remove himself from the play, Life of Galileo, as Brecht was seen to be a communist, which at the time, was a dangerous association to have. It is ironic that Loughton faced a similar dilemma to that of his stage persona, Galileo, and experienced the same kind of internal conflict. Both were torn between the value of loyalty – to a friend, or to scientific truth – and the promise of safety. Loughton left the play, and its tour to England was therefore cancelled, and Galileo recanted halting scientific advances for a number of years. But can we judge the people who make these decisions?

Brecht did. He labelled Galileo’s recantation an ‘absolute crime’, and went so far as to write a satirical Obituary for C. Loughton – the man was ‘dead’ to him once he decided not to act
for Brecht. But can we look at these situations anyhow, and see the immense harm it did to both men. Galileo, having previously stated that ‘any man who knows the truth, and calls it a lie, is a crook’, chastised himself and lived in immense guilt for the remainder of his life, even though he was able to smuggle out his Discorsi later. Loughton lost a friend in Brecht, and a connection to one of the foremost playwrights of his day. And if they were not harmed in this way, they would feel ‘Physical pain’, which pushes Galileo to recant, or lose their professional standing. Even for Brecht, he lost a friend, an actor, and a play, because of Loughton’s actions, but Loughton was no criminal – he merely acted in his own interests, and avoided receiving a dangerous label, ‘communist’, to which he had no loyalty. And neither was Brecht, for being a criminal. It was only the authorities that made him so.

What Brecht recognised in both Germany and America, which is examined in Life of Galileo, was the recurring situation of a dogmatic authority suppressing the opposing views of those within their jurisdiction. This is done often by use of rhetorical device, just as Brecht’s fellow playwright, Arthur Miller, noted. In his doctrine of ‘contemporary diabolism’ he stated that time and time again, the people in positions of power would associate their political or philosophical enemies with something demonic: Galileo had his ‘famed telescoped dubbed a ‘Devil’s tube’; Brecht was seen in association with the ‘Red Hell’; Miller’s The Crucible deals with the trial of witches, and those involved with ‘witchcraft’. Each time, an ‘inhumane overlay’ is given to a group within society, allowing the abrogation of all normally applied customs of civilised intercourse. This way, authorities can inflict harm, and the public – if only tacitly – condones it.

Galileo was ‘shown the instruments’ of torture, for simply expressing what he thought to be true, which was eventually shown to be true. But because he was seen as a ‘heretic’, he was able to be treated in this manner. And in the modern day, the US government policy of ‘extraordinary rendition’ allows people to be kidnapped, taken to a country with less human rights laws, and tortured until confession. How is this allowed? When George W Bush collated the nations of North Korea, Iraq, and Iran into an ‘Axis of Evil’ it was perhaps the most potent use of contemporary diabolism in the ‘modern day’ the label is not ‘witch’, ‘heretic’, or ‘communist’ – it is ‘terrorist’. Australian-Egyptian national, Mandouh Habib is a victim of such a policy. American war journalist, Megan Stack, in a piece for the LA Times, claimed that he had been kidnapped and tortured before ‘confessing to a litany of horror-related crimes’, none of which he was ever found guilty of. He was powerless in this situation and was forced, like Galileo, to say something he knew not to be true. It is the authorities that demonise these groups, and the authorities that cause this sort of thing to happen.

Of course, with such horrific methods, the people who inflict pain might, after the notification of others, be found out. Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning, a former US soldier, leaked masses of documents on the ‘War on Terror’, most notably the video entitled ‘Collateral murder’, which shows innocent people being shot down for the enjoyment of US soldiers. This was a great embarrassment to the United States government, and furthermore, a shame on the people of their nation. But they are not the victims. Harm to a reputation does not register against the harm to innocent victims, or against the harm that Manning endured in over 1000 days of torturous imprisonment without a proper trial.
Often, after conflict, when these crimes are found out, it is too late, the damage has been done.

Another former US government worker who leaked documents is Edward Snowden, who has been stripped of his citizenship (like Brecht) and lives in Russia. He has said that Manning and he are indeed ‘powerless’, and change must come from an ‘angry, informed public’, as they are who keep the government in power. But as Brecht saw, this seldom happens.

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I’ve decided to leave. This nation is no different. It survives on the promise that its people are petrified, its enemies are devils, and the playwrights are its enemies. There is no room for me in America. I’ve seen it all before.