

## **Outrage: Traces of the Troublemaker**

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In Itamar Moses's *Outrage*, we meet three historical figures who were outcasts of their society—the Ancient Greek philosopher Socrates, the Italian miller Domenico “Menocchio” Scandella, and playwright Bertolt Brecht. The threat of their revolutionary ideas landed all three of them in trouble with the law in their respective timelines, investigated and interrogated for going against the grain of society. However, all three left behind legacies that we still talk about today. Why was each of them perceived as such a threat to society? How and why have their ideas stuck around?

**Socrates:** impiety (not respecting the state religion/gods) and corrupting the youth (399 BCE)

A philosopher of Ancient Greece, Socrates was well known (and disliked) for his examinations of wisdom amongst his fellow citizens of Athens. He was also a controversial figure for his failure to properly practice the state religion and was accused of introducing and worshipping his own gods. The controversial actions of those who associated with him (such as Alcibiades, who we also meet in *Outrage*) also contributed to his bad reputation in Athens. Socrates is known for his loyalty to Athens and his commitment to his morals, refusing to recant his beliefs or flee to escape punishment. Socrates was a mentor to the philosopher Plato, who would then become a mentor to the philosopher Aristotle. All three have had immense influence on the evolution of philosophy in the Western world. The Socratic method—his method of posing questions in order to reveal truth and ignorance through discussion—is still widely taught and utilized today.

**Domenico “Menocchio” Scandella:** accused of being a religious heretic and spreading his beliefs to others (trials in 1584 and 1599)

Menocchio was an Italian miller, accused of and tried for religious heresy by the Inquisition. Menocchio caused chaos with his alternative religious beliefs and his personal cosmogony (his own version of the origin of the universe). He was critical of the teachings of the church and claimed that the church oppressed the poor. In the midst of the Counter-Reformation, the Holy Office sentenced Menocchio to prison for his blasphemous beliefs in 1584. Despite seeming to live a new life of total repentance after this, it was discovered that Menocchio's beliefs didn't change at all. In 1599 he faced a second trial and was sentenced to death. Menocchio's story represents the threat posed by his persistent questioning of religion and his refusal to be silenced even in the face of deadly consequences. Menocchio's legacy is preserved by Carlo Ginzburg's book *The Cheese and the Worms* (1976), as Ginzburg wanted to call attention to the significance of a singular, lower-class figure who had previously been lost to history.

**Bertolt Brecht:** accused of being a communist (in the US, 1947)

Having fled from Germany during World War II, Brecht was one of many artists investigated by the United States House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) for possible affiliations with the Communist Party. During his testimony, Brecht denied ever being a member of the Communist Party in any country. What made Brecht a threat both to the US and Nazi Germany was the critical political commentary in his plays and other written works. Brecht leaves behind a legacy of his part in the development of Epic theatre, a form of theatre that we still learn about and take influence from today. For Brecht, Epic theatre was motivated by his belief that art should be useful, and that theatre should inspire audiences to think critically about the world around them, including the government. Brecht was also influential in the evolution of the dramaturg as a more integrated role in theatre practices (thanks, Brecht!).