

GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PEASANT CHRIST IN DARIO FO'S MISTERO
BUFFO

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare:

that this dissertation entitled 'Genesis and Development of the Peasant Christ in Dario Fo's Mistero Buffo' is my own work except to the extent indicated in the Acknowledgement, Notes and References and by comments included in the body of the dissertation;

that this dissertation has not been submitted to any other university for degree purposes;

that no information used in this dissertation has been obtained by me while employed by, or working under the aegis of, any person or organisation other than the University of the Witwatersrand.

Signed:


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ABSTRACT

This study examines the theatrical career of the Italian playwright-cum-actor, Dario Fo, who from the mid-Fifties became a controversial figure in Italy because he proposed a militant theatre of counterinformation.

It addresses itself mainly to the micro-texts which make up Mistero Buffo as this play was written at the peak of Dario Fo's career and it epitomises the playwright's talent as an author, actor and philologist. This play is also Fo's most original oeuvre because of the message it conveys through a new giullare, not unlike his 14th and 15th century prototypes, who expresses himself in a grammelot, of Fo's own invention, based on the medieval speech patterns of the peasants of Lombardy. This play defines the role of Fo's plebeian spokesman or 'peasant Christ' and the reasons for his anger against the hegemonic classes.

In the opening chapter Dario Fo's involvement with the theatre is briefly surveyed and the main political tenets of his works are established, as we see how he progressed away from his bourgeois environment and turned towards Marxist and then Maoist ideologies.

The second chapter reviews the traditions on which Fo bases the theatrical framework of his oeuvre and shows the strong influence that

the 'epic theatre' of Bertolt Brecht has had on Fo's formation and development as a writer. It also deals with the importance of Antonio Gramsci and the role his views may have had in shaping Fo's didactic aims. Fo wanted to transform the tepid spectator into a burning revolutionary, willing to dismantle the abuses of both the State and the Church. Lastly this chapter deals with the influence Franca Rame has had on his latest plays which move away from socio-political issues to take up the feminist cause.

Chapter 3 deals with the sources of Dario Fo's type of art and traces them back to the Gospels, the early 'mystery' plays and the first profane plays to be produced by the popular theatre of the 15th century, the Commedia dell'Arte, Mayakovsky and Brecht.

In the fourth chapter Mistero Buffo is analysed and the importance of the role of the 'narrator' is established. The elemental world-view expressed by the sub-texts, which make up this play, serves to juxtapose and compare the crisis of the poor with the arrogant prosperity of the ruling classes. The very language with which the peasant characters express themselves becomes a weapon of humble reprisal.

The concluding chapter sums up how Fo has changed ideology and his point of view over the years and suggests that his theatre has depleted its message in the Eighties. It explains, furthermore, why

this author was chosen as a subject for this dissertation: Dario Fo's plays are regularly produced in South Africa and the situations they portray, though culturally distant from local reality, are nevertheless eminently relevant in this country.

A brief Appendix considers the Fo plays that have been staged in South Africa and reviews the most important articles that assessed them and how they were perceived by local audiences.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction: the man and his work

1981 was the year that introduced South African audiences to Dario Fo's 'theatre of presence' (1). On 4th May, the premiere of Accidental Death of an Anarchist was staged at the 'Market Theatre' in Johannesburg, directed by Malcolm Purkey, the driving force behind 'The Junction Theatre Workshop Company'. This play, hailed by theatre critics in London and New York as a brilliant fusion of sharp satire and knockabout farce, did not enjoy the same reception in South Africa. A local critic, Garalt MacLiam, for example, said that if it were 'seen merely as a farce, [it provided] a pleasant evening's entertainment' (The Star, 24 May 1981). He felt the play's message had been 'swallowed' by farce and 'watered down' in comparison to the Italian original. In many ways, this production was restricted by the choice of venue, by the nature of the direction and to some extent the dialogue. The cast needed to develop an intimate rapport with the audience, a task which was difficult within the confines of the far too spacious Market Theatre. The plot, which should force the audience to draw a parallel between Giovanni Pinelli's suicide (2) and that of South African political prisoners who suffered the same fate, under similar conditions (3), was extremely relevant to the South African context; yet it failed to stir and fuel the emotions of the majority of theatregoers.

With the staging of two more Fo plays, We can't pay! We won't pay! and Female Parts: the One Woman Plays, the reactions to this type of provocative theatre by the South African public, have been even more

negative. Critics coined the term 'kitchen-sink comedy' (4) for Fo's brand of humour and to this day it remains firmly associated with Fo's theatre. R. Daniel of the now defunct Rand Daily Mail, blamed the poor reception of We Can't Pay! We Won't Pay! on the fact that Dario Fo's plays lose their effectiveness when enacted outside Italy. He states that their success elsewhere is due to their exotic quality rather than the militant values they embody (Rand Daily Mail, 26 March 1982). What this critic fails to understand, however, is that Fo's plays are meant to transcend cultural barriers and local values; he fails to recognise the universal nature of the themes and situations portrayed (5). When they were staged in London's West End, for example, they were presented not as Italian plays for an Italian audience, but as plays suited to an Anglo-Saxon audience. They were adapted to convey the intrinsic values of that particular culture.

It has been suggested that the plays in South Africa might have been played more effectively if the cast had been black, since the daily travail of the working man in Italy is more akin to that of the local black population. MacLiam, on the subject of We Can't Pay! We Won't Pay!, had the following to add:

In author Dario Fo's Italy, tempers run high over the constantly rising food costs and corruption exists in all levels of society. So it is credible that a group of people in a supermarket there, might stage a rebellion and refuse to pay for goods. Such a situation is all but unthinkable in South Africa and consequently the premise of this work loses much of

its impact.
(The Star, 26 March 1982)

The aim of Fo's theatre is to inform the general public, and more especially the proletariat, of that 'side of the picture' which is not disseminated through the mass media. It is a type of 'alternative theatre' in the mould of socio-political satires such as those of South African playwrights Pieter Dirk Uys and Athol Fugard. Though so different in their styles, these writers treat many issues which have a parallel in Dario Fo's theatre, hence his plays should have struck a note of sympathy with the South African audience.

The lack of success of Fo's plays in South Africa cannot be attributed to the type of message conveyed in the plays (since it is highly relevant to this society) but rather to the theatre-going public, which is not yet 'ready' to be informed, and to the fact that the masses, for whom this type of theatre would have more meaning, do not normally have the opportunity to see such productions. Other factors which have determined the failure of these plays are of a technical nature, such as bad stage direction and poor adaptations of the plays. The very essence of Fo's farces is missed when played in naturalistic settings, with excessive stage props, and by actors who lack the 'versatility' and 'mimic' ability which Fo's theatre demands.

It is the relevance of Dario Fo's theatre in the South African context and the continued interest of South Africa's new generation of stage

producers (6) which first generated our interest in researching Dario Fo and defining the role of the Peasant-Christ in Mistero Buffo. To date, nothing of any interest has been written in South Africa about Dario Fo's theatre, and we think this warrants our attention, considering the immense popularity which this playwright has enjoyed worldwide.

In order to become acquainted with the idea of a Peasant-Christ in this study, one must start with the playwright-actor himself. Dario Fo's works, in many ways, are not of a high literary standard as many critics have observed. Fo states, in fact, that he purposely steers away from the literary because the public he wishes to address is skeptical and hostile to literary activity. Instead, he is first and foremost a 'theatrical animal' with aspirations of being author-cum-actor-cum-director-cum-political militant. Thus, his ability to write is but an integral element of a complex process of communication, in which his artistic ability as an actor and his critical awareness as an activist, play a far more important role. To support this theory, one has only to notice the unpolished yet extreme fluidity of his texts and the way they are open to improvisation if the occasion calls for it. When studying Fo's texts, the idea of the 'theatrical animal' cannot be separated from that of the scholar who does endless research to convalidate and support the militant, political message they convey. His physicality on stage supplements what he, as a writer, has not conveyed. No written language has, in our opinion, the power

to convey, suggest, imply as much as the multiple codes or registers that Fo uses when creating the message he wishes to put across to a generally unlearned, unsophisticated audience. The bond between Fo and public is established by a minimal amount of language but a large amount of non-verbal contact. An astonishing range of gestures, nods, winks, grimaces, tones of voice, song and dance are necessary to codify the total message and effect of Fo's theatre. Thus, his texts are mere canovacci that need to be expanded, not recited; his are 'creative shows' which he uses as a platform for voicing social and political dissatisfaction.

* * *

Fo was born in 1926 in San Giano (Varese), a small village of Lombardy, to a working class family (7). At a young age, he moved to Milan, where he frequented the Accademia di Brera. He later registered with the Faculty of Architecture at Milan's Politecnico, but prior to writing his final exams, he gave up his studies to pursue his theatrical interests. However, this period was very fruitful for Fo because it taught him how to adapt to an urban milieu and it enabled him to establish human rapports with people of other socio-cultural backgrounds. Fo said the following about this period:

(...) Studiando architettura, mi sono interessato alle chiese romaniche. Rimasi stupito come opere così poderose potessero essere espressione non di intellettuali o di artisti con l'A maiuscola, ma di semplici scalpellini, di semplici operai e muratori, ignoranti e analfabeti. Scopersi improvvisamente una cultura nuova, vera: la forza creatrice di coloro che sono sempre stati definiti i 'semplici' e gli 'ignoranti', che sono sempre stati i 'paria' della cultura 'ufficiale'.
(Po in L. Binini, 1977, p. 17)

Po's peasant background and his 'official', bourgeois education were essential to formulate the opinions and ideas which he professed at the time when he dedicated himself to the world of mass education. His mistrust of and hostility towards intellectualism and theoretical abstraction, his adherence to simplicity and concreteness and the exultation, through simple hilarity, of life and healthy joie de vivre, and his instinctive denial of decadence and bourgeois pessimism, have become trade-marks of his art.

It was while studying architecture that Po started acting in an amateur capacity, improvising stories, which he would recite in a farcical and satirical vein to his fellow students. He soon turned professional, entertaining in night clubs and cabarets, with a one-man show of songs, dances and comic sketches. His official career began in révues, the spectacular escapist entertainment of post-war Italy with leggy soubrettes, comics (some very brilliant like Toto, whom Po greatly admired) and glamorous chanteuses. The révue was a genre favoured by politicians of the Christian Democrat party which came to

power in 1948; beautiful girls showing a good pair of legs were preferable to being faced with the social preoccupations of contemporary Italian reality. During this period, Fo was inspired by the writings of Gramsci, Brecht and Mayakovsky and by the Neapolitan farces of Eduardo de Filippo (8). He also met some of the important figures of the Italian neo-realist cinema, such as Roberto Rossellini, De Sica, Gillo Pontecorvo and Carlo Lizzani, with whom he was later to work in Rome. Giorgio Strehler, the director better known for having introduced Italian audiences to the theatre of situation and alienation à la Brecht, was then Fo's biggest source of inspiration with regards to stagecraft. Many a time, Fo used to watch this director conducting rehearsals in Milan's Piccolo Teatro (9). After the elections of 1948, Fo moved in predominantly left-wing and P.C.I. circles, although he was not officially a member of the Communist Party.

That same year saw the production of Ma la Tresa ci divide (But Tresa Divides Us), a play which he wrote and directed and in which he played the part of the Angel. This play bore a faint resemblance to Brecht's Caucasian Chalk Circle (10). It was a satire directed, through the Angel, at the hypocrisy shown by the Catholic Church and the Christian Democrat Party during the elections that took place that year, and had been a major disappointment for the left. The form of the play was still amateurish and similar to his student plays and sketches. However, Fo's preoccupation with choosing recent and controversial

events as the dominant themes for his type of theatre, was already evident from the beginning of his career as a playwright.

In the following years, Fo produced his own révues and by 1950, he worked with the actor Franco Parenti to present a radio comedy, based on their storytelling ability. This partnership was to last for the next four years. As a result of this exposure, in 1951 Fo was invited to participate in a radio show by R.A.I., the Italian State radio network: the show was entitled Poor Nano (literally Poor Dwarf but implying poor, abused, exploited, voiceless humanity). This highly acclaimed show, which made use of the successful Pirandellian formula of an 'upside down world', aimed to desecrate and demolish the sacred and untouchable tenets of religious, historical and literary tradition (11). In many ways, it was Fo's first attempt at attacking the logic of convention and rebelling against the moral stance which always sees good on one side and evil on the other. Poor Nano established Fo as an iconoclast against established forms of Catholicism; this same attitude was later to inspire the more grotesque satire, Mistero Buffo. As a radio play, Poor Nano gave Fo valuable experience in animating a text without gestures and it helped to develop the tonalities of his remarkably deep, sharp and resonant voice which enabled him to differentiate acoustically between various characters, a technique which was later much used in Mistero Buffo. In 1952, Poor Nano was staged at the prestigious Odeon Theatre in Milan; this gave him the opportunity to champion the underdog with gesture and action,

in the official Italian theatre.

The following years saw Fo, Parenti and Durano form their own révue company, 'I Dritti' (12) and write, direct and perform in a revue called Il dito nell'occhio (A Finger in the Eye). This play, which toured Italy, was born as a reply to the tight censorship imposed on film, theatre and broadcasting by the right-wing clerical Christian Democrat government. Fo took advantage of a slight relaxation in censorship to mount this 'anti-révue' (13), with the aim of attacking those myths in Italian life which fascism had generated and Christian Democracy had preserved. Il dito nell'occhio was 'one in the eye' for official versions of history. Fo designed the sets and costumes as well as co-writing and co-directing the script; the lighting was done by Strehler, while the French mime, Jacques Lecoq, was the choreographer who created a number of mimes. The cast also included a young Milanese actress, Franca Rame (14), who was to become Fo's wife in June 1954. This play was the first in a series of shows which drew on French farce, on the traditional sketches of the Rame family repertoire, and on the traditions of the circus. This mixture of spectacle, mime and social comment was highly successful but made the authorities nervous.

Fo grew in stature and virtuosity as an actor and comic, as he learnt to exploit more effectively his extraordinary range of gesture, movement and facial expression, his variety of voices and accents, and

his skill as a storyteller. But so did his clashes with the authorities become more numerous. Reflecting back on the years of Il dito nell'occhio, Franca Rame said:

[...] Our true turning point, the point that really mattered, we took at the very beginning of our journey, 22 years ago, when with Paventi, Durano and Lecoq we staged for the first time The Finger in the Eye. Those were the days of Scelba and his 'subculture', of Pacelli (the Pope) with his civic committees, the days of total censorship. Police superintendents, ministers, bishops and cops understood it immediately: we were a 'company of communists' and we were making 'red propaganda'. Every night there would be an inspector in the auditorium checking our words one by one against the script and the Ministry for Entertainment would obstruct our touring arrangements, while the most reactionary theatre-owners would refuse us their buildings and the bishops would ask the police to tear our programmes from the walls of their cities. The Finger in the Eye was underlined everywhere we went, among the shows 'advised against' in the parish bulletins. This branding of 'the communist enemy of civilisation and of the Holy Mary' went on for many years with all our shows. However, the workers, the students and the progressive bourgeoisie were supporting us, thereby allowing us to move on and make ourselves known despite the lack of any prizes. (Rame in Fo, 1987a, p. 12)

From 1953 onwards, Fo's initiation as a song-writer became more evident with the help of Fiorenzo Carpi, resulting in the second révue, Sani da legare (A Madhouse for the Sane). This révue had a more forceful message as a political satire than Il dito nell'occhio, running soon into censorship problems imposed by the Ministry for Entertainment and aggravated by the Minister for the Interior, Mario Scelba. External pressure, in the form of protests from the American

ambassador Clare Booth Luce, a spokesperson for McCarthyism, hindered the play's popularity with the public, because of the adverse publicity it received from official quarters. The legge truffa (fraud law), whereby a party which obtained 50% of the vote had a two-thirds majority in parliament (a policy reminiscent of Mussolini's strategy to seize parliamentary power in 1923) ensured that enough political repression was felt to deal with undesirable situations, such as those created by Fo's theatre. Under this threat, the Fo-Parenti-Durano partnership could not withstand the pressure and finally dissolved. Of the three partners, only Fo chose to remain active in the political forum: Durano returned to conventional theatre and Parenti went on to do traditional French farce.

Meanwhile, Fo's activity resumed but this time in cinema. He collaborated as a screenwriter with Age and Scarpelli in the production of two unsuccessful commercial films, Souvenir d'Italia (1957) and Nata di Marzo (1958). He had previously participated as a co-writer, choreographer and actor in Carlo Lizzani's film Lo Svitato (1956). Fo's experience in the film industry was short-lived, since his improvisational, theatrical style of acting was at odds with the concise, naturalistic needs of the cinema. The lesson of cinema, besides highlighting Franca Rame's career, taught Fo some basic techniques of playwriting: how to divide a story into sequences, set a fast pace by cutting dialogue and doing away with the needless conventions of space and time. It was unfortunate that Italian cinema

was unable to exploit his talents. For this medium it was difficult to find suitable scripts and, on set, Fo's vitality and spontaneity were denied the space and freedom that on the other hand the theatre provided. But what Fo learnt from the film industry was an understanding of how montage gave pace to narrative and could be used to accost diverse elements and force one to make associations which are normally not made even in one's wildest dreams.

Fo's return to theatre saw the formation of the 'Compagnia Dario Fo-Franca Rame', and the presentation of a singular show in two tempos and four one-act farces that went under the general title of Ladri, manichini e donne nude (Thieves, Dummies and Naked Women). This collection of farces was written during Italy's 'economic miracle' period; thus, Fo deliberately turned his attention to the frivolous area of sex comedy. All four pieces nevertheless show his concern with developing a theatre of situation, then regarded as a reaction to the predominantly literary, pessimistic plays of Ionesco, Adamov and Beckett (15).

In 1959, the 'Teatro Stabile di Torino' commissioned Fo to write and direct a play to open its new season (16). Comica finale (Comic Finale) ensued, a play which consisted of four one-act texts drawn from 19th Century popular farces which were part of the repertoire of the 'Teatro Famiglia Rame'. Gianfranco de Bosio co-directed; this postwar director had pioneered Brecht's works in Italy and had done

research on Ruzzante (17), one of the major figures of the Commedia dell'Arte and a major influence on Fo's Mistero Buffo in particular. Comica Fingole was based on the tradition of the guitti, popular strolling players similar to the giullari, and on the lazzi, improvised comic routines which formed interludes in the repertoire of the comici dell'arte.

Gli arcangeli non giocano a flipper (Archangels Don't Play Pinball, 1959), the first of a series of full-length plays (six in all), gave Fo and Rome immediate success in the Italian theatrical establishment, being performed every season at the Teatro Odeon in Milan, the equivalent of a London West End theatre. This play was also the first play by Fo to be performed outside Italy; it was produced in Yugoslavia, Poland, Holland, Sweden and Spain. It was followed at yearly intervals by Aveva due pistole con gli occhi bianchi e neri (He Had Two Pistols with White and Black Eyes, 1960) and Chi ruba un piede è fortunato in amore (Stealing a Foot Makes You Lucky in Love, 1961). These three plays were well-produced and basically conventional light comedies. They were a great deal more inventive than the Poor Nano sketches, although they also used the mondo alla rovescia formula, that is, quick verbal responses in a frenetic succession of situations, parodies and ridiculous double entendres. Again, these plays were dominated by Fo's strong acting charisma, which he fully fulfilled by being actor, mime, dancer, clown and maschera, providing raucous laughter and a veneer of disturbing

satirical allusions.

These satires, which belong to Fo's bourgeois period, dealt with ludicrous aspects of Italian society. The middle-class audience was astonished by its rhythms and techniques and delighted by Fo in the leading role. Fo and Rame were now securely established both as actors and as personalities in the public eye. Social references were also more evident in these plays; both actors were now close to the Italian Communist Party (P.C.I.) and acutely aware of the political tensions in society - and the public readily picked them up. In a period which saw widespread industrial unrest, culminating in the general strike of 1960, their material caused the authorities in Milan to threaten to ban their performances.

The content and comic structure of these plays were, however, still very conventional, and although at times they might have been risqué, they reflected some of the values of Milan's public during the on-going economical miracle. Fo was addressing a returned bourgeois audience in the register of bourgeois theatre. Thus, despite Fo's vitriolic remarks against national standards, corruption and the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie, the fact that these issues were expressed in farcical terms legitimised them in the mind of the ordinary bourgeois citizens who were his audience; far from being threatened they felt absolved.

In 1962, with the relaxation of censorship by the Christian Democrats, the Compagnia Fo-Rame was invited to appear on the very popular television show, Canzonissima. This was the ultimate accolade bestowed on Fo and Rame by the Italian show-business world. Fo had achieved this within a mere ten years; this was a triumph for the present, which also ensured success for the future. This show, broadcast during peak-viewing hours, offered a selection of pop songs (in the old Italian sentimental style) from which the public had to select the most popular and best loved song, the canzonissima.

Fo gave a new meaning to this programme by opening with a repertoire of new songs, satirical sketches and sallies aimed at prominent personalities, and comic renderings of typical (yet not stereotyped) Italian situations. He aimed at stimulating the more intelligent viewer to question the cultural value of this type of entertainment, to look behind the facade of the 'economic miracle' and to see how exploitation had increased and scandals flourished. By subverting Canzonissima from within, he had established himself with a huge popular audience. At the seventh episode, he resigned after heavy censorship was imposed on his texts.

This programme also highlighted the Government's resolve to manipulate radical elements into the system, as though soothing the opposition. This experience made him realise that there could be no compromise with the dominant conformity and that he had to become more aggressive

and more judgemental of the inherent contradictions in his cultural environment. With a more enhanced reputation, Dario Fo succeeded in creating more rigorous and systematic political satires with more effective critical tools.

With the television experience over, Fo began to look at the present from an historical and cultural point of view in order to judge it better; he thus became involved with the research of material drawn from the Middle Ages. Three comedies were the result of this period's research: Isabella, tre caravelle e un cacciaballe (Isabella, Three Caravels and a Con Man, 1963), Settino, ruba un po' meno (Seventh Commandment: Thou Shalt Steal a Bit Less, 1964) and La colpa è sempre del diavolo (Always Blame the Devil, 1965). This research was essential for the development of his capolavoro on the Middle Ages, Mistero Buffo. These plays were meant to present social and political problems: they were more complex and had interwoven structures, even though there were few digressions from the main plot. They were entertaining and the pace of the plays was not fast and rhythmic. They depicted disturbing actuality through the medium of farce, combining moral fervour with dramatic interest. In the first of these plays, perhaps the most interesting and most innovative amongst them, Christopher Columbus, the protagonist, flirts with power, becomes corrupted and ends up a poor wretch in dire straits. The play was highly symbolic because it was a metaphor for the condition of the intellectual in Italy under the Centre-Left regime. The technical

devices employed were Brechtian in origin: it was a play-within-a-play and it was based on the research Fo had done of historical documents. This research differed from that done for Poor Nano in that the past is desecrated in accordance with an ideological interpretation of the present.

La colpa è sempre del diavolo dealt with the struggle between the Holy Roman Emperor and the Cathars, the communitarian and evangelical sect that was wiped out for heresy in the late 13th Century. At the time, the allegory was obvious: the Cathar communards stood for the Italian Communists, the Imperial forces represented the United States of America which was stepping up its commitments in Vietnam. However, Fo's attempts to disinter authentically revolutionary episodes from the history of popular culture, especially those involving pre-Reformation evangelical religion, which challenge the corrupt and reactionary orthodoxy from an, as it were, left-wing point of view, were the first foundations of what was to come with Mistero Buffo.

A significant turning point in Fo's artistry occurred in 1967 with his last production for the bourgeois theatre, La signora è da buttare (The Lady is To Be Discarded), a show for 'clowns only'. This play, set in an American circus of the 1860's, was made the vehicle for an attack on the United States and capitalist society in general. Between the frenetic pace and the excessive, manic joy of the circus performers, the message was clear: the protagonist, an aged female

called P. T. Barnum who dies a glorified death, represented American capitalism:

A moment before her death, she was elevated above a sink in a Statue of Liberty pose, and then ascended to a heaven packed with consumer goods, a touch of mock ritual denigrating both Church and State. Fo's circus was a metaphor of the industrial state, a vast bureaucracy of machines and trapezes in which man had yielded his individuality to the collective pandemonium, a puppet in a tyrannical circus of injustice, prejudice, crime and war.
(A. Sogliuzzo, 1972, p. 73)

The play satirised American imperialism, racism, justice and absurd forms of entertainment (like the 'flea-tamer' who tries to remove the flea's appendix). It attracted the attention of the authorities and Fo was threatened with arrest for mocking a head of state - President Lyndon Johnson. By using a clown-show format, consistency of characterisation was eliminated in favour of a style which moved further towards that of epic theatre (later adopted by Fo) in which the actor plays not a character but a 'mask'. With this play, Fo's theatre could no longer be contained within the structures, nor fulfill the expectations, of the conventional bourgeois Italian theatre, which he now despised: Fo disbanded the 'Compagnia Fo-Rame' and set about forming his own alternative theatre outlets which could reach audiences beyond the predominantly middle-class environment of Italian theatregoers. He said at the time, during an interview with L'Espresso:

For years I have been the court jester of the bourgeois, hurling invectives in their faces, which they responded to with ignorant laughter. Now I will become the jester of the proletariat. They will become the recipients of my invective.
(Fo in Mitchell, 1984, p. 52)

The company with which the Fo's confronted this task was the cooperative 'Nuova Scena', which would operate through A.R.C.I., the PCI's cultural recreational wing, and play in the camere di lavoro and case del popolo, the PCI's community centres and workers' clubs.

Dario Fo had the following to say at the time:

Il '68 può essere definito, sul piano teatrale, come l'anno zero, o meglio, come la ricerca di un nuovo destinatario e di un nuovo rapporto con questo destinatario.
(Fo in P. Puppa, 1978, p. 95)

With 'Nuova Scena' forming its own circuit and the creation of a 'teatro di piazza', Fo's theatre was involved not only with the production of the theatrical shows but with all the aspects linked to distribution and consumption. Thus, in 1968, it leaves behind the box office hits, it avoids the generic and indifferent consumer and becomes a theatre of political action for a new more militant audience; Dario Fo passes from the indirect metaphors of his oblique satire to a denunciatory type of theatre without any euphemisms or ellipses.

However, Dario Fo's success must be seen in terms of the Italian

crisis of 1965 and successive years. The crisis of the Italian theatre was a predominant topic of debate amongst intellectuals and supporters of the left in general. Theatre was being subjected to a process of progressive impoverishment; it lacked ideas and it was becoming more and more isolated in its structure. This resulted in the public abandoning it. The most obvious symptom was the absence of the public from theatres. The blame was placed on consumerism, which allowed people to be drugged by cinema and television, since they were cheaper. The low cultural level of Italians in general was also a factor to be taken into consideration. Thus, the solution was to make theatre accessible by bringing it to the public, as Vittorio Gassmann had done with E'Adelchi, by taking it to the factories (18).

The Italian public's dissatisfaction with theatre was based on the latter's lack of worthwhile material; the issues it dealt with were mostly dépassé and ineffectual in terms of social, political and cultural interest. The apathy created by the theatre was a result of the stringent theatrical measures imposed by the government at the time. The government's blackmail with theatre subsidies is a case in point because it was a marked threat to the theatrical institutions; it forced them to tow the 'official' line or pay the consequences. The Ministry for Entertainment, the main culprit which applied all the necessary pressure, offered theatre state grants, subsidies, honours, special prizes, for a small price, that of being a faithful adherent to the party's cause. The public, by supporting the theatre, was

inadvertently becoming institutionalised, and thus displaying the same signs of passivity and apathy as those shown by the theatre. The students, previously assiduous aficionados of loggioni in places left to the 'poor', were now beginning to select between the shows available and those that met new requirements.

[...] Nel novembre 1968, gli studenti del movimento studentesco di Milano giungeranno alla critica radicale del pubblico privilegiato della Scala, bersagliandolo di uova marce e pomodori.
(Binni, 1977, p. 11)

Dario Fo at this stage foresaw the new requirements of theatre and the need for transformation of theatre and of its ties with the public. Until then, Fo had been a buffone of the bourgeoisie, with a good, supporting public in 'official' theatre. The bourgeoisie permitted Fo to ridicule it and the system it advocated as long as it was done within a bourgeois forum. But the moment Fo was to leave that forum and reach for a new dimension, in order to speak to the 'ordinary' public, such ridicule was not permitted; in fact it was harshly chastised. State mentality at the time permitted literary men to poke fun at its power from within, but not from outside its institutions. Thus, Dario Fo abandoned the theatrical circuit of the Ente Teatrale Italiano (renouncing amongst other things, government subsidies) in order to create an 'alternative' theatrical circuit to the official one and he did this by making use of those facilities promoted by the PCI. This choice was dictated by the following two requirements: the

need to create a more 'direct' link with a 'popular' public, and not exclusively with a bourgeois élitist one, and secondly, the possibility of escaping from the blackmailing restrictions of the theatrical institution and of the State's political power. In an interview granted to Libération in January 1974, Dario Fo stated the following:

In Italia c'è anche un altro ricatto: il teatro è vietato ai minori di diciotto anni. Soprattutto ai minori, perché questo teatro gli permetterebbe di aprire gli occhi, e questo è pericoloso. Inoltre, il nostro teatro, il teatro borghese italiano, come quello francese, non si rivolge alle grandi masse, ma alla borghesia ...
(Fo in Binni, 1977, pp. 225-229)

Because of Dario Fo's resolve to abandon the bourgeois dimension, when the upper and middle classes came to see these shows, they felt immediately estranged since they were no longer the boss, they were no longer at home, but instead they were at the mercy of the worker. Like many left-wing European writers after 1968, including John Arden in the UK, playwrights like Fo felt the need to expose the repressive tolerance of the establishment and they used their theatrical talents to support class struggle and the revolutionary process which they saw as the only effective alternative to achieve state reform:

When we got involved with ARCI, it was in the hope that the spirit of 1968 was moving things in a new direction, even though we were well aware of what cooperatives meant, and who was behind the case del popolo, and in whose interests they were. We had the

illusion that working on a grass roots level we could change the organisational structures, and that the PCI had adopted a revolutionary line from the pressure of the student movement and the workers. We saw it as the only possible solution, the only representative of the working class.
(Fo in Mitchell, 1984, p. 54)

As Fo said in retrospect, it was a utopian project in which individual talents and capabilities were sacrificed to egalitarian principles. But whatever the internal difficulties there was no doubt as to the success the company enjoyed with the new public which it sought in a working-class environment, in cooperatives and trade union halls, in factories and workers' clubs. It was a public which knew very little about the theatre but which found the political attitudes the company presented close to its experience of life. Furthermore each performance was followed by a discussion.

Nuova Scena did not last long: it was torn apart by political arguments, by discussions over the relationship of art to society and politics, and by questions of organisation. Problems also arose with the PCI itself which controlled many venues used and whose officials began to react adversely to the satirical attacks that Fo made on their bureaucracy, the inflexibility of the Party line, the intolerance of real discussion. Dario Fo's own political convictions had moved progressively from Marxism to Maoism. His fascination with Maoism, inspired by the Chinese cultural revolution in the sixties, seemed to highlight the PCI's institutionalistic scope which he blamed

for destroying the relationship between the masses and the intellectual, between the workers and culture itself.

La grave responsabilità dei partiti della sinistra tradizionale è proprio il fatto di non essersi messi al servizio della creatività del popolo che è straordinaria, enorme. Il fatto principale della rivoluzione culturale cinese è d'aver creduto nel popolo, nella sua forza di creatività e di produzione, e soprattutto l'aver spinto gli intellettuali a partecipare alla vita politica, al di là della loro vita artistica, entrando nella lotta di classe. Da noi, il 'togliattismo' ha distrutto questo rapporto tra intellettuale e masse popolari. Togliatti (...) considerava gli intellettuali come gente che doveva produrre delle opere, ma senza mescolarsi alla 'politica'; la politica deve essere fatta dagli uomini politici ... voi - che siete artisti - fate dell'arte ... sta a noi - i politici - dirigerla e utilizzarla ... In Italia a forza di 'utilizzare' gli intellettuali, siamo arrivati ad una situazione catastrofica.
(Po in Binni, 1975, p. 228)

Before the split with the PCI came about, Nuova Scena in October 1968 performed Fo's play Grande pantomima con bandiere e pupazzi piccoli e medi (Grand Pantomime with Flags and Small and Medium-sized Puppets) at the casa del popolo of Sant'Egidio in Cesena, a modest beginning for what became a historical event in the context of Italian political theatre. The form of the play was a return to the rough, coarse theatre of Il dito nell'occhio, except this time its political message had been excessively increased. For the first time, Fo stipulated that his use of puppets, masks, pageantry and masquerade elements resembled the commedia dell'arte but stemmed from a popular, pre-commedia tradition, thus paving the way for Mistero Buffo:

Because of his extensive use of mimicry, masks and puppets, Fo's theatre is mistakenly characterised as stemming primarily from commedia dell'arte. But the commedia satirised social stereotypes, whereas Fo's political satire (broad comedy and highly presentational), originated in the period between the 10th and 12th Centuries, the post-feudal age when the Italian peninsula experienced a burst of political freedom; jesters roamed the land with a repertoire of gags and skits celebrating the end of feudalism and ridiculing the remaining feudal overlords and the Church. Performing in streets and market places, presenting comic routines consisting of simple language, mime and mimicry, the feudal jester delighted the common people while awakening them to the tyranny of the nobility.
(Sogliuzzo, 1972, p. 72)

In Grande pantomima con bandiere e pupazzi piccoli e medi, Fo used a huge puppet, drawn from Sicilian tradition, to represent the State in its continual fight with the 'dragon' of the working class. This play ridicules the Church, the Monarchy, the Army and Industrialism, while it suggests that the shadow of fascism still hangs over the contemporary political scene. Fo also denounced the PCI for failing to combat capitalistic oppression. Palmiro Togliatti, the PCI leader respected by Socialists and Christian Democrats alike, is one of the political figures satirised by Fo (who incidently played the role of Togliatti originally) for favouring compromise rather than reform, thus retarding the progress of the proletarian cause. Togliatti is portrayed in the costume of a priest (symbolic reference to the parallel drawn between the destructive nature of the Italian clergy in terms of the cultural tradition and Togliatti's own stand on culture),

who is scolded and ridiculed by two puppets representing Stalin and Mao Tse-tung. The exercise of this play was to show how industrialism, through its tool, the puppet 'Capitalism' (originally played by Franca Rame in a sexy two-piece swimming costume), has oppressed the masses of the Industrial State by de-humanising them (19), and creating human puppets who are easily manipulated by the hegemonic powers (20).

Besides Grande Pantomima and Il funerale del Padrone (The Boss's Funeral) (21), the Mugna Scena period produced little of lasting value apart from Mistero Buffo which followed in late 1969. It was to become one of his enduring triumphs in Italy and abroad. In it, he drew on the counter-culture of the Middle Ages, on apocryphal gospel stories, on legend and tales, presenting episodes in which he played all the roles and used a language in part invented, in part archaic, in part drawn from the dialects of Northern Italy, to develop the figure of the Peasant Christ.

The myth of the Peasant Christ arose from biblical tradition itself and was the result of the repercussion of the emphasis that various guerilla movements of the Sixties in Latin America placed on the Marxist egalitarian tenets inherent in Christ's teachings. With the advent of Christianity, the notions of 'people' and 'popular' underwent a profound revision. The apocalyptic message propagated by Christianity was based on the promise of a new egalitarian order that

would replace the present one. This apocalyptic message had been fuelled from the start by the Jewish tradition, during the years of oppression, which foresaw the need to create a closer tie with God and even to dominate it, by turning to the intermediary figures of Messianic order to help them overcome their daily adversities.

[...] Gli ebrei della diaspora alessandrina leggevano nei Libri sibillini che 'la terra sarà comune a tutti e non vi saranno più né mura né frontiere, né poveri né ricchi, né grandi né piccoli, né re né signori, né tutti saranno uguali'. Simili attese permeavano la società giudaica nella fase più acuta della sua disaggregazione politica e culturale e spiegano la variabilità dei comportamenti delle folle palestinesi nei confronti di Gesù e, soprattutto, la grazia accordata dalla piazza allo zelota Barabba per il rifiuto costantemente opposto da Gesù ad ogni richiesta di porsi alla testa della riscossa armata della nazione israelita.
(R. Romano, 1980, vol. 10, p. 890)

The Christian Messiah was also born from the squalor of the peasantry. With his appearance, Christ announced a kingdom of redemption and equality, wherein the poor would no longer be hungry or cold. The situation would be, of course, different for those who possessed power and wealth, for whom, then, the kingdom of Christ would be unattainable. The popularity of Christianity was then linked to the promise of a radical transformation which would take place at the level of meta-history. Christianity also promised to re-evaluate the notion of class in society:

La comunità cristiana era il nuovo λαός di Dio: ad

essa potevano accedere tutti, anche i pagani. D'ora in poi, le comunità cristiane, superata la matrice etnico-culturale che legava l'Israel storico a Yāhweh in modo esclusivo, costituiranno un popolo sui generis, transnazionale, 'stirpe eletta, sacerdozio regale, nazione santa, popolo acquistato' (I Pietro, 2, 9).
(Romano, 1980, vol. 10, p. 890)

At a time when the Roman Empire swarmed with various cults created to satisfy questions which 'officialdom' could not adequately answer, Christianity seemed to offer a simple doctrine, characterized by the spirit of solidarity, then unknown, which prompted persons of different social extractions to live together, making no distinctions based on wealth or sex. As a sociological reality, Christianity was not an exclusively popular phenomenon, but rather meta-popular, since it went vertically across the social strata with a certain prevalence in the intermediate classes. This was of course contrary to the Engelian view that the diffusion of Christianity took place amongst the lowest popular stratum. Thus, Christianity became the religion of the productive classes of the new order, providing an ideological-religious statute of auto-identification which allowed those same classes to be positioned legitimately on a well-defined fascia of society and to exert that influence which progressively persuaded Christianity to become the religion of the State. Therefore, the apparent dichotomy created by religion between classes was also evident in the città-campagna (urban-rural) structure: the countryside, which is 'popular', retained a far more pagan and subversive element in its culture, whilst the city, being more

erudite, conformed to the 'orderly' mandate of the Christian institution.

Christianity, from its well-meaning and humble origins, became a component of the State, of the mighty. The apocalyptic message of the Scriptures never materialised for the oppressed but it was also never totally discarded. Some sectors of society never fully accepted the autonomy of the Church-State. This is explained by the existence of sects throughout history that rebelled against the fictitious indoctrination of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The various revolts of these sects and the use of religious ideology by them to create a renovatio mundi are some of the many episodes of peasant reactions to assail the socio-economic and politico-cultural world of the hegemonic classes:

Il caso di Valdo è tipico: nel suo trattato De septem donis Spiritus sancti, [1250], Stefano di Bourbon parla di Valdo e della sua origini presentandolo come un ricco rappresentante della borghesia mercantile di Lione che, all'improvviso, dopo una lunga meditazione sul Vangelo, decide non soltanto di scegliere la povertà, ma di farsi iniziatore di un movimento pauperistico che, oltre a scegliersi uno status, si approprii anche del testo biblico per poterlo leggere direttamente senza la mediazione della Chiesa. (Romano, 1980, vol. 10, pp. 896-897)

Valdo's aim, as was Luther's centuries later, was to popularise the Scriptures, to allow the subordinate classes to have direct access to the original writings of the Christian church on which to base their

own faith and autonomous cultural manifesto. The birth of the bourgeoisie occurred then, in the form of the leaders that led the heretical popular movements (which could not yet express themselves culturally) of the Middle Ages. In many ways, these new middle-class leaders were the Gramscian 'organic intellectuals' who paved the way for historical change.

The old pagan cults, dispersed in a landscape which had become inhospitable and subject to exploitation and disdain by the upper hierarchy, took root in the countryside but lay dormant until, instigated by the new heretical leaders and the deep socio-political and economic crisis of the later Middle Ages, they re-awoke. The hegemonic-ecclesiastical culture reciprocated by drastically reducing popular culture through measures which included destroying pagan testimonies of any kind (architectural, literary, figurative). It also turned to selective methods, such as covering, hiding and officialising the folkloric culture by means of corrective measures. Therefore, the commitment of the Church was to evangelise the 'pagan' or the 'heretical', amidst a background of even more assimilation between ecclesiastical and feudal structures, by ostracising paganism and heresy (or alienating them in the campagna) through the ever-increasing rigid codification of the *liturgy and disciplinary norms*.

In a more modern context, the apocalyptic message of the Gospels is once again being used to re-awaken the dormant masses to rebel against

oppression and exploitation by the selected few. Such is the case in Latin America, where political awareness is coming from within the ecclesiastical world, by priests and liberation theologists who preach with the Bible in one hand and the gun, metaphorically or literally, in the other. The identification of Christ and his teachings with revolution by means of violence, is a new concept in the evolution of Christianity. The wealth and power of the Church is being corroded from the inside, by individuals intent in creating an 'utopic' egalitarian society to replace the present unjust one.

In Jorge Amado's novel, Capitães da Areia (Sand Captains) (22), subtitled for obvious reasons 'Porque a revolução é uma pátria e uma família' (23), for instance, the Catholic Church is shown to be one of the oppressors in Brazil's class struggle. This notorious Brazilian left-wing author, however, stresses how similar the Christian values are to those advocated by Marxist dogma. One of the protagonists in this novel of social realism, Father José Pedro, a former proletarian (a symbolic indication of the similarity between the two ideologies), as a representative of the Catholic Church (the oppressor), has to win the hearts of destitute children who find their answers in a semi-pagan religion of African origin. This religion, headed by the Voodoo-like Goddess Omulú, seeks the destruction of the hegemonic classes and emphasises that the day of revenge of the disinherited is close at hand. Unlike its western counterpart, this pagan religion echoes the feelings and fears of the sub-proletariat, and does not

promise to find the solution to its condition. Instead, it suggests that it is only through revolution that socio-political change can improve their lot.

What is particularly interesting in this novel is that Father José Pedro, in his altercation with his superior regarding the moral state of the street urchins, is compared to a communist:

- (...) Roubam para comer porque todos esses ricos que têm para botar fora, para dar para as Igrejas, não se lembram que existem crianças com fome ... Que culpa.
- Cale-se! - a voz do cônego era cheia de autoridade. - Quem o visse falar diria que é um comunista que está falando. E não é difícil. No meio dessa gentinha o senhor deve ter aprendido as teorias deles ... O senhor é um comunista, um inimigo da Igreja ...
(Amado, 1968, p. 156)

I [The children] steal to eat because all those rich people who have enough to throw away, give to the Churches and never remember that there are hungry children ...
'Be quiet!', snapped the canon. 'Anyone hearing you speak would say you were a communist. And it wouldn't be difficult. Working with that lot, you must have learnt to think like them ... You are a communist, an enemy of the Church ...]

Recalling the meeting he had with his superior, he is left to reflect on the allegations made; it is during this confused état d'esprit that the protagonist symbolically links the Christ-figure to the inevitable Marxist revolutionary:

um comunista ... [...] O padre José Pedro ia encostado à parede. [...] Pensava levar tantas crianças a Deus ... Crianças extraviadas ... Seria que elas tinham culpa? Deixai vir a mim as criancinhas ... Cristo ... Era uma figura radiosa e moça. Os sacerdotes também disseram que ele era um revolucionário. [...] E Cristo? Não, não podia pensar que Cristo fosse um comunista. [...] Será que um comunista age assim? Dar um pouco de conforto àquelas pequenas almas. Salvá-las, melhorar seus destinos. [...] Cristo também pensava assim ... como um comunista? (Amado, 1968, pp.157-158)

[A communist ... [...] Father José Pedro was leaning against the wall. [...] He wanted to bring the children to God, children who had gone astray ... Were they really to blame? Suffer the little ones to come unto me ... Christ ... radiant and youthful. The high priests also said that he was a revolutionary. [...] Christ? No, he couldn't possibly think of Christ as a communist. [...] Would a communist behave like this? Giving a little bit of comfort to those poor little souls. Saving them, giving them a better future. [...] Is this how Christ thought too... like a communist?]

The multiple factors of the South American example (the militant Christ, the Marxist revolution, the pagan-heretical religion, the hegemonic Christianity), although so characteristic of the real political problems of the Third World, are very relevant, at an ideological level, to Mario Fo's Mistero Buffo. The Christ-figure of Mistero Buffo is one that is firmly rooted in popular Christian tradition, a revolutionary saviour whose doctrine defies that of the hegemonic powers. His aim is to point out that popular tradition has been distorted by institutionalised Orthodoxy which is in itself

blamed for having created a society that bases its creed on the supremacy of one class over another. Thus Mistero Buffo was born of 'popular' anger and can be seen not only as representing a re-reading of the past but also as a stipulation of Fo's motto of controstoria ('counter-history'), that is history being quoted by estranged perspectives, the demystification and re-dimensioning of the God-hero.

In December 1970, Fo produced Morte accidentale di un anarchico (Accidental Death of an Anarchist), a grotesque farce about a tragic, real farce, a play in which his skill as a writer of farce and his gift as a performing-clown were brilliantly put at the service of politics. This play dealt with the tension caused by the real death of a prisoner (24) and the farcical inventions advanced by the authorities to explain and cover it. On this occasion, 'La Comune' set about providing a theatre of 'counter-information' which discredited the official investigation and even the widespread arguments put forward by the left in the media. It is estimated that in four years, this play was seen by a million people, many of whom took part in the fierce debates which erupted after each performance. In the course of its extensive tour of Italy, the play's title was changed to Accidental Death of an Anarchist and Other Subversives to incorporate the death of the well-known left-wing publisher, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, who was found dead under an electricity pylon with unexploded dynamite next to his body, as if it had been 'planted' on him by himself or others. With this play, Fo

had succeeded in his aim of making a theatre which made people laugh at dramatic things, whilst retaining all the anger the situation provoked.

The following years were for Fo and Franca Rame, years of intense political agitation, both in terms of their writing and their involvement in the active political arena. 'La Comune' was involved in researching the history of the Italian working-class movement and in stimulating revolutionary strategy. This period saw the production of plays such as Tutti uniti! Tutti insieme! Ma scusa quello non è il padrone? (United We Stand! All Together Now! Cops, Isn't That the Boss?) (1971), Morte e resurrezione di un pupazzo (Death and Resurrection of a Puppet) (1972), Padavyn (1972), Pum, Pum! Chi è? La Polizial (Knock Knock! Who's There? Police!) (1972), which were mainly highly didactic political documentaries that attacked American Imperialism, capitalism, the bourgeois institutions in the name of internationalism. He openly participated in 'Soccorso Rosso' (Red Aid), an organisation established to collect funds and provide comforts for Italian political prisoners detained under harsh conditions. His writing also dealt sympathetically with the Palestinian struggle, with the situation in Chile, and most unsympathetically with the methods of the Italian police.

The Seventies proved to be for the Fo's a decade not only of many successes and reached goals but also of a few personal setbacks. In

March 1973, Franca Rame was abducted at gunpoint from her home in Milan by a group of fascists, gravely assaulted and left bleeding in a park (25). Dissension within 'La Comune' was becoming more apparent because certain members felt that Dario Fo and Franca Rame were stifling their own creative activities. This inevitably led to this faction abandoning 'La Comune', taking with them a vast amount of theatre equipment which the Fo's had accumulated during their twenty years in show business. Needless to say, these dissidents never amounted to much on their own and were eventually self-destructed by further splits in their group; they basically lacked the political force that Fo had gathered during his years of experience with the theatre.

Fo himself was arrested later that year and held in prison in Sardinia for refusing to allow police to be present at rehearsals. After many demonstrations and protests, he was released; by this time the Italian authorities had come to realize that, besides being an artist, Fo was a political figure which the State wished to silence with any weapon at its disposal. This minor incident brought Fo to the forefront of public attention and drew more audiences to his plays. However, in our opinion, this period in Dario Fo's career lacked the novelty which his theatre was always credited with, because of its excessive and almost fanatical political line.

Due to the defection of actors from his group and the fact that Dario

Ro had to start anew, a new venue was required; this led to the purchase of the Palazzina Liberty Theatre, a dilapidated art nouveau theatre in Milan. The new move also foresaw the shift of political ground in Dario Fo's theatre. This political flair was evident in the farce Non si paga! Non si paga! (Can't Pay? Won't Pay!) (1974), which deals with the question of civil disobedience. The play was a comment on the people of Marghera, Turin and the south of Italy, who refused to pay the rising prices in supermarkets, public transport, gas and electricity bills, insisting on paying what they considered to be a fair price. Significantly the main upholder of law and order in the play is a communist shop steward, who disapproves of his wife's gesture of rebellion against the rising cost of living - a raid on a supermarket. This play was added to and altered at the suggestion of popular audiences, a practice now familiar in Dario Fo's productions. Can't Pay? Won't Pay! is perhaps Fo's most well-known play since it certainly is the one which has had most performances outside Italy. Like most of his plays since 1968, it was written as a response to a socio-political need and dealt with a specific situation.

In 1977, Fo returned to Italian television after a long absence, with the screening of two different versions of Mistero Buffo. This led to further plays being screened among which were two editions of Ci ragiono e canto, Settimo: ruba un po' meno, Isabella, tre caravella e un cacciaballe and La signora è da buttare. This return to the

bourgeois circuit is of interest because it lacks the extreme didacticism previously witnessed in the late Sixties and early Seventies. In 1978, now once again firmly rooted in the bourgeois theatre, he toured Italy with La storia della tigre (The Story of the Tigress), an allegorical monologue inspired by a trip to China (June 1975) and based on a Chinese folktale. The moral of this monologue was that, if you have a 'tiger' in you, you must never delegate responsibility to others, never expect others to solve your problems, and above all avoid that unthinking party loyalty which is the enemy of reason and of revolution. In 1981, following on the kidnapping of Aldo Moro, came Clacson, trombette e pernacchi (Trumpets and Raspberries), with which Fo overcame his block concerning issues related to terrorism (26); he categorically shows that his sympathies now lie with the victims of terrorism and of any form of violent political action. This is, of course, a far cry from the political anarchism of the early Seventies and from plays such as Pedavyn, where he seemed to suggest that a leftist dictatorship by the P.L.O. was justified because it operated within the framework of Marxism. Trumpets and Raspberries mocked both the police and their readiness to see terrorists everywhere and the political cynicism which led to Moro's being abandoned to his fate by his fellow politicians. This was one of Fo's last major political plays.

In 1981, he was invited by the 'Berliner Ensemble', the theatre founded by Brecht, Fo's mentor in many ways, to update Brecht's The

Threepenny Opera, which is an adaptation of Gay's J. Beggar's Opera (27). The ensuing result was L'opera dello schiagnazzo which had its premiere in December 1981 at the 'Teatro Il Fabbricone' of Prato. Ironically, the 'Berliner Ensemble' found Fo's rock version of this play difficult to accept. In spite of Brecht's having on occasion said that one ought to treat famous authors with disrespect, if one has the least consideration for the ideas they express, the Germans thought this adaptation degraded Brecht's earlier work. It did not improve on Brecht's or Gay's plays in any significant way, and it steered dangerously close to the plastic, cosmetic culture it was satirising.

In March 1982, Fo continued to demonstrate his consummate skill as an adaptor and performer of Medieval texts with Il fabulazzo osceno (The Obscene Fable), which is considered to be the third edition of Mistero Buffo, but based on more secular sources. This play consists of a group of three stories, Il tumulto di Bologna (The Bologna Riot), La parpèia thoola (The Butterfly-Mouse) and Lucio e l'asino (Lucio and the Donkey). They were all rehearsed and developed by Fo in front of an audience. Each dealt with an aspect of popular sexuality and scatology in a way which would have been censored by the Medieval Church and State authorities, but was somehow preserved through oral tradition.

The following year saw the performance of Patarumfete, a testimony to

Fo's return to the format of the clown-show and révù-sketch. In November 1983, Fo began work on a new play, Coppia aperta, quasi spalancata (Open Couple, Wide Open, Even), which deals in Brechtian fashion with the private life of a couple and their disastrous attempts to live separate lives. This play was a departure from the political scene, but not very different from Fo's other plays that had marital relations at their core, especially those he wrote in co-operation with Franca Rame, such as Tutta casa, letto e chiesa and Una donna sola.

In spite of the fact that many of Fo's plays are presently being re-adapted for the conventional stage by the author himself and by others in Italy and elsewhere, the Fo of the eighties is experiencing something of a crisis as a playwright, especially as it is a time when there is a widespread crisis of creativity in Italian cinema and theatre at large.

Dario Fo has a worldwide reputation; the Scandinavian countries were among the first to welcome him as a performer and to produce his works. The whole of Western Europe has by now acknowledged his importance and virtuosity. Foreign travel has, however, not been without its setbacks for Dario Fo and Franca Rame: there were attacks on the theatre where they were performing in Buenos Aires which was under military rule and a visa to the United States had for a long time been refused to them. The summer of 1986, however, saw the

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American administration at last relent; this perhaps is an indication of the impact and the importance the Po's have had on contemporary political theatre.

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Chapter 2:

Theoretical basis of and influences on Dario Fo's theatre

In order to understand Dario Fo's theatrical dexterity and ability as a playwright and actor, it is essential to analyse a few semiotic concepts relating to theatre and drama and used to full advantage in a Fo production. Drama is a very different literary genre to that of prose and poetry since it functions on two very distinct levels: firstly, as a dramatic text in a reading situation and secondly, as a performance in a theatre.

The semiotician Keir Elam makes a clear distinction between theatre and dramatic text and shows their interdependence:

theatre is taken to refer here to the complex of phenomena associated with the performer-audience transaction: that is, with the production and communication of meaning in the performance itself and with the systems underlying it. By 'drama', on the other hand, is meant that mode of fiction designed for stage representation and constructed according to particular ('dramatic') conventions.
(K. Elam, 1980, p. 2)

The underlined words emphasise the role played by semiotics, a science dedicated to the study of production, communication and signification of meaning in society. Thus, the dramatic text should not be considered in isolation from its performance in the theatre. The text is intended for performance and its meaning and communication cannot be realised fully except during a performance.

Petr Bogatyrev, who undertook to chart the elementary principles of

theatrical semiosis, affirms that 'on the stage things that play the part of theatrical signs [...] acquire special features, qualities and attributes that they do not have in real life' (Bogatyrev in Elam, 1980, p. 7). From this definition, one can deduce that all performance elements or objects are signs, as such, they assume a symbolic or signifying role on stage which they do not necessarily have in reality.

Elam uses a table on the stage as an example: the audience does not see a table on the stage as a piece of furniture at which to eat, but as a sign representing the class of objects denoted by the term 'table'. Therefore, the objects are not so much part of the dramatic world (where the actors can sit and eat on the stage) as elements of the semiotic code. Even a drawing of a table or an oral reference to one (thus not necessarily the object itself) could have the same function: the object on the stage is reminiscent of all other similar objects. Thus in a modern production of King Lear, only a 'throne' is needed to convey the idea of king, power, palace. In the same way, in a production by Dario Fo, batons and jackboots are synonymous with fascism, corruption, military juntas, oppression. This allows him to make use of only the most essential props.

Like the stage props, the actors' physical characteristics, their gesticulation and intonation as well as all other aspects of their performance, also become signs. The actor is in fact regarded as a

dynamic unit of a whole range of signs. Audiences will take note even of the slightest gesture, speech inflection, expression or physical peculiarity, such as a bedraggled piece of clothing or a scar, and consider it a sign to be interpreted. For example, Dario Fo's lanky, tall figure and unusually large hands stereotype him in his role as the proletariat's 'courtjester'; the blond and sultry-eyed Franca Rame epitomises a particular type of Italian woman. The importance of the actor's make-up is shown by this amusing account in which

Groucho Marx illustrates the point in his amazement at the scratches on Julie Harris's legs in a performance of *I am a camera*: 'At first we thought this had something to do with the plot and we waited for these scratches to come to life. But ... it was never mentioned in the play and we finally came to the conclusion that either she had been shaving too close or she'd been kicked around in the dressing room by her boyfriend'. The audience starts with the assumption that every detail is an intentional sign and whatever cannot be related to the representation as such is converted into a sign of the actor's very reality - it is not, in any case, excluded from semiosis.
(Burns in Elam, 1980, p. 9)

This means that besides regarding an object as referring to a class of the same type, the audience will make all kinds of associations with the object according to their own experience of the world. Depending on the social and moral values of a society, a table on the stage could, for example, be associated with meagre meals and general want, or it could act as a sign of harmonious family relations. Thus theatre signs will inevitably have secondary meanings for the

spectators and be associated with the social, moral and ideological values prevailing in the society to which the actors and the audience belong. Every aspect of the performance is subject to the denotation-connotation dialectic:

(...) the set, the actor's body, his movements and speech determine and are determined by a constantly shifting network of primary and secondary meanings.
(Blam, 1980, p. 11)

This connotative range of signs in the theatre makes for economy: very few objects are used to evoke boundless cultural associations. Various types of signifying associations may be derived from an object.

It may be, for example, that in addition to the denoted class 'armour', a martial costume, comes to signify for a particular audience 'valour' or 'manliness', or a bourgeois domestic interior 'wealth', 'ostentation', 'bad taste', etc.
(Blam, 1980, p. 10)

The sign in theatre is always polysemic since it can have multiple connotations. Because of the denotations and connotations of signs on the stage, the spectators experience the performance as a network of meanings amounting to a text.

Because a sign in the theatre is polysemic, it has a 'generative capacity'. The phenomenon of transformation, i.e. that a sign can be

changed or transformed into another sign, contributes immensely to the economy of communication in the theatre. Hence the double functionality of certain parts of the décor, whereby a wall, for example, in one act can become a hedge in the next. The sign is mobile and dynamic with a variety of functions. Signs, besides being exchangeable, may also be reciprocally substituted, in a process known as 'transcodification':

The replacement, for example, of scenic indicators by gesture or verbal reference involves the process of transcodification: a given semantic unit (say, a 'door') is signified by the linguistic or gestural system rather than by the architectural or pictorial, as often occurs in mime.
(Elam, 1980, pp. 14-5)

Code and function-switching is also evident in the traditional dialectic between the subjective (represented by the actors) and objective (represented by objects or props) elements on the stage. Often, the relation between the subjective animate and the objective inanimate may be modified and even reversed, although in conventional and non-conventional theatre, actors perform while the objects create the ambiance. However, it also happens in many plays that butlers, soldiers, housemaids, etc, are mere scenic indicators and may be regarded as theatrical accessories rather than actors who portray the action.

The great dichotomy between theatre and non-conventional theatre

occurs when the inanimate object can be 'promoted' on the objective-subjective continuum. A sword which may form part of an actor's apparel in one scene, may later become part of the action by becoming a murder weapon. Jiří Veltrúský gives the example of the bloodied dagger in the murder scene of Julius Caesar (Slam, 1980, p.15). In many modern dramas, such as those of Samuel Beckett, this inversion of the functions respectively assigned to the subjective (animate) and the objective (inanimate) elements on the stage is deliberately exploited and sometimes carried to extremes.

In this semiotic context Dario Fo's theatrical ability appears and excels on stage, enabling him to play with the duality of the actor's role as a stage sign which renders him 'transparent' to the audience on one hand and 'opaque' on the other by emphasising his physical and social presence. This technique is often associated with Brechtian epic theatre which has influenced Fo to a large degree.

Theatre and literature throughout the ages have been used as functional vehicles to support ideological supremacy. Denis Diderot (1), during the Enlightenment period, focused on the cognitive and politically useful function of art. Not unlike him, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (2) saw the importance that theatre played in re-grouping the audience into a community which could then transcend existing social distinctions. Marxists (3), more than a century later, saw the need to use the theatre and the reception of drama as a pedagogical

instrument, initially as an instrument of social criticism, but at a later stage as a means of re-educating the people and of re-organising the class struggle. This is largely the aim of Po's texts.

Antonio Gramsci (4), father of Italian and Eurocommunism, was concerned about the role of the artist, the lack of diffusion amongst the people of so-called artistic literature and the non-existence in Italy of a genuine popular culture. He voiced Dario Fo's own fears and therefore became a prime source of inspiration. Gramsci based his theory on the concept that new art may only spring from a new culture that promotes a new socio-cultural relation between equal classes. The new culture, envisaged by Gramsci, derives from the contrasts between 'high' or 'hegemonic' culture and popular culture. Popular culture had been conditioned during the Renaissance and had become dormant from that period onwards until the early part of the twentieth century. He argued (5) that intellectual of all types were not immediately involved with material production, but rather with the reproduction of capitalist ideological, cultural and class relationships. He felt that capitalism had led to the loss of cultural values, by creating a type of literature that was anti-democratic, anti-national, Jesuitic or more simply a forma mentis. Like Marinetti (6) (but with different objectives), Gramsci believed that a new language, a new order had to be created as a basis for the new regime:

Ogni espressione culturale ha una sua lingua storicamente determinata, ogni attività morale e intellettuale; questa lingua è ciò che si chiama anche 'tecnica' e anche 'struttura'. Se un letterato si mettesse a scrivere in un linguaggio personalmente arbitrario (cioè diventasse un 'neolalico' nel senso patologico della parola) e fosse imitato dagli altri (ognuno con linguaggio arbitrario) si parlerebbe di Babele.

(A. Gramsci, 1975d, p. 2193)

Hence the reason to create a new language for a new man, a linguistic code which would educate and truly communicate with the new masses.

After politics, theatre was Gramsci's only passion; he had a special interest in the theatre because of its diffusion and impact on all the classes. Between 1916 and 1920, Gramsci concerned himself with literary criticism; he wrote his theatre reviews and critiques for the Turin edition of Avanti. His first invectives against conventional establishments were pronounced against the theatres of Turin, which were responsible for 'l'abbassamento del livello del gusto generale' because 'ormai hanno perduto la loro genuina caratteristica d'arte, e servono allo sfruttamento delle velleità di divertimento volgare' (Gramsci, 1972, p.290). He blames this exploitation of popular entertainment on the bourgeoisie, who atrophied the theatre for its own ends.

Il teatro ha una grande importanza sociale: noi ci preoccupiamo della degenerazione di cui è minacciata per opera degli industriali, e vorremmo reagire, per quanto ci è possibile, a essa. C'è un gran pubblico che vuole andare a teatro: l'industria lo sta

lentamente abituando a preferire lo spettacolo inferiore, a quello che rappresenta una necessità buona dello spirito.
(Gramsci, 1972, p. 292)

Gramsci's conviction that theatre, as a public medium, has a vital role in the aesthetic education of its audience, together with his claim that a large theatre public always existed in fieri, only reaffirms his belief that the theatre's presumed 'commercial' creation was merely self-serving rationalisations of the entrepreneurs' 'bottega di psocottiglia a buon mercato' (Gramsci, 1972, p.250). This led inevitably to his blaming the 'lust for lucre' (7), and not the 'public's indifference or lack of discrimination' as the true reason for the depressed state of the theatrical arts in Turin at the time. So he stressed the need for renewal while defending both the art and the popular appeal of classical theatre (such as that of Shakespeare, Goldoni, Beaumarchais, etc). Yet, he claimed that if there still existed 'aristocratic', 'bourgeois', 'petty bourgeois' and 'proletarian-popular' tastes, an investigation into the socio-economic mechanisms that sustain and promote such varied 'tastes' was necessary. He favoured an 'Enlightened' (Goldoni, Beaumarchais) and 'naturalistic' (Ibsen) model of theatre because of the way it reflected society; this type of theatre was a 'critica dei costumi', whereby the public is called to witness its collective mores, values, clichés and customs and thus create the social and political ground for a possible dialectical exchange between the stage and concrete realities. It is interesting to note that most Marxists, with the

exception of a few, including Bertolt Brecht and Fo himself, were very fond of the naturalistic influence on the stage.

Gramsci also analysed technical features such as the role of the actor, the language of dramatic dialogue, character type and its verbal and non-verbal articulation. This analysis emphasises the integral function that structural elements have in the full realisation of the theatrical 'event'. The commedia 'per bene', according to Gramsci, reflected a petty bourgeois world view:

Bonarietà, semplicità superficiale, dialogo facile, leggero, una pizzicatina alle corde del sentimento, un cartoccino di sale casalingo: nasce la commedia borghese, la commedia 'per bene', che sa quel che si dice e quel che si rifa [...] profumata allo spigo e al cotegno.
(Gramsci, 1972, pp. 336-7)

In a manner predicting Brecht's later dismissal of bourgeois 'gastronomic' theatre (a step that Fo also took), Gramsci maintained that the commedia 'per bene' was the result of a certain public's acceptance of its own mirror image.

Dario Fo's zeal in becoming the spokesman of a forgotten popular culture is reflected in his adherence to Antonio Gramsci's political precepts. As to his theatrical apprenticeship, it is undeniably Brecht's influence that is most evident in Dario Fo's work. Fo was fascinated by Brecht's anti-naturalistic, anti-Stanislavskian attitude

in creating a theatre based on situation and on alienation (8). However Giorgio Strehler (9), another one of Fo's early influences, was to reduce Brechtian theatre in Fo's eyes to a bourgeois, théâtre digestif format. Nevertheless, it is imperative to understand and fully appreciate the theoretical tenets of Brecht's theatre to perceive the basic principles on which Fo's plays are based.

Brecht was an anomaly in early 20th Century theatrical history: yet his appearance was expected, if not eagerly awaited, amidst the innovative events that gave shape to the development of stage productions. At the beginning of this century, European theatre underwent a radical transformation, one which was partially inspired by the political and social conditions of the preceding century. The repercussions on European culture of major violent upheavals, movements of refugees, massive carnage and disregard for the individual's rights, created the opportunity for a new metaphysical language to emerge, based on gesture as much as on speech. Drama was freed from psychology and human interest: alienation and existentialism reigned supreme in a world where even the object had as much importance as the 'being'. This new metaphysical language employed many forms of expression and new techniques such as music and dance, mime, sets, lighting and stage props (10). Language moved towards achieving a more visual and auditory quality, thus bringing about the revival of pantomime, puppet shows, circus and vaudevilles. From the realm of the puppet shows and music-halls came

the clowning, slapstick comedy routines and vaudevillian stunts. These introduced the burlesque exaggeration on which the extremes of the grotesque in theatre were modelled. Some of these techniques were adopted by different movements, such as the 'theatre of the Absurd', via its exponents Genet, Arcabal, Ionesco and Beckett. Other techniques were appropriated by modernists such as Meyerhold, Mayakovsky, Brecht and Brecht, who used them to destroy bourgeois tradition, or really in its most blatant expression - naturalism. Naturalists claimed that art should be a reflection of objective reality, whilst young Marxists claimed that art was defined as a superstructure that merely reflected the economic base of reality. Thus, the Marxists proclaimed 'realism' to be the artistic vehicle most likely to convey truth and knowledge about society. For the theatre this meant the intentional revelation of drama as theatrical construction as opposed to the illusion of reality created by the fourth wall of naturalism.

The modernists produced a poetry of concrete, three-dimensional stage images, complex metaphors communicable in a flash of intuitive understanding. Brecht called this type of drama 'Epic Theatre':

Epic theatre was conceived by Brecht as one that would imitate the doings of men in such a way that it would put the spectators in a position to form a judgement about what they saw on the stage, a judgement upon which they might then act in the world outside the theatre.

(R. Speirs, 1987, p. 3)

His aim was to use professional theatre as a platform for the political education of the audience, despite its assumed subservience to bourgeois needs and interests. This political education, which came about in the form of the dramatist's own aesthetic self-consciousness or self-reflectiveness, was a two-fold fight against fascism and capitalism, since the barbarism of fascism was said to be rooted in the capitalist system. Hence, in his work The Resizable Rise of Arturo Ui, he sought to show the links between the interests of big business and the accession to power of Hitler in a caricaturing parable.

Brecht's interest lay in the menschenmaterial (the human material), whereby he depicted the worth of the individual's existence which seemed to have been reduced in the modern world and in the modern drama to nothing. Although he also often stated the diminished importance of the individual, it is the succession of memorable characters around whom he built his plays which firmly remains in the mind. Many of his characters were created as a statement against bourgeois beliefs and myths: for example, Beal (from the 1919 play of the same name), the embodiment of Eros (the life principle) and Thanatos (the death drive), was a figure taken from a Canaanite fertility God whose rites repeatedly seduced the people of Israel away from the worship of Jehovah. In this play, as in certain episodes of Fo's Mistero Buffo, biblical traditions are rejected by presenting a

lecherous and drunken figure that is the antithesis of the messianic, hortatory brand of heroes created by expressionists. Blok's 'messianic' Christ-figure in The Twelve, is the direct opposite of Baal, since he is used as an apocalyptic symbol for the oncoming socialist revolution. Brecht's Baal appears as the emulation or assertion of the vitalist principles of Friederich Nietzsche (11).

One of the defining features of Brecht's Epic Theatre was its 'open', episodic structure. He also used various features of expressionist origin: one was to restore to drama the function of voicing major issues and geistige Kämpfe (intellectual struggles of the times); another was to adopt the free, poetic use of the stage as a mirror of the protagonist's inner world.

Brecht, emulated later by Fo, believed in healthy vandalism of the works of the past; thus he freely plundered them for their Materialwert (value as raw material) (Speirs, 1987, p. 27) and claimed the right to impose on them whatever point of view seemed to be appropriate to the needs of the present. This stemmed from his conviction that theatre for him had to satisfy simultaneously his sensuous, emotional and intellectual needs. He was attracted to a naive, childlike theatre of fun which would have the same appeal to the ordinary spectator as sport or the circus, but his aim was to create theatre that was popular and intellectual at the same time, a theatre combining emotion with mental control. It is for this reason

that Brecht admired Karl Valentin (12), a popular Munich slapstick comedian; this actor had the ability to impart wisdom to his beer-hall audience through the physical qualities of his Chaplinesque clowning. After all, he did what Brecht admired most of all in an actor: he performed from within to an audience that digested all that was shown.

Whatever the dramatist's aim, whether to address his work to the intellectual Spieltrieb (instinct for play) of a sophisticated audience, or to teach useful, practical lessons to ordinary people, the theatre could only be effective, in the opinion of the young Brecht, if the physicality of the medium was directed at the instinct of the spectator.
(Speirs, 1987, p. 39)

According to Brecht, the dramatist had to hide his own ideas and smuggle them into his plays via his full-blooded characters so that the ideas would appeal to the instincts of the spectator. Later he was to change his opinion believing that it was more important to address his work to the spectator's reason rather than to his feelings. Fo, however, continued to believe that the audience's primitive instincts and suppressed feelings were to be aroused.

Brecht's theory of theatre was based on Marxist and Leninist tenets, although it attracted criticism from these same political sources; even so, he always tried to harness his ideological aims to the pursuit of dramatic arts. His chief argument for theatrical innovation was that history demanded it, hence the dialectical

function of his art. As he saw it, history showed him a bourgeois era, an off-shoot from the previous capitalist society, which was on its way to become a working class era. Brecht's Marxism had been largely influenced by Karl Korsch (13), who had broken away from Soviet orthodoxy. His brand of Marxism was focused on the dialectical view of the relationship between human action and historical necessity as advocated by the young Marx of 1844-48 (14). Brecht's work was later accused of formalism by the Soviets. The focus on human elements vis-à-vis historical necessity can be seen in Brecht's reflections on estrangement.

The dramatist had to devise a means of inhibiting any tendency by the spectator to understand and evaluate the world from any other point of view but that of the principal dramatis personae, if the audience was to view critically the patterns of cause and effect in drama. So he contrasted the Aristotelian concept of empathy unfavourably with his own concept of Verfremdung, estrangement, alienation or de-familiarisation. The technique of Verfremdungseffekt (15) was a precise translation of Victor Sklovsky's term Prizn ostranenniya, the theatrical trick or effect of making strange.

Brecht defined the learning process produced by Verfremdung as a dialectical, 'triadic' progression, moving from understanding (in a false, habitual manner), through 'non-understanding' (because of the de-familiarising presentation), and back to 'understanding' (in a new way).
(Speirs, 1987, p. 43)

Brecht established specific devices, tricks or effects by which such alienation of the audience would be achieved.

The first condition for the achievement of the alienation effect is that the actor must invest what he has to show with a definite act of showing. It is of course necessary to drop the assumption that there is a fourth wall cutting the audience off from the stage and the consequent illusion that the stage action is taking place in reality and without an audience. That being so, it is possible for the actor in principle to address the audience directly.
(B. Brecht, 1978, p. 136)

Brecht's Epic Theatre strove to produce a format of simplicity and a narrative, detached, dispassionate manner of presentation. As a director, he manipulated the spectator's response to the theatre; the play was to be like a parable, where events are mediated to the audience by a narrator who invites the people to reflect on what they see as an allegory of something specific. The presence of the didactic narrative voice (even in a genre other than the parable - such as in the historical play or in the Volksstück or popular farce) gives a parabolic quality to the writing. In his parables, the narrator is often represented on stage by someone who speaks during a prologue or epilogue; he states the theme of the parable or points out the moral, while seemingly demanding that the audience discover it for themselves.

The narrative voice in Epic Theatre has a controlling function. It

seeks to keep the dramatic characters in their place, namely subordinate to the teaching and learning process in which the author and the audience are engaged. Brecht treated his dramatic figures like pieces in a chess game, presenting them as social types or functions rather than as individuals. His characters progress from conservative, ill-informed non-entities to revolutionaries as is the case with Pelagea Wlaasowa (16) in his adaptation of Gorky's The Mother. This progression he referred to as the learning progress (17). Sometimes he used the chorus which presented the collective viewpoint to fuel his messages. Song too was an important vehicle for authorial commentary:

Brecht expected the composers with whom he collaborated to help him in his task of defining the attitude of a character by producing music of an estranging character, as in, say, the refrain of the 'cannon song' (The Threepenny Opera) where the accompaniment gets even faster, seemingly running ahead of the singers and thus giving the impression that the boastful soldiers are really far from being in command of the situation.
(Speirs, 1987, pp. 55-6)

The epic narrator exerts his influence through the language of the plays by means of parody, allusion, quotation, third person statements in the first person form. He also uses oxymoronic formulations, clichés, paradoxes, proverbs with an element changed. These unexpected formulations are designed to have the ideologically unsettling effect of abrogating commonly held prejudices. Apart from this functional justification, one has to recognise the aesthetic

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quality of sheer entertainment value of such clever phrasing. Brecht had a full understanding of the importance of captatio bene-volentiae, that is, of the importance of gaining the goodwill of his audience.

Brecht liked to have his plays performed on a relatively bare stage. The sparsely furnished set has the advantage of enhancing the reality of the people and objects on stage and of concentrating attention on what is essential to the story being told. Lighting (specially the use of white lights) was important: as well as encouraging concentration on what is exhibited, lighting makes a symbolic contribution to the whole, claiming for the stage that which is the space of reason. The white light permitted other aesthetic effects to be highlighted such as those rendered by colour, for example, or line.

His sets were notoriously revolutionary: he used basic materials for the set such as wood, paper, coarse cloth. He preferred to work in a seemingly 'primitive' theatre because it afforded him the opportunity to highlight particular features of his theatre. Thus he was able to use simple, direct, means of narration: when the soldiers were afraid, for example, he either had their faces painted white or a white light shone on their faces. If during a performance there was no audience response, he would allow for impromptu lines to be added. He welcomed suggestions from his actors as long as they could prove through gesture, movement or recitation, how they could improve the roles they played. However, as Esslin says, 'the Brechtian style of acting is

acting in quotation marks' (M. Enslin, 1974, p. 120); it is a statement which reaffirms Brecht's notion that the actor should not regard himself as impersonating the character so much as narrating the actions of another person of a definite time in the past.

The importance he gave to the actor arose from his acute observations of Chinese theatre, a major influence on his type of drama. He stated that in Chinese theatre, the artist never acted as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him.

He expresses his awareness of being watched [...].
The audience can no longer have the illusion of being
the unseen spectator at an event which is really
taking place.
(Brecht, 1978, p. 92)

Bertolt Brecht's theory of Drama having been summarised, his influence on Dario Fo cannot be ignored, especially if one takes into account Fo's early debut with comedies such as Gli arcangeli non giocano a flipper (1959) (18) and Aveva due pistole con gli occhi bianchi e neri (1960) (19) and his pièce de resistance, Mistero Buffo. His indebtedness to Brecht is most evident in the way he adapts the alienation/ estrangement effect and in the simplicity of his stage props. But when referring to Brecht's Marxist-oriented political theatre as a model for Fo's theatre, one must be aware of how it contrasts as well with that of the Italian playwright.

Fo's theatre, according to his own declaration, has more far reaching origins: it is supposedly the heir of popular tradition and therefore directed more at the common man, while Brecht's theatre is aimed at the intellectual classes while seeking to destroy bourgeois tradition. The different political views which fuel these two dramatists must be taken into consideration: Brecht, in a way, is a product of the Scientific Age of Marxism (20), whereas Fo is a product of another age which, being already distanced from it, can question its Marxist scientific values.

In order to infuse the theatre with Marxism and explain social phenomena to the people, new aesthetics were required. Besides, this audience reception had to be altered, as a basic concept of this theatre demanded the continuing interaction between audience and cast.

To identify the major differences between Aristotelian and Epic dramas and to present Brecht's new aesthetics, Josephine Piccolo gives the following schematic summary:

DRAMATIC THEATRE

Plot
Implicates the spectator
in a stage situation
Wears down his capacity
for action
Provides him with sensations
Experience
The spectator is involved
in something
Suggestion

EPIC THEATRE

Narrative
Turns the spectator
into an observer, BUT
Arouses his capacity
for action
Forces him to take
decisions
Picture of the world
He is made to face
something
Argument

Instinctive feelings
are preserved
The spectator is in the
thick of it, shares the
experience
The human being is taken
for granted
He is unalterable

Eyes on the finish
One scene makes another
Growth
Linear development
Evolutionary determinism
Man as a fixed point
Thought determines being

Feeling
(J. Piccolo, 1985, p. 162)

Brought to the point
of recognition
The spectator stands
outside, studies

The human being is the
object of the inquiry
He is alterable and
able to change
Eyes on the course
Each scene for itself
Montage
In curves
Jumps
Man as a process
Social being determines
thought
Reason.

The convergence between Marxist epistemology and Brechtian prescriptions for a new theatre is evident. Brecht was criticised for sacrificing entertainment for the sake of pedagogy, but he replied (21) that there was no inherent contradiction between the two. Marxism, as a doctrine, is very critical of society: the oppressed is told never to accept reality at face value as a 'natural' event. Instead, he is made to analyse critically the socio-economic causes which create oppression, and to believe that change can only occur through the class struggle.

Similarly for his theatre, Brecht required the critical participation of the audience, who was put in a position of not accepting the social events represented on the stage as 'natural', thanks to the use of estrangement-effects by the actors and the director.
(J. Piccolo, 1985, p. 163)

The effect of the Epic Theatre, in regard to reception was minimal: the audience was informed didactically, through the play, of a process that needed change. The Epic Theatre served to *diffuse* a dialectical materialist outlook which would enable the audience to view analytically society at large.

The influence of the new aesthetics on Fo is far ranging. He uses the oppressed in his plays as the 'object of the inquiry'. The spectator in Fo's theatre does not function as a mere observer who may (or may not) be aroused into action or into making decisions. Instead the spectator is a vehicle for the play itself, fuelled by didactic-Marxist doctrines that transform him into a burning revolutionary, willing to share the burden of dismantling the abuses of an uncaring, undemocratic system. Thus, in Fo's theatre, the spectator does not stand outside. A key concept in Fo's theatrical praxis is this breaking down of the fourth wall. He addresses the audience directly, in a way similar to Brecht's estrangement effects. This allows the audience to detach itself from the historical frame of reference of the 'pieces' and make contemporary analogies. Therefore, the spectator in Fo's plays is a pawn in the hands of the playwright. Dario Fo's militancy turns him into the agent provocateur who propels the audience towards revolt against the hegemonic bloc (22). Fo's plays, unlike Brecht's, have a direct, 'living newspaper' form, in the manner of the 'theatre of intervention', and are statements of a

'theatre of provocation' (if not 'action'), with its form akin to that of Agit-Prop (23).

Unlike the modern militant theatre of Fo, the Epic play was not intended for immediate action. The only possible transformation in the audience was a gradual one: it remained of an ideological nature and it led, at best, to a social practice consistent with it, but it did not lead to immediate action. Brecht remained a bourgeois who took upon himself the cause of the proletariat, by dramatising complex, philosophical discourses which challenged the rise of capitalism.

In this regard, Brecht and Fo are diametrically opposed. Fo, who is of popular origin, creates characters who do not aspire to be bourgeois. His type of theatre demands an immediate response. For this reason, Dario Fo's plays are concerned with highly topical, contemporary issues whose outcome could be decided by the audience's rage and therefore encouraging direct political participation. Whereas Brecht made commitments on a theoretical basis (i.e. by formulating new aesthetics for the theatre), Dario Fo's commitments on artistic production and society are demonstrated by his (the artist's) and the audience's active participation in the immediate struggle. Moreover,

according to Fo's own statements, his epic style derives from the popular tradition and as such

requires the public's emotional participation, whereas Brecht's epic style is mostly concerned with the critical attitude of the spectators. Fo, in particular, separates himself from the present canonization of the German playwright, as practiced by the Berliner Ensemble, and especially from Strehler's current stagings of Brecht's works (24). (Piccolo, 1985, p. 110)

Fo's theatre began at a time when the myths created by the 'scientific' age of Marxism, fully capable of explaining all social phenomena, had been dispelled. New forms of Marxism, such as the Soviet and the Chinese models, were now confronting each other irreconcilably. The orthodox Marxist doctrine was being challenged by the new 'western' currents of Marxism. Topics being discussed, ranging from those of Gramsci to those dealt with by the Frankfurt School (25), all centred around the new function of art, especially with regard to the impact which the artistic medium had on society.

At the highpoint of Fo's militant theatre, the revolutionary left was divided by conflicting theories and practices ranging from Lotta continua to the Autonomia, and all the way to those groups that had taken up urban guerrilla warfare. Within such a diversified and ever-changing picture it does not come as a surprise that Fo was not to share Brecht's all-encompassing picture of Marxism. (Piccolo, 1985, p. 166)

The 'all-encompassing picture of Marxism', which is based on philosophical ideology, had stagnated to such a point that imparting ideology ranked on a par with provoking militancy as important

elements of the modern theatre (26). Fo's theatre, like Brecht's, fulfills a demystifying function, but unlike Brecht's, it does not serve as a manual for instructing the masses ideologically since its main scope was to arouse actions. It lacks theoretical input but requires immediate political reaction. Fo's plays, because of their syncopated structure and ad-lib dialogue between audience and actors, free the audience from its passive role and give it a more active role in the participation of the performance. However, Fo does not abandon the idea of using 'types' inherited from the popular tradition, such as the shrewd, yet simple, Ruzante-like peasants (27), who demystify or unmask deception; nevertheless these 'types' do not have the intellectual ability to make the spectators follow a Marxist epistemological route. These characters are puppets whose actions are feeble and easily manipulated by others, just as the audience often is. One such character is the lo spico or the authorial voice; by allowing such a character to influence the stage action directly, while commenting upon it, the playwright manages to show the public how it is being manipulated. In Brecht's later plays, all the elements are given to the spectator, enabling him to undertake his own analysis. Whereas Brecht tries to create a whole 'science' and thus draws on philosophies and set ideologies, Fo's main source of information remains the direct experience or knowledge he has of the oppressed.

Dario Fo uses the grotesque to generate rage in his audience which

then provokes action. Fo can be identified as a 'comico in rivolta' to borrow the title of Melodoli's book; by adopting some instruments of Marxism, he has turned his medieval craft to the service of the class struggle. In his works, the varietà, the beffe, the farce and the grotesque, which he draws from the real lives of the oppressed, are embedded in Marxist doctrine in order to give some rational order to these fragments of reality (even if the theatrical forms employed are not at all rational).

Dario Fo keeps abreast of current socio-political events in order to incorporate them into his work as direct experience and as an alternative point of view. This is best seen during the early days of Dario Fo's career when he gave alternative versions of the myths which dictate our daily perception of psychology and reality (28).

Il teatro degli anni cinquanta di Fo è pieno di beffe, travestimenti, usi dell'aldilà, amori all'infinito, eccetera. La novellistica però era usata da Fo per raccontare l'attualità. Poi, la beffa, che è alla base di quasi tutte le sue trame, pur richiamando - nel suo svolgersi - la matrice medievale, si farà strumento interno alla commedia per sciogliere gli intrighi del balordo - anni sessanta.
(C. Melodoli, 1978, p. 66)

However, this tradition of portraying contemporary conflicts and highlighting them through the farcical element, the comic structure and the varietà legacy, is never abandoned in Fo's later plays. In fact, one of the major differences between Brecht and Fo lies

Inherently in their choice of subject matter, i.e. their inclusion or exclusion of contemporary events. Fo emphatically insists on using, as subject matter, immediate, everyday politics to fuel his arguments. This leads one to question the validity of his work when taken out of the specific context from which it arises. Thus, if one were to juxtapose Fo's highly topical and local plays with Brecht's more discerning parables, the validity of the latter's work would seem more apparent, since it is deeply rooted in a whole historical epoch. However, as Fo reiterated when interviewed in June 1984 by Josephine Piccolo (29), to juxtapose in this fashion would be totally unfair (if not erroneous) as the more a theatre is embedded in a specific situation and captures the essence of its contradictions, the more it is universally applicable.

Thinking back on his Mistero Buffo, he recalled an Ecuadorian version: the storyteller was an indio, dressed in his traditional attire who, starting from Fo's text, 'translated' it into the cultural equivalent of the experience of his people. The function and the mystification of the official Catholic Church existed both in Italy and in Ecuador although they manifested themselves in different modes and historical particulars. If one captured the essence of the contradiction, a work that drew its language from the actual life experiences of a group could be translated by the theatrical tradition of another, granted that the universal essence had been centred in the work.
(Piccolo, 1986, p. 175)

The present trend amongst the new left is to reduce the pedagogical function of theatre and to re-emphasise its function of ritual and

means of expression. Nevertheless, Fo, like Brecht, continues to maintain the pedagogical importance of the political theatre, its function of denouncing capitalist society, its value in demystifying and uncovering political treachery. But in Fo's latter plays, especially those that have been co-authored by Franco Rame, there is a new line of development. They serve the needs of people involved in a more immediate class struggle by posing new questions. These new contributions to political, popular theatre are of great value because, not only do they propagate a knowledge of demystification, but they also highlight the doubts of the oppressed and the difficult process of arousing consciousness amongst them. Because of Fo's (and Rame's) immediacy in reaching the audiences through topical issues, such as the condition of women, their relation to power, their way of transforming reality, a new type of theatre has emerged. It looks at the dialectical relationship between knowledge, politics and action.

Bertolt Brecht, as previously mentioned (30), advocated the right of any author to transform any pre-existing text (hence his daring adaptation of John Gay's The Beggar's Opera) (31). Fo, too, has followed Brecht's example of re-writing the 'classics', by tackling Brecht's adaptation of Gay's text, now re-entitled The Threepenny Opera. In his unmistakable fashion, Fo wrote his Opera dello schiavazzo, where the paragon of Marxist political theatre is confronted and re-invented anew. Brecht's play was aimed at presenting a picture of bourgeois society with a Weltanschauung of its

own, without which it could not function. Shifting from Gay's original text, Brecht aimed at exposing the corruption of capitalist enterprises, which he likened to the dubious operations of petty crime. In Fo's version, this notion of capitalism is developed even further; he makes various references to Foucault's observations on the factory as the model for all other institutions in capitalist society. The jail, for instance, has the same structures as that of a factory (32). The protagonist, Peachum, addresses the audience directly and tells everyone not to expect easy gratification from the show but rather 'scarpate nelle gengive' (Fo, 1981, pp. 15-6). This idea of the actor speaking directly to the audience, inviting the audience into the play, is perhaps Fo's major trademark, which dispels and breaks down the fourth wall. Again, Fo has updated his version of the play by taking into consideration contemporary events and personalities which could have a direct bearing on the play.

His remake of Mackie, for example, relies heavily on the model of Raffaele Cutolo, one of the bosses of the omorra (a form of organised crime prevalent in the area near Naples), while his depiction of jails is based mainly on Italian and West German incarceration practices.
(Piccolo, 1986, p. 172)

Because of this play's specific nature, being a remake of a remake, Fo's imagination is left unrestrained to develop his discourse on the theatre, cleverly exposing theatrical tricks and the subtle manner in which they are used.

Whilst Brecht made a distinctive mark on the Italian playwright, a different source of inspiration left its imprint on Fo's later plays, and that was the influence of co-author and wife, Franca Rame.

When Dario Fo married Franca Rame in June 1954, he established one of the most volatile and productive partnerships in Italian Theatre. Franca Rame came from the last and most important families of strolling players of Northern Italy (33); Fo had first met her while performing in a summer review entitled Sette giorni a Milano, a 'girlie' show with a troupe called the Sorella Nava. When Franca Rame left the family in her late teens, she quickly earned a reputation as a variety actress. The Rame-Fo collaboration started at this stage, but it was only in the Seventies that it flourished to what it is today. After a 14 year absence from Italian television, Fo made a triumphant return in 1977. For this occasion, Fo and Rame had put together a new play for television, where, for the first time, they directly approached women's problems: the show was entitled Parliamo di donne. Up to this point, both playwrights had accepted the infamous status of women as being just another condition of the oppressed - those who did not share in power-making decisions and who had their 'story' told and distorted by officialdom and myth.

Fo, in many of his plays, had always portrayed women as out-spoken beings, full of initiative and deceit. This attitude he had adopted

was not meant to show women as being crafty and wicked; it was just meant to highlight the extent to which women were prepared to go in order to assert themselves in the male-dominated world of power. Thus, in Fo's plays, women were portrayed as being shrewd and using their intelligence to outwit unimaginative, power-crazy men at their own game. Initially, Fo's female characters made their presence felt in the world of the family and the personal, rather than the world of the public. However, in the 1970's, they were ready to reach the larger world of social relations.

In Parliamo di donne, Fo attempted to give Rame a series of roles which were not the usual 'support' roles which had previously been assigned to her. The show consisted of a collection of sketches and songs dealing with the condition of women in a variety of situations, ranging from abortions to the absence of actresses in the Elizabethan theatre and the composition of the Holy Family. The play was criticised for simply presenting female roles rather than exploring female problems (34).

However, it was this collaboration that led to Tutta casa, letto e chiesa (35), the play which brought Franca Rame personal fame and success. It challenged the classic traditional Italian male view of women though it still consisted of sketches and songs. These plays within the play were re-worked and changed for the next six years, in order to produce a one-woman show, which Franca Rame could take on

tour all over Italy and Europe. The various versions of Tutta casa, letto e chiesa achieved an acclaim almost equal to that of Fo's Mistero Buffo. This play was the result of massive research undertaken by Franca Rame throughout the whole of Italy, where she interviewed women and had discussions with them in factories, borgate and in their homes in order to extract their true 'testimonies'.

All the research that she had gathered was then tried out in front of a women's collective for approval and their reaction. During these years, Rame played a more prominent role than usual as a writer, sketching out situations which were then put into dramatic form by Fo. This was a reversal of the second class role which she had always played in the Fo-Rame partnership. By entering the field as a playwright, she vindicated the female character's right to speak through a woman's pen.

The first production (36) of Tutta casa, letto e chiesa consisted of five monologues, lasting two and a half hours, performed on a virtually bare stage (as Mistero Buffo) with only a minimum of props and sets required. The bareness of the stage emphasised the breaking down of the fourth wall (which Fo had tried to achieve with all his plays since 1968), while 'epic acting', which involves directly presenting (rather than representing) a character, complete with comments and asides to the audience, avoided any attempt at a naturalistic portrayal. In 1981, a second edition of Tutta casa,

Letto e chiesa opened at the Teatro Odeon in Milan, a theatre which the Fo's had not set foot in for 16 years, as it catered for a predominantly bourgeois audience. They had since been evicted from the Palazzina Liberty but they chose the Odeon to demonstrate that the problems dealt with in the plays concerned women of all classes and types.

Tutta casa, letto e chiesa, when adapted for the English-speaking world, was called Female Parts, but the National Theatre in London, fearing this sexually explicit title might offend patrons, changed it to One Woman Plays. There were mixed feelings about this play after its first performance in English; the authors had been totally misrepresented in the translation. It was accepted that, in order to steer away from clichéing the play as being typically Italian in origin, it should be anglicised totally, a task which was done fairly well. However, in so doing, the trans-culturation lost the biting sarcasm which the Italian original held, and the language spoken by the female characters of the One woman plays seemed tame and middle-class (not at all representative of the working-class idiom of the Italian original). In England, this lack of mordant language in the play was minimised by the acting ability of South African-born Yvonne Bryceland who made up in tone and emphasis for what the play lacked in lines. It was directed (both in England and South Africa) by male directors, who used a naturalistic setting (37). In Franca Rame's performances only essential props (if any at all) were used. Although

the play enjoyed tremendous popularity in England, it has never been successful in South Africa, being flagrantly labelled a middle-class and 'kitchen sink' theatre (38).

For Fo, what started as the male observation of women had developed into a more profound understanding of the conditions associated with being a woman, a fact only achieved through his wife's incessant co-operation. When Fo first started writing his plays, he had to confront some of the stereotypes of women built into the media he had chosen, i.e. the farce. By exploiting these same stereotyped mechanisms, he managed to emphasise the hypocrisy of sex roles and marital institutions, and the lack of power of women. The female characters he created were, therefore, made to exploit convincingly the duplicity of language in order to reveal their plight. Most of these characters effectively use double meanings, revive dormant metaphors and use the deconstructive mechanisms of the farce to make their point. In many instances, they are mere co-protagonists (39) but in Mistero Buffo, most of the female characters have leading roles. A good example in Mistero Buffo is perhaps the 'Madonna-under-the-cross' who is charged with the task of delivering counterinformation and denouncing the excesses of the simple minded, arrogant males. Beneath the laughter is the constant frisson of recognition of a shared experience as Fo mercilessly focuses on the insanities of the political conniver, of officials just doing their job, of reality upside down. In the One woman plays, the same method

was employed: laughter conveyed truth, exposed cant, directed attention to the battleground of the sexes and to the general condition of being a woman.

What is the secret of this partnership? Perhaps it is the fact that Fo and Rame try to remove theatre from the rarified upper atmospheres where some try to isolate it, and return it to the people, where it belongs. Intellectual audiences, accustomed to having to dig for messages with some discomfort, do not mind a certain amount of boredom in theatres. For them, it is even spiritually purifying in a way - like self-flagellation. But the general audiences, for whom Fo and Rame wanted to write, do not want to be bored, nor are they keen on messages that consist in accusing the average sexist (Italian) male (since they too are part of the audience). In order to achieve this, two things were necessary: not to alienate all those males, while at the same time, not to dilute nor to compromise the message. They tried to get both men and women to share in the laughter, and possibly to think back a little wryly (and hopefully a little more clearly) later when they found themselves in similar situations.

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Chapter 3:

The Concept of the Giullare

Dario Fo's pièce célèbre, Mistero Buffo, was written explicitly to denounce the abuses committed by the ecclesiastical hierarchy during the Middle Ages. The aim of the playwright, in his research or re-visitation of the Italian Umanesimo, is to emphasise the popular struggle against capitalist and ecclesiastical oppression. Fo considers himself to be almost the sole representative of the popular cultural heritage which clashed with the 'official' interpretation of the Gospels and with the accepted history of the Catholic Church.

In his attempt at championing the oppressed, he creates a new form of theatre which has its roots in the performances of roving minstrels and market-square jesters. Dario Fo has distilled the popular, comic, irreverent elements of medieval mystery plays and religious cycles into a political-cultural onslaught against the repressions of the Catholic Church and the landowning classes throughout history. He expresses himself in the language of the peasantry (and by extension, of every class of oppressed people) or in grammelot, a mixture of Italian and various dialects of Lombardy. In reviving the use of dialect in modern Italian comedy, as in Mistero Buffo and its sequels, Fo went a step beyond a mere revival of popular culture. He created a new theatrical language which, combined with mime and gesture, transcends linguistic boundaries. This language is yoked to the voice of the underdog, railing against the machinations of politicians and authority figures of church and state. Mistero Buffo is largely dependent on an ecclesiastical background of corruption and tyranny in

a bygone era, but it is by no means exclusively so, as its political implications are universal and remain valid to this day.

The role of the peasant in the historical process has often been disregarded, if not refuted, by the so-called 'revolutionary' philosophers, on the grounds that it is a class characterised by political inertia and apathy. Karl Marx, for example, described the 'peasant insurrection' in these terms:

The symbol that expressed their entry into the revolutionary movement, clumsily cunning, knavishly naive, doltishly sublime, a calculated superstition, a pathetic burlesque, a cleverly stupid anachronism, a world-historic piece of buffoonery and an undecipherable hieroglyphic for the understanding of the civilized - this symbol bore the unmistakable physiognomy of the class that represents barbarism within civilization.
(Marx in T. Shanin, 1971, p. 229)

This derogatory attitude of Marx, besides being pedantic, also reflected the scorn felt by many Marxists towards the peasant's position in the class struggle. A clear exception to this attitude is that of Mao Tse-tung, whose political doctrine was based entirely on the support of the peasant force. In a 1939 speech, Mao affirmed that the historical process in China owed its success to the many peasant insurrections which assailed the Chinese feudal society (1). According to Antonio Gramsci, there is a clear dichotomy between città (city) and campagna (countryside), between worker and peasant. The most valid point Gramsci makes regarding the peasantry is that he

recognises this class's feudal psychology, which lies outside the political and historical process:

La mentalità del contadino è rimasta perciò quella del servo dalla gleba, che si rivolta violentemente contro i 'signori' in determinate occasioni, ma è incapace di pensare se stesso come membro di una collettività (la nazione per i proprietari e la classe per i proletari) e di svolgere un'azione sistematica e permanente rivolta a mutare i rapporti economici e politici della convivenza sociale.
(A. Gramsci, 1975b, p. 23)

Therefore, for Gramsci, the peasantry has always 'co-existed' outside the domain of law, lacking either juridical personality or moral individuality. Because of the peasantry's incapacity to organise itself as a class and to understand the State and its discipline, its efforts invariably lead to a tragic end. Nevertheless, Gramsci conceded some redeeming values which the peasant possessed: with the advent of the World War I, the peasantry showed, for the first time, its worth by fighting side by side with other classes.

Quattro anni di trincea e di sfruttamento, del sangue hanno radicalmente mutato la psicologia dei contadini.
(Gramsci, 1975b, p. 24)

Dario Fo's attitude towards the peasantry is politically closer to that of Mao Tse-tung's; the extent of the research undertaken by him confirms the importance he places on that class. After all, he claims, paraphrasing an expression of Mao Tse-tung, that his duty as a

giullare is to show that it is the people who create history, but sadly it is the boss who re-tells it (2). With Mistero Buffo, Fo hoped to show that his research had proven beyond any doubt the peasantry's capacity and right to re-tell its own history, without the prejudices of the hegemonic classes.

By setting the plot of Mistero Buffo in a non-specific time which is both the Biblical era and the Tre-Quattrocento, Dario Fo achieved a number of pragmatic goals which have historical, literary and socio-cultural implications.

On an historical level, the plot gives legitimacy to Dario Fo's claims that his research delves in popular peasant tradition. The play takes place in a pre-Commedia dell'Arte period. Thus the giullare had not yet been incorporated into the machinations of the upper classes; he was still a 'free' entertainer who amused his plebeian audience with delightful episodes which mocked the sacrosanct role of the upper classes and clergy. Before defining the true nature of the giullare, it is essential to picture the historico-political background of the epoch in which he first made an appearance.

Italy in the 14th and 15th Century was facing the tremor of change; however, the development of the peasant had been negligible. He was still part of the most exploited and oppressed class, whose main purpose was to provide (through hard labour) wealth for the nobility,

the landowners and the clergy, i.e. the dominant classes. Understandably, the tendency of the dominant classes was to control the economical, social and cultural life of the peasantry. Whilst the upper classes provided the land and meagrely-paid jobs for the peasantry (thus justifying their exploitation), the clergy, by advocating the 'values' of ecclesiastical culture via its written and printed media and above all its sermons and homilies, influenced and dictated the mentality and life of the peasant. This ecclesiastical manipulation thus ensured the establishment of norms and codes which controlled not only the daily running of life but also moral and social behaviour. The opinions propagated by the church influenced literary motifs and inspired myths, fables and popular representations. The birth of the comuni in Italy, created for the specific needs of a community, strove for the social advancement of its members. Thus, the comuni provided for an evolutionary process in its structure with a continuous upward movement of the plebeian classes. This upper mobility manifested itself in the field of education, which was provided by the Church or the State. Both the rural and urban sections of the population benefited from this. However, this also led to the formation of popular movements, such as those of the jacqueries (3), for example, which promoted popular revolutionary ideology, finding the justification of their rights in the Gospels. The ramifications of this upliftment in the peasantry was to be felt in all fields of literature, including the theatre.

Therefore, the development of popular theatre in the 1400's was the natural extension of the ecclesiastical performances which were staged inside or immediately outside the churches. The amalgamation of music and actions with Church rites had already created a highly artistic dramatic form, witnessed in some parts of Europe as far back as the 9th Century (4). Initially, the point of convergence between the faithful and the church was the liturgy and more specifically, the reading of the sacred texts and its exegesis. After the biblical reading came the homily which expressed the basic concepts through speech and gesture:

È questo il momento massimamente informativo del servizio divino, quello in cui più i fedeli devono capire, al di là delle barriere di lingua e di concettualizzazione.
(A. Rosa, 1383, p. 60)

Because of the difficulty the people had in understanding the vigorous Latin vocabulary, the clergy had to make use of mime and gesture in order to give meaning to an otherwise unintelligible ceremony. The liturgy, with time, had given way to small representations which took place in the parvis (5), on a stage especially constructed for such events. The sacred nature of such representations had weakened to the extent that fargical and supernatural elements were now incorporated, as a means of enriching the quality of the entertainment. The omnipresent spirit of the Church ensured that this development of drama remained relatively the same throughout Europe, although it

acquired certain national characteristics (6). In Italy, the church was an embryonic theatre; the liturgy supplied the subject, the religious ceremony the mise-en-scène, the Gregorian canto the accompaniment, the clergy the actors and the people the spectators. However, with the introduction of profane elements, this type of theatre soon became autonomous and in the 15th Century, well-known playwrights, such as Poliziano, Grazzini and Cecchi, were producing not only sacred plays but also profane comedies and farces (7). With the breakaway from religious interference, in the process of self-expression, more authority passed into the hands of individuals. It is this popular creativity that mostly attracted Fo to this particular era.

The sacred plays, towards the beginning of the 15th Century, were less defined by the Church; they had lost liturgical character and had ceased to be a mere re-phrasing of the Scriptures. The facetious and naturalistic elements which were inserted, turned them into common representations played by ordinary people using the vernacular. The peasants who frequented these sacro-profane representations were naturally amused at seeing their own image on stage. A vast gama of humorous forms and situations thus emerged, opposing the official serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture. Dario Fo's Mistero Buffo basically shows that this sudden emergence of popular theatre was not 'sudden' but 'dormant'. Hence his work serves as a key to explore the immense treasury of folk humour, which has

been repudiated for centuries by officialdom, and to offer a completely different, non official, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations.

But what form did the new sacro-religious play have? In Italy, as elsewhere, this art form was free: it was simply a story that unfolded chronologically with an episodic plot. It started usually with a prologue called an annunziazione, introduced by an angel who outlined the intrigue, invoked the spectators' warm reception of the play and promised gratification to the attentive audience. Sometimes, instead of the angelic prologue, a humorous rustic dialogue would occur between one or more characters (8). This type of play did not respect the Aristotelian unities of action, time and space; it roamed freely throughout the universe, including Paradise and Hell. Initially, there were no divisions between acts. In some plays, when the action dragged over many years, the intrigue was divided into 'parts', which corresponded to the journées of French tragiconédier and the giornate of Italian sacre rappresentazioni.

These plays were generally compact, animated, relatively free of awkward elements and usually well written. The characters, according to the medieval norm, were a mélange of rich folk and beggars, saints and sinners. God the Father was very rarely presented on stage; the playwrights preferred to represent Him by means of a voice from the heavens above or through an angelic messenger. On the other hand,

Christ often appeared in familiar guise, usually as a peasant. The Virgin Mary and the angels remained other prominent figures. The devil, usually not as popular as the aforementioned characters, appeared with the sole purpose of tormenting and tricking the plebs Dei. However, he was usually masked, but in such a way that the spectators would soon recognise him, as the 'rapacious wolf'. The heroines were so fanatically pious, so set on martyrdom, that they portrayed very few human qualities; they contrasted totally with the other female characters, such as the housewives, maids, courtesans, who possessed simpler and more realistic traits. Pontiffs, cardinals, bishops, priests, monks were generally portrayed as corrupt officials; seldom were they virtuous and holy men. The peasants were shown to be simple-minded, practical, sometimes astute but always comical. Other prominent characters included vagabonds, beggars, cripples, brigands and urchins. This array of characters did not exempt even emperors, kings and the nobility from social criticism.

The Italian Quattrocento was also of great interest to Dario Fo from a linguistic point of view. The most prominent trait of this epoch was the reaffirmation of Latin literature. The European culture in most countries had remained bilingual: Latin, which was supranational, and native vernacular. In Italy, Latin and the vernacular represented different cultural levels or two different and distinct cultures, representing social orders in opposition to each other. Latin, however, had remained a language animated by an impulse to adapt to

the active life of the country; its supporters advocated that it should become the language of an entire culture. It was in Tuscany and central Italy that the first symbiosis between Latin and the vernacular took place; Florence was the cradle of the new literature which propagated its rich past and the cult of antiquity in volgare. But by so doing, it gave status to the vernacular which proved worthy of a lofty subject matter; thus by the end of the 15th Century, the vernacular had succeeded in establishing itself as a language. Rosolo Amaseo (9), had already observed that the emerging vernacular was a language capable of confronting Latin; however, he did not fully realise the implications of his observations, as Varchi noted, thirty years later:

egli [Amaseo] voleva che la lingua volgare, quanto al parlare, s'usasse nelle ville, su pe' mercanti co' contadini, e nelle città co' bottegai, e insomma colla plebe solamente; e la latina co' gentiluomini. E, quanto al scrivere, che le cose basse e villi si scrivessero vere in volgare, e l'alte e gravi latinamente.
(Varchi in A. Greco, 1976, p. 9)

However, as a consequence of promoting Latin as the language worthy of 'gentiluomini', the vernacular established itself as the people's language, capable of representing their culture and their autonomy.

Latin remained the tool of temporal and ecclesiastical power. The liturgy, which for a while continued to be explained in this rigorous language, soon became an object of popular criticism; the satirical

and yet realistic intent of the Christian peasants was reflected in the distortions of the most common Latin prayers, as heard in Giordano Bruno's Il Candelaio (10). When Marta, a character in this play, addresses the Madonna, she does so in what she understands to be the Salve Regina:

Salve, Regina, guardane da ruina, Ciesh auto et
transit per medio milloro mibatte [...].
(Bruno in R. Mattioli, 1956, p. 124)

Although this example depicts the ignorance that existed amongst the peasantry, the dominant classes were not exempt from making these mistakes; hence the case of the rural priest who does not succeed in spreading the Christian message efficiently to his congregation because he himself does not understand either the language or the intrinsic theological concept inherent in the name of the feast of the Epiphany:

Un prete [...] annunziò in questo modo al popolo la
festa del dì dopo: Domeni, disse, veneriamo con molta
devozione la Epifania perchè questa à una delle
principali feste. Non so davvero se fosse uomo o
donna, ma in qualunque modo à necessario osservare
questo giorno con la massima reverenza.
(In Greco, 1945, pp. 72-3)

The national aspirations of Latin, that is, of the language that would represent a whole culture, were shortlived because it stood for the aristocratic minority. Thus, on a literary and linguistic level,

Dario Fo's choice of the Quattrocento is reinforced by his interest in the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' and their ensuing defeat.

The socio-cultural implications for Fo's choice of the misteri of the 15th Century, as a model for his Mistero Buffo, seem obvious: for similar reasons, Fo adopted the role of the giullare who was

[...] matto tra i savi, ma ispiratore di sagge risoluzioni, apprezzato e ricercato ma di basso status sociale, bersaglio di tutte le invettive ecclesiastiche eppure cantore semiufficiale di laudi [...], spola tra mondo colto e aristocratico e mondo non colto e popolare, con tutti gli scarti, le torsioni, i cambiamenti di segno che il continuo cambiar di casacca comporta.
(Rosa, 1983, p. 56)

The giullare is the dramatis persona who inspired Fo the most in salvaging Italian popular theatre. Fo is fascinated by the versatility of the giullare and by his ability to move through various forms of expression, to improvise and assume buffoonesque comic qualities. The giullare's ability to be a 'sociolinguista avant la lettre' (Rosa, 1983, p.56), is also admirably recreated by Fo, whose work can be inserted, according to G. Mariani,

[...] fra la tradizione della Commedia dell'Arte e il moderno sketch satirico, [...] giullarismo e impegno politico (11).
(Mariani, 1980, p. 901)

The giullare's multilingualistic ability - speaking under or over the

lines, mixing words and phrases of several languages known to the heterogeneous public, with the extreme mimicry of the giullare - forced Fo to formulate his own linguistic hybrid, better known as grammelot, with its roots in the medieval Paduan dialect. The use of grammelot is perhaps one of the most innovative techniques found in Mistero Buffo, because it reinforces the dichotomy between dialect, the true expression of the plebeian culture, and the aristocratic language, representative of hegemonic power. However, it is ironic in a way that Fo has chosen the term giullare for his characters, since this word belongs to the lingua dotta and does not have a popular origin. Straniero made the following point:

Infatti, per potersi proiettare a contorni netti nella 'militanza' ultrarivoluzionaria tanto cara a Fo, questo schema non può tener conto delle contraddizioni dialetticamente feconde della cosiddetta cultura dotta e libresca, che è precisamente la cultura da cui è scaturito anche il marxismo-leninismo al quale il 'giullare' Fo guarda con l'occhio ipnotizzato del fedele o addirittura del fanatico, sia pure corretto dalla domestichezza con l'ironia e il sarcasmo.
(M. Straniero, 1978, p. 16)

The same can be said of Fo's polyphonic language (12), reconstructed from several dialects of the Po Valley, which in order to sound like an indigenous language of the 14th and 15th Century at times makes use of a few parole dotte. According to Puppa, Fo's rural, plebeian language can be inserted nevertheless in the cultured and aristocratic tradition.

La lingua usata per questo montaggio è una re-invenzione, un idioletto di Fo, una koine dialettale mutuata dalle parlate medievali del nord d'Italia, specialmente il lombardo veneto, ricca di allitterazioni, di perifrasi sinonimiche, di amplificatio lessicali, piena di asprezze fonematiche, di urli sanguinolenti, di una mimesi allucinata e iperealistica del parlare basso. È sempre la contestazione verso la linea colta del teatro ufficiale la strategia di questa scelta linguistica, già manifestata in precedenza negli usi gergali e colloquiali, ma stavolta portata al centro, perchè, tranne che nelle chiose didascaliche, è questa l'unica langue adoperata in scena.
(Fuppa, 1978, p. 98)

According to Fo, the use of grammelot relies on the physical and the non-verbal signals given by the speaker. Rosa describes how the inventive ability of Fo's asemantic grammelot functions in such a way that the meaning is suggested

non [dalle] parole più intonazione, mimica, gestualità, ma [da] tutto questo senza le parole, [che vengono] ridotte a pure virtualità di senso, riproduzione di suoni.
(Rosa, 1983, pp. 57-8)

The performance does not only rely on the verbal repetition of a written text: it is the true and proper discovery of acting, full of autonomous and specific expressiveness, which evades necessarily the semantic uniqueness of the written word. The free, the spontaneous, the natural and the witty, can only be achieved by a certain amount of improvisation, as defined by Luigi Riccoboni:

L'improvvisu donne lieu à la vérité du jeu; ensorte qu'en revoyant plusieurs fois le même Canavas, on peut revoir, chaque fois, une pièce différente. L'acteur qui joue à l'improvvisu, joue plus vivement et plus naturellement que celui qui joue un rôle appris: on sent mieux ce que l'on produit que ce l'on emprunte des autres par les secours de la mémoire.
(Riccoboni in F. Greco, 1986, p. 224)

When Fo performs outside the regions where the dialects of the Po Valley are understood, he develops an onomatopoeic language which serves to emphasize the meaning conveyed by his gestures. The situations are usually explained in an explanatory prologue (13).

The tradition behind his grammelot is usually explained by Fo as having originated from the specific language of the Zanni. Zanni is the prototype of many of the masks of the Commedia dell'Arte; he is the father of all the servi be they shrewd and nice like Arlecchino or clumsy and foolish like Brighella. Occasionally, Fo connects his grammelot to the tradition of Molière, as his portavoce, the Chief Director of Police does in Pumi Pumi Chi è? La Polizia:

Sì, quella di Scappino ... Antonio Scappino (14)... quel comico ... no, non c'è nell'elenco dei sospetti ... nel '500 questo Scappino era andato appunto in Francia e si era incontrato con Molière, si erano abbracciati perchè si conoscevano, e subito Molière ha detto 'mi salvi ... tu mi puoi salvare, perchè mi hanno censurato l'ultima commedia, Il Tartufo, tutto il finale ... e tu mi potresti aiutare', ma io recito male, in francese poi ...', 'sì, ma tu reciti con i gesti, con la faccia, con le mani, sei un mimo straordinario ... tu vieni e reciti coi gesti, qualche parola così per dare la sensazione, bonfocchia pure, mastica, di degli sproposti, non ha importanza ... con

le mani ti fai capire, coi gesti, con la pantomima, quella non si può censurare', 'd'accordo, sì, ma cosa dovrei recitare ... che dovrei dire ... che personaggio è il mio ...', '... quello di un servo, ti chiamerai Scappino, e servi in una delle case più ricche della Francia, e c'è un giovane, il primogenito, che entra nel mondo della politica ... e tu a questo giovane insegnerai tutto il trucco, l'arte, dell' ipocrisia, della tartufaggine, del gesuitismo massimo ... la vera arte di un ministro della DC ... [...] va bene ... vi avverto che quella bellissima parlata si chiama grammelot ... è tutto masticato, tutto sputacchiato ... l'importante non è ascoltare le parole, ma i gesti, i gesti sono importanti ...

(Fo, 1977c, pp. 282-3)

The use of grammelot, other than in Mistero Buffo, reinforces Fo's belief that historical flashbacks are very pertinent to contemporary political reality (15). The grammelot functions as a form of burlesque mimicry. Fo's onomatopoeic re-invention of language has been increased in more recent contexts; a good example is the grammelot uttered by the grandfather, when hallucinating under the influence of drugs, in La marijuana della mamma è la più bella. However, the most important quality of the Paduan grammelot in Mistero Buffo lies in its potential to be the imaginary Esperanto of the poor and the disinherited (16).

In his research of the glorious past of popular theatre, Fo also rediscovers and adopts the figure of the ruzzante, who plays the role of a buffoonesque peasant. He was created by Angelo Beolco, a playwright of the Cinquecento. Beolco was so infatuated with his own creation, which he played to perfection, that he became known to posterity by

the giguet Ruzzante. The similarities between Fo and Beolco are striking; like Fo, Beolco started writing and playing in his own farces and grammi pastorali (17) from a young age. Fanatically devoted to Padua and envious of Florence, Beolco was proud of his 'common' birth, his Paduan education, his regional dialect and his compatriots, but especially of the peasants who lived in the environs. He praised the simple life and natural speech patterns of his people, which, according to him, had greater merit than learned language. His characters served as vehement supporters of his beliefs: in La Fiorina (18), one of the annunciatori of the prologue declares vigorously that he objects to declaiming his speech in Tuscan, since this type of speech is exaggerated and far from sounding natural. The use of indigenous dialects by Beolco was not an attempt to achieve instant artistic recognition nor to emulate the tradition of the oldest peasant farces; instead it was an integral part of his artistic method, for if he changed the speech of his Paduan characters to Tuscan, he would change the specific nature of these characters.

Like Fo, he was a genuine artist and his best works transcended regional naturalism and became universal comedies which reflected common life. The ruzzante-figure is Beolco's most well-known creation, being comparable to Shakespeare's Falstaff and Jonson's Bobadill. According to Carlo Grabher, 'Ruzzante is the image of the poor man in his simpler instinctive humanity' (Grabher, 1953, p.107), and this echoes Fo's thematic ideal in Poor Neph. Beolco's Ruzzante,

like the poor nano, uses dialect because it is essential for his naturalism. As Grabher said,

[it] corresponds to a particular feeling for life, always fresh, surging, burgeoning, carrying in consequence an essential change of spirit, of taste, of perspective.
(Grabher, 1953, p. 233)

Others have tried to emulate Beolco and this helped to raise the peasant farce to a more artistic level; he was the forerunner of the Commedia Dell'Arte (19) and he offered the first model of the Italian zanni (clowns).

The themes connected with Ruzzante also dealt with the injustices perpetrated by the dominant classes, amongst which can also be counted those meted out by the clergy. The opposition that existed between the clergy and the giullaresque world is an obvious one; the clergy faced the opposition of the only other common intellectual figure of this period, who was also its only rival in the dissemination of culture. The extreme mobility, uncontrollability and anti-institutionality of the giullare, contrasted totally with the stability and absolute conformism of the clergy. The aversion that the temporal authorities felt for the giullari led to various statutes and ordinances being passed to curb and limit the activities of the giullari (20).

The homogeneous entertainment of the giullare, in which the actor's capacity for mimicry is the main means of expression, was born from the popularisation of Biblical legends and thus free from the Church's sanctioning. However, this entertainment of invention, life, satire and rage, which referred to religion as a pretext for discussing the problems and the infamous condition of people in a polemic vein, became an instrument of dissent in the hands of the agent provocateur of this period, that is the giullare. The giullari, in their verbose invectives, interpreted religion in a humane and popular way. In fact, the interpretation of the Gospels was the bone of contention between the giullare and the hegemonic classes. Therefore, the giullare tried to portray the liturgy as being detached from reality and from primordial Christian objectives. Christianity, defender of indigent people, had, in its humble beginnings, preached love and humility, but had become, during the Middle Ages, an élite movement which promoted the socio-political exploitation of the 'masse dei diseredati' (Fo, 1977c, p.12). However, the vilest of crimes attributed to the ecclesiastical hierarchy was that of having accumulated wealth, not only material but also cultural. It eventually incorporated the art of the giullare in its bourgeois tradition, thus stealing it from the great tradition of the disinherited.

The giullare had often to escape from persecution, censorship and co-option into the courts, from which the 'official' tradition of the

Commedia dell'Arte was born. There were cases, nevertheless, of giullari who were accepted in the secular feudal courts and who enjoyed the protection of ecclesiastical dignitaries:

vis-à-vis all'intolleranza si oppongono esempi che mostrano come anche le gerarchie religiose fossero spesso inclini a permettere e, a volte, anche a proteggere gli spettacoli. [...] Il Cardinale Zaccaria Delfino presentava al Pontefice un suo parere in cui si affermava 'che le commedie emendate si debbono permettere' e [...] Monsignor Savelli faceva scrivere [...] una dissertazione con cui chiedeva il permesso di far erigere ad Orvieto un teatro a spese della comunità, e in cui si affermava la funzione morale del teatro e si illustrava persino l'utilità delle parti apparentemente sconce delle Commedie. (Taviani, 1969, p. XLIII)

The socio-political implications of such a move were evident: the major danger posed by the giullari remained in their ability to spread effectively values antithetical to those established and defended by the Church which repudiated the obscenities advocated by the comedians. Had the Church adopted the giullare's expressive modules, it might have been able to conceal the fundamental barriers of the politica culturale sanctioned by itself, which were now under siege from the giullari. As long as the theatre remained confined to the walls of the courts and the academies, its freedom and controversy did not arouse any polemics. But the giullaria (21) continued to spread its message, also to a vaster public of petit-bourgeois and illiterate plebeians, adding here and there buffoonesque improvisations of the noble condition. The Church maintained that the giullari had negated

the 'Christian Spirit' and leaned towards bad customs and pagan lasciviousness. This is the reason why eventually they adopted the mask, which was a method of hiding the real identity and of stereotyping, at the same time, a specific individual in society. The function of the mask is best shown by works from the Commedia dell'Arte period.

La Commedia dell'Arte, héritière de quelques déguisements carnavalesques, est restée longtemps fidèle au masque (Pantalon, Arlequin, etc.) solidaire de son caractère populaire. En dissimulant la physionomie de l'acteur, il autorise des boutades saugrenues dont il n'a pas à rougir et l'oblige surtout à représenter par la gestuation corporelle ce que son visage masqué ne peut rendre.
(J. Maertens, 1978, p. 110)

In the eyes of the people, the comedians were even more entertaining with their masks but to the Church, the masks seemed connected with necromantic magic. This new theatre of the giullari risked becoming a despicable upholder of an obscene reversal of order, as is apparent in the famous invective hurled at the popular theatre by Tommaso Garzoni and Niccolò Rossi:

Il nuovo teatro dei comici è contaminazione e profanazione. Esso, pur nel ristretto ambito d'un genere drammaturgico minore, è l'antitesi assoluta dei tratti che distinguono il cosmo delle humane litterae: nasce da gente sordida (non da animi nobilmente educati); risponde ad intenti mercenari (non a fini di gloria disinteressata); si risolve in scandaloso vagabondaggio (non in presenza culturalmente composta); si esprime attraverso maschere buffonesche (non attraverso personaggi);

sviluppa il linguaggio della parola sfacciata e del gesto 'ruffianesco' (non quello dello stile che sa 'coprir la cosa destramente'). Sia per gli aspetti strutturali sia per le componenti espressive, al giudizio di un ordine culturale che si riconosce nell'Umanesimo, la Commedia dell'Arte è l'Altro, e le sue manifestazioni sono irruzioni profane dell'Altro nel mondo aristocratico della forma.
(. Tessari, 1984, p. 17)

For the Church, theatre constituted a radical distortion of society and of its values: peaceful co-existence, work, class distinction, family organisation, female chastity. The comedians contaminated the conception of the 'poema', synthesis and emblem of the humanist culture, and thus contaminated the purity of woman, symbolic figure of social Christian conception (22).

The ecclesiastical condemnations were directed against the demoniac malaise of theatre, which had created values which justified idleness and greed. Theatre highlighted the most salient aspects of life: power, pleasure, Boccaccian and Machiavellian intrigue, embodying not only artem but also mores (23). The clergy disassociated itself from theatre because of these intrinsic characteristics that it had, which were capable of influencing negatively the spectator's mind. The time, which people had previously consecrated to religious rite, was replaced by time dedicated to the theatre. Time spent in theatre became synonymous with anarchy, vice and profanity. Theatre was associated with paganism, although this was denied vehemently by its defenders (24).

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It must be emphasised that Dario Fo based his theatre on the pre-Commedia dell'Arte period, from which he extracted the sources of Mistero Buffo. The Commedia dell'Arte can be isolated from the concept of popular theatre because it largely curbed the spontaneity of the giullare's art. The Commedia is essentially a form of the giullare's art absorbed by the hegemonic classes in order to entertain the idle classes. It is a mixture of 'clowning' and lazzi (stereotyped situations) which satirised the customs and vices of the time, according to the taste of the bourgeoisie.

Taking into account the Gramscian ethical function of the theatrical work which is always linked to a specific culture and civilisation (25), it can be seen that it was during the period of the Umanesimo and the Counter-Reformation that the first split between writers and the people occurred. The writers were no longer concerned with the popular sentiments of the masses nor were they devising ways of re-elaborating a new consciousness. Gramsci felt that in order to create a new national popular literature in Italy, there would necessary have to be an intellectual revolution which would have 'da noi la stessa funzione che hanno avuto la Riforma Protestante nei paesi germanici e la Grande Rivoluzione in Francia' (Gramsci in Mariani, et al, 1980, p. 911). For Fo instead, only a more committed relationship with the people was of necessity, as long as this relationship undertook to project the reality of a feudal past with traces of primitive

communism as propagated by the heretical sects of the 13th and 14th Centuries. Fo tends to research the past, not from the beginning of capitalism, but in pre-capitalist, feudal time before the Renaissance.

The development of Dario Fo's career is very similar to that of the giullare. He started his career as a 'courtjester' (26), appearing in 1952 on R.A.I., where he broadcasted, for eighteen weeks, the humourously grotesque monologues of Poor Nano; but he soon abandoned these bourgeois aspirations to become a popular giullare (27). Fo has tried to emulate the moralising professional story-tellers, either of the present (28) or of the past, but his giullare has a more specific ideology and a more faceted anarchical character. Fo makes his story-teller the spokesman of his implicit and obvious, revolutionary message which he never tries to hide. Moreover, he wants to re-awaken the 'revolutionary' spirit latent in the masses.

The late Sixties and early Seventies, which produced Mistero Buffo, saw two very important changes in Dario Fo's life. The first was with the bourgeois theatre

o meglio con le sue strutture fisse e le sue
convenzioni topografiche stereotipate, esemplificate
con la massima icasticità dalla televisione dello
Stato.
(Straniero, 1978, p. 7)

The second, reflected also in Mistero Buffo, concerned the repressive

and rigid structures of the left, represented by the Italian Communist Party (P.C.I.) and the A.R.C.I. (from 1969 onwards) (29). According to Straniero,

Fo globalizza l'oppressione politica della cultura del 'padrone' non solo in quanto informazione manipolata, cui contrappone la controinformazione come arma di classe (...), ma in quanto ha saccheggiato la cultura contadina preborghese, espropriando le masse popolari delle loro stesse possibilità espressive, che in quanto tali sono già eversive, perché inventive, liberanti, non codificabili nelle strutture e norme linguistiche repressive della cultura dominante.
(Straniero, 1978, p. 7)

These deviations were a consequence of the lack of autonomy; Fo had already participated in the cultural debates on the crisis of 'official' theatre but he did not want to restrict himself only to social critique. He conceived an expansion of his theatre towards the historical conflict between the classes, something which the P.C.I. was not prepared to do. This search for a 'revolutionary' and 'alternative' culture, had a direct influence on Fo's activities; he decided to abandon the Ente Teatrale Italiano (Italian Theatrical Society) in order to communicate directly with a new public. Thus, Mistero Buffo, born from Dario Fo's 'estrangement' from the bourgeois sphere of influence, was his choice for the new popular theatre.

According to leftist norms, Fo's militant work can be included in the concept of popular theatre since:

(è un) teatro che porta sul palcoscenico l'imitazione popolare: colore, gesto, modi, gergo popolare, neorealistico, divertente, pieno di violenza verbale, scenografica e coreografica, registrazione dei costumi di un quartiere popolare come se fossero dei rituali esotici. [...] teatro che parla del popolo, e presenta personaggi positivi, coscienti, operai e contadini, e soggetti attinenti alla vita del popolo, commedie e drammi sui problemi della classe operaia.
(Straniero, 1978, p. 9)

Fo's giullarata is in all likelihood very similar to the performance given by the medieval strolling players. Fo creates for himself this image of the proletarian-prophet with a buffonesque image, a heroic figure who represents the idiosyncrasies of the plebeians and the heretical and chimerical qualities inherent in the working class.

Oltre ai testi informi ed ambigui della prime letterature romanze, lo attraggono i vangeli apocritici, le figure di Fra' Dolcino e David Lazzaretti, i maledetti, i vinti e i perseguitati, compreso lo stesso Gesù Cristo considerato appunto sotto l'aspetto del Ribelle e del Giustiziere, com'è costantemente vissuto dalla tradizione popolare.
(Straniero, 1978, p. 14)

It is important to emphasise Dario Fo's fascination with the heretical, the unconventional, and his preoccupation with becoming part of the long historical elenchus of personae non gratae.

[...] Lungo tutto il corso bimillenario del Cristianesimo, accanto all'eresia dottrinale è sempre presente un tipo di eresia pauperistica e sociale, un filo di contestazione che unisce attraverso i secoli i circoncellioni e i poverelli di Lione, i patarini e i francescani (quelli autentici), i preti operai, i

'piccoli fratelli' e Simone Weil, e passa per Giordano Bruno, Arnaldo da Brescia, Thomas Muntzer e Gerrard Winstanley, quelli di cui parlano le enciclopedie e quelli di cui le enciclopedie preferiscono tacere (magari per pura ignoranza), come per l'appunto Winstanley e quel contestatore nascosto ma straordinario che fu il parroco Meslier, riconosciuto dai sovietici tra i precursori del comunismo ateo. (Straniero, 1978, p. 14)

Thus, his desire for inclusion in this elenchus is intended to show not only his political mannerism but also the denunciation he makes of the system, that suppresses any sign of opposition. In his shows, Fo exploits all the emotions that he can muster, from the resonance box of the stage to history, in order to make his i'accuse.

According to Mitchell, Mistero Buffo can be considered one of the most polemical and popular works of the European dopo guerra theatre. Object of scorn for the P.C.I. and also the Vatican, Mistero Buffo was, however, shown on R.A.I. in 1977 with great success. Prior to this event, it was performed in several parts of the world to an estimated 40 million spectators (30).

The title Mistero Buffo is taken from Vladimir Mayakovsky's work Mystery-Bouffe (31). Fo's Mistero Buffo consists of thirteen or more distinct texts (32) which are divided into two sections: the first reveals what the 'Mistero Buffo' is and the second comprises texts taken from Christ's life and Passion, the succession of the episodes can vary from performance to performance. No edition shows exactly

the same text nor do they include the words that Fo would improvise during a performance (33). Thus, as in a Commedia dell'Arte canovaccio, any published edition remains only an 'outline' of the text, which gives a limited and colourless idea of the stage version of the work.

In the introduction to each Mistero, Dario Fo reveals the main plot and the historical justification for his having salvaged that particular medieval text. Dario Fo believes in the essential authenticity of his texts although at times he is the first to admit that facts have been altered through the ages. However, he explains that these alterations are minimally important; what is important to him is not so much literary faithfulness but the fact that it is possible to manipulate and re-interpret the texts according to different ideologies.

Quando io racconto in che modo il giullare medioevale insegnava a interpretare la Bibbia e il Vangelo, ripeto l'operazione dell'autentico giullare che trovava in certi episodi della Bibbia e del Vangelo le chiavi per le sue parabole dei comportamenti eterni del potere e di chi è soggetto al potere[...]. Quando ripeto il modo in cui il giullare faceva leggere la Bibbia e il Vangelo, io indico al popolo di oggi quale era il suo modo di scoprire nella cultura di allora, la Bibbia il Vangelo appunto, la sorte che gli spettava. Qual era il suo modo di esprimersi per bocca dei giullari e l'invito a riappropriarsi della sua cultura per saper affrontare oggi di nuovo la cultura dotta libresca.

(Fo in C. Valentini, 1977, p. 122, note 2)

The introduction written by Dario Fo for the Mazzotta Edition concludes with a quotation from Gramsci, whom he acknowledges as the source of the theoretical basis of his work:

Conoscere sè stessi vuol dire essere sè stessi, vuol dire essere padroni di sè stessi, distinguersi, uscire fuori del caos, essere un elemento di ordine, ma del proprio ordine e della propria disciplina ad un ideale. E non si può ottenere ciò se non si conoscono anche gli altri, la loro storia, il susseguirsi degli sforzi che essi hanno fatto per essere ciò che sono, per creare la civiltà che hanno creato e alla quale noi vogliamo sostituire la nostra [...].
(Gramsci in Fo, 1977c, p. 13)

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Chapter 4:

Mistero Buffo

The methodology used in this chapter will be one of textual analysis, whereby the socio-political attitudes of the writer are revealed. Thus, the sub-texts are interpreted in accordance with the guidelines of Marxist criticism which stress the ideological nature and social function of the oeuvre. Furthermore, Marxist criticism concentrates on the oppression of the underprivileged and attributes the deprivation and exploitation to the patriarchal and the economic structure of society. Fo, in keeping with Marxist ideology, advocates how a social system can be changed by exposing the corruption intrinsic to it and by making people aware that they are entitled to a better deal. His theatre, therefore, is not studied purely from an aesthetic point of view, but to reveal the educational prescriptions which are encoded within its texts. In Marxist-oriented literary criticism there is always an obligatory translation of theory into practice and of reflection into action. Hence, we aim to show how the various medieval source texts are subverted by Dario Fo to reveal a totally different and potentially militant message.

From this analysis we deduce the distinctive themes which make up this text. The most recurring social theme is that of human misery and the lack of dignity in the human condition. Arising out of this is the denunciation of unjust laws which constrict the underprivileged classes. Another aspect of this theme, dealt with in Mistero Buffo, is the mother/son

relationship vis-à-vis the chauvinism of those in power and its confrontation with officialdom, where the mother/son relationship is symbolic of the woman/man conflict. Fo also expounds the theme of Christ as a social phenomenon and looks at the Christ-figure as a martyr, a revolutionary, or both.

On a political level, Fo elaborates the theme of injustice and power abuse in capitalist society, the creation of bureaucracy within that framework and the megalomania, i.e. obsession with power that results. Fo emphasises the distortion of popular reality and the myth of hegemony that the ruling class has created by appropriating the cultural heritage of the people and making it to be their own. Out of this is borne the theme of ideological indoctrination of the masses by Church and State alike, for purposes of repression, resulting in a degradation of the lower classes to the extent that the oppressed are forced to create defence mechanisms with which to confront their 'masters'. Another underlying theme which one can trace in Mistero Buffo is that the ideals which Christian doctrine upholds, i.e. peace, joy, happiness, are not within the reach of the lower classes, for they are robbed of the essential means necessary to experience these basic rights. Furthermore, Fo sets out to expose that it is the very institution which purports to uphold these ideals that, together with the State, deprives the people of these rights.

In this chapter we take a closer look at a text of Mistero Bufro and some of its variants. In the first section, the material salvaged can vary from contrasti like 'Rosa fresca aulentissima ch'appari inver' la state' (1) to texts and dramatisations of biblical stories, moralities and medieval fables, which make essentially the same point: 'official' literature often distorts popular reality; it transforms it and manipulates it to present a message that is more in keeping with its world view and morality.

In 'Rosa fresca aulentissima', the first 'Mistero Bufro' Fo proposes, he gives his own reading and explanation of this medieval text. Tradition now claims that it is the work of a fairly learned court poet but Fo tries to show that it was a text recovered from the popular tradition and that the original author of this contrasto was a peasant posing as a grandee. In scholastic textbooks, it is presented as a timid story of courtly love concerning a boy whose lasciviousness is contained by the gentle blandishments of the girl, who is the object of his lust. Fo tells his audience that if one were to restore its original meaning, it would more likely be an example of sexual harassment, in which the boy, a rich tax-collector, succeeds in raping the girl and, because of a special law that protected the rich,

In this chapter we take a closer look at a text of Mistero Buffo and some of its variants. In the first section, the material salvaged can vary from contrasti like 'Rosa fresca aulentissima ch'appari inver' la state' (1) to texts and dramatisations of biblical stories, moralities and medieval fables, which make essentially the same point: 'official' literature often distorts popular reality; it transforms it and manipulates it to present a message that is more in keeping with its world view and morality.

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In 'Rosa fresca aulentissima', the first 'Mistero Buffo' Fo proposes, *he gives his own reading and explanation of this medieval text.* Tradition now claims that it is the work of a fairly learned court poet but Fo tries to show that it was a text recovered from the popular tradition and that the original author of this contrasto was a peasant posing as a grandee. In scholastic textbooks, it is presented as a timid story of courtly love concerning a boy whose lasciviousness is contained by the gentle blandishments of the girl, who is the object of his lust. Fo tells his audience that if one were to restore its original meaning, it would more likely be an example of sexual harassment, in which the boy, a rich tax-collector, succeeds in raping the girl and, because of a special law that protected the rich,

was able to turn the tables by charging her with his seduction. This story is not only one of sexual harassment, but should be seen as the denunciation of the unjust laws which protected the gentry at the expense of the poor, defenceless peasant.

In a second television transmission of Mistero Buffo, to illustrate this point, Fo added a sketch of English origin called L'avvocato inglese which dates back to the end of the 16th Century (2). It deals with the story of a man accused of having raped a girl of the nobility. As in the previous text, the accused becomes the accuser: the lawyer, in a brilliant histrionic tirade, proves that the girl's physical attributes were the cause of the man's assault on her. These two texts are highly topical because they touched on an 'excuse' which is still often used today by the lawyers of those accused in Italian rape trials.

'Rosa fresca aulentissima' is, according to Fo, an invention of the people, which had become the cultural property of the bourgeoisie after its long association with Dante and the Dolce Stil Novo:

[...] La borghesia nei canoni, li determina. Poi dice, 'lo strambotto è roba nostra', non dice certo che lo strambotto è il modo di cantare dei contadini di un tempo, degli artigiani, e che aveva un significato legato al lavoro, al rito della terra. No, lo distrugge. Quando va a teatro dove c'è Rosa fresca aulentissima il pubblico operaio, con tutto che è roba sua, non lo riconosce affatto, non gli appartiene. Per noi invece, qual'è l'operazione? Prendiamo Rosa fresca aulentissima e la mettiamo in

scena restituendogli tutto quello che è la sua origine vera. E allora succede che quel pubblico capisce tutto, capisce da dove viene, i suoi modi di dire, i suoi proverbi, il discorso di classe che c'è dentro, che viene edulcorato.
(Fo in L. Binni, 1977, pp. 3-4)

In Fo's popular theatre, the workers participate totally in the play and they understand that what is being debated is their own dilemma. The same happens to the petty bourgeois and especially to the proletarianised students, who find in this space, the forum for the vital discussion of their problems.

Taking the Einaudi Edition of Mistero Buffo as our model, the first sketch (3) after the long and instructive tirade on 'Rosa fresca autentissima', starts with a chorus intoned by flagellant monks who inflict suffering on themselves and on each other in order to gain salvation, in Paradise, or more likely for 'erebophobia' (4).

Chiohi Bati', Bative Ehiashiehi! (E) compagno, metif
in acera, Batif forte e volentera, n'av' doja d'eti
bôti: bative! No trambit de ves isbiot(i), no
trambit le visigade, carne rota e disciunade.
Chiohih bati', bative Ehiashiehi! Chi vol torse
salvasion c'ol se bata de rûscon c'ol fragel a
batascioch, no fi' mostra de daf bot: bative!
(Fo, 1977a, p. 25)

This fear of not earning Paradise was instilled in the people by the ecclesiastical doctrine of the time. The 'battuti' were conditioned to live this life of sacrifice imposed by a harsh Church and based on a psychological game: in fact, in the play, the aura of piety and of sacrifice is completely lacking. The comical aspect of the action of these flagellants is underlined by the repetition of their cry of pain 'Chiochi, bati, bative Ehiaeehie!', which never ceases.

The term 'battuti' itself is made to have a Marxist connotation, being almost synonymous with 'oppressed'. These peasants are oppressed or 'battuti' by the hegemonic ideology which safeguards the interests of the powerful. However, in this laude (term used with a certain satirical intent), there is a certain demystification of the evangelical Christ, the trans-human Christ, while there is a total identification with a peasant Christ, a suffering, misunderstood Christ who shared conditions similar to theirs:

[C']ol Segnor onnipotent(e) foe batift veritament(e).
[...] Far salvarghe d'ol peccat Jesus Xristo foe picat,
'nsu la crozza foe 'ncludet, su la faccia g' foe
spiddat: bative!
(Po, 1977e, p. 25)

The 'Lauda dei Battuti' ends with an invective directed at the hegemonical exploiters, who condemn not only the very existence on earth of the peasant but also that of the peasant Christ:

E vui signori de l'Usira vui n'avrit mala ventura, vui
c'havit spùt a Kristo col sciorirve al mal acquisto:
bativei vui c'havit turciat 'm l'uga i danari a gui(e)
che s'ida. Ohiohich bati', bativei! Ehiaiehie!
(Fo, 1977a, p. 27)

In the text 'Strage degli Innocenti' (5), Fo presents a number of
different characters in a long dramatic monologue. A mad woman, who
has substituted a lamb for her dead son, addresses the soldiers, who
assume the lamb is a baby, and then a statue of the Madonna from whom
she seeks comfort:

No scapit, Madona ... no catèf pagura che mi no sont
un soldat ... sont una dona ... una mama anch mi ...
col me bumbin ... Scordiv chi loga tranquilla, che i
suldai i sont andat via ... sentève, pora dona, che n'
avit fait d'ol curir ... Pèime vardà ol vostro
fiolì. Oh! me l'hè bel et culoriti! Quant temp ol
g'ha? Belo, belo ... me l'hè alegher ... ol rid ...
bel, belo ... ol dev averge giusta ol temp d'ol me
... Me ol g'ha nom? Jesus? L'hè un bel nom: Jesus!
Belo belo ... Jesulìn ... ol g'ha già doi Gençit ...
ohi che simpatech ... ol me n'ol g'ha an'xo fait i
denci ... l'hè stait un poch malad ol mes pasat, ma
ades ol sta ben ... l'hè chi che ol dorma propi me un
angiulin ... (lo chiama) Marco! Ol g'ha nom Marco ...
ol dorma propi di giust ... Oh cara, me t'set bell Set
bel anca ti ... Marcolin ... L'hè anca vera che
nojàltre mame a s'em fait in d'una manera che ol
noster fiolìn ol ghe pare ol piú belo de t'iti ... ol
pol averge anch qual difet, ma n'inc no l' videm
miga. Ag voj tanto de quel ben a sto bestioli, che se

m'al purtâsen via a gnirîa matal
(Fo, 1977e, p. 37)

Fo, who is also an accomplished actor when he performs and interprets these different roles (6), contrasts the voices and attitudes of the mother, the ruthless and arrogant soldier and the mute Madonna with disconcerting speed. He also succeeds in emphasising the state of deprivation of the mother full of sorrow, who in the end leaves the scene singing a lullaby to the lamb even though she fully realises that it is only a 'bestiolî'. The monologue is only interrupted from time to time by the Chorus. The function of the chorus is quite important because it criticises God, who is supposed to be omnipotent and merciful, yet seems to draw some type of 'satisfaction' from the sight of a suffering woman. He mocks her role as a mother by allowing her to 'mother' an animal. The chorus reflects Fo's disparaging attitude towards the 'humane' role of Christianity!

MADRE-Ch, ol s'è desvegià ... ol ridei! Vardîf,
[...] Madona, se no l'è bel de catà ol me Marcolin
... Ch, Madona, av sentî mal? Fiv forza, no
piagnî ... che ol pe'or a l'è pasat ... Ol andrâ
tùto a fornî ben, vedarî ... L'è abasta aveg
fidûcia in la Providenza che ghe aîda a totîl
CORO-Signor, che ti è tanto misericordiâ de fag' gnî
la folia a quei che non sont capaz de tras foera
ol dolor.

MADRE-Nana, nana, bel bambin de la tua nana. La
Madona la ninava 'tant che i angiuli cantava, San
Giusep in pie ol dormiva, ol Gesù bambin rideva e
l'Erode ol biastemava, mila fioiolt in zel volava,
nana nana.
(Fo, 1977e, p. 39)

Fo tries to avoid sentimentalism not only by means of the bizarre situations that he portrays but also through the chorality of his acting performance in which he successively changes roles as a quick-change artist.

* * *

The unusual 'pathos' and the sense of tragedy in 'Strage degli innocenti' is immediately contrasted with the zestful and paradoxical 'Moralità del cieco e dello storpio' (7) which is a grotesque, comical sketch, originally attributed to Andrea della Vigna in the 15th Century, which exists also in Belgian and French versions. The episode narrates the strange meeting of two beggars, a blindman and a cripple, who decide to join forces. These two outcasts, again typical of the protagonists of Fo's early plays, invoke the charity of passers-by by complaining about their miserable condition.

CIECO - Aidème, bona zente ... fàitme la carità, a mi che son povareto e desgrasiò, orbo de doj oji, che, o meno male, no me pòdo vardarme, che m' gavarìa gran compassion e vegnarìa disperat a anatiarme.

STORPIO - Ohj zente de core, ahìbèt pità de mi che sont consciat in la manera che an dol vardarme am senti catar de tanto spaventu che vocarìa scapar de tìte gambe, se no fusse che sont storpiat de no moverme se no cònt ol caret.

(Fo, 1977e, p. 43)

Both find themselves in trouble: the Blindman's dog has disappeared and the wheels of the Cripple's cart have broken. In order to solve their personal dilemma, the Blindman decides to carry the Cripple on his arms; he in turn uses his eyes to guide the Blindman. The dialogue used to explain their misfortunes, is polyphonic and reminds one of the speeches of the comedians of the variété because of the numerous puns.

STORPIO - A no podo miga gní lillb ... Deo malediga
toeti i rodi del mundo e a faga gní quadrate
che i no podan più andà intorno a rudulà.

[...]

STORPIO - Ohj che pensada! Dei d'averge on gran
zervelo ti, pign de rode e rodele. Ohj che
el Segnur Deo m'ha fait la grazia de
'mpestarne le rode del to zervelo per farne
andare inturna de novo a dimandar la carità.

(Po, 1977e, pp. 43-45)

The world of the beggar is often a world of shrewdness in which the degree of their manifest physical deformity determines, at times, their ill-gotten gains. Thus, it is understandable why it is so important for the two beggars to avoid Christ, since they do not want to risk having their afflictions cured by a miracle. This would force them to look for a job, have a boss and lead a more disciplined if not harsher life. In fact, as soon as their improvised human machine gets close to Jesus Christ, the two men express their preoccupation that He might cure them against their wish.

STORPIO - (...) I disse che se sto fiol de Deo ol gnise a pasar de chi loga, mi gneria miracolat d'un boto ... e ti anca, a la misma manera ... Pensaghe un poc, se daverò ghe cata a tuti e doi la disgrazia de ves liberadi di nostri disgrazi. D'un boto ag s'trovaram in la cundision d'es obligat a tor via un mestier per impoder campare.
[...]

CIECO - 'Vagj a lavorar, vagabondo, - i te diserà, - brascio robade a la galera ...' E a perderemio ol gran privilez che g'avemo in pari ai siori, ai paroni, de tor gabelas: lori col slongar i truchi de la lege, nojaltri con la pità. Li doi a gabar cojon!!
(Fo, 1977e, pp. 47-49)

However, for all their awkward efforts to avoid entering Christ's field of vision, the two are miraculously cured. The Cripple curses fate which now forces him to find a meagre job or more likely to die of hunger if he is unable to do so. The Blindman, in a show of lyrical naïveté praises the beauty of his own toes which he sees for the first time. The paradoxical ending of this text, in which the miserable condition of the workers in the Middle Ages is shown from the perspective of these two outcasts, presents a stronger accusation than, for example, the dépouement of Gli arcangeli non giocano a flipper. In the Mistero Buffo text, the sense of class distinction is much stronger: it is as if the members of the different classes are members of different cultures, that exert a reciprocal force on each other, but do not find any points of convergence. Therefore, this scene contrasts the world of the beggar, of the worker, of the peasant and that of the 'Lords' (Siiori) which are separate but contiguous universes.

This grotesque situation, which emphasises the degradation in the world of the lower classes, underlines the revolutionary message which purports, by induction, the overthrow of the 'bosses' - the land plutocrats - while at the same time it takes note of the charlatanism of modern beggars in a way that often echoes Peachum's rabble of false beggars in Brecht's The Threepenny Opera (8).

Fo, when simultaneously acting these two roles, maintains the two roles as physically distinct as possible. He is comical and natural even though he often utters the words of one character while physically acting the part of the other. This is a good example that reveals that his is a theatre of situation in which one does not need to identify with the characters. It is typical in these plays that no actor represents Christ on stage. *Here, He is a described, objective presence* whom the two protagonists try to avoid. The focus of the text does not fall on the supernatural but concentrates exclusively on the misery and deprivation of the beggars' condition.

In the text of 'Le nozze di Cana' (9), the two main characters, 'l'ubriaco e l'angelo prologatore' discuss who has more right to tell

the story of the wedding at Canaan. Here Fo upsets the canons established by tradition and authority by taking episodes consecrated by the Church and turning them into farce with a distinctively provocative flavour.

This episode depicts the first miracle of Christ from a popular point of view. In it, the divine nature of Christ is minimised, whilst the Dionisiac, joyful and pagan aspects of the plot, are accentuated. Christ becomes the soul of the party and the catalyst of the Bacchanalian excesses which derive from it.

The passage starts with the dispute between the angel and the drunkard: the archangel speaks in the aulic and curial language of the authorities and makes all the insinuations typical of the speech of the powerful. He presents the official version of the miracle that occurred in Canaan. The elegant and eloquent nuncio starts his oration in a condescending manner:

Fate atenzion, brava zente, che mi voi parlarve de
una storia vera, una storia che l'è cominzada ...
(Fo, 1977e, p. 59)

The archangel's splendour eclipses the drunkard, a wobbling guest at the wedding, who wants to tell the story from his point of view, which is naturally more uncouth, more materialistic but possibly more realistic. The drunkard starts by interrupting the eloquent speech of

the archangel:

UBRIACO - Anco mi me ve voi contare de ona cioca ...
de un'imbrigliadura ...
ANGELO - 'Briagon!
UBRIACO - Vorria parlarve ...
ANGELO - Cito ... no parlare!
UBRIACO - Ma mi ...
ANGELO - Cito ... debio sprologare mi, che son lo
sprologo! Bona zente, tutto quello che
andremo a contare ol sarà tuto vero, tuto
recomenzao dai libri o dai vanzelli. Tuto
quelo che l'è sortio non elo de fantasia
...
UBRIACO - Anco mi voi contar, no de fantasia: me
son catat un'imbrigliadura sì dolza, una
cioca belissima che non me voglio catar
gimai plu cioche al mondo per non
desmentegarme de questa cioca belissima che
g'ho agoso adesso ... che l'è una cioca
...
ANGELO - 'Briagon!...
UBRIACO - Vorria contare ...
ANGELO - Nol Ti non te conti ...eh?!
UBRIACO - Eh ... ma mi ...
ANGELO - SSSI!
[...]
Bona zente ... Tuto quello che andremo a
contarne ol sarà tuto vero, tuto o l'è
sortio dei libri o dei vanzelli. Quel poco
che gh'em tacat de fantasia ...
(Fo, 1977e, p. 59)

It is interesting to note the play on the word 'sprologo' and then
'sprologare' which can be understood to be the equivalent of the word
'sproloquio'. 'Sproloquio' means a long and inconclusive speech; it
is a Freudian slip cleverly introduced by Fo to indicate to the
audience that the archangel is the one more likely to be talking
nonsense.

The interruptions become more and more vociferous until the archangel has his feathers ruffled by the drunkard. The drunkard plucks a feather from his wings, throws it in the air and blows at it to keep it floating. The extremely irritated angel interrupts his retreat to threaten the drunkard who is playing with his feather:

UBRIACO - Uhi, che bela piuma colorada ...
 ANGELO - 'Brigoni!...
 UBRIACO - (Sussulta e mima di ingoiare la piuma, tossisce) Eh, ... ma ...
 ANGELO - SSS!
 [...]
 ANGELO - Ma ti vol sortir da sto palco? [...]
 UBRIACO - Mi sortaria volentera se ti me t'accompagni, che mi no son capaz de tra' avanti un pie ... ca me stravaco, a me ribalto en grugnarme par tera ... Se ti et tanto bon de compagniame, dopo mi te conto de sta cioca belissima ...
 ANGELO - [...] Foral...Foral... Te desca so fora a pesciade, voh!
 [...]
 UBRIACO - Ah! me scasci a pesciade? [...] Zentel... Avì ascoltat? Un anzol ch'el me vol trar fora a pesciade ... a mi! Un anzol... (Aggressivo rivolto verso l'angelo) Vegne ... vegne anzelon [...] Che mi te strapeno 'me 'na gaina ... at strapo i piume a una a una, anco dal cul ... dal de drio ... Vegne, galinon ... Vegne!
 ANGELO - Aida ... No tocarme ... Aida ... Sassino.
 (Po, 1977e, pp. 61-63)

Feeling 'threatened' by the drunkard, the angel leaves the stage. In this exchange of words, the drunkard, a character analogous to Po's long series of peasant-characters such as the Blind Man, the Cripple and the Clown, prevails over the archangel because of the greater immediacy of his speech and his spontaneous vulgarity. The testimony

of the drunkard is also more authentic because it is based on personal observation; he had participated in the feast, he had partaken in the 'spirit' of the festivities, whilst the archangel, far too aristocratic, arrogant and virtuous, had not lived this experience except from the lofty heights of the heavens above. His testimony is taken from recorded testimony, from the written Gospels.

Symbolically, the archangel's retreat represents a victory of the working class over the hegemonic class. The drunkard narrates the events of the wedding at Canaan, by showing the joyfulness of the feast and by appreciating the epicureal delights of the nuptial banquet. It is interesting to note how he participates in the tragedy of the hosts when they discover that the wine has turned to vinegar. The drunkard insinuates that this can be taken for an omen of impending misfortune:

[...] Eno descovertò che una botte intera de vin, un
tinasso de vin impruntat per ul banchet de matrimoni
ul s'è reversat in aset' i me rispunde. 'Oh ... Oh
... tutt el vin in aset? ... Oh, che disgrassia ...
spusa bagnada a l'è furtlinada, ma bagnada in t'al aset
l'è disgrasslada de schisciare ... de casciare via!...
(Po, 1977e, p. 63)

In the official version, the wine was simply finished, but by adding the detail of it turning to vinegar, he increases the participation of the peasants in the drama. The tottering man describes Christ's intervention as the amazing work of a magician. The description of

The miracle of the wine which inebriated the benefactor, is done in a disconnected, but highly onomatopoeic and allusive manner:

Apene che l'ha parlat insci la Madonna, tütü, sübit,
han vist spuntat, fioringhe sui laver del Jesus, un
suriso inni dolzu, me inni dolzu in sü l'aver, che se
nu te stavet atentu, par la cumusiu, te se stacava i
rudeli di gencor e tumburaven süi diddò del pie.
Doize stu surisul... Apene l'ha finì de parlä, stu
sovin el g'ha dà un bazutin süi nas a la sua mama e
l'ha dit: 'Bon, zente, podria verghè dodeze sidele
impiendide de aqua ciara e neta?' L'è stat un fülmin,
trachete, dodeze sidele son rivà l' davanti,
impiendide d'acqua, che mi, vedè tuta quell'acqua in un
colp sol, me sont sentì infin male, me pareva de
negare ... bojai... S'è fai un silensio che pareva de
vesser in gesa al Sanctus, e stu Jesus l'ha
insciuscicà un po' cui man, dando de s'cioch, de tiron
cui dit, a s'cioch, e pö l'ha valzà su un man, cun tri
dit sulamente, che i alter d'ü i e tegneva schisciàt, e
l'ha cuminzat a far d'ü segni suravia a l'acqua ... di
segni che fan solament i fiol de Deo. [...] D'un boto
me senti rivà de dent i boc del nas un parfüm cum de
uva schisciada, nun pudeva confundesse ... a l'era
vini!

(Ro, 1977e, p. 65)

The drunkard then adds that he heard a conversation between Jesus and the Madonna; Jesus was insisting that his mother drink his wine, since it could only do her good. This statement in a way mocks Christ's invitation to the faithful to drink his blood which is the source of eternal life.

'Oh acra donai oh Madonnai mama! me sun smentegat,
scüseme, tegnevine un goto anca vui, bevetne un
gato'. 'No, no fiol, grazie, at ringrasi, me mi non
podi bever, che mi non sono abittada al vino, me fa
turnà la testa ... che dopo disì i stupidadi'. 'Ma
no, mama, no te pö far male, te menarà solamente un

po' de alegria! No te pò far mal, sto vino, a l'è vin
s'ceto questo, a l'è vin bon ... a l'hu fai me!
(Fo, 1977e, p. 67)

Since the Son appeared to have insisted so strongly that his mother should drink some wine, the good Christian who loves his wine, seems encouraged to believe that wine cannot be considered 'un'inversion del diaol':

E peu, a ghe non anò di canaja, malarbeti, che va
intorna a raccontare che ol vino a l'è un'inversion del
diaol, e l'è peccato, l'è un'inversion del diaol
satanazzo ... Ma te paresse che se ol vin ol fùdesse
un'inversion del diaol satanazz, ol Jesus ghe l'avaria
dato de bever a la sua mama?
(Fo, 1977e, p. 67)

In his drunken stupor, he reasons that had Adam had a glass of good wine in his hand when the Serpent appeared to him, he would not have been at all tempted by the Apple and thus the Fall of Man would have been avoided and with it the necessity of having to work. The logic (which is, if anything, illogical) behind these thoughts, seems to indicate how willing people in general are to accept any excuse which justifies their defying centuries of religious indoctrination.

The Madonna as well as Jesus manifest their simple humanity in this text. The mother-son relationship is not overtly reverent nor ethereal; it is wholesome and practical and reveals the strong family links which exist between peasants. Jesus appears at the wedding in

the guise of a wine merchant, proud of his product ('a l'è vin bon ... a l'hu fai mè!...') and not very much like the Son of God, 'the miracle maker', as in the image suggested by the official version. Jesus participates in the festivities as a member of the peasant community. He is their mentor, not the Messiah who is starting his public life. This Christ has all the expectations and aspirations of an ordinary man of that class.

The wedding of Canaan loses its religious solemnity and becomes a banquet like the many others that are frequently narrated in medieval literature. Bakhtin recognises the importance these Boccaccian descriptions which are manifested in the works of so many later writers and film makers as well, from Rabelais to Pasolini (10). The hedonistic irreverence of the drunkard also extends to his presenting his vision of Paradise; he imagines it is a big wine vat in which the souls can splatter to their hearts content. The socialist condemnation of alcohol abuse, which is considered a means of escaping the realities of life and the daunting duties of the working class, is opposed in this text; Fo seems to be mocking the new morality of the Comunisti, by having, in the great tradition of the Lombard strolling-players, a quasi-utopian vision of collective festivities and the pleasures of eating and drinking.

Perhaps the most significant text of Mistero Buffo is 'La Nascita del Giullare' (11), a text that usually accompanies 'La Nascita del Villano'. This text, of oriental origin, is derived from a Sicilian text of the Ducento. It reveals how the birth of the giullare gave rise to the secular, popular treatment of Christ and of supernatural events.

The narrator of this text is the giullare who, prior to the telling of his humble origins, jokingly points out to the audience the aim of his task:

Giular ca son mi ... che fa i salt e ca 'l trambula e
che ... oh ... oh ... a u far rider, ca foi coi alt e
fai vedar com'a sont groli e groai i balon che vai
d'intorna a far guere son sfigurat, o traì via el
pileo e ... pffs ... soi sengobrà.
(Fo, 1977e, p. 73)

Claiming to be the 'fruit of a miracle', he tells his story which is meant above all to be didactic: 'Vegnì chî ca è ora e lōgu ca'l fa 'l pejasso tutt inturna, mi a v'insegnî, vegna ...' (Fo, 1977e, p.73). The ensuing story warns one of the myth of the 'powerful' who have misappropriated the word of the Gospel to create their own laws which condition those around themselves to lead unworthy, sub-human lives. The giullare's poignant story has certain affinities with Pirandello's Sicilian novels from the point of view of the human misery and the

lack of dignity in the human condition, especially in the social conflicts between the landowner and the peasant. 'La nascita del giullare' questions the morale of the lords who have no respect for the lives and social condition of the peasant.

A servant discovers a mountain and cultivates the land until a rich land-owner decides to confiscate the now fertile land, with the help of the local bishop and thus with the sanction of the Church. When the peasant refuses to leave his land, the lord rapes his wife in front of his children. At this point, his family abandons him because of his obstinacy and he nevertheless loses his land. He decides to commit suicide, but just as he is about to take this drastic step, a stranger arrives and asks him for water. The peasant offers him not only water but wine; he then realises that the stranger is Christ, who promises to help him by performing a miracle which will permit the peasant to speak a new language that will 'cut like a knife' and permit him to mock and to deflate the ego and undermine the power of the mighty. Christ confers on him the mission of the giullare which is to spread the news of the oppression of the poor throughout the whole country, so as to ferment rebellion.

The mission of the giullare is political rather than religious, albeit sacred in origin; his subversive aim is to scorn and deride the hegemonic classes and to create a new awareness amongst the oppressed. Thus, the giullare has been entrusted by a higher

authority with assuming a prevalent position among those who cannot speak for themselves and have been stripped of their dignity. He will be their spokesman:

Ti devi schisciare sti padrun, e i previti e tûti quei
che va intorna, i nodari, i avogador, quei che va
d'intorna. No par ben de ti, par la tua tera, ma par
quei che ò come ti, ca non han tera e che non han
gnente e che han de soffregar. sojamente e che non han
dignità da vantare. Campar de servelo, e no de pie!
(Po, 1977e, p. 81)

When he recites this play, Po portrays not only the giullare but also the peasant-Christ. The giullare originated from poverty, from degradation and from anger and for these reasons he has the right to expose the injustices, the abuses of power and the insolence of the bosses.

* * *

In the 'Nascita del Villano' (12), the text is revived almost in its original form, as played by the giullare Matazone da Calignano. Continuing with the saga of the giullare-villano, the perspective of the villano, the lowest form of human subservience, is established by Dario Fo in his introduction to 'Nascita del villano', when he points out the villano's place in social order:

[...] Lassé c'è un angelo, qui il padrone, il signore,
il signore delle terre, e qui c'è il contadino, o
meglio il villano.
(Fo, 1977e, p. 82)

From this simple but ingenious dichotomy, this text goes on to depict in the most crude fashion, the 'official' treatment of the villano. 'Nascita del villano' narrates how the servile peasant was born from an ass's 'slofa tremenda', after Adam had refused to give another one of his ribs to create a creature who was prepared to do the most menial jobs for his master.

The signore teaches the servant, under the guise of religious instruction, that his fate is to remain that of a vulgar and ignorant creature, even though he has an eternal soul through which he may transcend the misery of his condition. The signore's argument is based on a visitation he had from an angel, who came from the heavens above to advise him on how to deal with his servant. The angel's speech is again in line with that of the 'angelo prologatore', being righteous, rhetorical and arrogant, in accordance with biblical tradition as professed by man:

Far ordine del Segnur, ti, da sto momento, ti serà
patron e maggior e lu vilan minor. No est stabilito
et scripto [...]
(Fo, 1977e, p. 87)

What follows can only be described as a diatribe on the presumed life of a villano, as envisaged by the boss and sanctioned by the Church. The ulterior motives of the boss are immediately clear: the life of the villano is to be of a sub-human standard; he must be completely subservient to his master. He is made to be a despicable, vile creature; no matter what hardships are heaped upon him, the villano shall always remain 'all'inferno [...] destinat' (Po, 1977e, p. 93). After listing in detail the villano's monthly routine, the divine messenger concludes with these sententious words:

[...] l'anema no ghe l'ha/ e ol Deo nol pò scultà./ E
come podrà aveg l'anema sto vilan bec/ se l'hè gni
foera d'un aseno cun t'un pet?/
(Po, 1977e, p. 95).

This affirmation reveals the moral blackmail of the dominant classes. Po sees an affinity between the villano and the giullare; both seem not to have a soul and they are not fooled by the boss's religious deception. The origin of the villano is therefore also the origin of the giullare. In these two texts, Dario Fo un masks himself as both a giullare and a villano, a man who nevertheless has dignity (after all the dignity of all men is the theme of this piece) and can no longer retain his anger, thus he points a finger at those who have perpetuated the myth of hegemony.

In this spectacular and Ionesco-like tableau, 'Resurrezione di Lazzaro' (13), death is the leit-motif although with extraordinary nuances. This sketch is designed to put even Fo's artistic and chameleonic capacities to the test. When acting this role, he interprets a multitude of people who gather to see Christ resurrecting Lazarus. This episode is born from the contamination of the attraction that the medieval miracle possessed and the contemporary revue show. The structure of this text is more polyphonic than any other in Mistero Buffo. In this passage, an entire crowd of people ranging from ten to a hundred spectators, is masterly impersonated by Fo, the actor. Fo ascertains the following in the introduction:

The text of the Resurrection of Lazarus is a virtuoso's battle horse because the giullare often found himself having to play as many as 15 or 16 characters one after the other, with no way of indicating the changes except with his body - by striking a posture, without even changing his voice. It's the kind of piece which calls on the performer to improvise according to the audience's laughter, cadences and silences. In practice, it's an improvisation which requires occasional ad-libbing. (Fo in Mitchell, 1984, pp. 22-23)

The first distinct character to be impersonated is that of the grave-keeper who welcomes the crowd of people at the cemetery:

- Oh scuse! Oh l'è questo ol simitieri, campusanto, duè che vai ol suscitamento d'ul Lazzaro?

- Sì, l'è quest.
 - Ah bon.
 - On moment, des palanche par entrar.
 - Des palanche?
 - Fasemo do.
 - Doi palanche?! Boja, e parché?
 - Parché mi a sont ol guardian d'ol simitieri e vialtri a vegnì dentar a impiascicà tütu, a rüinà i sciesi e a schiassar l'erba, e mi ho de veg compensat de tüt i fastidi e i scruseri che mi impianti. Doi palanche o na s' vede ol miracol.
- (Fo, 1977a, p. 59)

The grave-keeper gathers around himself the curious voyeuristic crowd, by making incisive remarks and clever jibes. In this highly noisy and busy scene, Fo makes a few apt statements on the nature of people gathered to watch a gory or sensational show. However, what he parodies unashamedly is the contemporary, materialistic, business-like mentality of those who turn even an extraordinary, mystical event into a mockery, for a profit. A spectator who arrives late, is stopped at the entrance to the cemetery, which now is an entertainment centre; the spectator has to pay not only an admission ticket but also an additional price for a seat. In the scene describing the racket connected with the selling of seats for a ring-side view of the miracle, Fo indirectly condemns the tendency, amongst members of capitalist societies, to deal in religious objects.

The vignettes of the sardine seller and of other spectators who speculate on the arrival of the holy man are amusing, but interesting because they highlight the typical reaction of the spectators, who have firm misconceptions of what Jesus's iconographic aspect should be

and their disappointment when they see what he looks like in reality.

- Ariva? Non arival
 - Sardele! Dolze le sardele! Doi bajochi le
 sardele! Dolze! Brustolide! Bone! Bone le
 sardele! Che fa suscitare i mortii Bone! Doi
 palanche!
 - [...]
 - Ul rival! Ul rival! L'è chi!
 - Chi l'è? cu l'è?
 - Jésus!
 - Qual'è?
 - Quello negru? Oh, che ogio cattiv!
 - Ma no! Quelu l'è ol Marco!
 - Quello de drio?
 - Qual'è? Quello alto?
 - No quel picolin.
 - Quel fiulin?
 - Quello lì cun la barbeta.
 - Oh ma 'l par un fiulin, boja!
 (Po, 1977e, p. 103)

Dario Fo's analysis of the crowd's reaction to Jesus is, in a way, a barb hurled at institutionalised religion which propagates numerous myths. By portraying a larger than life figure of Christ, the clergy have undermined their own teachings, their own ideology. Biblical descriptions give an image of a Christ who is a common, normal man. Yet, the Church has painted an aura of myth and has distanced the Christ-figure making it someone that transcends humanity. Fo questions and mocks the way in which the faithful have been made to believe that Christ embodies perfection, supreme virtue and celestial remoteness. The image of Christ that his contemporaries, like the crowd in the play witnessed, was different. They saw Christ as an average person; he was one of them. But the crowd is disappointed at

Christ's ordinary appearance because, through hearsay, they had expected him to be a great prophet, a superman of some sorts. Now he fails to meet their expectations. A spectator, who has more hunger than faith, incites Christ to perform again the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes:

- Jesus! Jesus, fag ol miracolamento dei pessi e dei pani come l'altra vólta, che i era sf boni!
(Fo, 1977e, p. 103)

This again reinforces the idea that the miracle of Lazarus rising from the dead was for many nothing but a mere show, which had very little to do with the metaphysical but had great entertainment value. In the following episode, the mixed audience of believers and the odd, hardened cynic, wait in anticipation for Christ to start the miracle-spectacle, which he performs by opening Lazarus' crypt:

- Chia! Varda! L'ha dit de tirà sù ol tumban!
- Oh la piera!
- Cittu!
- In genögio, in genögio, sù, giù tütü in genögio, va!
- Ma mi no, no va in genögio parché no ghe credol oh bella!
- Cittu!
- Pam vedé!
- [...]
- Boja! Chi guarda! L'ha tirà sù ol tombon, o gh'è 'ol morto, ol gh'è dentrol Boja, ol Lassarò, euh che spüssa, s'ol l'è stu tanfo?
(Fo, 1977e, p. 103)

The description of Lazarus' corpse is macabre, even disgusting.

References, in a cacophony of sounds, are made to the repugnant smells and worms that swarm over the putrified body; the shouts of the market-sellers are mixed with the voices of those who bet on the outcome of the miracle; the cries of admiration and stupor join the screams of the person who has just been pickpocketed. In the Mazzotta Edition (14), all these sounds lead to a truly choral finale and the anticlimax of an unhappy spectator who complains about the lack of theatricality in the 'performance' of Christ, a two-penny magician. He asserts that, during his time, before losing his head, John the Baptist was a far more accomplished entertainer:

- Oh l'è stait un gran belo miracolo ... meraviglioso
 - ...
 - Oh, mi ne g'ho vedui de mejeri ... ai tempi ...
 - Del Giovanni Batista ... o quel el che ne faseva de quel ... che miracol fioi! Roba de no crederghe! Fecad che g'han taja' ol colo ...
 - Questo o l'è bravo, ma ol manca de esperienza ... no el fa spettacolo: quater parol una valadina de beasci e a l'è tot fornit ... no l'è capaz de far teatro.
- (Fo, 1977c, p. 21)

This performance requires the consummate skills of Dario Fo or some such extraordinary actor. The allusive nature of Fo's own performance succeeds in suggesting all these characters and situations with few brisk gestures and clever position movements which strike the imagination of members of the audience who, in turn, add the necessary details. The spectators are practically presented with a mirror-image of themselves in a show in which they have an active role. As Fo

explains:

I am able to express my personal resources as a comic, because I believe in the giullaresque function of the comic. The ability of the mediaeval giullare to play as many as 15 characters ... depended on the necessity of doing everything on his own. It wasn't just exhibitionistic wishful thinking. We know that the mediaeval giullari performed their plays alone from the stage directions in the texts and their allusions to doubling. Even the most able inventions of the giullare required audience participation. The play of allusions and the collaboration of the audience who picked them up, redoubled the poetic and comic charge. So, what has been referred to as a 'didactic operation' wasn't really so at all, at least not in the sense that the audience was indoctrinated. Rather their imaginations were stimulated - this was the only way they could reach an awareness of their origins, their past and their culture.
(Fo in E. Artese, 1977, pp.139-140)

In these polyphonic monologues, one hears various sectorial speeches (those of pedlars, travelling vendors, news hawkers, washerwomen, merchants and the bustling crowd). The heterogeneous language reflects popular expression. Thus the variations in the dialogue here are different from those of other monologues where Fo contrasts plebeian speech with that of the dominant classes.

When Dario Fo and Associazione Nuova Scena started preparing Mistero Buffo for the stage in 1969, the original intention was to have a number of actors interpreting the various roles. However, this idea was soon discarded (after group experimentation) because it was not at all practical and because it would detract from the allusive character

of the giullare's performance. It would have broken, not only the rhythm and the flow of the texts, but it would also have placed more useless characters on stage, thus diverting the attention away from the performance of the main comedian. This type of show requires the 'filling-in' and 'fleshing-out' of details and situations by the spectator. It is perhaps like listening to a play on the radio: there is no need for costumes, lights, indications of space and time. The giullare-actor must know how to distance himself from the many roles he plays and must be convincing even when interposing fleeting vignettes that interrupt the main flow of the narrative.

* * *

Fo introduces the next text, 'Bonifacio VIII' (15), with a brief historical review of this malevolent Pope, hated by his contemporaries Dante Alighieri and Jacopo da Todi for his hypocrisy and totalitarian rule of the Church and the State alike. Bonifacio VIII was accredited with having committed many injustices but the most obvious one was that of silencing his opponents, no matter how insignificant they were. Jacopo da Todi, a Franciscan monk with no personal wealth except for a brilliant mind, was one of his many victims. It is for this reason that Fo points out that 'Bonifacio (...) ha ridotto la Chiesa come una puttana' in his quest for despotic dominance. In this

text, Fo's allusive mimicry relies largely on the spectators' imagination.

'Bonifacio VIII' is introduced against a back-drop of the famous orgy of Good Friday in 1301, in the midst of an assortment of prostitutes, bishops and cardinals. A favourite sport at this raucous, debauched party is to extinguish candles, at a distance of 3 meters, by emitting a flatulence. The scene starts with the appearance of the giullare who is impersonating Pope Boniface VIII. He mimes the gesture of a man at prayer and sings the following hymn:

AL JORN DEL JUDICI/ PARÀ QUI AVRÀ FET SEUVICI/ UN
REY VINDRÀ PERPETUAL/ VESTIT DE NOSTRA CARN MORTAL/
DEL CEL VINDRÀ TOT CERTAMENT/ AL JORN ...
(Fo, 1977e, p. 113)

the hypocrisy of the words sung by Boniface serve simply to mock him. In reply to his prayer, Christ appears in an invisible form and kicks the pope's behind.

Next follows the meticulous ritual of robing the pope. The actor mimics the pope, who has to choose what hat and jewellery to wear. This episode is included in the sketch in order to show how totalitarian authorities often oscillate between supreme arrogance and power and abject self-disapproval and enslavement to vanity. When Boniface faces Christ carrying the cross (the Christ-character is here played by a peasant-giullare), the pope with a magnanimous gesture

aimed at pleasing the people, frees a monk that he had imprisoned previously and, for the sake of appeasing Christ, he kisses him on the cheek, although he cannot hide the repugnance he feels.

The episode of Boniface's dressing ritual, is in many ways an Italian equivalent of a similar scene of Hitler preparing for a public appearance, in Brecht's Arturo Ui (16). Both openly show the narcissism of men corrupted by absolute power.

Fo takes a number of historical liberties in 'Bonifacio VIII' for which he was severely criticised (17). But the implicit historical jump that the text does, especially when it refers anachronistically to a peasant communal movement in the same historical process, is played with such theatrical dexterity that even his harshest detractors are inevitably disarmed (18).

* * *

In 'Il Matto e la Morte' (19), the first text of the Passion, tragical and grotesque elements are juxtaposed. In the opening scene, a madman and some loafers are playing Tarot cards, when the inn-keeper announces that thirteen guests have arrived for supper. The room where the Madman is playing cards is adjacent to the one rented by

Jesus and the Apostles for the Last Supper. The Madman has won a great sum of money but the game ends with his drawing the card of Death.

At this point, Death enters in the guise of a beautiful r iden dressed in white but with black rings around her eyes. Her presence scatters the players with the exception of the Madman. Always aware that his madness gives him a certain raison d'être, he does not run away nor get a fright. In fact, he starts up a conversation with Death, seemingly ignorant of what she represents:

MORTE - Enfacti ch'eo sont la Morte.
MATTO - La Morte? a sit la Morte, a vu? Ch ti varda la combinasiu? a l'e la Morte! Bon ... piacere ... mi a sont Mataxon ...
MORTE - Te fago pagùra, he?
MATTO - Pagùra a mi? No, che mi a son mato matazone, e ol san tùti che anco in d'ol zio go de i tarochi ol mato no ol g'ha pagùra de la morte. Anze, de contra la va zercando per far copia maridada, che insena i venze omia carta: infin quella d'amore!
(Fo, 1977e, p. 129)

Death reveals her task to the Madman, who is now in love with her ('Tùto an piase de vui' - Fo, 1977e, p. 131). She tells him that she is saddened by the fact that she must take Christ away from the world of the living. She predicts all the betrayals and tribulations that Christ will have to meet prior to his death on the cross, while the Madman throws verbal abuses at the traitor, Judas:

MORTE - Maladìa de la croze ...
MATTO - De la croz? Ol fornirà inciudad? Oh
pover Crist ...
[...]
MORTE - Te l'hait dito ... e como no el podaria es
mato, un che l'ans de tanto amor i omeni,
imperfino quel che el menarano a la croze
... imperfino 'l Giuda che l'anderà a
trajrio?
MATTO - Ah ol sarà ol Giùda? Quel là che e sta in
un cantun a la tabola, che ag farà ol
servizi? Ag-varia scumetidi ... Sta facia de
giùda! Specia che ag vag là a darghe un para
de sgiafuni a stu malnat ... e ag spùdi in
t'un ogio.
(Po, 1977e, pp. 133-135)

Knowing in advance what Christ's fate is to be, the Madman decides to seduce Death in order to deviate her from her purpose.

In this sketch, the role of the Madman combines that of the villano with that of the giullare; he is a prototype of the protagonist, also called the Madman, in Morte Accidental di un Anarchico (20). The latter Matto causes similar confusion in a more modern context. Their similarity lies in that they both want justice to prevail at all costs. In Mistero Buffo, he is part buffoon, part idiot, part pagan and part charlatan, yet a good samaritan who is capable of commendable actions; his efforts in seducing Death are directed at saving Christ; he wants to warn him and give him time to get away.

This tableau ends with the departure of the two protagonists, Death and the Madman, who personify the Life-Death contiguity. This dichotomy of Life and Death is foreseen from the very beginning of the

Tarot card game:

I GIOCATORE	-	[...] Cavalier col spadoni
II GIOCATORE	-	Rejna col baston.
MATTO	-	Strolega col cavron.
III GIOCATORE	-	Ol bambin innozante.
I GIOCATORE	-	Ol Deo 'nipotente.
MATTO	-	La justizia e la rezon.
II GIOCATORE	-	Ol turbaso e l'avocat.
III GIOCATORE	-	Ol boja e l'impicat.
MATTO	-	Ol papa e la papesa.
I GIOCATORE	-	Ol preite che fa mesa.
II GIOCATORE	-	La vita bela e alegra.
III GIOCATORE	-	La morte bianca e negra.

(Po, 1977e, p. 127)

During the card game, the Witch (a subversive and dark element) appears between the Queen (element of order and authority) and the innocent child. In the same hand, we find the executioner and the condemned, the pope and his nemesis, the female-pope and, to conclude this antithetical tableau, next to beautiful and joyful Life appears squalid and black Death. This presentation of an 'upside-down world' is typical of the carnivalesque solutions given by the popular Culture of the Middle Ages as an alternative model to the rigid order chosen by the dominant culture.

'Maria viene a conoscere della condanna imposta al figlio' (21) tells

of the attempts made by the Madonna's friends to keep from her the bitter truth of her son's *imminent crucifixion*. This text is the prototype for a series of dramas created by Fo for Franca Rame, based on the mother figure, the best of which were chosen by the television for a show called Parliamo di Donne (22). The Madonna's determined desire to find out what is happening to her son, her total acceptance of Mary Magdalene's obscure profession and her courage in the face of adversity, help to paint another very positive and resolute picture of the Madonna.

The text concludes with Mary's discovery that her son is in fact going to be crucified when Veronica shows her the shroud with Christ's imprint on it.

MARIA ~ Cos' l'è capitat a quella dona ... co la
g'ha un mantin tuto inseguinat? Ohj bona
dona ... av set fada male?
VERONICA ~ No, miga mi ... ma un de quei cundanat
che g'han metù de soto a la crose, lo quelo
co a ghe crifeno stregonaso ... e che no l'è
stregon, ma santol [...]. A g'ho sugad la
faccia insanguagnenta ...
[...]
MARIA ~ Fam'lo vedar.
ZONNA ~ No ves curiosa, Maria, che n'ol sta ben.
MARIA ~ No sont curiosa ... a senti ch'ol devi
vedel.
VERONICA ~ [...] eco, a l'è ol fiol de deol
MARIA ~ Ol me fiol ... ah ... a l'è me fiol de
mi!
(Fo, 1977e, pp. 143-145)

Once again, it is her human characteristics that are emphasised, not

her iconographical nature. Her maternal qualities come across; she lets it be known that Christ is first her Son and then God's Son. Her speech is interrupted because she runs out in desperate search of her condemned Son. There is not as much display of emotions in Fo's text when the mother finds that her Son is about to be crucified, as there is, for example, in Brecht's Mother Courage. Fo avoids extreme sentimentalism; but the spectator still feels the psychological need to scream out against injustice.

* * *

In the next sketch, known sometimes as 'Il Matto sotto la Croce' (23), the Madman presents Jesus, who is being undressed and prepared for crucifixion, as an exhibit at some type of freak-show, while the Roman soldiers bet on the numbers of hammer blows necessary to nail him to the Cross:

MATTO

- Done! Ehj done inemorate d'ol Crist, gnit a lustrarve i ogi ... gnit a videl belo snudo ch'ol se sbiota, ol vostro moroso ... doi palanchi par sguardada, ehnit done ... Oh che l'è belo de catà! A disiu che a l'era ol fiol de Dio: mi am pares col sebia igual a un altro omo ... [...] No perd st'ocasion ... [...] L'è a l'ordin ol cap di comichi? Tira su ol telun che andarem a incomenzare ol spettacool:
[...]

I CROCIATORE - [...] Bùtane un ciudo, che ol martel
a g'li'ho del me.

II CROCIATORE - Oh! che ciudasci! A scutemi che in
sete martelade ol picchi dentar tuto?
(Fo, 1977e, pp. 147-149)

The nailing of Christ to the cross is accomplished with much laughter
and many banal quips, while Jesus's suffering is counterpointed by the
lament of the women who watch on. Christ's pain is contrasted with
the sadism and cruelty of the Chief 'crociatore'.

III CROCIATORE - Daighe alora ... Daighee d'ol prem
bot ... Ohia ah! che a sbusa i
palmi!

CAPO - Ohoo, ol tremba da par tutt. Stì
calmi. Daighee d'ol segund bot ...
ohahiohoh! a slargà i osi! Ohoh se
spùda ol sangu a grochi. Daighe ol
terzo boto ohahiohoh sto ciud t'ha
sverzenat. Ohoh, che e done no ti
g'ha dimai sforzat. El quarto t'ol
regala i soldat Ohahiohoh che ti
g'hait dit de no masare Ohahiohoh e i
nemisi 'me fradeli i doveria amare.
Ol quinto t'ol manda i vescovi d'la
senagoga Ohahiohoh che ti g'hait dit
che i sont falzi e malarbeti,
ohahiohoh che i toi vescovi i sarà
tùti umili e poveretti. Ol sestu l'è
ol regalo de i signori ohahiohoh che
ti g'hait dit che no andaran in zielo
ohahiohoh e ti g'hait fait l'exemplo
del camelo. Ol setemo t'ol pica i
'mpostori Ohahiohoh che ti g'hait dit
che n'ol cunta nagot se i prega
ohahiohoh che l'è boni a fregar
mancioni in tera ma ol Signor, quel
no'll se fregal
(Fo, 1977e, pp. 149-151)

These seven hammer blows are followed by a cruel monologue that pokes

fun at the basic principles of the Christian doctrine (humility, poverty, charity) and praises the connivance and shrewdness of the powerful. The monologue also shows the 'couldn't care-less' attitude of the 'crociatore' who performs his task, without once worrying about the suffering he is inflicting on another human being. The seventh blow seems to describe the mentality of the Capo when dealing with Christ: his cruelty seems to be justified in terms of the Church's attitude which deemed it necessary to execute those who pose a threat to the established order. It also reflects the arrogance of the peasant in official guise: under the bureaucratic exterior there is the typically peasant behaviour. Even the divine qualities of Christ the King are scorned by the arrogant executioners:

Ag bevareno a la santità do sto cavaier e a la soa
sfortuna! Come av trovut, majstà? AV sentit ben
saldo in d'i mani, sto destrer? Bon, allora adesso
anderemo in giostra, senza lanza e senza scudo!
(Fo, 1977e, p. 151)

And with these words, Christ's fate is decided with a game of cards and dice, in which even the Woman participates. His participation in the game shows his bizarre humanity. The executioners use Christ's garments as bets in a macabre type of 'Strip Poker'.

I CROCIATORE - Brao! Sem a l'orden toti ...? 'ndem
allora, riżem insèma, me aricomandi ...
un strep longo a la volta. Av dag ol
temp: Ohj iazaremo/ Ehise/ sto penon
de nave/ ohoho/ par fag de drapo/
ohoho/ gh'em tacad un mato./ ohoho/

Ohj izaremo/ Ehies/ sto palon de
festa/ ohoho/ cucagna grossa/ ohoho/
Gesù Cristo in cofa./ ohoho/ Ohì che
cucagna/ Ahss/ che la sbusa ol
cielo/ ohoho/ ag piove sangue/ ohoho/
patre nostro ol piange/ ohoho/
legrive, legrive/ Ehies/ Ch'em trouat
chelo bravo/ ohoho/ c'ol sà fat
s'cisva/ ohoho/ par vestirghe da
nova/ ohoho/ Loeu, a l'è asè: me par
che ol stavia ben franco. Bon ... allora
tra' foera i dadi che fem sta ziogada.
(Po, 1977e, p. 153)

At the end of the game, the Madman has won Christ's shroud and the executioners' earnings. He also reveals that he had collected the thirty pieces of silver that Judas had thrown away prior to committing suicide. In his dealings with the executioners, the Madman shows shrewdness, together with a strange ingenuity that makes one doubt the authenticity of his madness. The soldiers in comparison are less intelligent and more gullible; they swallow everything that the Madman says. True to their nature, they obey orders without ever contesting them, even if they come from a Madman.

MATTO - Bon, tegnìvei, i è i voster anca
quell, se 'gnit d'acordi d'ol scambi.
Par mi ... mi ag sont d'acordi.
CAPO - Anca nujartri ...
MATTO - Bon, allora andit de prestia a torve
ol Glùda impicat pendùt, che mi ag
pensai a tirà de baso ol Crist ...
III CROCIATORE - E se ariva ol sentürion e at cata
in d'ol scrusamento?
MATTO - Ag dirò che a l'è stat una penzada
de mi ... che poe sont un mato. E che
vui non gh'avet colpa niuna. Ma no
stitt ch' a perd ol tempo, andit ...
CAPO - Sì, sì ... andem, e a sperem che no

ghe porten rognă, sti trenta dinari.
(Po, 1977e, p. 155)

His simple, lucid reasoning eclipses his so-called madness as he honestly intends to save Christ in the most practical manner. He is so well-intentioned that he hopes, ironically, to be able to cure Christ by taking Him to a friend, 'd'un me amiso stregon c'ol te medegară e at fagară guari in tri die' (Po, 1977e, p. 157). Both a miracle and witchcraft symbolically require three days to restore Christ; this eagerness to help Christ again reflects the candid attitude typical of the Madman. At this point, Christ refuses to accept the well-intentioned help of the Madman since it would hinder the 'divine' plan; by dying, Christ will ensure the liberation and redemption of humanity. The contrast between the mortal, suffering Christ and the determined, self-sacrificing Son of God, who wants to die for the love of humanity, is clarified in the following monologue. In the beginning, Christ's refusal seemed, to the Madman, the excuse of a very confused man, who is delirious because of the fever that has seized him:

[...] Ho capăt ... at g'hait la convingziun che oon sti
boeci in di mani e in di pie, tūt ins'cincă 'n di
ligadür 'me t'han cunsciat, no ti serà pî capaz de
andă intorna, ni de imbucat de par zol. No ti voi
star al mundo a dipend da i olter 'me un disgraziad?
G'ho indovinat? No l'è nemanco par quello? O
sacrablot ... e par qual rason doncal P'ol
sacrifici? Se te diset oos'è? Ol salvamento? La
redenzion ... oos te straparlet cosa? O poverazi!...
asfido mi ... at g'hait la fever ...sent 'me te bujet.
(Po, 1977e, p. 157)

But soon, the Madman concludes that it must be Christ who is raving mad. The Samaritan Madman, bitter and furious at Christ's refusal, declares that the only action truly worthy of Christ, was that of expelling the merchants and thieves from the temple:

[...] La sola voelita che ti me g'ha piazzàdo, Jesus,
l'è stait la voelita che set rivat in gessa che i
favevan mercat e t'è scomenzà a struntà tütì col
bastun. Chi che bel ved ... quel l'era ol to mestè
...

(Po, 1977a, p. 159)

This action made Christ a representative of the militant proletariat: his desire, candid but well motivated, had been to re-channel the course of history and justice.

* * *

'La Passione, Maria alla Croce' (24), after 'La Passione', 'Maria viene a conoscere della condanna imposta al figlio' and 'Il Matto e la Morte', concludes the four texts of the Passion. Again it deals with the subject of bureaucracy. It presents the Roman soldiers in charge of Christ's crucifixion. They confront the Madonna, who tries to reason with them in order to prevent the killing of her son. In desperation, she tries to bribe them; she barter a silver ring and a pair of golden earrings for a few minutes with her son:

MARIA - O bon suldat curtes, tegnì, av fo un
presenti de quest'anel d'argenti, e de sti
uregiti d'ori tegnì, in cambi d'un
plager ch'am podit cuncoed.
SOLDATO - Ol saria stu plager?
MARIA - De lasem netag via ol sangu, al me fiol,
cont un poc d'acqua e un strasc, de daghen
un poc de 'nbiasegass i lavri s'cepat d'la
set ...
(Fo, 1977e, p. 165)

The soldier answers that he is only earning his keep and that by accepting a bribe he could lose his job. The soldier is of plebeian origin, but nevertheless he tries to conform to his new role of authority. In a way, his real fear of losing the job enhances the importance peasants place on their status, once they have ascended to the sphere of officialdom. At the same time, as a representative of officialdom, he wields power and can use it to intimidate others. The soldier's male superiority is also subtly made evident by the patronising manner in which he addresses the bereaved woman:

SOLDATO - Halt sentit, la mia patrona, quant inn i
uri? As g'ho de fà? Per mi i'è ol steas
laoro: o solubafì vui, e de presia, de
sta scala, o mi scorii la cruse ...
(Fo, 1977e, p. 165)

The replies of the Madonna, although humble at times, are always full of the righteous outrage of a mother who is revolted by the system that has so unjustly condemned her son to die on the cross. This situation contrasts with the celestial apparition of the archangel

Gabriel, who has come to explain to Mary the reason for her Son's death:

MARIA - (Come in sogno) Chi set l'ilò, bel zovin,
ch'am par ariugnuset? Cos l'è che at
voit de mi?
[...]
GABRIELE - Gabriel, l'angiol de Deo, sont mi quello
vergen, ol nünzi d'ol to solengo e delicat
amor.
(Fo, 1977e, p. 169)

However, the untimely arrival of the archangel is not well received by Mary who accuses him of not understanding what it means to be a mother. Gabriel, who was also the messenger of the Annunciation and knew the fate of her Son from the very beginning, is told to get back to Heaven before he too is contaminated by the ills that befall those who are placed on earth:

MARIA - Torna a slargat i ali, Gabriel, torna
indré al to bel ciel zojoso che no ti g'ha
niente a far chif loga in sta sgarosa tere,
in stu turmento mundo. [...] Ti no t'è
abituat, che in d'ol paradìs no g'hai
rumor ni plangi, né guete ni preson, ni
cœmi impicci ni done violade!... No
gh'è ni fame, ni carestia, njuno che sùda a
straco-brasci ni fiol senza surisi, ni
madri searide e scurade, njun che pena per
pagà ol peccat! Vaj, Gabriel, vaj ...
(Fo, 1977e, p. 169)

Of particular interest is the manner in which the Madonna mimicks the servile speech of the Archangel during the Visitation. She is openly

hostile to him; he can never know what it means to be a mother or what it feels like to be one, firstly because he is a man and secondly because he, an angel, has no experience of the bond that unites a mother and her son.

Ol cognoset de pariment ... de pariment a mi? Ah
l'hait il ti, Gabriel, in dol venter grosi, al ne
fiol? At n'a s'agrijat ti i labri par no crier di
dulici 'nd'ol parturi? At l'hait nutregat ti? Dait
de teta ol latt, ti, Gabriel?
(Fo, 1977e, p. 163)

Gabriel apologetically reminds Mary that her pain and her sacrifice 'farà squarciarse ol ciel, che poda i omeni reversearse par la prima volta in paradisi' (Fo, 1977e, p. 171). Mary, now that she is a mother, can no longer meekly accept the will of the Father. Her attitude has radically changed from that of the day of the Annunciation; she is more human, more vulnerable, more real.

The presence of the archangel is ambiguous because it is not clear whether it is an hallucination of the poor Madonna or a 'true' supernatural manifestation of the kind experienced at the Annunciation. Fo meant the tragic aspect of the Madonna's ordeal to be the focal theme of this text; he uses her example to emphasise the confrontation of women with bureaucracy, whether celestial or terrestrial, when dealing with situations that threaten the bond of motherhood (a theme he and Franca Rame will return to in 'Mamma Priocchetona'). Gabriel appears to be interested only in the purpose

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fiol? At n'à sgagniat ti i labri par no oriar di
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Christ's death will serve, not in Mary's suffering as a mother. He lacks feeling and compassion. He epitomises the 'official' line of uncaring bureaucrats who see the need to fulfil their goals but not what it will cost the people. The importance given to Gabriel's role as the bureaucrat is shown by the fact that he is the last one to speak. Unlike the angel of the first text, who though arrogant was weak and easily ruffled, Gabriel is aloof, very masculine and unaffected by the plight of others. He reinforces the motif of male superiority first presented by the arrogant angelo prologatore.

Mistero Buffo touches on many themes but basically all reveal that Christ's death may have earned man salvation in the after-life but not man's elevation in this world. Christ's doctrine, which incorporates social egalitarian concepts has, however, in the hands of greedy men vying for earthly power, become an instrument for dissent and conflict. The Peasant Christ in Dario Fo's Mistero Buffo is the good Samaritan of plebeian descent, the man who shows his humanity, his love and his fellowship with other human beings. He is the new example to be followed by future generations. This simple man of the people traces his origins and his culture to the days of the evangelical church, a church which existed before it was institutionalised. He is the Learner of the eternal truth: all men are equal; thus, his task is to dispel the myths of racial superiority and social distinction. Above all, this Christ is the little man who, although being an essential element in the chain of

production, is a mere object in the eyes of his exploiters, the representatives of the hegemonic classes. This inconsequential man realises that the time has come to accuse the padroni for all the crimes they have committed and to claim his rightful heritage. But in his efforts to create a new, more just society, this Peasant Christ unmasks the abuses against the people perpetrated for centuries. As Fo states in the prologue to 'Rosa fresca ...':

Il fatto è che sempre in tutti i tempi e tutte le epoche, i vescovi stanno dalla parte dei padroni per mettere in croce i poveri cristi.
(Fo, 1977e, p. 19)

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Chapter 5:

Conclusion

The pertinence of Dario Fo's work today is in our opinion due to the powerful impression that this playwright has made in the history of Italian theatre. To the majority of Italians, his name is synonymous with risqué variety shows and Monty Pythonesque sketches which, when taken superficially, seem extremely absurd and rather slapstick. His reputation of being a skilful, versatile comedian and the histrionic enfant terrible of Italian television and stage has been, for a long time, a difficult image to live with. This is also the reason why Fo has found it so very difficult to project an image of artistic seriousness, of political zeal and conviction, and of dedication to the insatiable needs of the militant theatre and its supporters.

Fo's theatre has to be seen in terms of a reality in constant movement, always evolving and adapting to new socio-political situations. His theatre goes out to the people, thus it mutates whilst acquiring new perspectives of the needs of the audience. In many respects, Fo's theatre is a kaleidoscopic reflection of post-war Italy; it has mirrored Italian reality from the economic boom of the late Fifties, the years of student rebellion of the Sixties and the anarchist stance of the Seventies to the fast-developing economic power of the Eighties. Fo's progression has been one born from innovation; thus, rising from demystifying storytelling to counterinformation based on the direct experience of the oppressed, it is still adapting to new situations. This continuous evolution is unique in the history of theatre.

In many respects, Fo's political message has been considerably depleted today; the superficial vaudevillian antics of the Fifties, the breakaway from the bourgeoisie in the Sixties, the fanatical political fervour of the Seventies, are somewhat in contrast with the subdued activities of the Eighties. Fo's latest authorial project, Manuale minimo dell'attore (1987), seems to indicate a certain appeasement with his bourgeois public and a return to a more intellectual approach to theatre. Although comments such as 'Le nostre fonti non sono sempre attendibili, ma di certo sono quasi sempre affascinanti' (Fo, 1987, p.359) and 'Troverete testi con il titolo originale in tedesco o in inglese. L'ho fatto solo per impressionarvi' (Fo, 1987, p.360) are to be found in the bibliography of his latest work, the obvious research done, the vast accumulation of information and literary references, show his impegno, but at the same time the degree of research renders this work virtually inaccessible to the less privileged members of society and to the 'back-street' performer or amateur actor for whom ideally it is intended.

In the Seventies, Fo was acclaimed the people's courtjester, who restored the giullaresque tradition to its proper popular origin; in the Eighties, a more wise, pseudo-intellectual Fo seems to concede that the giullare tradition may have been of aristocratic birth, because at times they even condoned some of the medieval abuses

perpetrated against the lower classes:

Il teatro della commedia, quello che ha inciso nella storia dello spettacolo di tutta l'Europa per almeno tre secoli, è costruito da gruppi di gente colta, con preparazione e gusto moderni. È vero anche che, se pure in casi non fortuiti, costoro, come abbiamo visto, dimostravano una tendenza alla difesa di privilegi degni della peggiore corporazione medievale. (Fo, 1967, pp.16-17)

The aim of Dario Fo's theatre is to enlighten the underprivileged and present them with a knowledge that is generated by direct experience, but it also aims to entertain in the most complete sense. This pursuit has been constant but there have been changes and shifts of emphasis in the type of knowledge conveyed by his works. At the very beginning of his career, he offered his audience a view of reality that was in total contrast with the myths one commonly accepts as reality, as in Poor nano. He intended to stir the imagination, to defy and demystify stereotypes and sterile clichés. Through deception, he questions the existence of a monolithic truth or a single reality. Then, after testing the audience's general reaction and their eventual acceptance, the knowledge he offers is used to demystify the mores of the bureaucracy and of politicians, such as in Gli arcangeli non giocano a flipper. By the time Morte accidentale di un anarchico was created, imparting knowledge meant probing deeper and providing factual counterinformation; in this play, for example, he integrated counterinformation of an historical nature and of a

contemporary investigative kind within the structure of the play.

His plays documented facts and were permeated with grotesque or satirical elements. This development of providing counterinformation acquired a new dimension with Morte accidentale di un anarchico; the knowledge it imparted was to provoke militant practice, thus making clear the link between militancy and true knowledge. The information he now portrayed and performed was meant to cause militant action. In a way, the theatre of this period redefined the relationship between theory and practice, something the Communist Party had not dared approach. Fo's solution to the problem was to abandon the institutionalised left, which did not address the real needs of the people, for Maoism which he felt had made enormous strides on cultural issues. During a meeting between Fo's 'La Comune' and the 'Artistic Company of Jihan' in August 1975, Fo stressed his rapprochement with Maoism because of the latter's commitment to the people:

Eravamo comunisti e abbiamo capito non solo il revisionismo del partito comunista italiano, ma anche che era una situazione falsa, che era scorretto considerarsi comunisti e continuare a recitare dentro le strutture del teatro borghese. Ciò abbiamo capito che non basta rappresentare degli spettacoli che magari sono anche rivoluzionari, se chi gestisce di fatto il circuito è ancora la borghesia. Abbiamo cercato di fare in modo che il nostro teatro fosse gestito dagli operai, dai contadini, dai progressisti, da coloro che portavano avanti le lotte in Italia. A questo ci ha fatto decidere soprattutto la rivoluzione culturale cinese.

(Fo in Birri, 1977, p.85)

In many respects, it seems that for Fo it was inconsequential that the Chinese Cultural Revolution was instrumental in bringing about the destruction of the intellectual figure and his role in the cultural process of China and that Mao's incentive to put art and literature at the service of the worker, the peasant and the soldier, was a clever way of purging society of old, powerful, undesirable friends.

By the mid-Seventies, the intimate links between Fo's artistic activities and political militancy had led him into an impasse. His theatre, which had been placed at the service of the workers, now stood outside any dialectical relationship with the working class, which, contrary to Fo's belief, continued to follow the PCI. Never had Fo preached so blatantly about the necessity of reviving an authentically popular culture, yet he had fewer new converts. His plays only confirmed in simplified terms what his mixed audience, consisting now of petty-bourgeois intellectuals, workers, students, militants and the odd police informer, already understood, but they did not express the cultural message they were meant to convey. Even the language in these plays modelled itself on leftist propaganda, by incorporating more increasingly slogans of the ultra-left. The militant slogan-ridden language of the plays reflected and furthered the process of cultural degradation occurring in Italy. Fo had once enjoyed a political triumph but now, as he found himself becoming more and more alienated from the genuine political trends of the day, he gave himself up to a kind of plebeian narcissism, preaching left-wing

banalities which none of his subsequent work - notably the return to the farce - could redeem. His clinging to ultra-left precepts and isolation from everyday issues were matched by his total alienation from both the theatre and the audience itself.

When RAI invited Fo to present a retrospective of his theatrical work on television, he was quick to accept. This was almost a personal triumph and for the militant in him, the chance to reach a far greater audience. The Italian State television of 1977 was very different from that of 1962 which he had vowed not to return to unless major political changes occurred. This 'new' television had democratically supported issues such as divorce, abortion, regional autonomy and had witnessed the pact between the PCI and the DC which gave new meaning to the State's fight against terrorism. RAI was instrumental in airing the people's needs and in shaping a new awareness. Student unrest and militant workers' movements which had dictated and threatened governments in the past, were now foundering in the new climate of recession and austerity. The extraparlimentary left was now in total disarray and completely alienated, mainly because of its recourse to armed militancy which was at odds with the new 'social-democratic order' in Italy. In fact, Italy had been radically changed in one single generation, developing new mores which made it more liberal than most other Western nations. With this radical change, the country was finally prepared to accept the once destructive impact of Dario Fo's work, and to consume it just as avidly as any other

harmless product. In many ways, this was the period that confirmed Fo's recognition, but by the same token, it confirmed the loss of significance of his theatre. None of his new shows, such as Tutta casa, letto e chiesa, Clacson, trombette e pernacchi, nor his active participation in congresses and round tables in Italy and abroad did much to promote his image: instead they only accentuated Dario Fo's progressive disappearance from meaningful alternative theatre.

To negate Dario Fo's importance, however, would be foolhardy. The personal advancement of his career will be forever intertwined with the development of modern Italian theatre. The young, analytical Fo, who so effectively criticised Italian society, through his whimsical, inexhaustible determination, his polemical non-conformism, will always have a special niche in the history of the development of theatre. After all, with his critique of Italian society, he placed himself in a dialectical relationship with that society, an action which was to the advantage of theatrical reform. However, his erratic toying with militancy brought him to the point of extremism, and he found himself alienated from the very people he wished to serve. His aspirations, like his convictions, were sincere but somewhat naive in terms of revolutionary content. At the outset of his career, Fo was aware of the need to re-discover past popular culture, almost in a Maoist fashion, to plunder the past so that it would be of service to the present, to discard the fairy tales which obscured the meaning of life:

Il contenuto fondamentale degli spettacoli che parlano dell'Italia consiste soprattutto, secondo un' indicazione del presidente Mao, nel riprendere la cultura del popolo, togliere tutti gli orpelli, le sovrastrutture, gli accorgimenti decorativi che il potere della Chiesa, il potere aristocratico e borghese ha messo addosso per mascherarla, e restituire tutti questi momenti culturali al popolo perchè se ne faccia l'arma più grande.
(Fo in Binni, 1977, p.88)

In a way, Fo too was betrayed by his own public; after a decade of militant agitation, the general public still refused to apply the extreme solutions that Fo had overtly proposed. Fo had failed to cater for the real and complex needs of un popolo imborghesito, something of which the PCI had been aware for some time. His public did not want to take part in the dismantling of capitalist society but instead wanted to be part of the wealth and sudden growth being experienced by the Italian economy. Thus, Dario Fo's often simplistic treatment of major contemporary issues had very little effect on the audience who wanted above all to be entertained, not turned into ardent revolutionaries who would destroy the status quo.

In the Eighties, Fo's plays have mainly shown the latest political intrigues and scandals, with the monologues serving as a barometer to test the ideological climate and situation of the almost defunct revolutionary movement. His latest productions, whether giullarate or fare, seem on the surface less deep-rooted in culture and more

sketchy. Some critics see these changes as signs of exhausted themes, disorientation and the author's difficulty in adapting to the times. Although some elements of this critique seem valid, one can also see in certain of Fo's later productions, especially those written in conjunction with Franca Rame, an attempt at reaching new artistic levels and ideological growth. In his later work there is an acknowledgement of the need to develop more complex approaches to the question of power and knowledge. Keeping in mind Fo's flexible nature and the ability shown in the past to adapt to new situations, one can only hope that these experimentations are signs of new things to come.

It is unfortunate that most of the plays written by Fo have fallen into oblivion; those that are still performed today, like Mistero Buffo, Morte accidentale di un anarchico and Pum! Pum! Chi è? La Polizia!, have however become testimonies of one man's involvement in the evolution of contemporary culture.

The reason for selecting Mistero Buffo as a subject for this dissertation, lies, in a way, with the outright popularity that this particular play has enjoyed worldwide. In our opinion, it is Dario Fo's best documented play to date, a research that spanned not only Italian culture but a myriad of other European ones as well, thus giving it a particularly universal appeal. It is also a play created at the zenith of Fo's career, and which epitomises the playwright's talent not only as a writer, but as a choreographer, actor, artiste,

philologist. As an actor, he excelled in Mistero Buffo to the point that other actors stand in awe of playing the many parts required for this play. The virtuoso performance of Dario Fo might be seen in the same light as that of Lawrence Olivier playing Shakespeare's King Lear because of the sheer brilliancy of his acting. As a text, Mistero Buffo is linguistically rich because of the power of expression of the grammelot used in the play, and in the forceful message it conveys. Mistero Buffo represented the culmination of years of experimentation as well as the re-processing of theatrical techniques that were part of Dario Fo's own cultural background. It was also a play that studied and questioned the role of power, in the past and today, through the eyes of a wise giullare. Thus, it was aimed at challenging the point of view, imposed by those in power and unquestioningly accepted by those in a subordinate position; for this purpose, the oppressed in this play are the holders of truth while the powerful represent its negation and usurpation by force. Unlike other later and more scatological 'misteri buffi' (such as Storia della tigre and Il fabulazzo osceno), which were more allegorical and specifically concerned with the problems facing the revolutionary movement, the original version of Mistero Buffo was uniquely concerned with the socio-political division between the oppressor and the oppressed. In the introduction of the 1977 Mazzotta Edition, Fo justified his creation of Mistero Buffo as being necessary in order for the Marxist movement to form an alliance with the progressive grassroots Catholic movement so that 'non soltanto il regno dei cieli

sarà negato ai ricchi e agli sfruttatori, ma anche quello di questa terra' (Fo, 1977c, p.13); this shows his firm commitment to the people. Because of its unique texts and the way it repropose an aspect of popular culture as a solution for a new theatre, Mistero Buffo will remain a major landmark in the history of modern European theatre.

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Appendix

The last Fo play staged in South Africa is Orgasmo Adulto Escapes from the Zoo, a version of Female Parts (1), as co-written by Dario Fo and Franca Rame. This latest play makes Dario Fo the most staged Italian playwright in South Africa, surpassing the other all-time favourite, Luigi Pirandello. This sudden fascination of South African theatre directors for Fo's plays comes at a time when this playwright's work has lost most of its impact and popularity with Italian audiences. A reason for this is that not only do Fo's plays reflect the South African reality, but this playwright, according to David Alcock (2), is one of the few Italian artists who does not object to having his work produced in this country.

Dario Fo's type of theatre brings to the limelight contentious issues which would otherwise be suppressed by the authorities or shunned by more conventional theatre. The object of this theatre is, thus, to modify and broaden public opinion in the process of entertaining the audience. The theory behind the ideological message makes it a well thought out theatre, but not for that reason a less successful theatre. Fo's ideology is evinced in his theoretical as well as his creative work. Dario Fo's kind of 'journalistic' uncovering of taboo issues has proven to be successful worldwide amongst very diverse audiences, and South Africa should be no exception. Moreover, the message conveyed in most Fo plays is universal and often very relevant to countries with excessive repressive laws which suppress the human rights of the individual. This is perhaps one of the reasons for the

immense appeal that recent Fo plays have had in South American countries, such as Argentina and Chile, and in Israel, India and, to a certain extent, South Africa. In an interview given to Europeo in August 1981, Fo, replying to a question on the adverse publicity he has received from Italian critics, stressed that he is

l'autore italiano più rappresentato nel mondo, che Morte accidentale di un anarchico è in scena a Londra da due anni e ogni sera segna il tutto esaurito, che i miei spettacoli vengono recitati, oltre che in tutti i paesi europei, anche in Israel, in America, India, Giappone, Australia e perfino in Sud Africa. Nessuno ha scritto che nel maggio scorso ho ritirato in Danimarca il premio Sonning, il più importante riconoscimento dopo il Nobel, già assegnato a personaggi come Churchill, Stravinskij e Russell ...
(Fo in L. Colonnelli, 1981, p. 50)

Therefore, Fo's emerging popularity may be due to a situation akin to that which existed in the Italy of the Sixties existing in the South Africa of the Seventies and Eighties. On the other hand, Fo's plays are a tour de force for most actors, therefore, budding actors and actresses find in Fo's parts, the right vehicle to launch and consolidate their acting careers in what seems to be a very competitive and difficult market to enter. Hence, the South African adaptations of Fo's plays which have had the most success, were those that consisted of one-person parts (Ministero Buffo and Female Parts).

Directors are also challenged by the directing implications of this type of theatre. As the term 'epic theatre' implies, its binary

structure of dramatic action and epic recording or commentary is a theatre propos that is calculated to counteract the spectator's emotional identification with the dramatis personae. 'Epicisation' (3), that is the encroachment of the epic or narrative genre on the preserve of the theatre, comes about in that the commentary on the action is made through the use of all kinds of epic devices - for example, the introduction of a narrator, a chorus that delivers commentary, an epilogue and the like. The 'alienation effect' that is achieved in this way purposely forces the audience to exercise their intellectual faculties by giving some thought to the ideological content or the social message of the theatre. The critical awareness of the spectator must be enhanced by the alienation effect, which is brought about by presenting commonplace matters in an unusual or 'estranged' light. Roland Barthes considers the distance created by this means to be essential for securing the involvement of the audience:

[...] the essence of the theatre is staked on the perpetuation of [...] distance: it is not the success of any particular dramatic style which is in question, it is the spectator's consciousness and hence his capacity to make history.
(Barthes, 1972, p. 35)

Barthes sees the alienation effect of epic theatre as a semiological problem. The technique of 'epicisation' is an indication that 'the responsibility of a dramatic art is not so much to express reality as to signify it' (Barthes, 1972, p. 74).

Po's first plays to be staged in South Africa, Accidental Death of an Anarchist and We Can't Pay! We Won't Pay!, failed in both counts, if Barthes's theory is to be followed. When locally staged, these adaptations did not take into account the critical awareness of the spectator's understanding of the alienation effect, that is his perceiving the ideological or social message through an 'estranged' perspective. Secondly, the importance of functional costuming in the theatre (4) was seriously neglected in both these plays. The costume has a purely functional role which is intellectual rather than aesthetic or emotive:

The costume is nothing more than the second term of a relation which must constantly link the work's meaning to its 'exteriority'.
(Barthes, 1972, p. 42)

In the Accidental Death of an Anarchist staged in South Africa, the Chaplinesque-like costume and the exaggerated Silent Movie-type look of the actors, labelled the play from the start as a 'nutty farce' to be taken as light escapism; the message was not perceived by the spectator because of the lack of reality inspired by the farcical costumes. Barthes cited a performance of Brecht's Mother Courage as an example of successful costuming because it effectively conveys an overriding impression of war to the spectators by its use of grey colours, shoddy looking fabrics and a general look of poverty which is created by the use of wood and rope stylised décor. It is the

terrible 'truth' of war that has to be brought home to the spectators in the same way that in Accidental Death of an Anarchist, it is police repression and brutality that must emerge from the play, not a disjointed 'three Stooges' situation with smacks of slapstick. Hence, excessive realism or overstated buffoonesque attire in the costuming would detract from such an effect instead of enhancing it.

In the adaptation of Fo's We Can't Pay! We Won't Pay!, the excessive remarks concerning the Italian economy, the visual references to the lire and Italian canned products as part of the décor, immediately isolated the play from a South African context. The message of this play, topical in South Africa especially in the context of the indiscriminate rise of prices, some directly affecting the less privileged black consumer (such as the escalating price of bread, a basic necessity for both the black and white population of South Africa), was lost by having a too-Italianised situation portrayed.

The moral bias of Fo's theatre dictates the direct involvement of the spectator. This type of theatre encourages the spectator to ask what can be done in such a situation. In many respects, Fo's theatre is basically concerned with the problems of individuals' behaviour in a capitalist society. Fo's method is to pose a question which involves the spectator in a problem and then to let him find the solution for himself. Most South African productions of Dario Fo's plays seem to have given little emphasis to this essential prerequisite. The

spectators' active 'filling in' of the meaning of the theatre inevitably has moral implications in revolutionary theatre. What appears to be self-evident is questioned by Fo so that the spectator is forced to scrutinise his own historic situation more critically. Fo's social criticism is inextricably bound up with the structuring of epic theatre, where a combination of dramatic action and epic commentary serves to awaken the spectator to his moral responsibility within a particular socio-political situation. Dario Fo is relevant because of his evident sense of commitment and responsibility with respect to contemporary social problems. Any encounter with Fo, whether as a reader, spectator or critic, should therefore be bound to involve a confrontation with the issues that preoccupy modern man in a particular society.

The kind of public Fo's theatre addresses needs to be determined. In Italy, where Fo's plays are accessible not only to the bourgeois élite but also to the masses, it is possible to categorise very generally the theatregoing public into four groups representing four political groupings. Those representing the far-right denounce Fo for his political bias - it is mediocre theatre because it is communist. Thus an aesthetic judgement is based on political considerations. This far-right group makes no distinction between aesthetic and political criteria in their assessment of Fo's theatre, whereas more democratic rightwingers maintain an artificial division between the man and his art, asserting that Fo's theatre is great despite its political

leanings. Thus Fo's political ideology, as envisaged by his theatre, is condemned or disregarded by the far-right and rightwing groups.

Leftist groups also fail to evaluate Fo objectively in that their perception of Fo as the 'people's courtjester' induces them to discredit or dismiss his solid theoretical base. Such a negation betrays a kind of anti-intellectual attitude that characterises certain leftist groups; their assessment of Fo's theatre is that it is good in spite of his theorising about 'militant theatre', the role of the actor, alienation effects, the breakdown of the fourth wall. Even communists have certain reservations about the representation of communist ideology in drama that applies demystifying techniques and violates conventional perceptions of the hero. Thus according to the Italian (and most European) theatre-going public, Fo is evaluated either according to aesthetic or political criteria. Only a small percentage of his public views this theatre objectively by incorporating these two aspects. Fo's theatre, like any other theatre, should not be evaluated on purely aesthetic or political grounds; audiences should spontaneously react to this type of theatre, because it entertains and provokes at the same time.

The above criteria are difficult to apply to the South African audience in terms of its structure. Generally, the South African theatre caters for a very small, privileged section of the population. High-income bracket earners constitute the majority of

the audience, with academics, students and 'white-collar' workers constituting the remaining part. With this in mind, the masses do not generally have easy access to theatre and thus, may not profit from the didactic aims of engaged theatre. Because of the extremely complex racial structure, South African society is, generally-speaking, divided into black 'popular shabees' theatre, black South African theatre (which is patronised by a mixed audience, the majority of which is white), English-speaking theatre and Afrikaans-speaking theatre. Owing to stringent Government censorship, the South African audience is limited to a selective-type of theatre, with very few politically-blatant plays ever being performed in South Africa. For example, in 1986, the effects of the 'State of Emergency' hovered over South Africa's most prestigious Festival of the Arts in Grahamstown, when one show, The Molotov Cabaret, by Vader Jakob, Jannie en die Koeksisters, performed independently by End Conscription Campaign members, failed to premiere because one of the all-women cast was in detention (5). The diversity of theatre structures in South Africa gives rise to a unique situation. Nevertheless, South African theatre presently enjoys a high standard of performance.

The first Fo play ever staged in South Africa was the ill-received Accidental Death of an Anarchist, with its premiere on 4 May 1981 'Upstairs at The Market', in Johannesburg. In an interview given to Rosemary Raphael of The Star, Malcolm Purkay, the prolific director of this production, stated that 'theatre should be a cultural force.

If it isn't, it is out of touch with its community' the Star, 4 May 1981). Dario Fo's success with the play in London and America seems to indicate that the play is a 'cultural force', although the translations of this and other plays outside Italy seem to have their message watered down:

La machine théâtrale, transposée dans un autre pays, tient bon; mais elle a quand même perdu de la force de provocation politique qui était à son origine. Cela ne gêne un peu, cela ne rend un peu triste.
(Fo in J. Chesneaux, 1984, p. 26)

Accidental Death of an Anarchist, perhaps due to the nature of the direction and the cast's inability to develop an intimate relationship with the audience, failed to provide the great and provocative impact which Dario Fo intended. Kaiser Ngwenya, a critic with The Sowetan, a newspaper catering for a black readership, found the play 'fascinating', perhaps because he felt the message to be more relevant to his people:

Towards the end, director Malcolm Purkey links the play to real events of this country to remind the audience that we also have a few cases that are similar to that of an Italian anarchist who 'committed suicide by throwing himself out of the fourth floor window of an interrogation room'.
(The Sowetan, 26 May 1981)

Most South African critics seemed to agree that the production came across as being too frenzied, 'an oddball presentation - of Italian

farce' (The Citizen, 8 May 1981), as the title of a review suggested. Originally, Dario Fo attempted to expose the corruptions and abuses of the Police State by recreating extremely chaotic and quasi-schizophrenic situations on stage, to carry his message. Local playwrights, such as Pieter Dirk Uys, have used similar techniques, that is conventional farce and histrionic slapstick, to convey their socio-political message with more success. Raelford Daniel sums up the lack of success in the play in the following terms:

The sad truth of the matter is that Purkey's treatment is heavy handed and generally lacking in restraint. In what appears to be a desperate attempt to maintain a brisk pace at all costs, he has sacrificed lucidity. Much of the dialogue is gabbled and, in the case of the company's sole female, Sharon Lynne, spoken at so shrill a pitch that I was able to discern very little of what was being said.
(The Rand Daily Mail, 7 May 1981)

The second adaptation of a Fo play, We Can't Pay! We Won't Pay!, with its premiere on 24 March 1982, performed 'Upstairs at The Market Theatre', Johannesburg, fared as unsuccessfully as its predecessor. This play was the first of three inaugural plays by the then newly-formed Minotaurus Theatre Company. In its 'manifesto', as printed in the programme of We Can't Pay! We Won't Pay!, the Minotaurus Company stated its belief in portraying art as a criticism of the 'iniquity of present day conditions and a plea for a future where a decent human existence is no longer the exception'. Furthermore, the group stated its belief in the political effectiveness of theatre which lies in the

power and simplicity of its language and the communicative strength of gesture and action. These principles fell within Po's own perspective of theatre, as a tool for change in society. This play was directed by the German-born director, Dieter Reible, and had a well-known cast of actors, the most distinguished being Trix Pienaar and Chris Galloway. The Press, once again, reacted vehemently to this production. The most vociferous review came from Adrian Monbeath, who seemed to miss the point altogether:

If there has been a more ponderously, pretentiously and predictably dull theatrical production in Johannesburg over the past year or so than We Can't Pay! We Won't Pay! (Market), it has been my good fortune to miss it. The tone of the evening is set by a pompous piece in the programme on the play's author, Dario Fo, which includes nonsensical leftwing catchphrases, such as 'subsidised bourgeois theatre' and 'the people'. Once you read that, you can't complain you haven't been warned. What follows can be described as farce, the only problem being that it's approximately as funny as a cancer ward. (Well for me at any rate ... though, to be fair, some sections of the audience, no doubt possessed of more radical chic than I, evidently found it hilarious).
(The Sunday Times, 28 March 1982)

It is evident that the similarity between the frightening rise of the cost of living in South Africa and the 'food war' of Italy in the Seventies, did not affect in the least this critic. A more honest review was given by The Sunday Express journalist who stated:

Probably because I'm a long-suffering shopper myself, I identified sympathetically with We Can't Pay! We Won't Pay!, the Dario Fo farce presented 'Upstairs at

The Market'. The whole thing is crazy, of course, but is there any sanity in the way the cost of groceries, fruit and vegetables keeps zooming upwards?
(The Sunday Express, 4 April 1982)

This production was unsuccessful because it lacked true comic inventiveness which makes for constant laughter. Some critics considered the humour 'pretty basic' (The Sunday Express, 4 April 1982), a 'farce almost at the level of a Punch-and-Judy show' (The Citizen, 26 March 1982). Others tried to find a reason for the lack of impact that this play had with South African audiences.

In South Africa, where the socio-political situation is peculiarly compatible with the oppressive climate of Po's milieu, the plays have, perhaps, a more immediate relevance. Yet, conversely, in the two exposures I have had to Po's work, I find little to justify their reputation for wit and innovation. [...] It could be that the fault lies in interpretation - either because the essential flavour is lost in translation or because our actors lack the particular skills necessary to fully capture it.
(The Rand Daily Mail, 26 March 1982)

The first two adaptations of Po's plays both belong to the Po of the Seventies. Thus the socio-political message in these plays bordered on anarchy and revolution as the solution for ousting bourgeois rule and values. This in itself presents a few problems to the South African audience, firstly, because they are the ruling bourgeois class attacked and, secondly, because the plays are presented in a form which to them seems too unpolished and crude. The South African audience, looking for the sophistication and polish, say, of a

Stoppard, a Wesker or a Fugard, are not able to adapt readily to the simplistic values of Fo's 'People's Theatre'. They find themselves relating uneasily to a knockabout farce which, for all that its emphasis has switched from the salacious to the very matter of survival itself, remains, unabashedly, knockabout farce; a farce, moreover, in which all the attendant attributes of vulgarity and reiterations of action are meant constantly to highlight the incredible reality of the situation. It is our belief that the audiences that experienced these two highly political farces could not identify with the situations portrayed because, firstly, they were privileged and generally untouched by these socio-political dilemmas and, secondly, the power of accusation of these plays never emerged concretely and realistically enough, hiding instead behind a mask of inane absurdity.

The third Fo adaptation to be staged in South Africa was the highly acclaimed One Woman Plays, a play directed by Brian Astbury of the People's Space Company. This time, Cape Town was the venue of the premiere which took place at 'The People's Space Theatre', on 31 August 1982. Yvonne Bryceland, an award-winning actress, interpreted the multi-faceted roles of the One Woman Plays (6). During its season in Johannesburg, at the 'University Great Hall', in September 1982, this actress received a standing ovation for her rendition of the play. Unlike the previous Fo plays, One Woman Plays belonged to the more conformist period of Dario Fo's career, the late Seventies-early

Eighties. Co-written by Franca Rame, political extremist had given way to feminist issues which questioned the condition of being a woman. This production combined three different plays requiring three different comic styles. 'A Woman Alone' is a black farce about a woman who goes mad and is driven to it by the combined uncaring efforts of the men in her life (from a peeping tom brother-in-law to a jealous but faithless husband). She disintegrates to a final madness that might appear to be a defensive sanity. 'Waking Up', the second text, narrates the ordinary morning of an ordinary day for an ordinary mother, and it is a tribute to the millions of women all over the world who require extraordinary resilience and heroism to face their mundane and average everyday chores. 'The Same Old Story', the last of the three texts, was the highlight of the performance. This play deals with the issue of abortion, driving the message home that women alone are entitled to determine their own lives, free from any male prejudices. This play is the perfect example of tour de force acting and it illustrates the value of playing a Dario Fo-Franca Rame part for budding actors and actresses.

June 1987 saw another interpretation of one of the texts of the One Woman Plays, 'A Woman Alone', rendered by a talented young Italian-born actress, Carla Rech. This play was performed at the 'Black Sun Theatre' in Johannesburg and directed by Ruth Oppenheim. Generally, it received very good reviews from the critics. Rina Minervini commented that 'Dario Fo's one-hander has been done before, but I

doubt whether it has ever been given more charm, more humour or a finer feeling for its Italian milieu' (The Sunday Star, 7 June 1987). Garalt MacLiam, describing the immense popularity of this gifted young actress, stated:

Rech's comedy timing is superb for the most part, although occasionally she does allow herself to be thrown by gusts of laughter from an appreciative audience. Her understanding of the character is also most creditable and much praise for this must go to director Ruth Oppenheim.
(The Star, 8 June 1987)

Laura Prunotto, in a literary review of this play, pinpointed the following as being the reason for the play's success:

Uno degli espedienti interpretativi che la Rech ha saputo usare con estrema abilità è stato l'uso dell'italiano che ha consentito una trasposizione fluida e viva del lavoro in chiave naturalistica. Inoltre, essa ha istintivamente trovato la giusta misura tra ironia e angoscia, evitando di cadere nel volgare ed ha messo in evidenza la fragilità del personaggio, mantenendo un particolare tono di voce che anche nell'insulto e nell'imprecazione nascondeva un accenno di lacrime. Abbigliata castamente, con solo una spalla nuda quale suggerimento sexy, alla fine questa Maria afferra il fucile senza convinzione, intuendo una fatalità da cui non può immaginare vi sia riscatto, ma 'proponendo' il suo caso al pubblico.
(ISSA no. 2, 1989, p. 79)

Owing to the popular success of this play, a repeat performance was given by the same actress in 1988, at the 'Norwood Public Library', in Johannesburg.

During the same period, in July 1987, at the Grahamstown Festival of the Arts, director Solly Philander presented his version of A Woman Alone, which was interpreted by Nadia Bilchik. Whereas Carla Rech's interpretation was adapted to the Italian context, this production transferred the original situation to a South African context. We concurred with Laura Prunotto in stating that this latter production conferred upon the work 'uno spirito nuovo', but we would be far more critical of the interpretation:

Vi si sente il fermento di una sottocultura costituita da elementi di culture antiche e aliene, di cui soltanto tracce sono rimaste nelle nuove generazioni. I nomi inventati di Elsie e William vorrebbero denotare abitanti di quartieri affollati e 'grigi' in cui vari gruppi etnici si mescolano formando una classe ibrida di emarginati morali che vivono ai bordi della società affluente ostentando quasi come sfida una cervelletica indipendenza di vita e di costumi. Magnificamente disincantata, con la sigaretta tra le labbra golose, ricorrendo all'uso di un inglese sudafricanizzato, questa Nadia/Elsie è del tutto credibile e riconoscibile da parte del pubblico sudafricano ma non riesce a coinvolgerlo. Essa rimane un fenomeno isolato e il suo monologo assume toni da cautionary tale.

(ISSA no. 2, 1989, p.79)

Having received a certain acclaim at the Grahamstown Festival, the play did not fare as well with the Johannesburg public. It started its season at the 'Dalro Windybow Theatre' in Johannesburg, on June 1988, after which the show was slated by many critics for the lack of authenticity on the part of the actress. As one critic stated,

with an accent located somewhere between Bez Valley and Athol-Oaklands, Bilchik fails to convince me that she is a downtrodden South African housewife. She simply does not look or sound like an Elsie. Her ethos is too robust for an Elsie. She looks like she has just stepped out of a northern suburbs lingerie shop.

(The Star, 22 June 1988)

This was unfortunately true of this adaptation and the repercussions of this were felt in the humour itself, which became puerile. This critic went on to suggest that had the director preserved the play's Italianness, the absurdity of the humour would have been more palatable. He added:

The bareness of the whole exercise is curiously acceptable in its Italian context, but seems rather tired at home in post-feminist, yuppie South Africa.
(The Star, 22 June 1988)

The latter comment had no real foundation, because, in the first instance, South Africa is only now coming to grips with the feminist cause (thus the reason for the very topical popularity of feminist plays), despite its deceptive 'yuppie' appearance. Secondly, the well-intentioned but obviously ineffectual speech inflection of the actress was not well researched, thus distancing the play from the original and universal quality that it was meant to have.

The Grahamstown Festival was also instrumental in bringing to the

forefront a very ingenious rendition of Mistero Buffo in Afrikaans, entitled Asjas Passie. Directed by Ben Dehaeck of the 'Brueghel Theatre' of Stellenbosch, this play did the Cape Town season in 1986, before its discovery at the Festival in July 1988. Giuseppe Stellardi, a lecturer in the Italian Department at the University of Cape Town, commented that

sia la critica che il pubblico (purtroppo spesso non numerosi) hanno mostrato di apprezzare la produzione e di intenderne la portata politico-sociale, oltre che artistica.
(ISSA no. 2, 1989, p. 78)

The success of this play, finely interpreted by Duncan Johnson, earned this actor the 'Fleur du Cap Prize' for acting and a study bursary from the Italian Government. The translation of this play, from Italian, via Dutch, to Afrikaans, by Hermun Pretorius, seems to indicate that Fo's plays may be transferred successfully into any context. Asjas Passie, again a tour de force piece of acting for any actor, differed from the previous play in the sense that it treated once again a socio-political situation and not a feminist one. Its success probably lies in having been absorbed by an appreciative new-Afrikaans and coloured audience, so starved of 'open' texts.

The last Fo play to be staged in South Africa is Orgasmo Adulto Escapes from the Zoo. Advertised in the programme as 'entertainment about women and their sexual situation', it was performed at the

'Black Sun Theatre', in Johannesburg, from 16 May 1989. Directed by David Alcock, this play was interpreted by two energetic actresses, Michele Maxwell and Amanda Strydom. Orgasmo Adulto..., a two-hander looking at woman's role in history, as well as her modern day trials and tribulations, takes a *sidelong* glance at male *chauvinism*. The play consists of the following monologues and dialogues: 'Prologue', 'Waking Up', 'Dialogue for a Single Voice', 'We All Have the Same Story', 'Mamma Friccheton', 'Medea Prologue' and 'Medea'. This production generally received a good review from most critics. Garalt MacLiam stated:

Entertainment about women and their sexual situation, the programme notes blandly inform, but the fare is far from bland and actresses Amanda Strydom and Michele Maxwell make a full meal from the material provided by writers Franca Rama (sic) and Dario Fo.
(The Star, 18 May 1989)

Once again, critics ~~concur~~ that the play was a vehicle which offered both actresses the chance to show their mettle and each rose to the occasion. Rina Minervini commented that

'Escapes from the Loo' might be more apposite for one section of this eyebrow-raising compilation of Rame/Fo monologues and dialogues about women and sex. But elsewhere there's genuinely provocative theatre to be had.
(The Sunday Star, 21 May 1989)

This play was immensely popular because of its topicality. The recipe

of feminism, sex (7) and farcical humour generally seems to attract a good audience; however, after its successful first few shows, some performances were cancelled due to lack of attendance.

When political and social commentary are made within the framework of a farce or comedy, two different types of theatregoers can be satisfied: those who are interested in the commentary and those who regard theatre merely as escapism or amusement. Farces by Dario Fo ought to serve both purposes but his plays are not without deficiencies, especially if produced incorrectly. The last ten years of socio-political struggle in South Africa have demanded a rigorous response from those who claim to be able to instruct the masses. Thus, committed South African directors recognise the need to provide an alternative political and social perspective through the medium of theatre, thus making Dario Fo an obvious choice.

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Notes

Chapter 1:

- (1) In an interview given to Angelo Scandurra of Il Girasole, Fo described his theatre, as being political and provocative, but also a 'teatro di presenza', whereby the problems connected with life in general are presented to a public who is often kept in the dark by the State. For more details, see Scandurra, 1986, p. 3.
- (2) This play was inspired by the murder of Giovanni Pinelli, an anarchist railway worker well-known to the Milan Police as a political activist. After the bombing of Milan's Agricultural Bank, he was arrested and illegally held by the police for a period longer than is permitted by law. He was murdered on the night of the 15/16 December 1969. According to the official version, he allegedly 'fell out' of the fourth floor window of Milan's Police Headquarters during an interrogation session.
- (3) A case that comes to mind was that of the death of political activist lawyer, Dr. Neil Kgett, who allegedly 'committed suicide' at John Vorster Square Police Headquarters in Johannesburg. Like him, many other political detainees died under similar suspicious circumstances.
- (4) 'Pejorative term for those English plays written from the 1950s onwards whose distinguishing feature was a portrayal of working- or lower-middle-class characters surrounded, in the view of their critics, by an undue degree of domestic squalor. "Kitchen-sink school" was a term applied first to [...] social realist paintings [...] in the early 1950s, but has achieved lasting currency in relation to the theatre' (A. Bullock, 1977, pp. 333-334).
- (5) Mel Gussow, a critic for the New York Times, reacting to the successful New York premiere of Fo's We Can't Pay! We Won't Pay! at the Chelsea Theatre Company, commented that this playwright's popularity lay in seducing 'an audience into responding to the most indelicate comic situations'. The success of this play in New York was linked to the immediacy of the subject and its effect on the audience. As Gussow added: '[this play] is as timely as the wage-price index and as saucy as spaghetti à la bolognese. Mr. Fo's manic farce should be obligatory viewing for anyone battling, i.e., succumbing to the high cost of living' (The New York Times, 18 December 1980).
- (6) Dario Fo's most recent play to be staged in South Africa was Orgasmo e Alito Escapero from the Zoo. For more details about this adaptation, see pp. 187-189 of the Appendix.

- (7) Fo's father was a railway worker, while his mother was a peasant writer.
- (8) Fo was later to become the most successful popular actor-playwright in Italy, after Eduardo de Filippo.
- (9) For more detailed information, see T. Mitchell, 1984, p. 37.
- (10) Brecht's The Caucasian Chalk Circle, London, Methuen, 1971. This play was Brecht's last great play completed in the United States of America. It boldly treats the problem of goodness and the difficulties of achieving justice in a wicked corrupt world.
- (11) See p. 197, note 28, of this dissertation.
- (12) 'I Dritti' (the Stand-ups) were a joke at the expense of 'I Gobbi' (The Hunchbacks), the most prominent révue company in Milan, who reacted against the spectacularity of American-based 'imported révues' and opted for a more intellectual, satirical cabaret which they called a 'chamber révue'.
- (13) Anti-révue was political satire and irreverent comedy; its theatrical tradition belonged to avanspettacolo (as opposed to cabaret), a kind of variety theatre performed between two movie showings, very much in vogue in Italy between 1930-1940.
- (14) She was a member of a popular touring theatrical family, the 'Teatro Famiglia Rame', who specialised in farces and vaudeville. Franca Rame has played a vital role in Fo's theatre since the mid-fifties as first actress, organiser, consultant and co-playwright. Since 1978, she has written plays that highlight the specific features of women's oppression, thus bringing a feminist perspective into revolutionary political theatre.
- (15) For a more detailed discussion, see Mitchell, 1984, p. 42.
- (16) Fo's brother, Flavio, was, incidentally, the administrator of the 'Teatro Stabile di Torino' at that time.
- (17) See pp. 96-98 of this dissertation.
- (18) For more details about Vittorio Grassman's L'Adelchi, see R. Rebora's 'Nasce con L'Adelchi il T.P.I.', Sipario, no. 168, April 1960, pp. 5-20.
- (19) For more details regarding the treaty on de-humanisation and alienation of the worker, see K. Marx's chapter entitled 'Alienated Labour' (in the 'First Manuscript'), Economical and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, S.L., Progress, 1977, pp. 120-134.

- (20) In Grande pantomima ... and Morte e resurrezione di un pupazzo, Fo's use of puppets was innovative because they were not adornments but pivotal characters in the action. On the other hand, the actors struck puppet-like attitudes, moving and acting with mechanical precision. The de-humanisation of the actor related to Fo's political theme of the oppressiveness of the industrial state, whereby the worker is controlled and manipulated like a puppet.
- (21) This deals with working class situations in contemporary Italy.
- (22) See J. Amado, Capitães da Areia, Mira Sintra, Publicações Europa-América, 1968.
- (23) 'Because the revolution is a fatherland and a family' [our translation], this emphasises that Marxism can easily replace the Christian doctrine because it too represents the same values.
- (24) See p. 191, note 2, of this dissertation for more details.
- (25) Franca Rame was later to use this experience as the basis for a monologue entitled Non mi muovo, non urlo, sono senza voce (I Can't Move, I Can't Scream, My Voice is Gone) which was premiered in London in May 1983.
- (26) In 1979, Fo was working on 'The Tragedy of Aldo Moro', that is the kidnapping and murder of the Italian ex-premier, an event which had brought Italian terrorism into the international news headlines. The extraparlimentary left groups were being forced to keep a low profile to avoid being accused since the terrorism issue was being used to discredit them and the left in general. Fo was advised to abandon this discussion on terrorism.
- (27) See p. 197, note 31 of this dissertation for further details.

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Chapter 2:

- (1) See R. Barthes on Diderot in Barthes, 1973, pp. 185-191.
- (2) Jean Jacques Rousseau's 'A Discourse on the Moral Effects of the Arts and Sciences' (Rousseau, 1979, pp. 3-26) sheds some light on this discussion.
- (3) Bertolt Brecht's 'Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction' (D. Craig, 1977, pp. 412-420) and Max Adereth's 'What is Littérature Engagée' (Ibid., pp. 445-485) deal with the pedagogical and dogmatic function of literature.
- (4) See A. Gramsci, 1975d, p. 2114
- (5) See W. Sillanpaa, 1984, p. 157
- (6) See F.T. Marinetti's 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism' (1909), translated by R.W. Flint, as quoted in U. Apollonio's Futurist Manifestos, London, Thames & Hudson, 1973, pp. 19-24.
- (7) 'Gli scrittori italiani di teatro non sono artisti e il teatro italiano non è un fatto estetico, ma un fatto veramente pratico, d'ordine commerciale' (Gramsci, 1972, p. 338). It was for these same reasons that Dario Fo made the decision to abandon 'bourgeois' theatre.
- (8) See T. Mitchell, 1984, p. 37.
- (9) Ibid., p. 37.
- (10) In his 'manifesto', Antonin Artaud, one of the most influential theorists of modern drama, expresses the importance of involving the audience in a direct way, thus advocating a total theatre in which all the forces of expression should be brought to bear: 'Vogliamo arrivare a dar vita a un certo numero d'immagini, ma immagini evidenti, palpabili, che non siano rovinare da un eterno disinganno. Se facciamo un teatro non è per rappresentare lavori ma per riuscire a fare in modo che quanto c'è di oscuro nello spirito, di occultato, di irrisolto, si manifesti in una specie di proiezione materiale, reale. Non ci proponiamo, come è stato fatto finora, com'è sempre stato richiesto al teatro, di dare l'illusione di ciò che non è; ma al contrario di fare apparire agli sguardi un certo numero di scene, d'immagini indistruttibili, incontestabili, che parlino direttamente allo spirito. Gli oggetti, gli accessori, perfino le scene che figureranno sul teatro dovranno essere intesi in senso immediato, senza trasposizione; dovranno essere presi non per ciò che rappresentano, ma per ciò che sono in realtà. La regia

propriamente detta e le evoluzioni degli attori dovranno essere considerate solo come i segni visibili di un linguaggio invisibile o segreto. Non un gesto di teatro che non porti dietro di sé tutta la fatalità della vita e le misteriose incidenze dei sogni. Tutto ciò che nella vita ha un senso augurale, divinatorio, corrisponde a un presentimento, proviene da un errore fecondo dello spirito, si ritroverà al momento adatto sulla nostra scena' (Artaud, 1986, p. 13).

- (11) For more information regarding Friedrich Nietzsche's vitalist principles, see Nietzsche's The Philosophy of Nietzsche, a compilation of all his major works, New York, Modern Library, 1977 (date of publication not given).
- (12) See Speirs, 1987, p. 37
- (13) Karl Korsch (1886-1961) was a German libertarian Marxist versed on the theory of freedom. He belonged to a group of 'leftist' thinkers for whom Marxism was said to be the direct expression of the proletarian movement, rather than a theory imported into it from outside. Together with Lukács and Gramsci, Korsch represented the Hegelian Marxism of the 1920s. His books were first published in 1923, at a sinister time: the date of Hitler's Munich putsch and the failure of the German Revolution. In the late 1920s, he befriended Bertolt Brecht and taught him the elements of Marxism, thus influencing Brecht's theatre to move away from anarchic nihilism.
- (14) Works pertaining to this early phase of Karl Marx are: The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, The Holy Family (in collaboration with Friedrich Engels) of 1844-5, The German Ideology (also in collaboration with Engels) of 1845-6 and The Communist Manifesto of 1848.
- (15) See Brecht, 1978, p. 139.
- (16) Pelagea Wlassowa is the protagonist of Brecht's Die Mutter, which is a reproposal of Maxim Gorky's novel, The Mother.
- (17) See Speirs, 1987, pp. 50-56
- (18) This play was Fo's first play ever to be performed outside Italy. It was also his first play to combine political farce with a Brechtian form (evident not only in the play's songs but also in its dependence on paradoxical situations to make its point). In this play, Fo's résumé-sketch and short farce are abandoned for a coherent plot line and character development which almost makes it a fully structured play.
- (19) 'The Influence of Brecht, and of The Threepenny Opera and Arturo

U) in particular, is strongly apparent in Fo's second play for the Odeon (Aveva due pistole con gli occhi bianchi e neri), a black comedy described as "a play in 3 acts and 2 interludes" which again deals with a criminal underworld' (Mitchell, 1984, p. 45).

- (20) Scientific Marxism manifested itself through dialectical materialism, which in turn is a type of science capable of explaining social phenomena and of putting people in rational control of them. Brecht's efforts were directed towards infusing the theatre with this type of Marxism.
- (21) See Piccolo, 1986, p. 163
- (22) Term employed by Gramsci which refers to the political domination and control exerted by the State and bourgeoisie over the proletariat.
- (23) Term often used by Mayakovsky to classify poetry which promoted agitation and political propaganda for the Agitpropburo, a department of the Soviet Union's Communist Party Central Committee. In a more modern context, Agit-Prop theatre aimed at producing agitation and propaganda for political issues that needed the immediate involvement of workers. This type of theatre was most prevalent in the Soviet Union in the Twenties, in Germany during the years of the Weimar Republic and in the United States in the Thirties.
- (24) Piccolo is voicing Erminia Artese's opinion as expressed in the latter's work Dario Fo parla di Dario Fo, Cosenza, Lerici, 1977.
- (25) The Frankfurt School refers to the work of members of the Institut für Sozialforschung which was established in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1923, as the first Marxist-oriented research centre affiliated with a major German university. In the Twenties, the work that the School - then headed by Carl Grünberg - produced, tended to be empirical, historical and oriented towards problems of the European working-class movement, although it also published theoretical work by Karl Korsch, Georg Lukács and others. In the Thirties, the Institute sought to develop an interdisciplinary social theory which could serve as an instrument of social transformation. During World War II, the Institute, exiled in the United States, departed from the Marxian theory of history, claiming that it was a form of enlightened scientism and rationalism hostile to Orthodox Marxism. This Institute was, in turn, criticised by Marxist-Leninists and scientific Marxists for its alleged surrender of revolutionary and scientific Marxian perspectives.
- (26) During a period of serious crisis in the Marxist Movement, Fo

stated: 'Practice is what counts. At this moment, as far as ideology goes, we are in a state of disaster. However, we put our work at the service of real facts, of reality. Practice. Just because at the level of ideology things are not working out, this does not mean that you abandon everything. There are still real situations that demand your struggle' (see Piccolo, 1986, p. 167).

- (27) Term referred to the buffoon-like peasant character created by the 16th Century Italian playwright-actor, Angelo Beolco. Ruzzante was a popular figure, who used peasant 'logic' and dialect to fuel his invectives against the upper classes. Because of his comical and ridiculous appearance, he could escape censorship even when pronouncing the harshest statements.
- (28) Fo's Poor Nano springs immediately to mind with regard to our daily perception of psychology and reality. This radio comedy series dealt with reversing biblical, historical and even Shakespearian stories, in order to see how they could present the point of view of the underdog. So in the story of 'Romulus and Remus' who built Rome, the poor nano, the narrator, tells the story of these two legendary boys who felt alienated because other children's mothers would not allow them to play with children who were raised by a she-wolf. The story of 'Othello' is retold as that of an albino (not a Moor) who is offended by Desdemona's refusal to offer sexual favours to his old drinking companion. Similarly, in the story of 'David and Goliath', the listener is obliged to sympathise with the poor giant who is judged prejudiciously due to his size, while David is the young lout who mercilessly provokes Goliath.
- (29) See Piccolo, 1986, p. 218
- (30) See p. 57 of this dissertation
- (31) See J. Gay's The Beggar's Opera, in C. Burgess (Ed.), New York, Crofto Classics, 1966. This text originally aimed at discrediting the 18th Century English Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole, and his entourage because of their corruption and their involvement in political scandals.
- (32) See Foucault's Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, tr. A. Sheridan, New York, Vintage/Random House, 1979.
- (33) She was a member of a popular touring theatrical family, the Teatro Famiglia Rame.
- (34) For more detailed discussion, see Mitchell, 1984, p. 79.
- (35) See Franca Rame and Dario Fo's Tutta casa, letto e chiesa,

Milano, La Comune, 1977.

- (36) At the Palazzina Liberty in December 1977.
- (37) With the exception of the version put on at the Wits Great Hall, in September 1982.
- (38) See A. Vinassa, 1988, p. 9, for a more detailed discussion.
- (39) As with *La Bionda* of *Gli Arcangeli non Giocano a Flipper*, in *Le Commedie di Dario Fo*, Vol. I, Torino, Einaudi, 1977a.

* * *

Chapter 3:

- (1) 'The cruel economic exploitation and political oppression exerted by the landlord class on the peasants, forced them to unleash several insurrections against the dominant upper class. In Chinese feudal society, only the peasant class struggle, the peasant insurrections and the peasant wars were the true motivating factors which contributed to historical development' (our translation) (M. Tse-tung, 1967, pp. 10-11).
- (2) See Binni, 1975, p. 236
- (3) Peasant movement in Northern France which revolted against the nobility in 1358.
- (4) The oldest examples of this art form date back to circa 970 AD; these manuscripts are found in the monasteries of St. Gallen in Switzerland, Fleury in France and Winchester in Great Britain. For more details, see Herrick, 1970, p. 1-3.
- (5) Enclosed area in front of church or cathedral.
- (6) The development of sacred drama in Europe was based on the dramatisation of Corpus Christi, Nativity and Passion episodes put on by the Catholic Church. In Great Britain and France, the sacred play was known as the 'mystery' (mystères) and 'miracle plays'. 'Morality plays' were derivations from the same genre, which combined farcical elements with religious virtues. Other art forms included 'Masks' and 'Pegeants' which were allegorical and fantastical pantomimes; Ben Jonson's famous repertoire was based on these. In Germany, the Bänkelsang was more didactic, combining the grotesque with the satirical; the ignorance of Latin amongst the Germans was the reason for this art form. In Spain and Portugal, Juan del Encina and Gil Vicente became the exponents of the autos ('actions'), a strange mixture of monologues, comical sketches and musical interludes with various religious themes. In the Slavic countries, due to the harsh winters, the most common art form was 'story-telling', mimed and narrated by buskers. These stories were often centred around legendary, mystical and quasi magical-religious characters drawn from the Apocryphal Gospels.
- (7) For further details on Grazzini and Cecchi, see Herrick, 1970, p. 4.
- (8) This type of opening dialogue was to re-appear later as the prologues in Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew or Ben Jonson's Every Man Out of His Humour.

- (9) Romolo Amaseo (1481-1552), a prolific critic of the Renaissance, was the author of De linguae latinae usu ritenendo. Amaseo, 'che divenne famoso come colui che voleva cancellare il volgare' (G. Taffanin) upheld an opposite view to that of Pietro Bembo on the 'questione della lingua'.
- (10) G. Bruno's Il Candelaio, Act 4, Scene X. For more information, see Bruno's 'Il Candelaio' in R. Mattioli's Letteratura Italiana, Storia e testi, Vol. 33, Milano/Napoli, Riccardo Ricciardi, 1956, p. 124.
- (11) Mariani gives the following works by Fo as an example: 'Sani da legare (1954), Isabella due caravalle e un cacciaballe (1963), La Signora è da buttare (1967), Mistero Buffo (1969).
- (12) The term 'polyphonic', which best describes the type of speech employed by Fo (especially in the monologues), is borrowed from the Bakhtian definition of the novel: 'the novel can be defined as a diversity of special speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages and diversity of individual voices) artistically organised. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities ... this internal stratification present in everyday language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre' (M. Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 262-263).
- (13) See example from Il Tecnocrata Americano in note 15 of this chapter.
- (14) Antonio Scappino is a stock character of the Italian Commedia dell'Arte who was one of the many zanni (clowns). He was especially noted for his cowardice, taking flight at the first sign of conflict but he was a colourful figure who always carried a wooden sword. Molière's Les Fourberies de Scapin (1671) made this character a part of French comedy.
- (15) In Il Tecnocrata Americano, for example, Fo created an American grammelot which he used in anti-nuclear and anti-American demonstrations. This particular play is a grotesque parody of an American technocrat; when first performed, Fo mimed and made sounds of aeroplanes and space shuttles, adding in once in a while a word or two of English (like 'yeah!' and 'Ok!') - Fo speaks French well but not English), with the precise inflection and accent. This American grammelot has been used by Fo in satirical interpretations of ex-President Gerald Ford. In one of his asides, during a televised version of Mistero Buffo, Fo tells how Il Tecnocrata Americano produced an 'improvised' riot, during

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- (13) See example from Il Tecnocrata Americano in note 1st of this chapter.
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one of the performances in Paris, amongst a small group of American spectators; they did not understand a word of what was being said, but somehow they knew it was satirising them.

- (16) For a description of the language in Mistero Buffo made by the critic Renzo Tian, see C. Valentini, 1977, p. 125.
- (17) Drammi pastorali combined elements from the rustic farce and the pastorale; thus, Arcadia was substituted by the northern Italian countryside and the neoclassical nymphs and shepherds by burlesque peasants.
- (18) La Fiorina is one of Ruzzante's or rather Angelo Beolco's (1502-1542) best works in which he uses the dialect of Padua and expresses his poetics. See R. Viola's Due saggi di letteratura pavana (Padova, 1949) which also contains a reprint of this play, with its Italian translation face to face.
- (19) Certain critics disagree. The Commedia dell'Arte, according to some, derived from the old Roman theatre and more specifically from the fabula atellana, a type of Punch and Judy Show, which showed masked characters who, in turn, had derived from the Greek farces. Perhaps, Harlequin and Pantaloon were also direct descendants of the old Roman clowns, even though their genealogy was never well documented, there being no proof nor direct evidence to show such a link. The role of the Ruzzante was not fixed. It varied from play to play: sometimes he was a soldier, other times a simple peasant. In other words, Ruzzante was not a stock character in the mould of the Captain, the Doctor or even Pantaloon, but an everyman prototype.
- (20) Harsh measures were often taken to curb the giullari's activities. These could range from censorship to death. Thus in 1548, with alarm at the growth of the Huguenot Movement in France, the government banned all performances of religious plays (mystères). It is interesting to note that the more liberal, Protestant churches were even more intollerant towards the giullari and actors in general. Thus, in 1617, Geneva passed the 'Lois Somptuaires' which banished theatre and dramatic literature. An Act of the British Parliament in 1642, closed all English theatres. In both cases, the authorities felt that the actors and giullari promoted decadence and were a threat to the political stability of the country. See also Fo's own comment in the prologue to 'Rosa fresca ...' in Fo, 1977e, p. 21.
- (21) Cesare Molinari describes the term giullaria in the following manner: 'La varia genia dei cantastorie, dei canterini, dei giocolieri, dei saltimbanchi, dei buffoni, dei matti'. He maintained that 'la giullaria rappresenta il momento in cui il teatro professionistico riassume in sé oltre alla funzione

estetica ed a quella d'intrattenimento, anche una funzione informativa sia sul piano culturale che su quello dell'avvenimento politico e quotidiano, narrati non solo, ma esaminati criticamente e polemicamente' (C. Molinari, 1972, pp. 1-19). The giullari carried out those functions that today are the task of the mass media.

- (22) It is interesting to note that women first appeared in plays of the Commedia dell'Arte in 1560. Both the Church and the aristocracy had refused the participation of women in theatrical ventures. Therefore, the formation of the Commedia, where they could participate, became a symbol for women, of a condition suspended between autonomy and exploitation, between dreams of honour and destiny as a merchandise. For the first time, women joined in the wealth and prestige of theatrical history, since the only other professional activity open to them was prostitution. Whilst prostitution, in the eyes of the Church, allowed for a depraved use of the female body as a means of deterring other ethical perversions, acting prompted the use of women for propagating a more contagious, subtle and vast social perversion: 'Nuda o vestita, la donna introduce nella Commedia dell'Arte, l'attrattiva di un oggetto sessuale che esalta il proprio fascino a contatto con le trame elaborate dai comici' (Tessari, 1984, p. 23)
- (23) Reference to the specific duality of theatre, which propagates not only entertainment, as an art form (artes), but also the values of a civilisation (more).
- (24) Cardinal Borromeo, one of theatre's most vituperous opponents, declared that the plague of Milan of the 17th Century, which occurred between Epiphany and Lent, was divine punishment for the sinful attendance at evil shows. Comedies were usually staged during Carnival (period between Epiphany and Lent), thus it was a time during which people substituted pleasure for liturgical worship.
- (25) For more details, see Gramsci as quoted in G. Mariani, et al, 1980, p. 911.
- (26) That is, at the service of the bourgeois state organ of information, therefore within the system.
- (27) His dislike for the bourgeoisie is well-known: in an interview conceded to Playboy in 1974, he explained the reasons for having abandoned bourgeois theatre: 'Ecco la nostra uscita dal teatro borghese: abbiamo capito che non basta fare un teatro rivoluzionario e d'avanguardia insieme alla borghesia. Perché? Perché la borghesia digerisce tutto, è il più grosso struzzo, della storia dell'umanità, come diceva Lenin; nessun è mai

riuscito a digerire e defecare coriandoli come la borghesia. Quindi dovevano scegliere per forza degli spazi che fossero realmente quelli di un'altra classe. [...] Poi da noi vengono anche i piccoli borghesi, i borghesi illuminati, tutti quelli che vogliono, ogni tanto viene anche qualche industriale pazzo: si siede lì e soffre' (in L. Binni, 1977, pp. 2-3).

- (28) In an interview with *L'Espresso*, Dario Fo affirmed the importance that story-tellers from his youth had in the development of his dramatic career: 'Quando ero ragazzino, al mio paese era pieno di fabulatori che andavano per le piazze a raccontare storie o fatti di cronaca. Certo è che il gusto per raccontare, per improvvisare, per inventare situazioni era cosa di tutti i giorni, anche senza bisogno di essere ubriachi o di aspettare che arrivasse Carnevale' (in R. Cirio, 1987, p. 128).
- (29) L'Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana (Italian Cultural Recreational Association) is the P.C.I.'s cultural wing.
- (30) As quoted in Mitchell, 1984, p. 10.
- (31) Mayakovsky's *Mystery-Bouffe* (1918), considered the first Soviet play, was a hymn of praise to socialist optimism and to the Revolution. Written in the language of poetical allegory, this work reinforced the historical meaning of the Revolution and suggested solutions for today's urgent problems (echoing Fo's own feelings). His lyrical sentiments often took the form of vicious attacks on the enemies of the Revolution - in this particular play, he satirises Rousseau and Tolstoy because of their hypocrisy and great bourgeois tradition. *Mystery-Bouffe* is an indication of the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, as well as being an invective against the Catholic-Orthodox hierarchy which plagiarised all the popular traditions (again echoing Fo's own feelings on the subject). Perhaps ironically, this is how Vladimir Mayakovsky described his *Mystery Bouffe*: '[...] our great revolution condensed by poetry and dramatic action ... *Mystery* is all that is great in the Revolution, and *Bouffe* is what is amusing. The poetry of *Mystery-Bouffe* consists of slogans for meetings, shouts on the street, the language of the newspapers. The action of *Mystery-Bouffe* is the action of the crowds, the collision of the classes, the struggle of ideas - a miniature world in the circus arena'. (A. Miller, 1976, pp. 99-100)
- (32) The text of reference here is that of the Einaudi Edition, which includes the following micro-texts: 'Rosa fresca sulentissima', 'Lauda dei battuti', 'Strage degli innocenti', 'Moralità del cieco e dello storpio', 'Le nozze di Cana', 'Nascita del giullare', 'La nascita del villano', 'Resurrezione di Lazzaro', 'Bonifacio VIII', 'Il Matto e la Morte', 'Maria viene a conoscere

della condanna imposta al figlio', 'Gioco del Matto sotto la croce', 'Passione - Maria alla croce'. All the quotations from Mistero Buffo are taken from this edition.

- (33) To verify this, one needs but to compare the Mazzotta Edition (1977c) with the Einaudi Edition (1977e).

Chapter 4:

- (1) Einaudi Edition, pp. 5-23.
- (2) As reported in Mitchell, 1984, p. 26
- (3) Einaudi Edition, pp. 24-29
- (4) Our own word, appropriately 'invented' to mean 'fear of hell' (from Erebus, the god of darkness, son of Chaos and brother of Night. Erebus is also the darkness below the Earth, thought to be the abode of the dead or the region they pass through on their way to Hades).
- (5) Einaudi Edition, pp. 30-39
- (6) References will be made not only to Fo's ability as a playwright but also as an actor in Mistero Buffo.
- (7) Einaudi Edition, pp. 40-55
- (8) See Brecht's Bertolt Brecht Collected Plays; The Threepenny Opera, ed. & tr. J. Willett & R. Manheim, Vol. 2, Part 2, London, Eyre Methuen, 1969.
- (9) Einaudi Edition, pp. 58-69
- (10) These descriptions are very similar to those in Rabelais' works (especially Pantagruel et Gargantua) and in the popular culture of the Middle Ages. The images of the banquet, the eating, the drinking, the excesses, lose their religious solemnity and become images of popular celebration where abundance is not a sin but a hymn to creation. The images of the medieval banquet are very visual and often grotesque, and besides Fo, other film producers have found it important to incorporate these images in their work. Pier Paolo Pasolini springs immediately to mind with his famous epic 'trilogy': The Decameron, The Canterbury Tales and A Thousand and One Nights.
- (11) Einaudi Edition, pp. 70-81
- (12) Ibid., pp. 82-96
- (13) Ibid., pp. 96-103
- (14) Mazzotta Edition, pp. 20-21. The text of 'Resurrezione di Lazzaro' in the Mazzotta Edition seems more drawn out and richer in description, especially regarding the crowd's behaviour and

its expectations during the miracle.

- (15) Einaudi Edition, pp. 105-119
- (16) See Brecht's The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, tr. R. Manheim, London, Eyre Methuen, 1976.
- (17) 'Michela Straniero retitles the play "Mistero Buffo", and sets out to debunk Fo's spurious sense of history, producing a list of historical inaccuracies and anachronisms which occur in Mistero Buffo (such as, for example, the fact that the term mystery is not found in the Mass but in the Rosary), and accusing Fo of falsifying historical facts and simplifying the popular elements of his source material. Straniero maintains that Fo, in his zeal to reappropriate popular culture from the mystifying hands of bourgeois commentators, ignores or mutilates texts which are of bourgeois origin' (Straniero in Mitchell, 1984, p. 16).
- (18) Zeffirelli's comment on this particular text is a good example. He accepted the legitimacy of satirical critique against the Church's and the Papacy's corruption, but he disapproved of its extension to the Gospels. He rejected Fo's satirical figure of Christ, but admitted that Fo is a phenomenon of Italian theatre and a direct descendant of Plautus and the Commedia dell'Arte actor.
- (19) Einaudi Edition, pp. 122-135
- (20) See Dario Fo's Accidental Death of an Anarchist, tr. G. Hanna, London, Pluto, 1980.
- (21) Einaudi Edition, pp. 136-145
- (22) As part of Fo's 1977 theatre season. Franca Rame's mother figures have an inflexibility, a political awareness and a sense of solidarity with all women, often provoking a certain sentimentalism in her more tragical manifestations.
- (23) Einaudi Edition, pp. 146-159
- (24) Einaudi Edition, pp. 160-171

Appendix:

- (1) This play was born from the immensely popular Tutta casa, letto e chiesa (All House, Bed and Church), a production which included the same three texts in the One Woman Plays. However, 'for her projected performance of the show at the Public Theatre in New York in September 1983, Rame changed the English title to Adult Orgasm Escapes from the Zoo, in acknowledgement that the ingenuous, open and basically cheerful character of this monologue ["A Woman Alone"], [...] is one of her finest and funniest farcical creations' (Mitchell, 1984, p. 81).
- (2) As stated by David Alcock, the South African director of the Orgasmo Adulto Escapes from the Zoo production staged at the 'Black Sun Theatre', Johannesburg.
- (3) Term borrowed from Roland Barthes. For a more detailed discussion, see Barthes's Critical Essays, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1972.
- (4) See the importance of costuming under 'Diseases of Costume' in Barthes, 1972, pp. 41-50.
- (5) For more details, see A. Sichel's review in The Star, 3 July 1986.
- (6) Yvonne Bryceland first appeared in the One Woman Plays at the 'National Theatre', London, on 26 June 1981, in a production directed by Michael Bogdanov.
- (7) Rina Minervini's review was entitled 'Ramefications of Sex', and is indicative of this formula for success.

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