

Structures of the Comic and of Politics
in the Works of Dario Fo

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Ai miei genitori, Giovanni Piccolo e Carmela Riotto.

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INTRODUCTION

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

DARIO FO- Internationally renowned Italian playwright, Husband
FRANCA RAME- famous Italian actress turned playwright, Wife
THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
RONALD REAGAN- President of the United States (like Pirandello's
Madame Pace, he is evoked by the CHARACTERS)

TIME: November 1984, shortly after the re-election of an actor as
head of State

PLACE: The United States of America, first in Washington (the seat
of State power), later in New York City - Broadway (the seat of
Stage power)

BRIEF PLOT SUMMARY- After being repeatedly denied access to the
U.S. by the State Department (in 1980, 1983, and in September
1984) on the grounds of allegedly aiding the Red Brigades, two
famous Italian political satirists are granted a visa to attend
the Broadway premiere of their play Accidental Death of an
Anarchist. In order to acquire a feeling for "the state of the
art," the two make a whirlwind tour of Broadway-the Mecca of
world theater- in its On, Off and Off off versions. Upon their
return home they rush to release their impressions of the U.S. in
a travelogue divided into five acts and published by one of
Italy's leading magazines. In it, they persevere with their
scathing indictments of U.S. foreign and domestic policies,
focusing on the evoked figure of the Actor-President. Likewise,
the principle "business is business" governing artistic selection
in Broadway is subjected to satire and to a contemptuous treatment
by both artists.

Reality or fiction? As in many of Fo's plays the dividing
line is a thin one. Although the plot and cast of characters are
well worthy of a farce by Fo, the above descriptions are not
excerpted from the program of a theater performance. Rather they
refer to real events that transpired in the ominous year 1984, in
a land closely resembling the Oceania of Orwellian description. A
fairly broad sector of the American public has made its first
acquaintance with Dario Fo and Franca Rame under the circumstances

of the match between the two Italian actors, defended by progressive intellectuals and theater personalities, on the one hand, and the State Department of the U.S., on the other. It was a fitting first encounter that is faithful both to the actors' style of political commitment and to their vocation for the farcical.

Prior to this recent episode, a small sector of American audiences had been familiar with Fo's work, mainly through translations and stagings of his plays and a few articles in drama journals. Although a comprehensive doctoral dissertation introducing Dario Fo to the American public was written in 1977, the renewed interest in the playwright's work as well as later developments in his theater warrant a continuation of critical research. This dissertation seeks to make a contribution especially in the analysis of the dramatic texts.

In order to become acquainted with the main characters of this study, one must start with Dario Fo, born in San Giano, in the province of Varese, in 1926. For the past twenty years he has shared with the recently deceased playwright and actor Eduardo De Filippo the greatest popularity among Italian audiences. He has written more than forty plays and has starred in and directed most of them. Fo has been a constant participant in and initiator of conferences and debates on the social role and techniques of the theater both in Italy and abroad. The numerous awards received in other countries, as well as the many translations and stagings, testify to the international recognition of his talents. In fact, since 1977, Dario Fo has been the Italian playwright with the

greatest number of plays performed abroad (more than Pirandello!) in countries ranging from Sweden to Argentina, from France and England to Hungary and Yugoslavia. Books on Dario Fo have been published in West Germany, Denmark, England and France. However, his record is not impressive merely because of quantitative output. In Italy and increasingly abroad, Fo's name is synonymous with the salvaging of traditional popular theater and with its adaptation to modern day political satire, carried out in a militant fashion.

Franca Rame, born in a family of travelling actors specializing in farces, has played a vital role in Fo's theater since the mid-fifties as first actress, organizer and consultant. Since 1978 she has written plays that highlight the specific features of women's oppression, thus bringing a feminist perspective into revolutionary-minded political theater.

Disregarding Fo's dictum that "Il teatro si spiega solo con il teatro", scores of theater critics, drama scholars and students have examined Fo's production from the early fifties to the present, attempting to systematize and explain it. The approaches have ranged from philological research to semiotic analysis, from journalistic and sociological investigations to anthropological and psychoanalytical studies. With the exception of a few scholars, however, there has been a tendency to neglect the dramatic texts themselves. Many and diverse factors have contributed to such neglect, some connected to general trends in drama criticism, others arising from Fo's specific situation and

characteristics.

Reacting against the domination of "literary" analyses of theater, many scholars of the theater, in the last twenty years have correctly emphasized the total character of the dramatic events, thus highlighting acting, staging, directing and the relationship between audience and stage. In Italy, in particular, an important new current in theater history and criticism focuses on the figure of the actor considering him/her the pivot around which the performance revolves. Generally speaking, then, the dramatic text has lost its supremacy and is considered only one among many elements that constitute the performance. Fo acts in, stages, directs his plays and claims that he writes "on the stage." Thus it is not surprising that many critics tend to emphasize all the other elements at the expense of his contributions as playwright.

Fo's work exploits forms of the comic that often have been deemed unworthy of scholarly attention: in his plays he uses such "unsophisticated" devices as slapstick, deus ex machina solutions, scatology, circus and variety show techniques. In addition, farce, the lowliest among theatrical genres, dominates his works. Thus although most critics would concur that he is a great actor, his texts have not generally been regarded by established critics as artistic products deserving serious analysis. In addition to this type of discrimination, one must take into consideration the impact of Fo's and Rame's militancy which has led many to judge their works not from an aesthetic viewpoint, but merely on the

merits or demerits of their political discourse. In fact, in keeping with this line of reasoning, a general tendency among Italians is to view Fo and his theater as exclusively a product of a particular social and political situation. Thus the relevancy of his work to other political and historical settings is greatly underestimated.

Needless to say, this latter tendency shows its greatest limitations when confronted with the phenomenon of Fo's success abroad. There, a serious critic cannot ascribe the fortune of his plays to supposedly acritical militants who acclaim anyone supporting their immediate cause or to throngs of aficionados of Fo the actor, coming to applaud their favorite performer regardless of the merits of the play itself. In that context, in fact, the dramatic text itself acquires its greatest importance as the main vehicle capable of transmitting the essence of a play, even in translation.

Dealing with Fo's dramatic texts presents some methodological problems because each play is written and re-written numerous times in response to criticisms by the audience and to changes in the political situation. In the monologue-plays, entire sections are removed and later used in other plays according to the needs of the moment. In this study, the texts analyzed are generally the first edition approved by Fo, although one must bear in mind that it is very unlikely that a play will ever again be performed in the exact form indicated by the written text.

In spite of methodological difficulties springing from the

"work in progress" status of Fo's plays, one can detect constant features that surface throughout his production. The present study attempts to analyze these running threads by grouping them loosely under the headings of "structures of the comic and of politics". Structures of the comic refers to specific verbal and situational constructions and devices aimed at provoking laughter. Structures of politics refers to the theatrical shape given by the playwright to his perceptions of class struggle and power relations in society. Focusing on these structures, while following their evolution and continuity, is a key to understanding what makes Fo's plays relevant and effective, not only in their original context, but also when they are removed from it.

The three main chapters of this study are not uniform in their approaches or analytical tools: each section confronts different but related issues, following a chronological order without making "evolution" their primary concern. The first chapter examines Fo's period of apprenticeship in several forms of the traditional popular theater: in particular it connects Fo's work with such forms of the "minor" theater as storytelling, varietà, and the farce. Fo's characteristic use of "deceit en abyme" structures and his often-used reversal of point of view are examined both in their connection to the tradition and with his innovation of them.

The second chapter focuses on the playwright's use of the grotesque. Bakhtin's observations on the connection between grotesque realism and the Carnival tradition are used as a

mainstay in understanding the social function of laughter. In analyzing the two best known plays by Fo, Mistero Buffo and Morte accidentale di un anarchico, the grotesque is viewed in relation to the playwright's vision of the world of the oppressed and the politics of the oppressor.

The third chapter investigates Fo's approach to the relationship between theater and knowledge; his evolution from "speaking for those who have been cut off from History" to his later view of the theater as a means of disseminating counterinformation capable of leading to revolutionary political action. His views on the "didacticism" of the theater are compared with Brecht's aesthetic theories as their respective remakes of John Gay's The Beggar's Opera are analyzed. The final section of the third chapter examines Franca Rame's specific contributions to the most recent co-authored plays, analyzing in particular her innovations of the grotesque linked to her stress on the tragic elements in women's experience.

CHAPTER I
DARIO FO IN THE FIFTIES: AN APPRENTICESHIP IN THE ART OF
DEMYSTIFICATION

1. The Hero and the Villain revisited

The reader who leafs through Italian glamour magazines of the early fifties is struck by two fresh faces, both acclaimed with enthusiasm and showered with rosy predictions. The young man, Dario Fo, is admired for his comic talent, inventiveness and high energy, attributes that promise to make him "the great Italian comedian of tomorrow". His particular brand of humor is complemented by his physical appearance: he is tall, lanky, loose-jointed, awkward and has a perennial look of bewilderment on his face, typical of the newcomer from the provinces. What is peculiar about Fo's wide-eyed persona, however, is his ambivalence: he comprises a mixture of the Fool and the Knave, two types whose roles were kept clearly separate in traditional comedy. The characteristics embodied by each type seem indispensable to confront the innumerable contradictions facing Italy in the postwar years of Reconstruction, and hence Fo's double nature seems more than justified.

The young woman, Franca Rame, is mainly admired for her physical attributes, which cause her to be nicknamed "the Rita Hayworth of Italy." However, as she smiles from the covers of "Grand Hotel" (Italy's leading fotoromanzo), in spite of her glamorous furs and plunging necklines, the reader seems to hear

the beat of a candid heart. In fact, both her press and stage persona exude a great degree of moral uprightness which, glitter aside, gives her the image of the homespun "girl next door."

As if in a Hollywood "boy-meets-girl" script, much to the delight of the gossip columnists, the two team up both on stage and in real life during the mid-fifties. Further integration into the norms of conventional society occurs as the two are blessed, a few years later, with the birth of a son. Reporting on the happy event, pink press journalists rush to assure avid readers that the boy has luckily inherited his father's brains and his mother's looks. The first serious signs of deviation from the expected practices of stardom appear as both take turns impersonating the Red Befana,¹ the alternative Santa Claus sponsored by the Italian Communist Party (P.C.I.), for the purpose of distributing Christmas gifts to needy children. Increasingly, the names of both artists are associated with activities of the PCI, yet the glamour magazines do not reject their favorite couple; they simply direct their focus to Franca's furs and taste for fashion. In real life, episodes of political censorship against the two increase, culminating in the 1962 protest walk-out staged by the couple during Canzonissima (Italy's leading song contest). This event signals a shift in the image of the two built by the press: gradually journalists substitute the couple's customary candor with an image of social commitment. The point of no return is finally reached in 1968. As the two immerse themselves in the turbulent world of revolutionary politics, both on stage and in

their personal lives, the newspapers declare a complete loss of innocence on the part of both artists. In fact, the final shedding of the glamorous/naive personae corresponds, both in scandal sheets and in the "serious" press, to the build-up of the militant/sinister personae. This new image that started to be projected in the press in the early seventies accompanies them to this day.

This quick excursion into the world of glamour magazines² does not aim at uncovering a frivolous side of Dario Fo and Franca Rame's artistic activities; rather, it is intended as a key to understanding the most prominent quality of Fo's protagonists in the early fifties: candor.

Today an observer better acquainted with Fo's later plays would find it difficult to recognize a kinship between Fo's early characters and his later ones. In fact, because of the conspicuous changes, one would tend to see discontinuity as the predominant feature within Fo's overall work. A minimal amount of candor persists in the characters of Coppia aperta (1983), Fabulazzo osceno (1982), and other plays, allowing one to discern the kinship between "Il Lungo" of Gli arcangeli non giocano a flipper (1958) and the husband of Coppia aperta. This resemblance, however, is a superficial one. The main aim of the author, in the later plays, is of a political nature; his energies and talents are devoted to uncovering, by means of the comic, the hidden laws and structures of capitalism. In his later works, if a character starts out by being naive, at the end of the play, the

public expects the character to have acquired greater wits, due to the harshness of the lessons inflicted by society. This is not the case in Fo's early plays, in which candor itself is a weapon exposing the evil in society. The "naive" characters, in fact, are the only ones demonstrating common sense and healthy ambitions in an absurd "civil" world dominated by the sly.

While tracing the ups and downs of the single feature of candor in Fo's plays could be helpful in illuminating the development of the author's ideology, it could also be misleading as a starting point for analysis, since it obscures the basic continuity existing in his work. Fo himself insists on the predominance of such continuity in opposition to those critics who emphasize a breakdown into the two rigidly distinct periods of bourgeois theater and militant theater.³ Rather than searching for the single thread sewing together his work, this study will focus on the heterogeneous makeup of Fo's plays, following the warp and woof which create different textures in the fabric of his texts according to the different periods in which they were written. The choice of such a procedure is not arbitrary; it is in fact dictated by the character of combination that exists in the comic genre in general, and in Fo's work in particular.

In the American and English press Fo and Rame have been defined as "Italy's leading political satirists"; however, in Italian, both are called comedians. Although satire is one aspect of their work, the term "comedian" in a more accurate manner includes the different modes of the comic that they employ:

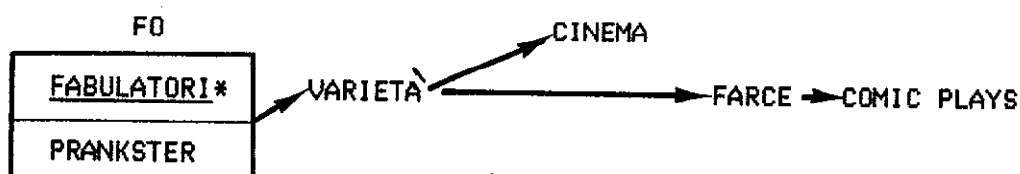
parody, satire, irony, scatology, slapstick and mime. At the level of structure, Fo has ventured into various theatrical terrains; varieta (an Italian form of entertainment similar to the music hall), farces, five-act plays. What stands out, however, in Fo's versatility is his talent for combining the different forms so that, for example, a five-act play is "contaminated" by aspects of farce, of varieta, of story-telling, thus offering an enriched final product.

The principle of "combination" exists in the comic genre taken in its own right. For example, satire and farce, both of which are the main modalities in Fo's art, etymologically denote the coming together of different elements. In tracing the history of the different etymologies assigned to the word "satire", Attilio Brilli shows that its true source is the Latin word satura⁴, the lanx satura being a ritual dish filled with different types of food for offering to the gods and lex per saturam a law with different prescriptions. In both cases the name satura designated a single unit containing diversity. The word "farce" has its origins in the Latin verb "farcire", to stuff, and the term farsa was first applied to a special Mass in which the Latin rite was interspersed with vernacular passages.⁵ This case also illustrates the blending of heterogeneous elements.

The grotesque form of the comic, one which is frequently used by Fo, also relies on the combination of contiguous and heterogeneous elements. In his study of the evolution of grotesque realism, Bakhtin demonstrates that part of the grotesque's freedom

of invention lies in its ability to unify discordant elements and to draw closer that which is distant. This process, according to Bakhtin, assists one in discarding a dominant world view while suggesting the possibility of a completely different world ordering.⁶

In Dario Fo's artistic development, the fifties were years of apprenticeship in the art of renovating old forms, of combining the traditional with the new and obtaining original hybrid products. If one were schematically to trace Fo's itinerary in the fifties, it would look approximately like this:



*Fabulatori = spontaneous popular story tellers.

Each successive phase incorporated the previous ones. Although the characters, the content and the outlook of his plays have changed greatly in Fo's thirty-year stage career, this initial apprenticeship in the development of comic structures has proven a stable base from which the author has departed very little except during limited periods of his activity.

The young man Dario Fo, upon making his official artistic debut with the 1952 radio broadcast Poer nano together with Franco Parenti, an accomplished comedian, seemed to be adhering to

the dual metaphor of the world as a stage and of the stage as a microcosm of the world.⁷ In fact, in his characteristically candid/sly way, he extended the metaphor by including himself as the demiurge and his work as the Creation. In spite of the humble-sounding title (Poer nano means 'Poor guy'), for Fo "in the beginning" there was nothing less than the construction of an alternative world history in juxtaposition to the one generally handed down through official myth, religion and historiography. Not unexpectedly, this parallel world, molded in Fo's image and likeness, begins with an episode from Genesis: the revised story of Cain and Abel, in which, emblematically, Cain is washed clean of thousands of years of abuse while Abel loses his claim to innocence.

As the piece contains essential indications of the major techniques that were later to be developed by Fo, for the reader's convenience the piece is quoted here in its entirety:

Oh Signore, come sei stato buono te, che hai fatto venire fuori il sole alla mattina, invece che potevi benissimo farlo venire fuori il pomeriggio...O Signore, come sei stato bravo te che hai fatto andare gli uccelli che volano nel cielo azzurro e invece i pesci in acqua...e non ti sei nemmeno sbagliato! Oh Signore...Ciao" Tutte le mattine l'Abele si affacciava alla finestra e diceva così le preghiere del buon mattino. "Come l'è bravo l'Abele!" "E che inventiva che c'ha!" E la gente che era venuta giù dabbasso per ascoltarla ci facevano un mucchio di applausi e ci dicevano cose gentili...A letto c'era il suo fratello Caino che sentiva gli applausi che ci facevano al suo fratello Abele. "Anch'io, anch'io le preghiere del buon mattino!" diceva il Caino, saltava giù dal letto coi suoi ugitt picul e i pè piatt e cominciava "Oh Signor d'amore acceso, non t'avessi mai offeso, o mio caro buon Gesù... me ricordi più" "Oeu! Ma che stupit quell l!!!!" diceva la gente giù dabbasso. "Ma come fa un

fratello così bello con gli occhi azzurri e i riccioli d'oro averci un fratello in sci stupid e cunt i piè piatt come el Caino" E lui sentiva e ci veniva il magone-poer nano- "Ma non prendertela così: ci diceva l'Abele- "Piuttosto andiamo giù nella pubblica via dove c'è la gente gentile che poi ci dice le cose gentili." "Andiamo, andiamo" -E andavano giù dabbasso indove che c'era la gente gentile che appena li vedeva passare dicevano "Oeu, ma come fa un fratello così bello coi riccioli d'oro e gli occhi azzurrri come l'Abele averci un fratello insci brutt, con j'ugitt picul e i piè piatt come il Caino?" -Lui sentiva e ci veniva da pianger-poer nano- "Non prendertela così, andiamo là dove c'è il pozzo" -ci diceva allora l'Abele- "Che noi ci facciamo la voce dentro e viene fuori l'eco gentile" "Andiamo, andiamo...dall'eco gentile" -diceva il Caino. E andavano di là dove c'era il pozzo. L'Abele si affacciava e faceva "Chu-Chu" e l'eco rispondeva "Uhiuhihihi" E tutti i colombi che volavano nel cielo presi di gioia- "Anch'io, anch'io l'eco gentile" -diceva il Caino e si affacciava anche lui sul pozzo e faceva "Chu-Chu" e l'eco rispondeva "Uhauhaaahh" E tutti i colombi volavano spaventati nel cielo. E il Caino ci rimaneva male, poer nano. "Ma non prendertela così" -ci diceva l'Abele "Andiamo là nel prato che ci sono un mucchio di fiori colorati con il profumo gentile ..." "Andiamo, andiamo..." diceva il Caino. Andavano là e davvero c'erano un mucchio di fiori colorati con il profumo gentile. E l'Abele andava vicino ad un fiore dove c'era su un'ape e ci faceva "Oh ape apina, come sei carina tu...CiCiCi" e l'ape apina ci andava nelle labbra e ci dava un bacio. Com'era bravo l'Abele. "Anch'io l'ape apina!" diceva il Caino e ci andava lì e faceva "Oh ape apina! Come sei carina tu- CiCiCi" e "Zac" una sghagnada en tel dit. "Porco qui, porco là!" diceva il Caino. "A chi porco qui porco là?" disse il Signore venendo fuori da una nube- "No Signore, non prendertela così...egli non sa quello che dice" disse subito l'Abele. "Come non so quel che si dice?!" Urlò il Caino "Guarda qui che cagnada ch'el m'ha fà: e prendeva su un bastone che ci ha lì e tac! ci dava una gran legnata sulla testa all'Abele...che cadeva per terra morto, poer nano e allora il Caino c'è rimasto male, poer nano. (Poer nano, pp.8-14).

How was it possible for the traditional Biblical story to be transformed to such an extent? In order to attempt an answer to this question one must go back to the important issue of point of

view. It is, infact, through the switching of the observation post that the comic is achieved in this first gallery of rehabilitated villains.

Fo himself traces the acquisition of his particular vantage point to his own biographical origins. He was born in San Giano, a small town on the Lago Maggiore, bordering on Switzerland. As a young child he was exposed to the tales of the fabulatori, spontaneous popular story-tellers, who in this case were illegal fishermen. Because of their activity, which involved risk and adventure, Fo claims that these fishermen had to rely a great deal on the use of imagination and "those who use imagination in order to transgress the law always keep part of it to amuse themselves and their friends."⁸ The stories they told were born of the observation of daily life and were marked by bitterness which was vented through satire. According to Fo:

Raccontavano sempre in prima persona. Ora avevano messo troppa rabbia, troppa forza nel lanciare la lenza e avevano raggiunto campanili nascosti in fondo al mare...Ora avevano fatto i furbi nella corsa con le lumache e quando la lumaca ch'era arrivata prima si era sfracellata contro una pietra si erano commossi e non avevano avuto il cuore di raccoglierla per mangiarla (Artese, p.9).

With the personal influence of the Lombard fabulatori in the background, it does not seem surprising that the story of Cain and Abel could be transformed in such a radical manner. With reference to this primary influence, Claudio Meldolesi states:

Il processo creativo di Fo risulta dei più mobili (se nell'analisi del suo teatro si guarda all'incessante valorizzazione dei contenuti di attualità) ma proprio

questa mobilità ha bisogno di un "blocco strutturale" di un immaginario-profondo costante e fertile.⁹

Part of this "immaginario-profondo costante e fertile" is the lesson of the fabulatori. One feature common to the tall tales of the fabulatori and to Fo's story is the technique of estrangement. In satire, according to Brillì, this mechanism can be articulated in a number of ways. Estrangement can be obtained, for example, by temporarily dislocating the point of view--before and after; by using a character with a liminal or "other" position--the picaro, the child, the naive, the savage, the madman--or by using subhuman or suprahuman categories (Brillì, p.42).

In the stories told by the fabulatori a common device aimed at producing estrangement is the hyperbole. For example, the simple mechanical gesture of casting a fishing line, when subjected to an exaggerated application of force, produces the unexpected result of catching a steeple. By implied comparison, the action of casting a fishing line and regularly catching a fish becomes less mechanically accepted: one knows now that it requires a proportional force and skill to yield the expected result. Transgression of these rules by excess, as shown by the example of the catching of the steeple, leads to unwarranted results. In the case of the snail, the expected sequence--snail race → snail dinner--is disrupted by the excess in speed, which brings the snail to a heroic death, leading the racers to reflect on the cruelty of their mechanical eating habits. The issue of

acceleration implied in this example is one to keep in mind in considering Fo's overall work and his frequent use of the quickened tempo of the farce.

In addition to the issue of estrangement, the "theatralization" of Fo's narration and the generally bitter outlook of his work reveal an influence of the fabulatori on the author. As in the tall tales of fishermen, Fo has divided everything into main characters (Cain and Abel) and chorus (the townsfolk), into makers of history (the main characters) and tellers of history (the story-teller persona).

In spite of the hilarity generated by his rendition of the story, the underlying bitterness is betrayed by the process of "victimization" that each reputed villain undergoes. In his essay, "Elogio di Franti," Umberto Eco takes on the task of unraveling the hidden mechanisms of point of view at a semiotic level.¹⁰ Franti is the notorious villain of De Amicis's book, Cuore; he is a bad schoolboy whose hallmark is the "laughing grimace." In a manner similar to Fo's own rehabilitation of villains, Eco proceeds to unmask De Amicis' ideological standpoint by analyzing the various instances in which Franti's laughter occurs, and by putting into question the sociological and political motives of the author. In the economy of Cuore Franti was envisioned by De Amicis as playing the role of Negation; however, he was shortchanged of his thoroughgoing critical potential by the manipulations of his unsympathetic author. Fo's villains, by contrast, enjoy the full "collaboration" of their author in

carrying out their mission of criticism.

Even if not consciously acknowledged at this phase of his career, the situation becomes the pivot around which Fo develops his comic structures. In later interviews Fo defines the situation as the central knot or condition that set the stage for the character's behavior or actions (Artese, p. 22). For example, in the David and Goliath episode of Poer nano, the basic situation is the disproportion between the giant and the youth; in the episode of Samson and Delilah, also included in Poer nano, the central feature is Samson's unwisely managed strength.

What is the basic situation of Cain and Abel? To those who have been influenced by centuries of Christian tradition, the episode of the two siblings calls to mind the first act of violence perpetrated on earth, an act leading to the indelible imprinting of the mark of Goodness and of the mark of Evil which set the two brothers apart. But this deeply embedded Manichaeic division obscures the original situation that eventually led to the killing. Fo in his transfigured version instead insists upon it, rehabilitating with his novel approach the much slandered figure of Cain.

In the Genesis story, Cain, the herder, and Abel, the farmer, sacrificed the products of their labor to God. Inexplicably, God accepted Abel's sacrifices but refused Cain's, thus creating a situation of arbitrary rejection. Subsequently, when Cain's face darkened with anger over his exclusion, God reminded him that it

was not his competence to judge the Creator's behavior. What concludes the story and what generally is best recollected is the fratricide committed by Cain and his sarcastic response to God's inquiry about his brother's whereabouts.¹¹ In his remake, Fo exploits the rigid division between Good and Evil generally associated with the original story but does it in such a way as to uncover the underlying and forgotten basic situation of arbitrary exclusion. This he achieves mainly through parody. Brilli's definition of parody succinctly highlights the genre's aims and procedures. He says:

La parodia consiste nel colpire un bersaglio irridendone il tradizionale veicolo espressivo. Parodiare un autore vuol dire "caricarne" gli stilemi ricorrenti, renderli grotteschi tramite la loro evidenziazione, ridurre il dialetto al rango di formula. La parodia quindi irride all'ufficialità e alla auctoritas di un linguaggio e la forza dell'irrisione dipenderà anche dalla sacralità del linguaggio parodiato (Brilli, p. 46).

Brilli also mentions, among the more complex forms of parody, one in which the double effect of degradation is obtained by dislocating a particular historically codified situation in another situation that is apparently incompatible with the first. This more complex type of parody is the one used by Fo in his story. Here, in fact, a situation with a high degree of sacredness--a biblical story--is transferred to the lowly context of a small town setting with its circle of gossiping townsfolk, the evening stroll, and other provincial practices. The offspring of the original nucleus of humanity, with all of the emblematic significance emanating from them, are reduced to an ordinary pair

of brothers struggling for identity amidst a chorus of highly impressionable townsfolk. Thus Fo's first step in desanctifying the story occurs as he removes it from the Biblical mists of a young earth and deposits it onto the incompatible prosaic reality of life in the provinces. A distant and distorted echo of Genesis opens the story as Abel grotesquely congratulates God on having correctly distributed winged animals and fishes in their respective habitats, and for making the sun come out at the right time. The hieratic gestures of sacrifice are transformed into Abel's ostentatious "Good morning prayers," only to be further degraded in Cain's mechanical recitation of a quasi-logical propitiatory rhyme. Along with "adaptation" in time and space one also finds a degeneration into everyday psychology. The Manichaeic conflict between Good and Evil is transformed into a case of sibling rivalry, expressed with a phraseology typical of that condition. ("Me too, me too" is the rueful cry Cain utters at the end of each of his brother's feats.)

Although originally written for a radio program and not for the stage, Fo's story is structured as a series of scenes in quick succession: 1) the morning prayer, 2) the stroll in "the gentle streets," 3) the echo, 4) the bee, 5) God and epilogue. Following the oral tradition, the scenes are evoked through an alternation of "direct quotations" by numerous characters and a running commentary by the story-teller. The fabulatori's traditional use of the hyperbole here is replaced by the rapid accumulation of examples illustrating the basic situation of arbitrary exclusion.

Each scene has a repetitive structure: Abel engages in a rather commonplace type of behavior that receives an enthusiastic response, Cain eagerly imitates it only to encounter unqualified scorn. At the end of each scene Abel proposes to go on to the next activity, which he expects to be highly gratifying, thus leading Cain in a vicious circle of rejection that becomes increasingly violent.

Scene by scene, in a cumulative manner, Fo deconstructs the commonly held categories of Good and Evil, desecrating both the Biblical original and the updated provincial setting characterized by its closed mentality. Through a procedure that places the two brothers in parallel positions, we witness the gradual emergence of Abel's personality as that of a vain opportunist, while Cain, the candid follower, increasingly acquires the aura of the victim. Abel's whole behavior is dictated by a desire for gratification and applause, his language is full of affectation, and even his iconography, the "blue eyes and golden curls" that are much praised by the townsfolk, completes the "type." As the story develops, the first impression of vanity is further increased by Abel's refusal to take a position against his brother's general exclusion: he continues to repeat the refrain "take it easy" typical of those seeking to avoid conflict. Abel's presumed "goodness" is parodied by the disproportion existing between the inanity of his actions and the high favor they encounter, i.e., his moronic morning prayer is praised as inventive, a simple stroll in the street is greeted with cries of admiration, a howl

in the wells brings the gentle flight of doves, and the tickling of a bee results in a kiss. Again disproportion characterizes the unfavorably reactions showered on Cain with the crucial difference that each scene brings with it increased violence. This violence seems directed mainly against Cain's body. In fact, Abel projects a lithe almost spiritual presence, whereas Cain is heavily anchored to his body¹²--a body that is scornfully mentioned only in dialect ("ugitt picul e piè piatt"), a body that is stung by "gentle" bees. Not unexpectedly, Cain's final reaction against his brother's obnoxiousness is also a bodily one: a heavy blow with a club.

Up to the bee scene, the main devices used by Fo to obtain a comic effect are degradation, disproportion, repetition and accumulation. In the last scene we witness a switch in the mechanism of the comic: language acquires prominence over evocation. The last scene is in fact structured not so much on the basic situation but on the problem of "misunderstanding." Cain's frustrated reaction to the bee sting, in juxtaposition to Abel's affected language, is an expletive. By God's prompt indignation, one understands that the word uttered by Cain is not "Porco qui, porco là" but rather "Porco Dio" (God, the swine), a commonly used expletive that would have been censored because of its blasphemous implications. However, the semantic meaning of the expression has long been lost, and thus God's angry reaction appears almost unjustified. The retort God uses is a reaction typical of an irate motorist ("What did you call me...?") responding to namecalling by

a second party involved in the incident, and this adds to the comic quality of the situation.

This first error of literal-mindedness has a sequel. In his never-ending search to please and to avoid conflict, Abel hastens to advise God to "take it easy, for he knows not what he says." This maxim has a doubly comic effect. First, in reference to the underlying Biblical code, it is anachronistic because it erroneously transfers a phrase uttered by Jesus in the New Testament to an Old Testament setting. Second, if we consider the provincial transposition made by Fo of the Biblical story, it is exceedingly lofty and presumptuous. By virtue of a mechanism similar to the one operative in the first misunderstanding, this maxim is interpreted literally, this time by Cain, who dispels his brother's claim in a rather heavy-handed manner. The comic here is enhanced by the juxtaposition between Abel's high language and Cain's low dialect response.

2. From Fabulatore to Farceur

Although the popular comic tradition of which the fabulatori were part made ample use of puns and other comic devices associated with language, the last scene of the story of Cain and Abel reveals, in its structure, the influence on the young Fo of "avanspettacolo" and of "varietà", two forms of "minor" theater popular in Italy, especially until the fifties.

The joke, in its multiform versions of puns, absurd situations, and misquotations, had become one of the mainstays of the sketches of varietà and avanspettacolo. In fact, some standard modalities had been developed for its insertion into the shows: a joke could be told straight by a stand-up comedian to the audience, an actor could tell it to another in the context of a sketch, or a whole sketch could be developed to illustrate it. The last part of the story of Cain and Abel shows some characteristics similar to those of varietà: the literal interpretation of the expletive and of the maxim provides the structure for the continuation of the scene. The "joke" is experienced by the characters much in the same way as a sketch illustrating a joke.

Avanspettacolo and varietà were direct descendants of that nineteenth-century café-chantant, i.e., eating establishments that provided live entertainment. They both had reached a great number of popular audiences beginning at the end of the nineteenth century to the mid-forties. Avanspettacolo was performed in the movie houses, and consisted of sketches, strings of jokes, and ballet, all performed before the showing of a

movie.¹³

Varietà came about with the transferring of the cafe-chantant from the restaurants to the theaters in the late nineteenth century. Luciano Ramo, who had actively participated in it, becoming one of its few historians, describes the traditional varietà as divided into three parts. The first part had a musical character comprising popular tunes, comic duets, romanze, and orchestra numbers; the second part consisted of visual entertainment with gymnasts, acrobats, jugglers, oriental companies, and magicians; the third part had what he called a "theatrical" orientation, with one-act comic plays or vaudeville.¹⁴ This basic structure underwent a number of changes. In a first phase it was simplified to include only the first two parts; later on attempts were made to make these two sections more cohesive by writing a script providing the structure and logic of a story. This later development led from the intermediate step of "pivista" to the contemporary musicals (Ramo, p. 26).

In defining varietà, Franca Angelini emphasized its lack of unity and cohesive plot, its reliance on the skill of the performer rather than on a tight script. Besides acting as a model for non-naturalistic theater, the varietà set a standard of direct interaction between actor and audience, a characteristic to which Fo was attracted.¹⁵

Although varietà became a model for the Futurists, and influenced all the major trends seeking to renovate

twentieth-century theater, it remained a form of entertainment associated with the lower classes. Fofi points out that its audience was largely from the subproletarian and petty-bourgeois strata, while both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat regarded this form of entertainment with suspicion (in De Matteis, p. 4). Its tendency towards dispersion almost mirrored the ambiguity and vagueness of the strata to which the audience belonged, strata characterized by vacillation between the struggle for survival and the struggle to protect petty gains that were constantly being threatened. The actor who best expressed these moods and social position was the Neapolitan comedian Antonio de Curtis, known by the nickname Totò.

Sandro de Feo, a noted theater critic linked Totò's specific brand of humor, which relied on cruelty, distortion, inarticulation and nonsense to the modernist currents in other artistic fields. In fact, he said that the brand of humor used by the comedian was the equivalent, in the field of comedy, of Picasso's figures and dodecafonic music.¹⁶

Dario Fo, a fervent admirer of Totò, although differing personally from him in style and type of humor, sought to analyze and learn from the popular actor. One of the aspects of Totò's acting that struck Fo most was his predilection for situation over plot. This is an important element, because by the time Fo started to write farces he also assigned to situation the pivotal role in a play. Referring to Totò, Fo says:

Bisogna partire dal sistema da lui usato per costruire

le sue rappresentazioni. Ho detto che la storia lo interessava meno della situazione. Prendiamo per esempio La camera affittata a tre... La situazione di base è sapere chi riuscirà ad appropriarsi del letto o della cuccetta. Ci si dimentica di questo dato, ne viene in primo piano un altro: il conflitto tra il povero uomo che arriva con una valigia legata con una corda senza posto per dormire (Totò), e il deputato con il quale si scontra che è l'uomo di potere, è il potere stesso, il potere in assoluto. Poco a poco Totò lo distrugge. Con quali mezzi? Con piccoli gesti, prese in giro, ironie, lo tocca, gli starnuta in faccia, deforma i nomi; è un logoramento continuo, pezzo per pezzo lo distrugge, per buttarlo fuori alla fine con le sue valigie dalla finestra del treno. Ha vinto. L'essenziale non è più impossessarsi del letto, ma distruggere il potere. Siamo passati su un altro registro attraverso una serie di piccoli fatti che diventano mostruosi, smisuratamente ingraditi fino al paradosso (in De Matteis, p. 321).

Although the "cruelty" and aggressiveness associated with Toto's persona are characteristics opposite to those associated with Fo's mostly mild-mannered persona, it may be useful to analyze some of the techniques employed by Totò, for they reveal traits that are typical of the sketches in varietà.

In Camera fittata a tre,¹⁷ the initial part, until Totò's appearance on the scene, consists of the exchanges between a lawyer and a first maid, and those between a businessman and a second maid. Both exchanges result in the rental, unbeknownst to each pair, of the only remaining bed in the hotel. When Totò enters the scene, the previous misunderstanding occurs once again, due this time to the involvement of a third, uninformed maid. Totò's arrival, however, marks a switch in the structure and tempo of the sketch.

His discourse, in contrast to that of his logical and

courteous stranded fellow-travelers, consists of an unremitting string of puns and double-entendres, laced with seemingly unconnected interpolations. He starts off by suggesting to the maid that since there are no rooms available he might sleep with her. Having obtained the bed in the corridor, he perceives the unknown individual standing by it as a threat and organizes his defense. This consists of a degradation of the newly introduced person's last name. In fact, Mr. Vermicelli is asked by the "Maestro" Stonatore (Totò) whether he is acquainted with a Mr. Cirio (the brand name of a famous tomato sauce); and when introduced to the lawyer he finds his last name transformed creatively by Totò into Tagliatelle. The fight for survival, which in this instance is translated into the procurement of a bed, mounts as Totò suggests to the weary Mr. Vermicelli, who has just announced his intention to take a trip to the hospital, that he take a side trip to the cemetery. The persecution continues as the "maestro" exploits the second traveler's mild interest in his artistic talents by implying that better treatment should be reserved to him, the artist. Totò's digression on the ills of not following parental advice is what finally deals a fatal blow to his rival's resistance, clearing the way for his occupancy of the bed.

A similar pun by pun digression focusing on the development of situation at the expense of plot is one that Fo was to adopt in his re-elaboration of nineteenth-century farces.

Prior to his efforts in rewriting farces, Fo worked for a

period in the genre of rivista, a particular type of varieta organized around a theme. His collaboration with Giustino Durano and Franco Parenti in the rivista, Il dito nell'occhio¹⁸ in 1953, assured him popularity and recognition of his talents as a comic actor. The piece is recognized as one of the first examples of openly political satire to be written after the lifting of the censorship of the fascist period.¹⁹ In keeping with Fo's initial inclination towards demystification and switching of point of view, as seen in Poor nano, this review of famous historical figures and world events shattered their aura of grandeur and heroism, employing the brand of humor and structure typical of varieta. Fo later commented that his satire, at the time, was directed against the commonplaces of social officialdom and a mystified historiography that sought to promote patriotism .

In the years 1955-1956 Fo also had a brief experience with the medium of cinema, both as a script writer and actor. He starred in and collaborated in the film by Lizzani, Lo Svitato (The Screwball), playing once again the part of a candid character who causes the explosion of society's contradictions in the metropolis. This character was much influenced by Jacques Tati's Monsieur Hulot, and by the literary source of Hasek's "Good Soldier Schweik" (Valentini, p. 53).

Owing to problems in the script and to Fo's unsuitedness to acting in cinematic settings, this experiment proved to be a failure, and Fo returned to the stage, having assimilated some lessons from the new medium. In fact, he stated in later

interviews that an artist seeking to establish ties with popular audiences and to renovate his art cannot close his eyes to the latest innovations in the artistic world and in society. Thus, for example, he introduced the technique of flashback into his theatrical works and sought to re-elaborate through the theatrical medium the cinematic rhythm of Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and other comic artists.²⁰

The year 1958 marked Dario Fo's return to the stage, when he formed a theater company of his own, which also included Franca Rame as lead actress. But the main surprise in store for critics and audiences was the repertory he had chosen for the season: seven farces divided into two shows.

Even though the farce as a structure had been somewhat rediscovered in the twentieth century by those authors generally grouped under the heading of "theater of the absurd", this "minor" genre had been neglected in the twentieth century. Its beginnings as a theatrical genre date back to thirteenth-century France. First applied to Latin Masses "stuffed" with vernacular refrains, the term came to denote, together with the soties and moralité comiques, one of the derivatives of the fabliaux. In France, farces flourished under the reign of Louis XII. The most famous farce produced there was Maître Pathelin, published in 1489.²¹

In Italy the tradition of the farce had a later start. Popular embryos of it existed in the Middle Ages, for example, in the mariazo,²² a simple comic scene developed by peasants

around the theme of marriage, and performed at weddings; but its more developed beginnings date back to Naples in the second half of the fifteenth century. At its inception, the farce comprised both comical compositions (farse giucose and farse Cavaiole) and more serious ones (farse spirituali and farse allegorico-cortigiane). It was successful as a genre both in aristocratic and in popular culture. For example, Ruzante, a sixteenth-century author and actor from Venice, who is much admired by Fo, was able to combine in his plays and farces both experience of the quitti (poor traveling actors) and the elevated tradition, thus giving the courts convincing portrayals of the life and problems of the peasantry.²³

The farce acquired prominence again in the nineteenth century when it was performed initially at the intermission of five-act dramas and later at the end of these plays as a "comica finale." The genre became the main arena for the "attore brillante," as it was reserved exclusively for them. The one-act comic piece was also generally well received, holding the spectators rapt until the very last lines were uttered. For many, in fact, the main attraction was the "minor" piece and not the "elevated" dramas that were supposed to be the prime feature.²⁴

What is specific in the farce as a genre? Whereas the "comedia" relies heavily on a cohesive plot and an attempt at verisimilitude, the farce is an expression of basic theatricality. It does not pretend to be anything other than an "artifact" whose aim is to create hilarity; thus there is no attempt to dress up

its devices. Not much attention is paid to logic in plot development, the entertainment being born of the ever-increasing speed with which a basic comic situation is driven to its most excessive and extreme conclusion. Increased speed, both in human behavior or in the development of a situation, has the effect of producing a mechanized image of people, of their bodies and of their actions. According to many theories of the comic, including Bergson's and partly Freud's, one of the mainsprings of laughter is the realization of the "mechanical" nature of the human body, as revealed by episodes of its malfunctioning or its awkwardness.

According to Franco Ferrari, a scholar of contemporary theater who has studied the farce in relation to other comic forms, the effects of criticism inherent in the farce are lessened because it attacks all of society indiscriminately; it leaves its starting points suspended, thus taking away its critical edge. Almost as though to compensate for these shortcomings, the farce sets no limits to its unchecked creative impetus. Ferrari sees the potential for farce being used by those in power as a mechanism similar to a safety valve for venting repressed rage. Thus he points out the necessity of the author's intervention to prevent its use in this way.²⁵ For Fo, however, the "elemental force" of the farce constituted a temptation especially in relation to his thinking about the centrality of "situation." In fact, in this regard, he states:

Quando scrivevo le farse, per esempio, mi ero reso conto concretamente che non c'è vero teatro che non sia teatro di situazione. Ogni azione teatrale nasce da una

situazione scenica pregnante di sviluppi di azione. Il dialogo è solo uno degli strumenti per esprimere questi sviluppi. Per esempio: un uomo nudo si è rifugiato in un bidone della spazzatura vuoto. Questa è già una situazione: quando lo spazzino lo scopre da quella prima situazione può nascerne una serie di altre, innumerevoli. Il teatro che voglia basarsi su di un dialogo autonomo dallo sviluppo dell'azione, che non è espressivo di un'azione potenziale, non è teatro, è letteratura. Il linguaggio teatrale è sintetico, non consente indugi descrittivi della situazione o di stato d'animo, a meno che non siano parte del ritmo che si vuole tenere (Artese, p. 22).

What shocked both the public and the critics most about Fo's new farces was his seeming abandonment of political and social satire and his concentration on the aspect of "entertainment." The situation and types were drawn and re-elaborated from nineteenth-century canovacci belonging to the Rame traveling theater company, which had specialized in farces for a number of generations.

The very titles betray a particular use of the farce: most of them take commonsensical maxims and touch them up in an a-logical manner. For example, the title of his play Non tutti i ladri vengono a nuocere is an a-logical adaptation of the maxim Non tutti i mali vengono a nuocere; in Gli imbianchini non hanno ricordi, the title exploits in a pun-like manner the connection between whitewashers and lack of memory; and finally, in his pochade, the commonsensical part Le donne si spogliano is put side by side with the absurd "e i cadaveri si spediscono."

Situations typical of the nineteenth century theater are constantly "contaminated" with references to contemporary

activities and fashions: thus the owner of the castle in I tre bravi is a modern day silkworm entrepreneur; in I cadaveri si spediscono, le donne si spogliano, the mainstay of the farce is an efficient modern-day agency that makes use of the postal system for the disposal of unwanted husbands.

The farce in its open character of "fictionality" has traditionally made use of situations, of trickery, make-believe and set-ups. The line between truth and falsehood, already called into question by "theater" as such is further emphasized in a genre that openly declares its "theatricality" by permitting limitless construction of situations. Since the beginning of his career Fo has paid much attention to the question of truth and falsehood. Starting from his first gallery of rehabilitated villains, one of his constant concerns has been to unmask the hero. He peels off layers of pretended virtue in order to reveal a deceitful core.

The demolition of undeserved admiration took place by setting up situations reflecting the real position of the slandered underdog. Thus, for example, the repeated illustration of Cain's situation of unjustified rejection not only rehabilitates Cain but also places his brother in a bad light, revealing the falsehood of common opinion. Although the dialectical antithesis, candor/deceit, is present in Fo's first works, it is not until his re-invention of the farce that he fully explores and exploits the possibilities offered by the pairing of such opposites. In analyzing the principal images of people derived from the farce,

Bentley points to the interaction between the Knaves and the Fools, the former embodying deceit and the latter, candor.²⁶ In fact, he even traces their proportions in the farce to one of its historical antecedents, the Roman Atellanæ which generally included the Blockhead, the Braggart, the Silly Old Man (three types of fools) and the Trickster (the Knave). In Bentley's analysis, however, even the latter revealed himself a Fool as his ingenuities get him nowhere. Thus even the cunning join the ranks of humanity revealing itself as molded in the "image of the apes" (Bentley, pp. 248-51). For Fo, however, the farce furnished the ideal training ground to experiment with inventive strategies, to set up mechanisms of trickery and discovery. This time, not as a means toward escapism, as Bentley remarks for traditional farces, but as a way of performing social criticism. In fact, "in the image of the ape" does not seem to be a label that Fo extends to the whole of humanity in an undifferentiated manner: those who hold power seem to exhibit a greater degree of the beastly than those who are oppressed.

In an essay comparing the two types of literary communication that set the novel and the theater apart, Cesare Segre examines the farce Maistre Pathelin, a piece about a deceiver who ultimately is deceived by others that he has trained in deception. He emphasizes and analyzes the manipulation of topic and discourse that the various characters employ in order to cause an epistemological crisis and thus achieve the deception of others.²⁷

A similar type of analysis of Fo's farce L'uomo nudo e l'uomo in frac would highlight some mechanisms of deceit and discovery that the author was to utilize also in later plays. The title itself introduces a much exploited topos: dress as a symbol of the lability of social status in its juxtaposition to nakedness, which indicates real essence. Resting on the antithetical pair, truth/falsehood, the device of disguise has been very popular, starting with the classical theater of Greece. Pirandello predominantly used the dichotomy of appearance and reality as a basic situation for his plays. In the Italian theatrical tradition the theme was also thoroughly exploited by the "grotteschi" plays in the first decades of the twentieth century (Angelini, p. 101). Thus the issue of the gulf between appearance and reality is not a new one. It remains to be seen how Fo deals with it in his own specific style.

Although all seven farces produced in the 1958 season have at their base a situation of deceit, the one that most insistently deals with the issue is L'uomo nudo e l'uomo in frac.²⁸ Divided into three movements, the farce starts with a premonitory philosophical discussion between a candid streetsweeper and a philosophically inclined colleague on the issue of truth and falsehood. This discussion is interrupted by the sudden arrival of a streetwalker who claims to be fleeing from the authorities. She begs them to help her and convinces the "philosopher" to leave the scene with her. The second movement begins with the discovery by the now solitary streetsweeper of a naked man with a tall hat

hiding in his garbage can. The man had just escaped from an amorous adventure that had been interrupted by the sudden arrival of the woman's husband. After using a number of strategies to convince the streetsweeper, the naked man succeeds in enlisting his help in finding a suitable way to make his way home in spite of his nakedness. The situation seems to take a turn for the better with the arrival on the scene of a flower vendor dressed in tails, who, for a price (paid by the streetsweeper) will furnish the naked man the appropriate attire for his return home. The third movement begins under the sign of disguise and distrust as the streetsweeper, wearing the tails, carts the man hiding in the garbage bin to his home. This seemingly contorted barter that sees the vendor and the streetsweeper exchanging clothes, leaving the naked man in his original state, is due to the streetsweeper's unwillingness to become the unclothed party. In fact, he fears that once the naked man achieves a clothed status at his expense, he will proceed to go about his business and abandon him, by then naked, in the garbage bin. As soon as the complicated dressing manoeuvres are finished, the streewalker and the guard reappear on the scene: through their conversation we find out that the woman's flight from the authorities was all a trick aimed at enticing the streetsweeper. The guard forcibly prevents the streetsweeper dressed as a gentleman from taking away the garbage can; thus, in the last scene, we see the streetsweeper disconsolately drawing his conclusions as to the absurdity of truth/falsehood while the naked man steals away in the garbage can.

The farce opens with a highly irregular situation: a chorus of streetsweepers singing in the night on the outskirts of the big city. Their song is:

Dorme il saggio sul letto di lana
 Dorme il pigro sul letto di piuma
 Il reumatico dorme sul legno
 E il furbastro su di un seno gentil.
 Noi la notte puliamo le strade
 I lunghi viali sporcati nel dì

Foglie morte sfigurate dal gelo
 O dal malvezzo di un cane scurrile
 Raccattiamo le cartacce e gli stracci
 E le cicche schiacciate dai tacchi,
 Prima che, per un triste destino
 Vadan tutte a ingorgare il tombino.
 Qualche volta troviam mille lire
 Porco giuda ma son fuori corso!
 Sopra il fuoco le faremmo finire
 Ma poi ecco ci prende il rimorso
 E le doniamo ad un cieco accatton (Teatro comico, p. 209).

The parody here strikes at nineteenth-century Italian opera. The comic effect is obtained by mixing lofty expressions such as seno gentil, triste destino, letto di piuma, with the prosaic terms reumatico, cicche, cartacce, tombino. The everyday reality of of the streetsweeper, whose trade consists of cleaning up the debris left by others in their day's activity, is seen through the lens of the fabulatori, which lends a heroic dimensions to his squalid position. The legacy of bitterness of the fabulatori is expressed by the closing irony of fate. The final lines evoke a Hobbesian world view: the lowly streetsweeper passing down the trickery of fate to one situated even lower on

the social ladder.

The mention of the out-of-circulation bills handed to a blind beggar neatly introduces the issue of appearance and reality. The following exchange between the two streetsweepers gives an idea of the structure of the dialogue occurring in the farce:

Primo Spazzino: Senti ad un certo punto è meglio dire la verità e non pensarci più, almeno io penso così.

Secondo Spazzino: Ah sì, l'hai detto, la verità...e che cos'è la verità? Tu dirai il contrario del falso...giusto, allora dimmi un po': qual'è il falso, qual'è il vero? E vero ciò che è vero o è vero ciò che è falso? Quindi se il vero e il falso si identificano... (il primo spazzino si allontana scocciato)...Ehi aspetta, perchè te ne vai via così di volata?

Primo Spazzino: Perchè voglio restare da solo...ecco perchè.

Secondo Spazzino: Dico...mica ti sarai arrabbiato con me delle volte?

Primo Spazzino: E chi è arrabbiato...Solo che sono stufo di star qui a farmi fare un testone così dai tuoi discorsi tutte le sere. Tu fai i discorsi da matto. Poi a me viene da pensare. Te l'ho già detto che a me, pensare, fa male tutto qua (indica la fronte).

Secondo Spazzino: Perchè non ci sei allenato...il cervello è un muscolo è finchè non si abitua allo sforzo...

Primo Spazzino: Sì, bravo, e io sforzo il muscolo...così dopo, magari, mi viene uno strappo al cervello...Sei bravo! (Teatro Comico, p. 210).

As can be seen, the language is colloquial Italian with a prevalence of northern expressions (di volata, delle volte).

The last few exchanges are built on a seemingly logical development based on a false presupposition--that the brain is a

muscle and all muscles are subject to pulling when strained; hence thinking too much can cause a sprained brain. This form of the comic occurs very often in Fo's work; in the brief space of this farce, one can find seventeen instances of it.

In examining the whole category of quasi-logical arguments (under the heading "Arguments by Association"), Olbrechts-Tyteca quotes Leibnitz's distinction, which defines as absurd all that is in contradiction with a logical or geometric necessity, and as ridiculous all that is incompatible with a moral necessity.²⁹ Fo's humor tends to rely more heavily on the first type of contradiction, so that oftentimes his characters, and particularly his candid ones, seem to live in a universe defying all laws governing the world of "normal" persons, a universe governed by mischief and chance events. Bentley connects the farces' predilection for the absurd to its very structural essence. According to him, in fact, generally the absurd is thought of as an amorphous mass. Farce, by contrast, makes the absurd its very skeleton, the scaffolding that supports its whole development. Important to the articulation of this structure is the role of chance and coincidence. Bentley states that in all other theatrical genres, coincidence is either incorporated in the play in a way that makes it seem a logical occurrence to the audience, as in the case of comedy, or it will take the form of inescapable fate, especially in tragedies or melodrama. In farce, instead, there is no special convention for coincidence, they are granted

an acceptable status in their own right as part of theatrical device permissible to a lowly form of the theater (Bentley, p. 245). By emphasizing the break of the norm deriving from coincidence, however, Fo's candid characters frequently succeed in making their counterparts and the public question the legitimacy of the accepted norm. Hence, the farce acquires the function of criticism, in addition to its mirth-causing qualities.

The question of truth is explicitly introduced in this farce by a candid character, the one who through a series of circumstances will be put in the position of unwilling deceiver. One of the characteristics that invite the cunning to "make him do" things is his lack of defenses against others: he never seems to question their intentions. The only time he seems to suspect the possibilities of trickery--when he refuses to give up his streetsweeper's uniform and thus risks being placed naked in a garbage bin and forgotten--proves to be the time he loses most. (In fact, wearing the tails and continuing to push the garbage cart, he sets himself up for a beating by the guard, who is intolerant of such outlandish situations.)

In the farce Maître Pathelin, the rhymed dialogue is the key element, as it expresses the different verbal strategies employed to manipulate issues and discourse in order to create favorable conditions for the trickster (Segre, pp. 40-47). In Fo's farce, instead, the situation itself is the simple most important factor; the dialogue is not a prominent aid in the progression of the action. The string of situations is not mainly

the result of a verbal strategy. For example, in the first movement, the streetwalker, who is the first bearer of deceit, simply appears, her presence unevoked by the preceding dialogue. Later, the discovery of the naked man in the garbage can is likewise not motivated by verbal manipulation. The final reappearance of the guard and the prostitute has no connection with the dialogue. Instead of setting up objective conditions, the dialogue must conform to a given situation which it did not help to create. Thus the puns and double entendres that enliven the dialogue are mostly a verbal mirror of an absurd starting situation; they do not seek to create a situation through the manipulation of language. The following dialogue demonstrates this verbal mirror:

Guardia: Scusi se l'ho fermata...ma lei perchè ha portato via quel bidone?

Spazzino: Un bidone (guardando il trabicolo come lo vedesse per la prima volta) E già è un bidone! Non me ne ero neanche accorto...avevo comperato questi fiori e non sapendo dove metterli li ho messi qui dentro...ma io l'avevo preso per un vaso.

Guardia: Un vaso con le ruote?

Spazzino: Sì, sa uno di quei vasi moderni da trasporto... (Teatro comico, p. 231).

While on the surface the streetsweeper appears to be a manipulator of language, in reality he just candidly improvises on elements suggested by the absurd situation. (The garbage can is a vessel of transportation for the naked man, even if the guard is not aware of its inventive use.) As will be seen later, in examining Fo's re-elaboration of traditional popular theater, the

figure of the "naive", both as the vehicle for expressing a suppressed point of view and as a bearer of truth, has a rich genealogy. The streetsweeper, as well as other candid characters, is strikingly reminiscent of the protagonist of Hasek's Good Soldier Schweik, a model that was also re-elaborated by Brecht and Piscator. Like the Slavic "epic imbecile," Fo's candid characters make the commonly accepted contexts explode by the force of their candor.

In The Good Soldier Schweik, a good example of the type of occurrence appears in the first few pages. The Archduke and Duchess have just been killed in Sarajevo, and Schweik steps into a beer hall, the usual hangout for agent provocateur Bretschneider, who is eager to obtain information about the assassination:

Bretschneider finally relapsed into silence. His gloomy face only lit up on the arrival of Svejik who came into the pub, ordered a dark black beer and remarked: "Today they'll be in mourning in Vienna too." Bretschneider's eyes gleamed with hope, and he said laconically: "On Konopiste there are ten black flags." "There should be twelve," said Svejik, after he had taken a swig. "What makes you think twelve?" asked Bretschneider. "To make it a round number. A dozen adds up better, and dozens always come cheaper," answered Svejik (Hasek, p. 8).

The irony here is not at all intentional on Schweik's part; he simply enunciates two small truths that are part of his daily living. The irony belongs entirely to the author. Similarly, the streetsweeper in his candor is not at all ironic; the situation itself, with its structure, contains the basis for a double

meaning.

In furnishing a typology of farce, Jessica Milner Davis traces two main classes: the "humiliation" farce and the "deception" farce, the former expressing a far greater degree of degradation and aggressiveness than the latter (Milner Davis, p. 50-56). Fo's farces would most likely fall under the heading of deception farces, with the added twist of different layers of deception enclosing one another. Thus one could define his specific mode of deception as the "deceit en-abyme."

The first movement contains an act of trickery (the prostitute's claim to be fleeing the police) which is not perceived as such but will be revealed later on in the farce. In the second movement the naked man is fleeing from an already committed act of deceit (adultery) and tries to enlist the streetsweeper and the flower seller in another one (i.e., the deception of his wife, by making it seem he is returning from an Ambassador's party). The third movement sees the revelation of the trick originating in the first movement, and is governed by a whole range of behavior based on the reaction to a disguise (the guard's resentment of the presumed rich man engaging in eccentric behavior, the prostitute's excessive awe towards power as perceived in the person of the "Ambassador"). The concatenation of these acts of deceit is technically faultless, its rhythm without respite, its theatricality openly declared by the characters themselves. In referring to the sudden arrival of the betrayed husband, the naked man says: "Just like a character from

a farce"; more conscious of the resemblance to varietà, the streetsweeper comments: "Just like in the jokes" (Teatro comico, p. 216). In reality, Fo's farces contain elements deriving from three main sources: the fabulatori tradition, varietà, and traditional farce. The first element is more noticeable at the level of outlook; the varietà legacy is mainly responsible for the language, puns, and gags; traditional farce governs rhythm and structure.

3. The Comedy of Deceit and Discovery

Fo's experimentation with different theatrical forms took a further leap forward in 1959, the season following the production of the farces. In fact, it was during this year that Fo wrote, directed and starred in a full-length three-act comic play titled Gli arcangeli non giocano a flipper.³¹ The medium of the traditional comedia gave the playwright more room to develop situations and plot than the preceding "minor" forms had allowed. What remained to be seen was whether his adaptation to a genre that had been developed and perfected by the dominant cultures throughout the ages would act as a brake on his non-conformist inspiration.

The title itself, Gli arcangeli non giocano a flipper, preserved the flair for the disjointedness that had characterized his previous production. The two poles of the title, the archangels and the pinball machines, were emblematic of Fo's own position, caught between tradition and modernity. The archangel, which was also to be used in later plays like Mistero Buffo (1969), symbolizes ostentatious authority and high-officialdom, the part of religion that Fo rejects out of hand. The pinball machine could be read to represent the two components of the game: manipulation and chance. In the 1950's, the pinball machine had become a very popular form of mass entertainment. Ironically, those in the lower section of the working class, who had been "manipulated" by political and economic forces in the years of postwar reconstruction and lopsided industrialization, entertained

themselves with the manipulation and manhandling of a machine. The persistence of the pinball machine as an emblem of manipulation can be traced in the later play, "L'opera dello squignazzo (1981), in which Fo was to represent the exploitation of sex by a pinball machine in the shape of a woman's body whose erogenous zones light up according to the player's moves.

The pinball machine represented also the element of chance. While the upper classes could afford to place high bets and win fortunes in fancy casinos, the workers found their equivalent thrills at the corner bar, where the pinball machine lured the hopeful with its dazzling lights. The character of chance and manipulation embodied by the pinball machine is best conveyed in a tirade launched by Il Lungo, the protagonist of the play, when he comes to his first realization that his dream was a joke:

Io vorrei proprio sapere chi è che ha sto
incarico...Chi è l'arcangelo Gabriele?...
Michele?...Raffaele?...Chi è? Ma dico arcangeli: se è
vero quello che mi raccontavano da ragazzino, che il
Padreterno vi ha dato questo incarico, perchè siete
venuti proprio a prendervela con me? Ma andiamo, pure i
sogni con il doppio gioco...Perchè se si comincia a non
doversi più fidare neanche dei sogni!...Ma porco giuda
mi avete preso tutti per un flipper che basta metterci
dentro cento lire, lo fai scattare e puoi sfogarti a
sbatterlo, scollarlo finchè ti pare? (Le commedie I,
p.88).

Thus one can see that the familiar refrain of the trick, already amply used in the farces, governs Il Lungo's conception of the organizing principle of the world.

The title, with its out-of-harmony poles, also suggests another possible influence on Fo's work: the theater of the

Absurd. In the 1950's, a new theatrical convention swept across European stages, bringing together such diverse authors as Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov, Genet. Martin Esslin, in his seminal book dealing with this theatrical current, quotes Ionesco's definition: "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose...Cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots man is lost, all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless."³²

Metaphysical anguish had been brought to the stage by authors such as Sartre, who, however, presented their sense of the irrationality of the human condition in the form of highly lucid and logically construed reasoning. Conversely, the dramatists of the Absurd strove to express their feeling of the senselessness of the human condition and of the inadequacy of the rational approaches by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought (Esslin, p. xix). Fo makes abundant use of quasi-logical arguments, of nonsensical rhymes, and of out-of-whack characters, but at bottom he preserves a certain degree of faith in rationality.

Even in these early plays, where a Marxist outlook had not yet been developed, his characters strive to undo the "beffa" (prank) that has been organized against them either by the ordering of society or by chance. There is a search for a logical thread, for a method in the madness.

Referring to the first play, in his preface to Fo's Commedia, Franco Quadri, one of the most noted Italian theater critics, says:

L'elemento visivo, espresso in gags, che fisicizzano le battute, ne surrealizzano il senso o traggono semplicemente spunto dai ritmi dell'azione, è tradotto in movimenti corali esasperati e meccanici, e fedelmente registrato nella scrittura. Sono generalmente vecchi lazzi della Commedia dell'arte, recuperi del repertorio popolare, filo-chapliniani, rinsecchiti e stilizzati da una tecnica che si ricorda del mimo acrobatico di Lecoq, o riprende le accelerazioni e i gesti forsennati e eterodiretti di un Larry Semon, adattandoli a motivi di attualità. Questi giochi scenici si innestano ne Gli arcangeli... in precise situazioni che trovano antecedenti nel grande teatro comico, da Plauto in poi, a cominciare dal classico esempio del camuffamento o nella confusione dell'identità dei personaggi, sfruttato in ogni possibile gamma, dal travestimento in abiti femminili alla trasformazione in animale--qui per l'esattezza in cane--allo scambio di indumenti che induce allo scambio di persona (Intro. to Le Comedie, p.ix).

Quadri further points out Fo's utilization of cinematic techniques which results in a play freed of the regimentation of rigidly cut scenes and of the conventions of time and space. Thus this first play of Fo's has a patchwork character, stitching together the various themes: thriller, vaudeville, pochade, political satire, comedy of customs. But again, what holds it together in its rapid succession of units is a mechanism that was discussed in connection with the farces: the dialectic between deceit in the situation and candor in the character. Here more than in the farces one sees trickery take on the features of the "beffa"; the birth of a situation is not so much due to chance as, increasingly, to plan.

Although the play is divided into three acts, the basic episodes of deceit that constitute its structure are five. The scene opens with a well-planned trick by which a gang of petty thieves from the outskirts of the big city manage to take 100, 000

line from a pastry shop, plus various cakes and sweets as additional booty. The action then moves to the apartment of a part-time prostitute, Angela, where Il Lungo, the gang's fool, is made to believe that he is marrying, with a Coptic rite, a wealthy Albanian heiress. After the performance of the mock marriage, the staged trick falls apart, and by its end Angela learns that Il Lungo is not really a fool, but is playing the part in order to make a living at his friends' expense. In fact, he likens himself to the "Rigoletto of the poor", the original buffoon served to entertain the rich, while Il Lungo was merely the laughingstock of his friends at the corner bar (Le Comedie, p.26).

The next act of deception, coinciding with the start of the second act, takes place at a ministerial office where Il Lungo had gone to get back payments on his pension. He discovers that in the files he is nothing more than a hunting dog. This misidentification was due to the spirit of revenge of an employee who, being forced to retire, altered the files in rather creative ways. In order to bypass the iron laws of the bureaucracy, Il Lungo is forced to sit in a cage of the humane society, whence he is rescued by a mad magician. He escapes from the magician's house only to land, trouserless, in the sleeping car occupied by the Minister on his way to a small town for a school inauguration. Through a turn of circumstances Il Lungo ends up wearing the Minister's clothes and is escorted to the inauguration, where he performs the politician's duty in a rather unconventional but winning way. While in the small town, he is reunited with Angela,

who had been the Minister's lover. The third act starts with another piece of deception by which Il Lungo and Angela try to make a joint escape from the Minister. Then the scene suddenly switches back to the gang's bar, where Il Lungo is awakening from the after-effects of a blow. As he realizes he had been dreaming he sees a replay of the dream in real life. He eagerly rushes to Angela's apartment, but is initially disappointed, for the girl behind the veil appears to be ugly. After his tirade against archangels, misorganizers of dreams, Angela takes off the false nose and eyebrows to reveal her true and beautiful features. The scene ends in a rather sentimental way, with the rest of the gang snickering at the maudlin turn of events.

As can be seen, there is a basic disorganized character to the play, making it reminiscent of a varietà loosely articulated around a theme. As in the farces, there is little internal justification for the passage from one scene to the next. But with respect to the farces there is now an alternation of "unjustified" changes in situation with changes due to the conscious unraveling of a planned trick. The passage from the mad magician's house to the sleeping car is an example of the first kind, while the passage from the bar--the intermediary stop from the pastry shop to Angela's apartment--belongs to the second type. This playful alternation of scenes dictated by logic and scenes born out of chance is a hint of the combination made by Fo of the structure of the farce and that of the classical comedia, the first representing the "non-logical", the second the "logical".

In delineating Fo's various transitions, Meldolesi speaks of a Fo fabulatore venturing into the theater in order to "lengthen the measure of his narration." His initial experimentation with farce provides him with the dimension of "duration". But this acquisition is not a static one. In fact, Meldolesi says of Fo's plays:

Le commedie sono da tenersi sintesi di fabulazione, farsa e arte comica, in continuo mutare di composizione: dietro il riso Fo tormenta senza posa quei suoi strumenti alla ricerca dello spettacolo che non riesce a fissare; disponibilità coraggiosa al nuovo e continuità del vecchio nel dubbio si alternano in Fo, che da comico è sensibilissimo ad ogni mutamento esterno e non si tira indietro se gli pare conveniente cambiare registro, anche incoerentemente...La farsa all'interno della commedia ci sembra rappresenta la continuità della prosa di racconto. La farsa crea quell'intesa col pubblico che il fabulatore realizzava spontaneamente, al suo paese, per tradizione. Dove la farsa si chiude in sè, il gioco non si sviluppa, la battuta si isola, la canzone fa da intermezzo; dove invece la farsa, come genere assonante alla fabulazione crea un ambiente, una temperatura, nasce una reazione a catena degli elementi: ecco il caratteristico procedere del "teatro di Fo" per spiazamenti continui (Meldolesi, p. 75).

The discontinuities in the fabric of the play, which at a structural level correspond to the alternation between comedia and farce, at the level of content seem to mirror the trial and error itinerary of an epistemological quest for truth. In fact, all of the plays written in this first phase, aside from a concentration on different topical scandals, have as a common feature the effort to develop a methodology leading the candid character to truth or to making truth triumph. At this stage Fo can put on the stage only his own confusion, his lack of method;

and in fact all of the plays' endings bear testimony to the author's own uncertainty. Gli arcangeli (1959) ends with the ambiguity of real life and dream; Settimo: ruba un po' meno (1964) ends with the lobotomization of the character intending to unmask a fraud, leading to the candid character's bitter conclusions on the possibility of truth triumphing; and Chi ruba un piede è fortunato in amore (1961) ends with a compassionate friend lying to protect the candid character from a sorrowful truth.

Passing through the various stages of Fo's initial phase, one can see the candid characters develop a sly side. The rehabilitated villains of Poor nano represent candor in its most uncontaminated form, whereas the naives of the farces start losing part of their candor even if only for professional reasons. In fact, even though candid in mind and at heart, these characters have unclean professions: one is a thief, two are "fake" whitewashers, three are strongmen for hire. By the time Fo starts writing his plays a deliberate slyness has come to characterize his heroes and heroines; the Fool and the Knave have been combined. The most explicit of these combined types is perhaps Il Lungo, who cites the "giullari" as his distinguished predecessors in the art of pretending idiocy for the amusement of others who pay (Le Commedie, p.26).

In L'uomo nudo e l'uomo in frac the mechanism of deceit and discovery had at its disposal only the condensed space of a one-act farce subdivided into three movements. In Gli arcangeli

the structure had been further enlarged to three full acts and five main movements with consequences of increased complication and specular games. The ambivalence of truth and falsehood can be clearly seen as one examines in depth each episode of deceit, the process of its discovery and its consequences.

In the first scene a local screwball gang of balordi decides to defraud a baker, partly in order to finance a beffa to be played later on their gang's fool. Naturally they use deceit as a means to achieve their ends. They make Il Lungo pretend to be a victim of food poisoning and then by innuendos they exploit the baker's guilty conscience for their purposes. His financial prosperity in fact derives from his unlawful use of chemical mixes for his supposedly "homemade" baked goods. The baker is thus exceedingly happy to buy the silence of a supposed victim of his deceit for only 100, 000 lire. By the end of the scene it is impossible to judge who is the deceived and who is the deceiver: the gang's sly characters think they have successfully pulled a trick on a candid baker and on the gang's fool, the baker thinks that he has had a relatively easy solution to his predicament, and Il Lungo has once again deceived all in his pretense of mental vacuity.

Following the model of L'uomo nudo e l'uomo in frac, a song at the very beginning of the play functions as a prologue. It gives a hint of the themes that will be developed, as well as an introduction to the environment of the play. Again, as in L'uomo nudo e l'uomo in frac, characters belonging to the

"unrespectable" side of society sing in a chorus; this time, however, their profession is petty crime. As they come forward on the stage to sing, all seven dressed in identical attire, they create an atmosphere of surrealism with features specific to the outskirts of a big city in Italy in the fifties. The initial metaphor of the night as a big umbrella full of holes reveals the gang's world view, which is indeed a pessimistic one, but unlike the streetsweepers, who seemed saddened by the tricks of fate, the gang fully utilizes trickery as a way of life. In fact, they keep on repeating that a sense of measure is the golden rule that governs success in their exploits. Exaggeration instead leads to failure in one's love life, in stealing cars or in blackmailing pet owners. The pinball machine makes its appearance as an emblem of chance and of manipulation. The moon loses its romantic appeal as it is likened to the lighted button of a special pinball machine, custom-made for King Kong. The *varietà* legacy appears at a linguistic level with puns: for example, ben piangente creatively developing the pattern of benestante. In addition, the jargon of the world of petty crime is abundantly used: words such as ghenqa, balordo, fregare, and bidone figure prominently in the song (Le commedie, pp.7-8).

Fo does not yet portray the world of petty crime as a microcosm of the structural organization of capitalism as he was to do later in his remake of John Gay's The Beggar's Opera. A critique of the world of politics and of the bureaucracy will be made later on in different acts of the play, but at this stage it

remains a critique of mores, of corrupt habits, and not so much of political and economic structures.

Unlike Didi and Gogo, Beckett's tramps in En attendant Godot,³³ Fo's balordi have very specific temporal and spatial identifiers. The former act in naked setting enlivened only by a tree that changes according to the season, signaling a natural cycle rather than a historical epoch. They, too, use the slang of the lumpen-proletariat, but in a more general way. Their world is the atemporal one of the maudit elements of society, they speak of hangings, of stinking feet, of fear of beatings, or waiting for orders of and for salvation by the "big cheese" (Beckett, p. 7-18). Their symbolism is also a universal one: the master/slave relationship is abstracted from historical contingency and represented by a man leading another man on a leash (Beckett, p. 15).

By contrast, Fo's society on stage is very much tied to history; absurdity and disharmony are not the result of a congenital human condition but rather are due to historical situations created by human beings. Even as Fo steers clear of the details of a naturalist theater, his scenes are full of class identifiers. His gangs are not just bands of outcasts that could roam anywhere in the world anytime. They speak the language of the balordi from the outskirts of Milan in the 1950's extricating themselves from the hurdles of postwar reconstruction. They are forced to interact with a malevolent stratum of bureaucrats, as perceived by the people, all busy ordering drinks from the local

bar and idly waiting for payday. They make their living off the petty bourgeoisie, often exploiting, as in the case of the baker, the middle class's yearning for respectability. They are subject to the leadership of a corrupt political elite, bent on creating self-sustaining myths and filling their pockets with bribes. Yet there is no idealization of the wretched of the earth.

In contrast to the populist attitudes that influenced much of the work of progressive artists in the fifties and colored their portrayals of solidarity among the oppressed, there is no spontaneous solidarity among Fo's outcasts; the outlook of self-interest governs their attitude towards their fellow poor. Further, exploitation occurs at a sexual level among the poor, it is not a coincidence that in Gli arcangeli the female counterparts of the gang are prostitutes, and that the members of the gang "buy" their right to be their temporary masters with the money they have deceitfully obtained from others, as happens in the closing scene at Angela's house (Le Comedie, pp. 39-50).

As announced by the song, trickery governs the whole play, but the second movement is a particularly clear illustration of the beffa mechanism. In Italian literature and theater the beffa has a distinguished tradition: Boccaccio's Decameron has countless tales based on the mechanism of the planned trick, the most famous one being the story of Andreuccio da Perugia.³⁴ Also famous is a series of tales in the Decameron having as protagonist Calandrino, a candid character who is constantly tricked by his friends, Bruno and Buffalmacco (Boccaccio, p. 532).

An open reference to the episode in which Calandrino is deceived by his friends into believing that he is invisible is made in the character portrait of Il Lungo done by one of the gang's members (Le commedie, p. 18). The beffa tradition continued to flourish in the Renaissance, both in popular and in elevated culture; in this regard it is worth remembering Machiavelli's La Mandragola.

With the Farse Cavaiole the beffa was directed at the candid inhabitants of Cava by the shrewd inhabitants of Salerno.³⁵ The playwrights of the grottesco trend continued the tradition of the beffa in the initial decades of the twentieth century. The best known play featuring the organized trick was La cena delle beffe, by Sem Benelli, a remake of a Renaissance story.³⁶ With regard to these literary antecedents Meldolesi writes:

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 (Meldolesi, p. 66).

Fo's attachment to the beffa mechanism can also be traced to his background previous to his official entrance into the world of theater. The best known episodes are: Fo's youthful staging in 1948 of a "street theater" piece parodying the politics of postwar reconstruction, and a later one, staged during the years in which he studied painting at the Brera Academy, parodying the rituals

of elite culture.

The first beffa was inspired by the annexationist ambitions of a "white" municipality toward a smaller "red" one, from which it was divided by the Tresa river. In the staged performance, the element of continuity was a cow whose ownership Luino, the white municipality, claimed on the grounds that she grazed and completed her digestive functions on its lands. Corollary scenes included a parody of Luino's motorbike races; the vicissitudes of a poor peasant who had tried to enlist the aid of the local priest and authorities only to be answered in the incomprehensible "officialese" of the 1948 elections; and finally a satire aimed at official historiography. In it, a statue of Garibaldi, after shaking hands with King Vittorio Emanuele II, is heard to say: "And now I would like to see angels come down from the sky, " and sees its wish come true in the form of paper winged "angels", (Fo himself being one of them), hanging from cables (Meldolesi, p. 23).

The Brera beffa required a more elaborate and methodical planning strategy than the previous one. Fo and his friends, aided by their press connections, started off by circulating the rumor of Picasso's imminent arrival in Milan. Then they organized a welcome reception at a fancy hall, with tickets sold at La Scala and other elite outlets. On the day of the supposed arrival, a crowd of cultural VIPs stood at the station to welcome the "Maitre." The famous painter (in reality a look-alike who worked at the Brera Academy as an attendant) was quickly escorted away by

a small group of fake aficionados. Needless to say, he did not make a showing at the reception in his honor, but the attending cultural elite was much scandalized by the mayhem unleashed by Fo and his associates. In the chaos a motorbike was seen circulating among the tables, several giant statues exploded, and a stretcher arrived, having been called for a critic hostile to Picasso (Meldolesi, p. 25).

These pranks should not be regarded as mere manifestations of a goliardic spirit. In fact, they express Fo's taste for transgression, for seeing the world from the point of view of the excluded other. In a sense, they provide a theatrical dimension for the narratives of the fabulatori. According to Meldolesi, during these pranks "Il palcoscenico non era un luogo di traduzione della realtà in un codice di convenzione; era il luogo dove le cose concrete della vita assumevano una dimensione assurda (Meldolesi, p.22).

The deliberate and planned character of the staged trick is best rendered by a section of the first act of Gli arcangeli in which a member of the gang describes the whole process to one who is uninformed and whom he hopes to enlist in the conspiracy (Le Commedie, p. 17-19). The preparatory first phase of the beffa consisted in an all around effort to convince Il Lungo that the time had come for him to take on the responsibility of family life. The next step, of course, was the selection of an appropriate mate. Il Lungo, in his characteristically candid way, sought her through a rather paradoxical newspaper ad which read:

"Giovane disoccupato, nullatenente, mediocre presenza, lieve difetto fisico sposerebbe giovane ricca, bellissima, possibilmente bionda ma illibata, muri propri, senza difetti fisici" (Le Commedie, p. 18). The obvious lack of response to such an ad was remedied by phase three of the prank, which saw a part-time prostitute, Angela, enlisting to play the part of a wealthy Albanian heiress, who wished a wedding with a Coptic rite. The catch to this last detail was that it involved a spectacular wedding ceremony, full of mystery and pathos.

In the plays, the process of exposing the absurdity of social organization took place by the interaction of the beffa and the candid character. In the previously cited prank, one of the key elements of the beffa is the marriage ad. The cunning friends take a "marriage ad" as a given datum without questioning its nature as an alienated form of communication, reflecting certain social structures, and unequal relationship between the sexes. In fact, they apply a commonsensical approach to it: for a marriage ad to be rational, it should hide the weak points of the person who placed it, and should appear "reasonable" and proportionate to the expectations of the party sought. With his candor, Il Lungo transgresses these norms; he reveals his weak points and openly declares expectations disproportionate to his own "virtues." In this manner he uncovers the hidden aspect of unequal "business transaction" and of sexual exploitation that a "logical" marriage ad hides. Thus, there is an implicit criticism of the shrewd and an open siding with the naive.

In making the contradiction explode, however, the candid character has no alternative setup to propose. In fact, throughout Gli arcangeli it is clear that Il Lungo and Angela denounce the status quo with their behavior and their whole being, but at this stage they themselves are quite confused as to their own aspirations. Angela, the prostitute, has constant yearnings for respectability in the form of a white wedding gown. Il Lungo also seeks stability and, following Angela's suggestions, abandons his parasitical profession to seek a pension from the State which would enable him "to go straight without turning his head at other people's laughs". Talking about the causes that led her to prostitution, Angela cites mainly ignorance. So far one seems to be going in the direction of a satire castigating excess and applauding rationality, honesty and moderation. Yet in the final scene, as the love story between Il Lungo and Angela takes the turn of a very conventional "happy ending," we see the gang making fun of them and clamoring for gypsies and violins, thus throwing cold water on a "sensible conclusion."

This ambivalence of Fo's is also seen in his previous works. For example, in the farce La Marcolfa (1958), right up to the very end, everything led to the same "ideological" conclusions of a Goldoni play. A maid who puts too much trust in luck is tricked by her fiance into believing that she has the winning lottery ticket. Right away the maid, who has been constantly rebuffed for being ugly and ill-tempered, receives marriage proposals from her aristocratic bankrupt master and from other upward mobile

characters. Towards the end, the fiance reveals his trick, which he intended to serve as a lesson in rationality and measure for everybody, but by an ironical turn of fate he learns that the ticket he had just torn to pieces really was the winning ticket (Teatro comico, p. 41).

Although Fo deals with moral problems, one could not call him a "moralist" since at this stage he has no model to propose. In analyzing satire, Brillii points out its task of "correcting vices," which has heavy ideological repercussions, especially in a conservative direction (Brillii, p. 20). In fact, he points out that, after Rabelais and the decline of the Carnival tradition, satire has taken on a function of censorship, of castigating that which is different from a moderate norm, all in the name of bourgeois rationality. Its connection with the popular oral tradition and thus with its subversive implications was later replaced with its use by the bourgeoisie as a didactic tool for the creation of a world in its own image (Brillii, pp. 26-9). In recovering satire from the popular tradition of the fabulatori, however, Fo avoids the bourgeois legacy. He updates the stories to reflect modern concrete reality, criticizing the status quo by offering a view of the world from the point of view of the excluded. In analyzing satire, Brillii makes the distinction between the laughter of "inclusion" that was typical of the Carnival and of the Rabelaisian tradition, and the laughter of "exclusion" founded on the technique of ridicule, and prevalent in bourgeois satire (Brillii, pp. 15-16). Within this distinction Fo

is clearly representative of the former.

Although Fo's characters mainly have petty bourgeois aspirations at this stage, and occasionally fall into didacticism, their pars destruens is much greater than their pars construens. In fact, the disjointed structure of the play suggests also a disjointed perception of the different sources of oppression in society, and thus a difficulty in formulating an organic alternative. In the first scene, the baker's adulterative practices reveal deception at the point of consumption. Next we are introduced into the world of the exploitation of women in the episode of Angela's house. Then the State, as embodied in the bureaucracy and the police, is castigated. A satire on the world of politics, high and low, follows. Finally, to conclude in a cyclical way, the last tableau returns to the world of petty crime. Like the ball of a pinball machine, *Il Lungo* seems to be hurled by chance into a journey through parallel worlds all tied together by the physical resemblances that he notices in the characters populating each world. In fact, the same actor plays the baker, the Coptic priest, the clerk, the police inspector, and the Minister, causing a series of embarrassing misidentifications by *Il Lungo*. However, the theatrical artifice of resemblance is not strong enough to stand as a metaphor for the inextricable connections between the different socio-economic structures. A more organic view of structural connections was to be presented starting with the play Isabella, tre caravelle e un cacciaballe (1963), which stands as a link between his early production and

the more openly political later plays. At this point the play's structure is similar to that of the story of Cain and Abel: it is built upon repetition and accumulation of abuse from different unrelated sources. Unlike his predecessors in candor, however, *Il Lungo* uses his experience as an apprenticeship in trickery and does not hesitate to apply the lessons learned.

The deceit-discovery mechanism in the second movement of the play leads *Il Lungo* to reveal his "judiciousness" to Angela, his female counterpart in candor. The consequence of this revelation is the promise that he will stop playing the fool and seek a living in a more respectable way by obtaining a pension for war-related wounds. Ironically, as he starts "playing it straight," the absurd organization of society seems to pursue him all the more mercilessly, giving life to perhaps the most surrealistic scene of the play--a tableau that could be titled "The struggle of Humanity against the Bureaucracy."

The inspiration for the whole fable comes from a book by Augusto Frassinetti titled Misteri dei Ministeri a satirical treatise on bureaucracy in which the parody is enhanced by its transposition into philosophical-psychological discourse.³⁷ *Il Lungo's* dealings with the bureaucracy start with a much contested request for a birth certificate necessary for his pension. In a scene dominated by slapstick, as he humbly approaches each window after waiting in interminable lines, the clerk slams it in his face. He tries again, as each window is opened by the clerks to pick up their coffee cups, but to no avail. Exasperated he creates

a diversion and manages to "guillotine" each employee at his or her respective window, and then, by glueing a rubber stamp to their foreheads, he forces them to validate his documents in a sequence materializing the "bureaucratic machine". Il Lungo then proceeds to search for his birth certificate and finds out that his identity for the registrar is even more bizarre than the official name his father had given him, i.e., Tempo, Sereno, Nuvolo, Agitato. According to the State, he is in fact a mongrel hound. Having lost his patience, he starts to threaten the snickering clerks with a bomb, causing the entrance on the scene of a police inspector and his assistant. After a cross-examination modeled on the good cop/bad cop routine, parodying the thriller, Il Lungo convinces the police of his just cause and the police inspector summons the "army" of clerks to be questioned as to the source of the misidentification. Picking on the army-like solidarity of the clerks, and on the iron discipline of the inspector, Il Lungo sets up the scene in a militaristic vein (Le Comedie, p. 47-51). In this section the objects and levels of parody crisscross each other. The clerks move in a militaresque manner and recount even a human interest story in perfect bureaucratese. Their alternation in giving the details of the genesis of their colleague's madness suggests the perfect replaceability required by the bureaucracy of its members with consequent annulment of individual personality. The bureaucracy is again the target of ridicule as the type of alterations made by their vindictive colleague (which included deaths preceding births

and marriages between priests and rangers) suggests the venting of an exuberant imagination that had been repressed too long by the monotony of bureaucratic practices.

The modality by which *Il Lungo* exposes the idiosyncrasies of both military and bureaucratic discipline is displacement. He wreaks havoc by appropriating and using the idiosyncrasies exhibited in the military profession, thus causing a mechanical chain of reaction devoid of logical foundation. *Il Lungo*, a civilian, displaces the authority of the police inspector by merely acting as one. First he suggests a militaristic measure--decimation of the uncooperative clerks. Later, with a commandeering tone, he halts a clerk who has come forward to speak and give information about the mad bureaucrat. Deceived by his tone of voice, the police inspector reacts automatically and loudly repeats *Il Lungo's* order to halt. The chain of command is obligingly played out at its lowest level as the inspector's assistant, once more, echoes his superior's order. The clerk is thus prevented from speaking, although the logic of the situation would require otherwise. The inspector recovers quickly from his gaffe but, undaunted, persists in his militaristic manner, in this way further illuminating the links between the authoritarian mode of the army and the rest of the State structures (*Le commedie*, pp.47-48).

The technique of displacement was utilized in varietà sketches and is one among many elements from that genre that Fo introduces in this play. In fact, a noticeable number of dormant

metaphors³⁸ typical of varietà sketches are awakened in the text. For example:

Clerk: (...) Si sarà lasciato certamente prendere la mano dalle deformazioni anagrafiche...

Il Lungo: Ma doveva lasciarsi prendere la mano proprio con me? Gli stronco la mano, il braccio e anche il piede a sto' matto (Le Commedie, p. 49).

A more complex type of awakening of a dormant metaphor occurs sporadically later in the play, and it will be examined in its proper context.

Having once again become the victim of deceit, Il Lungo must experience the specificity of bureaucratic falsehood.

Frassinetti's treatise must have served as a direct source of inspiration in this aspect. In listing the different modes of reprisal that clerks have at their disposal to resolve internal bureaucratic conflicts, Frassinetti talks about the "violations" of files, citing as extreme manifestations the manufacturing of totally invented ones, and of hybrid forms mixing the real with fantasy. These tricks are not always discovered, but when they are, they have dire consequences for the victims, revealing the specificity of bureaucracy's modus operandi, i.e., rigid respect for procedure (Frassinetti, p. 53-57). Frassinetti's Kafkaian account includes forced gender changes, mutilations, and even deaths, all done in order to conform to a newly acquired bureaucratic status. He writes:

Nell'ordinamento attuale, nessuna ribellione è possibile. A cosa è valsa l'indifferenza del sig. Lutero Settepelli il cui doloroso quesito ("Che cosa hanno fatto queste mie povere ginocchia...") ho riferito

poc'anzi?

Anagraficamente defunto e non essendosi rassegnato alla simulazione, ha dovuto morire a tutti gli effetti o per lo meno scomparire. La sera del 23 ottobre 1946, sull'imbrunire, fu visto correre all'impazzata verso le montagne. Un gregge delle vicinanze fu quella stessa notte aggredito da un uomo nudo e furioso, che non si allontanò prima di aver sbranato alcune pecore ed essersi cibato delle loro carni ancora sanguinanti. Dopo di allora il Sig. Settepelli non ha più dato segni di vita (Frassinetti, p.67).

Fo transposes the general principles expounded in the treatise to the particular situation of his hero. The police inspector and the bureaucrats reach an agreement aimed at avoiding scandal. When Il Lungo asks for an explanation he is told that his only solution is to pretend he is a dog, let himself be captured by a dog catcher, and after spending the customary three days in the kennel have his canine identity suppressed by a cooperative kennel bureaucrat. Finally, then he would be released as a person. A handsome monetary compensation would, of course, make up for all his troubles (Le commedie, p. 51-3).

While Frassinetti's fatalistic, detached account achieves its comic ends by the alternation of "bureaucratese" with objective journalistic reportage, thus relying on language, Fo's version is made theatrical by the methodical construction of a concrete absurd situation. Step by step Il Lungo sees materializing before his eyes a future situation of himself as a muzzleless mongrel, caught by the dog-catcher, brought to the humane society and dutifully released as a human after a three-day wait.

The specific nature of bureaucratic tricks mirrors the

bureaucracy's inflexible adherence to procedure--this iron law cannot be broken even when the falseness of its presupposition, i.e., Il Lungo is not a dog, is evident to all. This is not the only instance in which Fo underlines the *modus operandi* specific to a particular context by making the prank conform to its practices. Throughout the play, there exists a "typology" of the trick, all influenced by its context and origin. Thus, in the case of the baker, the gang whose code of operation is fraud, sets up a beffa relying on a supposed hidden fraud perpetrated by the baker; when they trick their candid friend, they use disguise-- the ultimate fraud focusing on substitution of a person.

Continuing the play's fable-like structure, the next two scenes take place first at the Kennel, and later at the mad magician's house. At the Kennel, the bureaucratic promises of nonadherence to rule fail to materialize as a scrupulous bureaucrat is ready to suppress Il Lungo, who has not been claimed after three days. However, a mad magician saves the day by claiming him at the last moment. He plans to train him to perform magic tricks in the circus and expects to make a fortune out of him (Le Commedie, pp. 62-64).

In reference to Fo's use of the "novella" and other literary sources as inspiration for the plays, Meldolesi points out that they serve as a platform from which the playwright can stimulate the imagination of his audience. Starting from this literary form, the author can blow everyday events, gestures, and speech to greater proportions, enabling the spectators to acquire a critical

distance, and at the same time allowing him to underline the exaggerated aspects of mass, consumeristic society (Meldolesi, p. 71).

From one trick to the next, we see Il Lungo hurled, without much logical explanation, into the world of politics, or better yet, into the "fetishism of power". In fact, politics is not seen in its centralized parliamentary habitat, but rather in the external manifestation of power: the signs of power such as ceremonial dress, inauguration speeches, and distribution of medals are all subjected to corrosive parody (Le commedie, pp. 73-74).

What immediately greets the spectator is the sight of a politician asleep, making do with a rudimentary couchette which distinguishes him from the regular traveler. Through a turn of events featuring slapstick, the trouserless Il Lungo ends up wearing the Minister's clothes, leaving the latter trouserless in his turn. Almost as though to emphasize the fetishistic properties of the objects of power, the Minister's clothes, worn by Il Lungo, cause him to be mistaken for the politician and thus escorted by local officials to the inauguration of a school. The ceremony he performs further underlines the dichotomy between substance and appearance. The emptiness of political rhetoric, for example, is rendered by a defective microphone that spurts out sporadically words such as "freedom...justice...country...peace...love...Italy" (Le Commedie, p. 73). The trickery of patriotism is represented by a magician's sleight-of-hand: after cutting the tricolored

ribbon, Il Lungo places the pieces in the tall hat and extracts little Italian flags. The distribution of medals to deserving teachers reproduces the mechanical sequence of a machine: medal pinning, embrace...medal pinning, embrace...until all the medals are gone and Il Lungo gets fresh supplies by pressing the master of ceremony's nose, like a button on a candy machine (Le Commedie, p. 73). The emptiness of ritual is further emphasized by contamination: Il Lungo would like to embrace Angela but in that context can do so only after pinning a medal on her; thus the code of love is grotesquely mixed with the code of awards.

Politics in its own right enters the text only in a small measure, its best example being the following exchange between the false Minister (Il Lungo) and the mayor:

Lungo: (si guarda intorno) Niente male. E questo sarebbe il letto dove mi diceva ha dormito Napoleone?

Sindaco: Già, proprio lui. Vede, prima di diventare albergo questo palazzo era la sede del governatore austriaco.

Lungo: È straordinario in quanti letti ha dormito quel Napoleone! Fra lui e Garibaldi, se si dovesse credere a quello che ti raccontano in ogni posto che vai? Si dovrebbe arrivare alla conclusione che non facessero altro che dormire...

Sindaco: (adulatore scoperto) Ah! Ah! Questa non l'avevo mai sentita...Ma sa che lei è il ministro più spiritoso che abbia mai conosciuto?!

Lungo: (con intenzione, senza pesare sulla battuta) Forse perchè sono meno ministro di quanto non sembri... (Si lascia andare sul divano che sta sul lato destro della stanza) Scusi se mi siedo, ma dopo quella corsa...manco da braccio ho corso tanto...

Sindaco: Come?

Lungo: (quasi sottotono) Niente, niente...ricordo degli inizi di carriera...

Sindaco: (adulatore) Capisco. Ad ogni modo, mi scusi se insisto, ma lei oggi è stato veramente grande: quella trovata dei fuochi d'artificio, i giochi di prestigio...un ministro prestigiatore: non me lo sarei mai aspettato!

Lungo: (staccato, con sufficienza) Beh, le dirò, nel nostro ambiente c'è da aspettarsi di tutto: ci sono quelli che fanno i salti mortali, quelli che s'arrampicano sui vetri, i trasformisti, i tiratori scelti: i prestigiatori sono i più comuni, più o meno lo sanno fare tutti... (Le commedie, pp. 75-76).

The comic humor is caused here by the awakening of a dormant metaphor: its modalities are more complex than in the previous example as they rely on complicity with the audience, who know about the development of a particular antecedent situation while the interlocutor on the stage is not aware of it. Thus in this scene, the mayor compliments the pretended minister on his wit, ignoring that "hound" is not used in a metaphorical sense to imply servitude at the beginnings of a career, but refers to a previous real experience of his, the days at the kennel and at the Mad Magician house. Also his being "less of a minister," as Il Lungo remarks, reflects a real situation. In a previous exchange between Il Lungo and Angela, the same mechanism was used in order to bring forth the humor of the situation:

Angela: (...) Ma che ci fai vestito a 'sto modo?
Accidenti, ti sei piazzato, eh? Ma che razza di carriera hai fatto?

Lungo: (a mezzo tono) Ho cominciato da cane.

Angela: (sentenziosa) Beh, gli inizi sono sempre difficili.

Later, talking about her friend, the real minister:

Angela: L'avrei giurato che sarebbe andata a finire così. Credeva di essere il più sveglio di tutti e vedrai che va a finire che lo lasceranno senza nemmeno più i pantaloni.

Lungo: L'hanno già fatto...e proprio perchè non era sveglio (Le commedie, p. 71).

The target of Fo's satire is the behavior of politicians, their inclination towards bribery, their lack of scruples, their hypocrisy and thirst for power. In later plays belonging to this first phase, a critique of political corruption occupies a more prominent space than in Gli arcangeli, but it remains a criticism of behavior and not of structures, as will be the case in the plays of his "political-militant" phase.

All the mines of ambiguity that have been drifting throughout the play are made to explode in the last scene. Their explosion, however, does not cause a complete destruction: it merely reveals the contradictions.

The outer shell enclosing the play has been the much used structure of the dream combined with that of the voyage. In the plot, Il Lungo is experiencing a rerun of the dream in a state that he now believes is awakesness; thus he uses the metaphor of spectacle to express his "state of grace".

Lungo: (sottovoce, quasi temesse di rompere un incantesimo) Ma non avete ancora capito? Stiamo tornando da capo...È come al cinema che dopo il "prossimamente" ti fanno vedere tutto da principio...Spettacolo continuato (Le Commedie, p. 85).

Later, in apologizing to the archangels for his previous tirade, he says:

L'ho sempre saputo che voi al flipper non ci giocate...Sono stato proprio stupido a cascarci! Ma c'è il fatto ch'era un così bel sogno...Ammazzalo, che bei sogni che organizzate, arcangeli! Meglio che gli Americani! (Le Commedie, p. 91).

This sarcastic comment on Hollywood "happy endings, " at this point is uttered in direct reference to the ambiguity between dream and reality. In later plays such as his remake of John Gay's The Beggar's Opera, Fo was to pose the question of happy endings in relation to catharsis versus critical function of art.

Earlier we noticed contrasting directions in which Fo's characters moved. The aspirations toward respectability--Angela's white gown and Il Lungo's yearning for economic well-being--can be placed on the pole of dream; but as the two rush headlong towards their aim, the snickering friends in the gang, who stand on the pole of reality, remark that all they need now are violins and gypsies. However, even with this dichotomy we have not yet reached the last box of the "deceit-en abyme". Il Lungo, who, they believe, has by now returned to his original candor, resorts to trickery to free himself of these friends and to make Angela prove her love for him. He pretends to fling out of the window all the money he has acquired while playing the crooked politician causing his friends to rush down to catch it, while Angela proclaims her unswerving loyalty to him, even if penniless. The ending leaves everything suspended: the stage directions would have our hero and heroine running away hand in hand into the sunset (Le Commedie, pp. 90-1). Yet, deep down, the spectators, who have gone through two hours of schooling in the unreliability of appearance and the

prevalence of the absurd, would find it difficult to accept this provisional conclusion at face value.

Meldolesi has called Fo a "poet of disaggregation" (Meldolesi, p. 76). In this first play, the disjointed reality of the big city, the inhuman rhythms of industrialization, the proliferation of new objects and needs typical of a capitalist society are captured by an imagination nurtured on the hyperbole of the fabulatori, fascinated by the disjointed tempo of the farce and varietà, and freed in time and space by the new techniques of the cinema. These instruments allowed Fo to use the stage as a specular structure reflecting a reality distorted not by artifice but by its own absurd organization. Though dealing with reality Fo's theater is not naturalistic: he selects certain emblematic features of society and through the mediation of a dialectically candid/sly character he sets before the spectator a series of situations aimed at shaking the passive acceptance of the status quo. Thus the problem of audience is not a small one for the playwright; in fact, unlike Il Lungo, in his first period Fo was the Rigoletto of the rich, given that theater goers were mainly members of the urban bourgeoisie (Valentini, pp. 62-76).

The discrepancy between "message" and "receiver" was to be solved by Fo in the late sixties with the formation of an alternative theater circuit geared towards popular audiences and in opposition to what Franco Quadri calls "il teatro del regime." This break required a period of maturation and further experimentation in re-elaborating repressed forms from popular

culture. The element of continuity between this first nucleus of experiences and Fo's breakthrough in the late sixties and in the seventies will be examined in the context of analyzing the two plays that best represent his "middle" period: Mistero Buffo and Morte accidentale di un anarchico.

CHAPTER II

THE SIXTIES AND THE SEVENTIES:
DARIO FO SHARPENS THE WEAPON OF THE GROTESQUE.

1. Towards a redefinition of the role of the artist

If the fifties were for Fo years of apprenticeship in using the tools of theater, the sixties were years in which he had to confront issues related to the artist's social role. During these years, both Fo the artist and the persona of Fo experienced something akin to the growing pains of adolescence. However, it was not an awkwardness of limb and coordination, but rather a restless search for the appropriate theatrical space - a quest that veered the playwright from bourgeois theater stages to television, from P.C.I. sponsored workers' social centers¹ to alternative private cultural circles composed of revolutionary-minded people.²

In the fifties, Fo's disjointedness and restlessness had come to signify the eclectic wealth of a vivid imagination. He was seen as the warlock's talented apprentice, mixing the most diverse ingredients into the cauldron of theater. The magic thus obtained succeeded in enchanting the bourgeois theater-goers, in spite of its polemical content, and it held under its spell millions of glamour consumers who had not experienced his works directly. This latter category of "vicarious" spectators was composed mostly of men and women from the lower classes who were perhaps attracted to the couple Fo-Rame because of the contradiction they embodied:

i.e. glamour on the one hand, and a denunciation of wealth and injustice on the other. This unity of opposites could be seen as emblematic of a certain period of the class struggle in Italy, namely the fifties, with the glamour of the purported economic boom (il miracolo economico), with a lull in the workers' struggles, and with the heavy-handed exclusive rule of the Christian Democratic party (D.C.) (Valentini, p. 74-75).

In Italy the decade of the sixties opened with a bang announcing the end of a quiescent period. The most dramatic events took place in July 1960, as workers protesting a proposed alliance between the D.C. and the neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (M.S.I.) were fired upon and killed by the police in Reggio Emilia, Palermo and Catania (Valentini, p. 70). These killings provoked a series of strikes and struggles that mobilized large sectors of the people, particularly those who had participated in the resistance movement against fascism. During the fifties this sector had been largely ostracized by the ruling D.C., had been excommunicated as "atheistic and communist" by Pope Pius XII, and had been the target of the so-called ben pensanti. The pressure from this vast base resulted in the formation of a center-left coalition government including some of the leftist parties in 1962.

Artists like Dario Fo and Franca Rame, who were at that time sympathisers of the P.C.I., were deeply affected by these events and were further pushed to question their social role. Thus they joined, through their works and in other ways, the ongoing debate

raging among progressive intellectuals and artists concerning the social role of these strata in capitalist society. In the fifties and sixties an important point of reference in this debate was the work of P.C.I. founder Antonio Gramsci who had devoted large sections of his Prison notebooks to the nondemocratic character of Italian culture and intellectuals and had pointed out possible remedies to the situation.³ A direct reference to this source was to become important for Fo at the close of the decade, especially in connection with the influence of Mao TseTung and the Cultural Revolution.

Dario Fo's engagement with these new questions expressed itself with the quick rhythm and sudden changes characterizing his own farces, rather than with an even and gradual buildup. Thus in 1962 he worked in the state-owned Italian television; in the period 1963-65 he was back in the bourgeois theaters; in 1965 he offered his own re-elaboration of Brecht; then in 1967 he borrowed from the circus for a show denouncing the role of the U.S. in Vietnam; in 1969 he re-proposed the giullare;⁴ from 1968-69 he worked inside the A.R.C.I. (the P.C.I. sponsored cultural circles); and in 1970 he broke with them and established his own alternative circles.

From its inception, this restlessness stemmed from the gulf between Fo's demystifying message and the fact that the traditional theater audiences were largely composed of the bourgeoisie, a class that benefitted from mystification. In practice, for more than ten years Dario Fo had been the giullare

of the bourgeoisie, amusing them with his comic talents but addressing his message to the wrong audience.

Fo was not alone in experiencing this malaise. The sixties brought revolutionary changes in the Western theater as a whole. The emancipation of theater from the domination of the literary text, the primacy of the body and of movement, the attempt to erase the separation between stage and audience (exemplified by the famous happenings of the Living Theater) were all phenomena that exploded in the sixties and crossed national boundaries with great nonchalance. Thus Fo was no stranger to the influences of the Bread and Puppet Theater, the Living Theater, the Teatro Campesino, and the San Francisco Mime Troupe (Valentini p. 93).

Given his propensity for art on the side of the people, three interrelated questions can be seen as guiding Fo's journey into the sixties: the demystification of what? For whom? And to what end? They led him to explore two main nuclei of theatrical experience - popular theater and political theater - and to seek a synthesis of the two. Moreover, Fo's answers to these questions often led him to clash with the establishment. While previously his work had been subjected to mild censorship (Artese, p. 34-35), the most clamorous encounter with the censors was to be experienced by Fo in 1962, during his coordination of Canzonissima.

Fo continued to ride the wave of popularity throughout the early sixties, a few years after his success with Gli arcangeli, thus it was not surprising that as a tribute to their talent and

popularity Dario Fo and Franca Rame were offered the post of organizing Italy's most popular varietà. The offer had been made by the Radio Televisione Italiana (R.A.I.), a state-owned agency that had just undergone a mild reform imposed by the center-left government. Every Saturday night during the fall-winter season, Canzonissima was watched by the largest television audience. It consisted of a weekly song competition interspersed with skits, choreographed dance routines, and various other performances all coordinated by a presentatore (in this case the couple Dario Fo-Franca Rame). Fittingly, this extravaganza was connected with a state lottery that awarded 150, 000, 000 lire to the lucky purchaser of the winning ticket. All in all it seemed a form of entertainment mirroring the escapist aspirations of the fifties. Fo and Rame attempted to inject it with a dose of their demystifying style and the new spirit of the sixties, giving way to one of the biggest incidents ever to face the R.A.I.

Chiara Valentini, as well as most other commentators, sees Fo's brief experience in television as a very important turning point in his career (Valentini, pp. 77-84). It afforded him the opportunity to reach millions of people generally excluded from the realm of "culture" and relegated, instead, to a degraded form of "mass culture". This popolo was now the addressee of Fo's message.

The fifteen million Italians who on October 12, 1962, switched on their television sets to watch Canzonissima were

confronted with a most unusual song: "Popolo del miracolo/miracolo economico/oh popolo magnifico/campion di libertà/di libertà di transito/di libertà di canto/di canto e controcanto/di petto e in falsetto.../Su cantiam, su cantiam/Evitiamo di pensar/per non polemizzar/mettiamoci a cantar/facciam cantar gli orfani/le vedove che piangono/e gli operai in sciopero/" (Valentini, p. 77). This was only the beginning of the contrasting styles with which the spectators would be presented in the following weeks.

In fact, the predictably sentimental tunes of such singers as Vilma De Angelis and Alberto Tajoli were interspersed with cutting satirical skits with Dario Fo and Franca Rame on the burning questions of the day. After the first two weeks, following a parliamentary investigation, the skits underwent serious cuts by the R.A.I. censorship. A process was begun which eventually led to a showdown between Fo-Rame and R.A.I.

One of the early uncensored skits featured an overly zealous worker who everyday would greet the portrait of the company founder by blowing a kiss and saying "Toh, un basin, " mimicking the language of a small child. The R.A.I. program director received a protest letter from an industrialist who had been forced to remove his father's bronze bust from the factory lobby because, following Dario Fo's seditious example, the workers were blowing their daily kiss and mockingly greeting the bust with the words, "Toh, un basin" (Valentini, p. 79). Fo had definitely succeeded in capturing the imagination of a different type of audience.

Another example of the R.A.I.'s predicament was its attempted censorship of a skit on a scandal involving the owners of construction companies (a notoriously corrupt sector within Italian industry). A few years earlier Fo had written and performed in a play entitled Chi ruba un piede è fortunato in amore, which also dealt with construction speculation. In that case the censors did not intervene too drastically, as it was performed mainly to bourgeois audiences deemed mature enough to take the joke graciously. But in the case of Canzonissima, with its mass audience, the censors justified their cuts by saying that such an expose would inflame the construction workers and exacerbate the conflict with their employers, especially at a time when negotiations for a new contract were taking place. These latest cuts incensed Dario Fo and Franca Rame to the point where they staged a furious walkout just a few minutes before the show was to be broadcast. This dramatic exit was followed by a number of legal suits and countersuits that Fo and Rame eventually won, but the two artists were de facto barred from Italian television until 1977.

Although his first attempt to reach a vast, non-elite audience was cut short by the intervention of the state censorship, and he was forced to return to his traditional elite audiences, Fo did not totally abandon the new path. In fact, premonitory signs that he was coming to terms with questions concerning the role of the artist and the creation of popular culture were seen even while he performed in the traditional

theater.

The two plays Isabella, tre caravelle e un cacciaballe (1963) and La colpa è sempre del diavolo (1965) can be seen as intermediate pieces connecting his previous production to the two main nuclei of his later works, the popular theater and the political theater. This latter distinction is somewhat artificial, as Fo himself has often declared that all theater is political and his in particular is addressed to the "polis". However, the two terms of "popular" and "political" could be loosely used to describe two trends that run throughout his later work: the monologues (with roots in the fabulatori narrations and creatively extending themselves in the Fo-persona of the giullare); and farcical plays usually focusing on explicitly political events.

The play Isabella is Fo's first deliberate attempt to deal with the model of Brecht's epic theater, a model that in the sixties was establishing itself as the paragon for all political theater. Even in Fo's early plays some resemblances can be seen to Brecht's plays - for example the use of songs and the emphasis on non-naturalistic elements - but such affinity could be ascribed to a similarity of influences (Brecht was much influenced by Karl Valentin and the German cabaret, while Fo was influenced by varietà). In Italy, Brecht's work reached the audience through the mises in scene of Giorgio Strehler, the director of the Piccolo Teatro di Milano, the only one at that time authorized to put on Brecht's plays in Italy. For the purposes of our

analysis at this point, Brecht is important as a playwright who addressed, in his works, the position of the intellectual in society.

Fo's Isabella was performed at the same time that Brecht's Galileo was being staged by Strehler in Milan. Fo's Colombo and Brecht's scientist are both emblematic of the encounter of intellectuals with the power of the State - and its dire consequences for the former. It was not a coincidence, at least on Fo's part, that his play was produced at a time when many intellectuals in Italy were flocking to the center-left coalition. In a style of militant commitment that was to characterize his work later on, Fo was giving them a warning - through a parable - about the evil results of putting themselves in the service of power.

The play-within-a-play is the theatrical device adopted in Isabella. The action takes place in seventeenth-century Spain: the main actor of a travelling troupe is to be executed because he has dared to stage a play by Rojas, the Celestina, which had been forbidden by the Inquisition. However, he has been granted the grace of performing, before his execution, a play of his own choosing, in the public square. Aided by the crowd, the actor constructs a rudimentary stage and enlists volunteers to be actors in his play: the performance will be the story of Christopher Columbus. The daring, heroic Columbus of textbook memory becomes, in Fo's revisitation, an adventurer who is willing to play into the hands of power and who deceives himself into thinking that by

making up some clever stories (hence the term cacciaballe) he can manipulate power to his own ends (Mazzotta I, pp.287-324). However, Columbus is discarded by the Court when he is no longer useful. Finally he is tried as an example to others who are not willing to identify totally with the establishment and thoroughly exploit the oppressed in its name. In fact, Columbus' transgression had consisted in wanting to maintain a certain edge of power by giving inaccurate route indications that would not allow anyone else but him to find the road to the Indies (pp 316-7). He had threatened and bribed the sailors to swear that the newly found land was rich in gold and diamonds, as to assure the financing of another expedition by the King (Mazzotta I, p. 315). His own motivations were not at all humanitarian: rather, he wanted to make sure that he would partake in the exploitation. But those in power required absolute loyalty and no sense of independence in intellectuals and "technicians". A fitting parable then, for those seeking posts within a state structure that had proven time and again its class character of exploitation.

In Fo's play, as the main actor performing the story of Columbus seeks to prolong the performance in the hopes of receiving a pardon, he engages in exchanges with his audience about the likelihood of being acquitted - thus the actor as dramatis persona breaks out of the fourth wall of naturalistic theater (Mazzotta I, p. 324). Here Fo is putting on the stage his ongoing concern for a theater requiring the active participation

of the audience - even if in real life his own theater does not yet do that. The figure of the actor, standing up against reaction, in the midst of the people and on their side, is at this point just a creative intuition. Later on he was to verify this intuition historically while re-elaborating the lost heritage of medieval giullari.

La colpa è sempre del diavolo introduces on the theatrical space a historical epoch what was to become dear to Fo: the years of the rise of free cities, which sought to govern themselves in opposition to the corruption of the Catholic Church.⁶

The play observes Fo's characteristic farce tempo. The action quickly switches from the scene of the unperformed execution of a young woman accused of being a heretic, to the palace intrigues of the nobility, relying on substitution of persons, disguise, and similar devices. Also for the first time a creative linguistic tool is put on the stage: it is a basic medieval dialect of the Po valley, comprising sounds and expressions typical of the area but not belonging to any one town, allowing larger, easier communication.⁷

While until 1965 Fo's excursions into popular culture remained at the level of artistic intuition, in 1966 he had an opportunity to lend some methodological and historical weight to his supposition. In those years many progressive intellectuals in Italy has begun to do ethnographic studies concentrating on different aspects of people's lives. One of the main centers sponsoring study and research in that direction was the Istituto

Ernesto De Martino (Meldolesi, pp. 90-91).

A group of researchers, progressive singers, ethnomusicologists and others had joined to publish a periodical called Il Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano that researched folk songs and other cultural expressions of the people (Valentini, p. 91). They carried out a thorough and extensive search for materials of popular art by going into both villages and cities to record the voices of a culture that was threatened with extinction by the ubiquitous influence of the mass media.

Among these researchers, there were dissenting opinions as to the method of salvaging and as to the validity of the hypothesis of a "people's" culture as an autonomous entity in juxtaposition to the dominant elite culture. An influential voice in the ongoing debate had been that of Pier Paolo Pasolini who, in a 1960 book on popular poetry, argued that such autonomous culture never existed - rather the popular tradition was made up of creative fragments that were composed as cohesive wholes by members of the dominant classes.⁸ Other positions instead argued that there were moments in Italian history when cohesive autonomous cultures had arisen, but it was only later that their essence was denied or absorbed and denatured by a dominant culture (in Meldolesi, pp. 138-39).

During his association with the group of the Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano, Dario Fo exposed himself to firsthand experience with popular singers, such as the Sardinian group of shepherd called I Galletti di Gallura, rice pickers, and Sicilian

cantastorie, all people with whom he was to have a continued collaboration. These people brought back to him, after twelve years spent in an elite environment, the world of labor and of life among popular strata, the world of Fo's own youth. As a result of the collaboration between Fo, Il Nuovo Canzoniere, and the folk singers themselves, in 1966 a show entitled Ci ragiono e canto was organized and toured many cities in Italy. An introduction of the show declared that the purpose of the program was:

...rappresentare (con i canti storici) la condizione del mondo popolare e proletario com'è oggi in Italia.
 ..., perchè nello spettacolo come nella vita convivono, si intersecano, si sovrappongono, si elidono: festa e fatica, nascita e morte, Sicilia e Piemonte, modalità e tonalità, dialetto e vernacolo medio, religione e socialismo, arcaismo e avanguardia politica, l'anno mille e l'oggi, la rappresentazione sacra e quella laica, canto e gesto. (in Meldolesi, p. 138).

With reference to these two latter elements, Fo's contribution to the group effort was to show the inseparable nature of popular song and of movement, the former in many cases being born out of the necessity to give rhythm to a labor activity. Thus, for example, Fo showed how even a poetic form adopted by the elite such as the strambotto not only had popular origins, but was tied, in this particular case, to the rhythm necessary to the oarsmen to propel their boats (in Meldolesi, pp. 103-05). Similar types of artistic compositions originated also from the songs with which Sicilian ropemakers marked the movements necessary to their trade. In addition to tracing artistic forms to material activities, Fo also remarked the social nature of such creations:

at least two people were required to carry out any one of the activities, hence the endeavor and the creation were not at all individualistic. The introduction of the program concluded that:

Ci è parso più volte di trovarci dinnanzi non solo e non tanto a una cultura contrapposta e ricca di momenti autonomi nei confronti di quella egemone, quanto piuttosto a una vera e propria 'civiltà', a una cultura con una sua propria tradizione e delle proprie direttive di sviluppo, con un proprio modo di rielaborare ciò che assimila, e fornita soprattutto di una grande capacità di difesa dei propri valori e di resistenza nei confronti di quelli della classe dominante (in Meldolesi, p. 138).

Fo carried this discourse even further in suggesting that in order to be open to new experiments, the artist had to delve into the past and, in particular, to root himself in people's culture. Later on, during his production of Mistero Buffo, he linked his own activity to this method declaring:

Ritengo che a teatro, tanto più si va sperimentando verso il nuovo, tanto più si deve affondare nel passato, si intende nel passato che può interessare; e a me interessa soprattutto un passato che sia attaccato alle radici del popolo, cioè che parta dalle manifestazioni di vita e di cultura del popolo come fonte essenziale di solidità e di ampiezza di rappresentazione sia nella vita che nella cultura, per poter esprimere nuove ricerche e saggiare nuove indagini, sulla base del concetto di 'nuovo nella tradizione' a cui sono legato (Valentini p. 99).

The first tour of Ci ragiono e canto was followed, a year later by a Ci ragiono e canto numero 2; by this time, however, the Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano had split from Fo. Much of the dissension hinged, according to the group's opinion, on Fo's negligence of philological rigor, on his emphasis on an artistic adaptation, and on his excessive "staging" of the songs

(Valentini, p. 98). Some of the members of the group, however, joined Fo, and later collaborated with him in his theatrical productions.

The overall experience of the two year collaboration with the folk singers and with intellectuals committed to the salvaging of popular culture was an essential acquisition, giving Fo a structure that allowed him to make the great leap represented by his work Mistero Buffo in 1969.

2. Mistero Buffo: The grotesque in the popular culture of the Middle Ages.

According to Chiara Valentini's account, the planning stages of Mistero Buffo did not differ radically from Dario Fo's previous methods and structures (Valentini, p. 119). As in both La colpa è and Isabella, he had sought his materials from the past. This time, however, his search had been more extensive: Fo had in fact gone from remote archives in Sicily all the way to Poland and Czechoslovakia looking for the original texts and traces of medieval theater. The themes recurring most often were religious ones, particularly New Testament episodes, some of which were reinterpreted from a grotesque viewpoint.

As in his previous plays, Fo began to work with and direct a group of actors. During the rehearsals, however, it became clear that the separate texts forming the play had not been adequately transformed by the codes of drama and remained isolated pieces of literature voiced by actors. In order to remedy this situation, Fo drew from his vast and varied theatrical experience. Just one year before, in 1968, during the Scandinavian tour of his La signora è da buttare, which was performed in Italian, Fo had bridged the language gap with the audience by giving an improvised prologue elucidating the action of the play. As this introduction was well received, Fo began to expand and dramatize it, transforming it into a "polyphonic"⁹ monologue that borrowed some lines from the play itself. Recalling this past experience, Fo thought to treat

his medieval texts, voices from another time and culture, like a foreign language that needed to be explained and illustrated. He built on this initial intuition to arrive at a total restructuring of the play: the whole action would be evoked by one actor, and the commentary would run throughout the play, tying together the different pieces, rather than functioning as a prologue.

Even if later on Fo would justify these changes by claiming that he had consciously tried to adopt the style of the giullari, Chiara Valentini points out the artist's debt to his experience in the "minor" forms of the theater:

In realtà era stato soprattutto l'intuito teatrale, l'enorme esperienza che aveva accumulato in vent'anni di teatro, passando dalle passerelle della rivista alle ribalte borghesi, ai capannoni di lamiera della periferia a fargli intravedere questa straordinaria soluzione. Dove lo straniamento viene liberamente interpretato e saldato al recupero della cultura popolare e la vocazione monologante del Poer Nano, dei grandi comici della rivista italiana, s'incontra con la passione civile e l'impegno politico (Valentini, p. 120).

The introduction to Mistero Buffo found in the Mazzotta edition of Fo's plays reveals very forcefully Fo's main concerns during that period (Mazzotta I, pp.7-13). In it one finds a historical justification for the salvaging of the medieval texts, including, at the end of each piece, an extensive bibliography to document and support his claims.

The rediscovery of popular tradition is then linked to contemporary developments, particularly the growing trend, at the grassroots level among Catholics both in Italy and in Latin America, to interpret the New Testament in an anti-institutional

sense. Fo wished for a dialogue between Marxists and the proponents of the new trends in Catholicism "per la creazione di una civiltà nuova, a misura dell'uomo e nella quale non soltanto il regno dei cieli sarà negato ai ricchi e agli sfruttatori, ma anche quello di questa terra" (Mazzotta, p.13). The introduction ends with a quote by Antonio Gramsci, one which Fo will often use in giving a theoretical foundation to his work:

Conoscere se stessi vuol dire essere se stessi, vuol dire essere padroni di se stessi, distinguersi, uscire fuori dal 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.. (Mazzotta, I, p.13)

However, this quote, which could be paraphrased as "in order to know where you are going, you must know where you have come from," was variously interpreted by Marxist artists. In fact the prevailing tendency was to locate that past - "where you have come from" - at the beginnings of capitalist society, whereas Fo chose a period prior to capitalism. His past is feudal, punctuated by the attempts of heretical sects to carry out primitive communism. This fascination with the world of the Middle Ages is important not only as far as content is concerned, but also in regard to his mode of comic expression. In fact, many parallels can be made between Fo's re-creation of the medieval world and what Mikhail Bakhtin calls the "carnavalesque tradition" especially as embodied in the works of Rabelais.

According to the critic, the popular tradition of the

Carnival, which had flourished autonomously and in juxtaposition to the official culture in the Middle Ages, for a period of fifty or sixty years (varying according to country) during the Renaissance made its entrance into "elevated" culture, producing such masterpieces of world literature as Rabelais' Gargantua and Pantagruel, Shakespeare's plays, and Cervantes' Don Quixote (Rabelais, p. 72).

In linking up Rabelais' work to the popular culture of the Middle Ages, Bakhtin points out the high degree of conflictuality existing between official feudal culture based on seriousness and its popular counterpart which was instead based on the comic mode.

Laughter had been banished and pushed to the margins of official culture, but its strength was still felt during the Carnival and year-round in specific locations like the public square and the market place. The serious mode was, by contrast, closely linked to the content of the feudal class' ideology.

According to Bakhtin:

The very contents of medieval ideology - asceticism, somber providentialism, sin, atonement, suffering, as well as the character of the feudal regime, with its oppression and intimidation - all these elements determined this tone of icy petrified seriousness (Rabelais, p.73).

Thus any discourse on truth or on the Good could find no other expression in the official Medieval world than monologic seriousness.¹⁰

The ascetism of the Middle Ages banished the body as well. It connected it to the Fall, to all that is impure and removed from

godliness. By contrast, popular culture connected much of the liberating powers of laughter to the "lower bodily stratum". That which is close to the earth, far from evoking fear of death or of sin, is instead linked to the regenerative cycles of life, a materialist outlook that acknowledges the death of the individual but makes it a moment in a never-ending chain of life. Bakhtin points out that such perception is not subjective or biological but rather social and universal:

Man experiences this flow of time in the festive marketplace, in the carnival crowd, as he comes into contact with other bodies of varying age and social caste. He is aware of being a member of a continually growing and renewed people. This is why festive folk laughter presents an element of victory not only over supernatural awe, over the sacred, over death; it also means the defeat of power, of earthly kings, of the earthly upper classes, of all that oppresses and restricts (Rabelais, p.92)

In this light, it is not surprising that the classes in power felt threatened by this alternative mode and sought to repress it using all means available. By the same logic it is not surprising that many centuries later a playwright like Dario Fo, concerned with radical social change would look to medieval popular culture as a source of inspiration for a transgressive contemporary message.

The title itself, Mistero Buffo, brings to mind a variety of elements, as it encloses contiguously the sacred and the profane. The word mistero initially meant a component of the ritual of Mass. Later on, starting in France in the eleventh century, it was adopted in a dramatic sense to indicate those

performances of Old and New Testament scenes done in the vernacular, mostly by lay people.¹¹ These misteri (which in Italian were more commonly called Sacre Rappresentazioni) had taken the place of the drammi liturgici, which were dramatizations of parts of the Mass or of Biblical episodes and were performed by clerics, in church, during Mass. Both the drammi liturgici and the misteri were soon banned by the Catholic Church, as they became "contaminated" with profane and comic elements tending to criticize the Church (Garzanti, p. 208). These latter types of misteri buffi were very frequent in both Poland and Czechoslovakia, and Fo possibly drew his inspiration from them.

Another source for Mistero Buffo is to be sought in the theatrical poem by that title written by Vladimir Majakovsky in 1918. It illustrated the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, using religious traditions in an allegorical manner (Garzanti, p. 735).

Mistero Buffo is composed of twelve distinct texts divided into two sections: Mistero Buffo proper and I testi della passione. The sequence in which they were played and their numbers varied greatly from one performance to the next, making the work of textual analysis rather difficult. To this, it should be added that no edition carries the running commentary Fo would make during the performances, as it was often improvised and therefore subject to changes. Thus, in a sense, like in a canovaccio of the Commedia dell'Arte, one is left with a

skeleton of the text, which can give only a limited and impoverished idea of the whole work.

The first part comprises different types of salvaged materials, ranging from contrastisti like Rosa fresca aulentissima and related textual analysis, to the dramatizations of Biblical stories; from moralità to medieval folk tales. The second part is more homogeneous, containing three or four scenes from the Passion of Christ, all based on medieval misteri.

The Mazzotta edition, used for this analysis because it is the most complete one, includes: Lauda dei battuti, L'ubriaco, La strage degli innocenti, La resurrezione di Lazzaro, Passione, Il matto e la morte, Moralità del cieco e dello storpio, Maria viene a conoscere della condanna imposta al figlio, La crocefissione, Bonifacio VIII, and La nascita del villano.

Throughout Fo's performance - during which he is a lone figure dressed in black on a bare stage - there is an alternation between what could be loosely termed "the text proper" and the actor's commentary, which is an integral part of the play. Actually, so deep is the connection between the two elements that often it is impossible to tell where one starts and the other leaves off. The commentary takes many forms; from textual interpretation to visual aids (such as slides), from digressions linking up the past with the present to improvisations whose theme is furnished by "incidents" in the audience or on the stage (Valentini, pp.125-27).

The past is evoked also at a linguistic level. The re-created texts are presented in a language invented by Fo, which is an amalgam of different dialects from the Po valley, reconstructed by Fo to sound like a vernacular from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In order to aid comprehension of particularly obscure words, he often repeats a synonym borrowed from a neighboring Po valley dialect.

Thus, little by little, it is as though the modern-day man in black disappears from the stage, which then is slowly populated with lame and blind beggars, the Pope, archangels and Madonnas, jokers and giullari. Parallels could be drawn to the polyphonic novel as described by Bakhtin, with the added dimensions of voice and motion. Far from having the static and frozen characteristic of an affresco of a past civilization, Fo's re-creation is dynamic, truly "dialogic",¹² and seems to communicate an ineffable process of becoming.

Among the many characters Fo evokes, one can recognize several direct descendants of his "naive" characters of the fifties. It is also possible to discern his constant focus on the viewpoint of the oppressed, his gusto for the creation of absurd situations and for the mechanisms of deceit.

In the episode of the drunk engaged in an altercation with an angel over who will tell the story of the Canaan wedding, one sees a combination of all the elements mentioned above as characteristic of Fo's period of apprenticeship.

The issue of point of view becomes an almost palpable one in

this piece where the angel, speaking in the language of authority and invoking its force, would like to push the drunk off the stage. The winged, elegant creature starts off with a lofty, condescending prologue, aimed at gathering the people to hear the story: "Deime rason...bona zente...scoltime cont atenzion imparché ve voj contare..." (Mazzotta, I, p.15). Interrupted by the loud remarks of the drunk, who is praising the aftereffect of abundant libations, the angel loses his initial magnanimous tone and starts to threaten him. The confrontation escalates until the drunk starts reclaiming his right to speak. He has participated in the wedding and he has partaken of its spirit, unlike the celestial creature who is too removed to relate the experience. As the angered drunk starts to pluck the feathers off of the wings of the righteous angel, yet another victory has been achieved by the oppressed. Having gotten rid of the angel, the drunk starts relating an episode from the wedding: his overhearing of a conversation between Jesus and the Madonna. In the drunk's own words, Jesus insisted that the Madonna drink a sip of wine: "'Tegnì mama, bevin un goto anc vui' la ghe diseva 'No podi me caro, che no ag sont abituada mi al vin' la respundeva lé. 'No te pol far male, mama, ol te menerà solamente l'alegreza, nol te fagarà male...che l'è vin bon! gl'ho fait mé!'" (Mazzotta, I, p.17). Here, both the Madonna and Jesus manifest a very corporeal dimension. The mother-son bond is no longer a removed, celestial one, but rather it has acquired the earthy strength of family ties among the peasantry. The words "che l'è vin bon! gl'ho fait mé!"

convey the bragging of a proud winemaker recalling the generations of experience in that art, rather than the words of a proud miracle-maker. The image of the banquet, of eating, drinking, and of excess is a frequent one in medieval literature and Bakhtin acknowledges its importance in Rabelais' work (Rabelais, pp. 278-302). Here, the Biblical wedding feast loses its solemnity to become an image of popular celebration, where abundance is not sin but a form of praise of creation.

The mode of celebration specific to the popular classes is but one manifestation of their own ideological system - of a whole civilization that Fo is trying to salvage. The serious and the severe modes belonged, according to Bakhtin, to the expressive code of the ruling classes, while for the popular strata the serious and the comic coexisted.. The kind of authority that Jesus represents, for example, in this piece, is not the humorless one associated with Church dogma. Rather it is the joyful authority of someone who does not hesitate to take part in the general festivities and in drinking wine, as a member of a community which has a direct relationship with the land. In a sense, this Jesus is an element of that different order of which Gramsci spoke.

Fo's favorite structure in the farces - absurd situations laden with several layers of deceit - is most evident in La moralità del cieco e dello storpio. Traditionally the moralità were dramatic forms that occurred frequently in Europe in the fifteenth century. They differed from the other forms of religious representation by their use of allegory and abstractions

for overtly moral ends. In France, by the end of the sixteenth century, the moralité had become a type of satyric comedy full of political allusions. Fo's re-creation is modeled more on its later development than on its original role.

In Fo's characteristic manner, in the beginning there is an unusual coming together of two beggars, one blind and one lame. Like the protagonists of Fo's early plays, both these characters are outcasts. Standing on opposite sides of the street, they invoke the charity of passersby, while lamenting their miserable state. Finally, since both of them are stranded - the lame man's cart has broken wheels, the blindman's dog has escaped - they devise a remedy to their situation: the blindman will carry the lame man, who will direct him. Their exchanges (here one must remember that it is a polyphonic monologue) resemble those of two comedians from the varieta, with one playing the straight man and the other the comedian. Thus, there is a series of puns on the word wheel:

"Storpio - A no podo miga gn' lillò. Deo malediga toeti i rodi del mundo e a faga gn' quadrade che i no podan pu andà intorno a rudulà...Storpio - Ohj che pensada d'averge on gran zervelo ti, pign do rode e rodele. Ohj che el segnur Deo m'ha fait la grazia de 'mprestarme le rode del to zervelo per farne andare inturna de novo a dimandar la carità" (Mazzotta I, p.26).

Like the world of Il Lungo and friends, the world of the beggar is one of deceit. In fact, as the improvised human machine is approaching Jesus Christ, the two men express their worry that He might heal them against their will:

Storpio - ..I dise che se sto fiol de Deo ol gnise a

pasar de chi loga, mi gneri miracolat dun boto.../e ti
anca.../a la misma manera.../Pensaghe un poc, se davvero
ghe cata a tuti a doj la disgrazia de ves liberadi di
nostri disgrazi. D'un boto ag strovariam in la cundision
d'es obligat a tor via un mestier per impoder campare.

...
Cieco - Vagj a lavorar vagabondo.../i te
diserà.../bracce robade a la galera.../e a perderesmio
ol gran prèvilez che g'avemo in pari ai siori, ai
paroni, de tor gabela: lori col slongar i truchi de la
lege, nojaltri con la pità. Li doi a gabar
cojoni!(Mazzotta, I, p.27).

But despite their awkward efforts to avoid entering in Jesus' field of vision, the two are healed. The lame curses fate that now forces him to look for a job and starve to death, while the blind, in an attack of lyrical naivete, praises the beauty of his own toes which he sees for the first time in his life. The paradoxical character of this ending, in which the miserable condition of the working people in the Middle Ages is illuminated by the perspective of the two characters who are outside the world of labor, has a stronger power of indictment than, for example, the ending of Gli arcangeli. In Gli arcangeli there was much ambivalence in the aspirations of even "positive" characters like Il Lungo and L'Angela. Here the sense of separation between the classes is much stronger. It is as though members of different classes were members of different civilizations that interacted but did not find points of convergence. Thus we have the world of the beggar, the world of the working people, the world of the siori, separate, though contiguous, universes.

While Fo's initial vocation was mainly to destroy myths and champion the viewpoint of the oppressed, he seems to be attempting

also to create an alternative system that is holistic in character - that comprises virtues and idiosyncrasies while including different moments of people's lives.

This medieval world evoked by Fo shares many similarities with that of Gargantua and Pantagruel; Fo's dramatic text, even while greatly differing in genre, resembles the grotesque realism of Rabelais' prose narrative.

Bakhtin points out examples of the grotesque, Fo's favorite mode, in all stages of art. But he is particularly interested in analyzing the period in which this artistic expression reached its climax - the Renaissance - with the work of Francois Rabelais in particular. According to Bakhtin, the grotesque, as a world view, was prevalent in the popular comic culture of the Middle Ages. It was the culture of the town square, of the marketplace with its loud peddlers, the Carnival. This ideological element was codified in the form of artistic creation, in a later period, in the Renaissance (Rabelais, p.72).

In comparing different theories of the grotesque, Sylvie Debevec Henning insists on the simultaneous and a contiguous existence within it of the ludicrous and the fearsome, of the familiar and the uncanny. These seemingly paradoxical coexistences form the basis for an "inner logic" of the grotesque which "contests the very premises of conventional logic, e.g. the principles of noncontradiction, difference and identity".¹³ In opposing Kayser's theories, Debevec Henning relies heavily on Bakhtin's work. She points out that the grotesque should be called

"a play with the very indeterminacy of existence," rather than a "play with the absurd" as Kayser would have it (Debevec Henning, p.107).

In his monographic study of Rabelais, Bakhtin quotes a definition of the grotesque given by L. Pinsky, which for its force and incisiveness should be reported here:

In the grotesque, life passes through all the degrees, from the lowest, inert and primitive, to the highest, most mobile and spiritualized; this garland of various forms bears witness to their oneness, brings together that which is removed, combines elements which exclude each other, contradicts all current conceptions. Grotesque in art is related to the paradox in logic. At first glance, the grotesque is merely witty and amusing, but it contains great potentialities (in Rabelais, p.32).

Bakhtin gives an example of this propensity for putting in relation things that are seemingly distant or opposing in the series of objects that Gargantua uses as torchecul (Rabelais, pp.371-80). A clear example of the same tendency could be seen in Fo'd episode entitled Il matto e la morte. Some players are in a tavern calling their tarot cards:

I Giocatore - ...Cavajer col spadon!
 II Giocatore - Rejna col baston.
 Matto - Strelega col cavron.
 III Giocatore - OI bambin innozente.
 I Giocatore - OI deo 'nipotente.
 Matto - La justizia e la rezon.
 II Giocatore - OI furbaso e l'avocat.
 III Giocatore - OI boja e l'impicat.
 Matto - OI papa e la papesa.
 I Giocatore - OI preite che fa mesa.
 II Giocatore - La vita bela e alegra.
 III Giocatore - La morte bianca e negra (Mazzotta I, p.24).

In this series one finds the witch (the element of subversion and

darkness) in between the queen (the element of order and authority) and an innocent child. Within the same couplets one finds the executed and the executioner, the pope and the female pope. And to conclude, next to a beautiful and merry life stands a pale and black death.

According to Bakhtin, at the origin of such strange contiguities stands the fact that the popular culture of the Middle Ages sought to propose an alternative model to the dominant culture by drawing from a past of undifferentiated relations. Usually, in analyzing carnivalesque culture, the emphasis is placed on its tendency to turn the world upside down. Entire studies like Cocchiara's¹⁴ anthropological findings have been devoted to the role reversals that occur during the Carnival and to tracing its origins in antiquity and throughout different cultures. In the same vein, B. Holms' monograph on Fo concentrates on this mondo alla rovescia present in the playwright's work.¹⁵ Bakhtin acknowledges the importance of reversals but also gives evidence of the parallel trend of the contiguities of opposites and of elements that are usually considered distant.

Unlike most other theorists of the comic, who approach their subject from a psychological or a biological viewpoint,¹⁶ Bakhtin takes a historical view toward laughter and the art forms associated with it. He posits a historical period in which a rural sort of primitive communalism existed. In this society, people saw themselves not as individuals but as components of an entire social body. In this community, laughter and seriousness stood

side by side, sacredness was all-pervasive without being relegated to a separate time and space (as it was to be with the beginning of organized worship), and the cycles of life and death were not in opposition to but succeeded one another in a contiguous relationship, like that of the seasons (Civita, p.39-42). Thus in rebelling against a dominant culture based on rank and individual power, popular culture proposed this previous era as an alternative world view and model of social relations. During restricted periods of the year - the Carnival - and in restricted spaces - the town square - this was the paradigm that dominated. Fo does not go back in history to the same period as Bakhtin; he selects the Middle Ages as a period of time in which popular culture stood in a fairly autonomous juxtaposition to the dominant culture. In many works he points to the heretical sects that proposed an anti-institutional interpretation of Christianity, as a model of primitive communism. Although disagreeing with the mystical aspects, Fo appreciates their desire to establish this alternative model.

While functioning in a world governed by rank and power, Fo's medieval popular characters embody a different type of order. This applies also to the relationship between body and spirit. The body, with all its range of functions, is prominent in Fo's work, as it is in all carnivalesque literature. There is in fact an abundance of scatological and sexual references, depictions of banquets and festivals of excess associated with eating and drinking (the Canaan wedding in the drunk's version).

For example, in Moralità, after the blindman laments the excessive weight of the lame man, the following exchange takes place between the two (both of them are "defective in some bodily function):

Cieco - ...T'ait magnà un incuden de fero a colasion?

Storpio - A ti se mato, a son doj giorni che no magno.

Cieco - Bon, ma i saran puranco doj mesi che no ti caghi.

Storpio - Ohj che sberlusciadi: Deo me vegna a testimoni...a i sont sie die a pena che no i vag de corpo.

Cieco - Sie die? Doi pasti almanco al giorno ai fano dodese coverti. San Gerolamo protetor de i fachini e son drio a portarme intorna un magasin de scorta par un ano de carestia. Am despiase ma me at scarego chi loga a ti am fet ol sacrosanto piaser d'andarte a scarigar ol magasinamento inlegale! (Mazzotta, I, p.27).

In these brief exchanges the importance of eating, lack of food, and all the physiological consequences clearly stand out. In medieval popular culture these elements were part of a systematic way of perceiving the world that Bakhtin connects with the "material bodily lower stratum" (Rabelais, pp.368-436). Rather than being associated with degradation, the lower parts of the body were associated with the earth and with the cycles of life, death, and regeneration.

Linking the non-negative function of the "material bodily lower stratum" to the function of ritual laughter (carnavalesque laughter), Alfredo Civita, a commentator of Bakhtin, points out that the laughter in Rabelais does not limit itself to ridicule but performs a constructive function as well. In fact its authentic role is not solely that of bringing down to a banal level that which is unjustly held high; its further step entails

the symbolic reconstitution of that original unity in which the individual was mirrored in the social body (Civita, p.42). In Fo's work, this latter function of reconstitution is performed by rational discourse and Marxist politics, especially in what he calls the "fourth act" of the play, i.e. the discussion organized at the end of the performance.

Although drawing on some of the characteristics of systematic contiguities, Fo avows a destructive function to his laughter: the grotesque mode is employed explicitly to degrade that which causes fear, and in so doing it clears the way for collective social action aimed at replacing an unjust order (Mazzotta I, pp.54-55).

The most outstanding example of this in Mistero Buffo is Fo's treatment of Boniface VIII. The pope is almost crushed by the weight of his gigantic and luxurious cape. He haughtily commands and offends his clerics until, during the procession, he runs into Jesus Christ. On the advice of his papal following he decides to approach him and offer to carry his cross, all for public relations of course. As Christ does not recognize him, he starts to rid himself of all his rings and paraphernalia of power, then proceeds to have an altercation with Christ concerning the whereabouts of the friars. (These were the Franciscans and the spirituali whom Boniface VIII had persecuted and thrown in jail.) As he rudely pushes aside Simon the Cyrenian in order to take the cross, Christ kicks him away, causing him to lose the last vestiges of hypocritical humility:

Cristu!! Una pesciada a mi...Bonifax!! Lo Preense!! ah

bon...canaja...malnato...o sol savese to
 padre!...disgrasiò! Cap de' aseni!...Sente no gho
 pagura de dite! che me fa el piazer de vederte inciudà
 ca incoo giusta am voj ciucare a voi torme lo plaser de
 balare... balare...balare! andaz de putane!! parché
 sunt Bonifax a mi...prence son mantelon, capelo, baston,
 aneli...tuti!
 va me sbarluscen...canaja...Bonifax sun?
 Cantare!(Mazzotta I, p. 35).

Boniface's final outburst of anger makes him lose all dignity, and makes him reveal his real way of life. This style of cursing resembles that of an angry child - Cap de' aseni! - thus degrading any semblance of authority even further.

Events that are tragic in their essence, such as the fact that the Church is directed by the likes of Boniface VIII or that Christ is to be crucified, are handled in the grotesque mode. This is characteristic of all the texts included in Mistero Buffo, with the exception perhaps of the episode of the drunk. Fo is opposed to a tragic representation of tragic events, for in his opinion, this would lead to a cathartic liberation from rage. On the other hand, a grotesque representation of tragic events unleashes and redoubles the rage, stirring an urge for action rather than absorbing it (Mazzotta II p.215). Thus the comic is associated with the kindling of a spirit of criticism leading to action.

Fo's assessment of the critical properties of the grotesque is in sharp contrast with Pirandello's views. In his essay L'umorismo Pirandello relegates the grotesque to a position of "vulgar comic", mere popular entertainment lacking any virtue in the direction of reflection.¹⁷ Humor is juxtaposed to the comic:

in the former, after an initial "avvertimento del contrario", a moment of reflection leads to the bitter realization of the deceptive nature of reality, whereas for the latter, no such critical moment occurs. In analyzing Giusti's poem "Sant' Ambrogio" Pirandello points out a first stage in which the poet feels rage and disgust for the Austrian soldiers who have been sent "here in the vineyard to serve as stakes." But as the church in which these soldiers are standing fills up with the music of the organ, the poet is led to reflect on the sad, uprooted condition of the soldiers and hence to feel pity and brotherliness towards them (Pirandello, pp.114-15). If one were to stray for a second from Pirandello's strict terminology one could detect even in this example a certain influence of the grotesque, rather than of the humorous, in the unusual assemblage of the soldierly and of the spiritual under one roof. But even if this semantic point were conceded, a substantial difference would still exist between the two. Fo's accostamenti are made with the final aim of social action to change the world, while Pirandello's humorous anti-heroes are generally paralyzed by the realization of a multifaceted reality. Thus the questioning of a mechanically accepted logic which can be elicited by the representation of grotesque can lead to very disparate outcomes.

These claims, and Fo's manner of carrying them out, have been the subject of many polemics and debates. These will be dealt with in the section examining Fo's "political" theater. For the moment, this analysis will limit itself to tracing Fo's method of

recovering the popular tradition.

On the relationship between tragedy and comedy, Fo states:

Partendo dall'VIII secolo venendo in su, troviamo sempre storie drammatiche raccontate in forma grottesca. E una lunga, ricca tradizione. Se poi andiamo tra i greci ancor di più, lo stesso per i Romani. E inutile dire che se esiste la divisione tra teatro aristocratico e teatro comico del popolo, è giocata proprio sulla seriosità dell'uno e sulla comicità dell'altro (Artese, p.64).

Fo is not the only one to break the Aristotelian antithesis. In fact, efforts at systematizing the differences between the two genres, as attempted by W. Moelywn Merchant for the Methuen series, have proven the impossibility of finding the great divide between them, especially as pertaining to the subject matter treated. In fact, the legion of commentators and dramatists quoted in the book, from Shakespeare to Christopher Fry, can do no more than acknowledge the curious coexistence between tragic and comic within the body of the same play, be it a tragedy or a comedy.¹⁸

In Mistero Buffo perhaps the most poignant episode expressing the relationship between tragedy and the grotesque is in the piece Il matto e la morte. In it the coexistence of the serious and the nonserious is blatant even at the level of theatrical space. Il Matto is at first playing cards with other idlers in a room adjacent to the one rented by Jesus and the Apostles for the Last Supper. His companions suddenly disappear when a pale lady clad in black walks in. Il Matto, the only one remaining, exchanges puns with her and ends up courting her. Toward the end, she reveals her sadness, for she has the task of

taking Jesus away. Lady Death foretells all the betrayals and the suffering He will encounter, while Il Matto launches into grotesque invectives against Judas. The tableau ends with the two leaving the scene together, almost as a Bakhtinian embodiment of the contiguity of life and death (Mazzotta I, pp.23-6).

In the piece entitled Resurrezione di Lazzaro, death is again the main theme, but this time it is transfigured in the metaphor of spectacle. The action, in fact, can be seen as a contamination between a medieval miracolo (the representation of one of Christ's miracles) and contemporary forms of live entertainment. The structure of this piece is much more polyphonic than any of the other texts. In it a whole crowd of tens or hundreds of spectators is re-created.

Meldolesi has suggested that Fo's work be looked at from the perspective of the two poles of the classical and the baroque (Meldolesi, p.92). In this one piece in particular it is as though Fo, alone on the stage in the sobriety of the classical, brings back to life the spectacular machine of the baroque. Meldolesi suggests that Adriane Mnouchine's Theatre du soleil accomplishes this end by filling the stage with real people, machinery, and objects, such as in 1789, whereas Fo as a comico evokes the crowd and their actions with sobriety. He refers to Fo as "il comico che custodisce in sè il grande spettacolo multiplo per raccontarlo di volta in volta diversamente, servendosi diversamente del suo mestiere." (Meldolesi, pp.169-70).

In a cemetery the performance of a miracle is being prepared.

It will be "The resurrection of Lazarus". A late spectator is confronted at the gate with modern-day entrepreneurial techniques: he will have to pay an admission charge as well as a fee to have a seat. As the place begins to fill, a woman warns "Uei scominciom miga a spingere," while others are speculating when the saint will arrive. Meanwhile a merchant peddles his grilled sardines, capable of raising the dead. As Christ appears on the scene, we hear his description from the point of view of the spectators: "Ol riva!! a l'è chi.../L'è quello là?.../Si, quello cont la barbeta bionda...oh me l'è zovin...ol para un bagai...E quella l'è la sua mama de lu...voj!! Bela dona eh?". Another spectator, dissatisfied with the fact that neither Christ nor the Madonna have lived up to his iconographic expectations, complains. As a hungry spectator spurs him on to repeat the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes ("...che i era inscì boni.."), the moment has come to roll away the stone of the crypt. As the crowd rushes forward to see better, we hear the cries of a few trampled spectators: "No sti a sping..am versit buta anc me in la tomba?" (Mazzotta I, p.20). The state of preservation of Lazarus' body leaves something to be desired, as can be gathered by the exclamations of a few members of the crowd: "Fève in drio che ol vegne fora un tanfo de far trar su l'anema.../Dame on fasoletto de quarcime ol nas..ohi che spusa.../Per mi sont pront a fag scumesa che stavolta ol miracol ol va in l'aria..." (Mazzotta, p.20). In spite of the skeptical pronouncement, Jesus lives up to his reputation and "performs" the miracle. Meanwhile one of the

bettors discovers his purse has been stolen, and a dissatisfied spectator laments Christ's limited theatrical abilities. The spectator claims that in his days, John the Baptist, before he was decapitated, was a much better performer!.

In this poliphonic monologue the audience hears specialized languages, like those of the peddlers, along with speech patterns typical of certain stereotypes. Thus, as in the language employed by the vendors at the marketplace, the merchandise is at times praised and then put in a humorous context, the same is done of the eventual customer. The religious bigot is heard admonishing his neighbors to at least pretend they are praying, a woman reacts to the resurrection scene by saying that she is about to faint. Although heterogenous in their specializations, the speech patterns are part of a common culture, that of the popular strata, which is different from other monologues where Fo juxtaposes the language of the people with that of the powerful.

The whole scene this time targets superstitious beliefs and notions of spectacle common among the people, thus using the grotesque to raise questions as to the role of spectacle itself.

A piece whose bite is directed at officialdom is Passione. It takes place under the cross. In the first part the dialogue is between the Madonna and a soldier, later between the Madonna and the Archangel Gabriel, who has come to express his grief. Following the repetitive style of the invective, Mary invites the angel to fly back to his happy heaven where there is no hunger, no pestilence, no war, no rapes, no crucifixions (Mazzotta I, p.23).

As the angel dares to insist that his grief is equal to hers, the Madonna loses her patience and lists all the tasks connected with childbearing and childrearing that the angel has certainly not performed, and so is unqualified to speak. Here again images of death and images of birth mingle, this time in the context of the merits of real experience versus symbolical abstractions.

At the level of speech patterns, there are three main types: the soldier's, the grieving and angry mother's, and the angel's with its lyric pretensions.

The soldier is clearly divided between his role of authority "chi v'1'ha dait '1 parmes", and his popular origin. He patronizingly addresses the Madonna: "cara la mi mama de lu", "la mi patrona", "o dona benedeta", "o dona", and "oh sacra dona" (Mazzotta I, pp. 21-22). At the beginning he attempts to speak in a cynical "virile" way, remarking that the Madonna should not take her son down from the cross as "no l'è anc'mo ben stagionat". As "il dutor de madri" begins to move him, he points out his own helpless position "Ma ag podi fag nagot...che mi son comandat che vaga fina a l'orden sta cundana, son condanat a fav muri ol fioll, o ben, de cuntra, li loga, mi picheran su mi co stes so ciodi" (Mazzotta, p.22). As she understands her power to move the soldier, the Madonna attempts to bribe him so as to make her son's last hours more comfortable. Her requests are very motherly, i.e. that the soldier wipe the blood off his face and that he place her shawl between her son's shoulders and the cross in order to alleviate the pain. She then starts inveighing against the

archangel Gabriel and mimicks his lofty speech during the Visitation: "con la to vose de viola inamorosa p'ol prim ti...stegni a dime che saria gniu Reina mi...e beata, jucunda a cap de toeti i doni". And then she grotesquely subverts the Archangel's meaning: "...a sto bel tron rejna! Rejna col fiol zentil e cavajer con doi speroni fait con doj gran ciodi impiantati a piè". The archangel, with his untimely arrival, confirms the parodied speech patterns as he announces his presence by saying "Gabriel, l'angiol de deo, sent me quel vergen, ol nunzi di ol to solengo e delicat amor". In a flurry of grotesque lyricism he refers to Jesus as "ol segnor zovin deo inciudat", in great contrast to the irreverent terminology previously used by the soldier (Mazzotta I, p.22).

The tragic element here is clearly predominant. Gabriel's marks of officialdom and his lofty speech do not cause laughter - the dominant dimension is that of an angry, grieving mother. This relation of tragedy to the experience of women is one to keep in mind, especially as it will influence Fo's work later, due perhaps to a greater collaboration with Franca Rame also at the level of playwriting.

Mistero Buffo is the play that assured Fo's fame internationally. In France in particular, it was the subject of several articles by important critics such as Bernard Dort.¹⁹ The interview and polemic carried in the pages of Cahiers du

Cinema²⁰ give a sense of the influence of Fo's theatrical practice and theorizations, even in a country that benefited from the structure of a Theatre National Populaire (T.N.P.). The objections of Fo's interviewer articulated themselves mostly around a supposed "populist" character of Fo's theater, the failure to acknowledge that the giullare, as an artistic mediator, also created an art "for the people" rather than an art "of the people".

Fo responded to these charges by claiming the "antagonistic" position of giullari within dominant cultural systems. Also, basing his claims on his own practice and that of Franca Rame, he remarked that the workers were not so preoccupied with who the artist is but rather with what the artist says (where he or she stands in the struggle) and how it is said. Also Fo continued to defend the validity of transposing his theatrical creations to the Middle Ages since they continued to be linked to contemporary struggles.

The debate on the validity of the giullare either as a historical or poetic figure has continued from the inceptions of Mistero Buffo to the eighties, including the writing of an entire book, I giullari e Fo by Michele Straniero, aimed at dismantling Fo's theories.²¹

In this respect it seems useful to employ the distinction Meldolesi makes between Fo the comico and Fo the theoretician. This latter aspect of Fo should not be measured by the same yardstick with which one judges a systematic Marxist thinker,

since Fo has never claimed to be one, nor has he proven to be. One of Meldolesi's criticisms of Fo's salvaging of past culture is his neglect of the necessity of rupture from the past - a sharp break is also required of a revolutionary class in order to establish a new culture based on new, nonexploitative, social relations (Meldolesi, p.139).

Similarly, Nepoti offers a caveat regarding Fo's giullare even while assessing it positively. The technique of Fo's modern-day giullare is interpreted as a "reincarnation of heretical voices from the past, making him carry out the task of persons of the oral tradition".²⁵ Nepoti goes on to say that Fo must deal with the problems raised by Gilles Deleuze's position that "repetition is not a necessary and founded behaviour if it is not put in relation to that which cannot be substituted, (Nepoti, p.9) that is, Fo would have to think that the conditions that gave rise to the figure of the giullare persist in spite of the passing of time. According to Nepoti then:

Fo sincronizza allora passato e presente (il che è un procedimento straniante) mirando lui giullare di oggi come il Joungleur antico, a ottenere attraverso gli strumenti del grottesco e della ragione il risarcimento della cultura popolare espropriata.../Il procedimento è simile a quello utilizzato nei primi tempi dell'attività di Fo, quando il rapporto della satira s'intuiva non era con la storia, ma col modo in cui essa è raccontata, quindi col presente (Nepoti, pp.9-10).

One of the shortcomings of this method, according to Nepoti, is that it allows Fo to pick and choose episodes of the oppression-resistance series, making parallels that neglect the dialectics of history.

3. Farce as the mirror of bourgeois politics: Morte
accidentale di un anarchico

Fo's works since the late sixties have been referred to as political or militant plays. The playwright himself, however, takes issue with his commentators' assessment. In fact, as early as 1973, in the introduction to a collection of his plays, he disagreed with the use of the term "political theater" by addressing the various connotations it usually brought to mind. He said: "Teatro politico è diventato una specie di sottotitolo di teatro noioso, teatro saccente, teatro pedante, teatro schematico, teatro di non-divertimento" (Mazzotta I, p. 7). Then he pointed out that all plays, like all forms of art, bear an ideological imprint and hence a political stance, whether they be works commissioned by the State (as in the case of classical Greek theater) or whether they present themselves as pure entertainment (as in the case of Feydeau's farces). He concluded:

Quindi quando si dice teatro politico in verità si aggiunge un inutile aggettivo specificativo. Lo si può accettare come una specie di etichetta polemica, contro il teatro inteso come arte che illumina tutto e tutti. Per quanto riguarda i lavori messi in scena dalla "Comune" io avrei preferito chiamarli di teatro popolare, per il discorso che c'è dentro e che vuol dire arrivare a recuperare un teatro di classe. Quello ch'è importante sottolineare di questi anni è soprattutto il fatto che i testi sono stati messi a disposizione del movimento, e che sono nati, sono stati costruiti e trasformati proprio insieme alla crescita e ai conflitti del movimento, superando quindi la dialettica sul terreno letterario e diventando anche scontro, non soltanto confronto" (Mazzotta I, p. 7-8).

Thus Fo's emphasis on reviving a suppressed class culture is

now placed in the context of the artist operating within a movement demanding revolutionary change. The artist is clearly not an isolated bearer of truth, but rather the texts are the result of interaction and confrontation with the active elements of the class struggle. This new optic implied many changes both in the ideal addressee of Fo's plays and in the theatrical spaces he chose in order to be able to reach a new audience. In fact, particularly in the years from 1969 to 1977, Fo brought his works to the most unorthodox of theatrical spaces: factories taken over by workers, churches converted to secular use, community centers and town squares, reaching people who had never before set foot in a "proper" theater. Especially during the period 1969-1977, at the end of his plays, Fo organized discussions and debates around the issues suggested by the work. Thus the plays underwent a number of changes and rewritings based on the criticisms and suggestions by the audience.

In a sense one could say that Fo's post-1967 production provides a representative sample of the issues and problems that faced the revolutionary movement in that period. Even a quick glance at the titles of the plays from 1967 on reveals Fo's militant participation in the movement: La signora è da buttare (1967), a history of the rise of U.S. imperialism and its role in Vietnam seen through the lens of the circus; Grande pantomima con bandiere e pupazzi piccoli e medi (1968), a historical look at Italian politics and parties; Fedayn (1971), testimonies of the struggles of the Palestinian people, especially after Black

September; Guerra di popolo in Cile (1973), dealing with the Allende years and the C.I.A.-sponsored coup; Non si paga, non si paga (1974), on the effects of the P.C.I.'s politics of historic compromise on a proletarian family; Tutta casa, letto e chiesa (1977), co-authored by Franca Rame, a woman's view of women's oppression.

Although the basic grotesque mode articulated through the structure of the farce continued to be Fo's mainstay during this period, he also experimented with new tools. For example, since counter-information had become a vital part of his plays, he sought to incorporate documentary media into his works. Likewise, since quick intervention in struggles became an important concern, some of his plays sacrificed a refined plot and smoothly synchronized rhythms to more immediate, direct and fragmentary types of communication (Cowan, p. 138-40).

Even though some of this preoccupation for the speed of intervention had sometimes led him to neglect the strictly "theatrical" aspects of his work, Fo in the main continued to insist on the specificity of the theater as a type of art possessing its own modes and codes. In comparison to his previous plays, Fo's post-1967 production drew more directly from real life episodes and events, seeking to provide counter-information. This emphasis on the real, however, did not reduce his art to mere "documentary realism" or to didactic exposes. Following Brecht's dictum, in dark times he sang of dark times, but with the code of the theater rather than with that of the politician. In fact,

referring to this issue, Fo frequently paraphrased Mao TseTung's analysis of the role of artists in the revolution. In an interview released in 1976 he said:

Mao diceva tu che fai l'attore devi fare propaganda: ma ricordati il tuo dovere è di non far comizio. Tu devi riuscire ad inventare soluzioni, moduli, tempi che sono del tuo mestiere e fanno spettacolo. Il tema può essere lo stesso del comizio, ma il modo di esprimerlo, i mezzi, le innovazioni, le sollecitazioni non possono essere gli stessi di un politico altrimenti fai un cattivo servizio tanto alla politica quanto all'arte e al teatro" (Artese, p. 108).

The play Morte accidentale di un anarchico is perhaps one of the best examples of Fo's talent for articulating a political discourse with the specific modes of the theater.

A much quoted metaphor would perhaps render the orientation of Fo's operation in this play. In The 18 Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte Marx had suggested that when history repeats itself twice the first time it is as tragedy, the second time as farce. For Fo the aspect of tragedy remains as a concealed substratum that concerns the life of the oppressed. In the epoch of the decay of imperialism, history with a capital "H" has lost even the pretense of awesome dignity that characterizes tragedy, it moves and unfolds with the less-than-dignified and disjointed tempo of the farce. In current times then, there can be no Napoleons to lend a tragic dimension to bourgeois politics. Rather the farce is the appropriate mirror that reflects, undistorted, the behavior of the ruling circles: like them it makes no bones about disguise and trickery.

The events that inspired Fo's play, while tragic in their

outcome, with their open and declared mechanisms of deceit, were no less farcical than farce itself. L'anarchico, as it is commonly abbreviated, premiered in December 1970, a few days after the first anniversary of its historical source. On December 15, 1969, a young railroad worker, Pino Pinelli, member of an anarchist circle, died by "accidentally precipitating" from the fourth-floor window of police headquarters in Milan. He had been brought in three days before, during a nation-wide round-up of leftists, in the wake of a bomb explosion at the Banca Nazionale dell'Agricoltura in Milan. These bombings had left sixteen dead and eighty-eight wounded. The left was held responsible for the act. The thousands brought in for questioning were denied bail and legal assistance, many were brutally interrogated and detained well beyond the legal limit. Pinelli was one of these, but unlike the others he lost his life. The official police version of the "accident", and the newspapers, called it a suicide that was hence a tacit confession of guilt. In spite of harsh repression and renewed efforts to cover it up, in a year's time the left, and in particular the revolutionary wing, was able to discredit the police version of the anarchist's death, point to the neo-fascists as authors of the bombings, and link all this to a whole strategy employed by rightist forces within the government and the army - la strategia della tensione.²³

L'anarchico does not take the form of a documentary reconstruction of these events. In fact the plot structure, for example, draws heavily from other theatrical precedents, notably

Gogol's The Inspector General, written in 1836.²⁴ In the Russian play, the mayor of a provincial town is informed of the forthcoming arrival of a government official in charge of looking into alleged acts of corruption by city officials. Needless to say, all those concerned are terrified by this incognito reviewer. In their frantic efforts to guess the identity of the official they mistake a penniless young bureaucrat from Saint Petersburg for the inspector and proceed to shower him with attentions. They request his presence in their revamped domains and the mayor even offers the hospitality of his own home. Although at first surprised, the wily young bureaucrat catches on to what is happening and takes advantage of the situation by accepting bribes disguised under the form of loans. The opening of a letter by the postmaster reveals the mistake, but as the officials meditate on a proper revenge against the impostor, the real inspector appears on the scene. The Gogol play was aimed at exposing corrupt bureaucrats. Fo utilizes mainly the skeleton situation of the apprehension created in a "guilty" bureaucracy by the arrival of an inspector. However, he is not so much interested in exposing the works of the bureaucracy as in utilizing some of Gogol's mechanisms of deceit and discovery, which he then reinterprets for his own counter-informational purposes. In fact, this time the authentic police reports, with all their incongruities and gaps, serve as a base for the movements of the farce.

Unlike the early plays, we are not confronted with a trial and error search for an imaginary truth, nor is the protagonist a

"naive" character that makes the situations explode; rather we are confronted with a "certified madman" who exposes the different layers of dishonesty and intrigue employed by the State while taking on himself the many faces of power.

Fo's play starts off at the police headquarters, in the office of police commissioner Bertozzo, who is interrogating a suspect charged with impersonating a psychiatrist. In the course of the first few exchanges the audience learns that the suspect is a matto patentato (certified insane), a modern-day version of the traditional "Fool" who speaks in a scientifically competent manner of his histrionomania, i.e. his fixation for impersonating different characters. His self-assured stance allows him to intimidate Bertozzo, who switches from the "tu" form of address to the "Lei" form as Il Matto points out his grammatical shortcomings. A reversal of the traditional roles of inquisitor and accused takes place until Bertozzo, exasperated, drives Il Matto out and then goes to a meeting. The madman returns to the office to claim his papers, and takes advantage of the fact that no one is in the room by going through the commissioner's files administering his own brand of justice. In so doing, his attention is caught by the voluminous file of the anarchist case. As he meditates on possible uses of it, the phone rings. Il Matto picks it up, pretends to be a colleague of Bertozzo from another city and finds out that a "reviewing" judge has been sent from Rome to look into the anarchist case. After having rehearsed a demeanor appropriate for his part, Il Matto goes to the office of the

assistant chief of police (the office in which the anarchist's interrogation took place), announces the fact that he has been sent by the central government to review the case and demands the prompt collaboration of all police personnel, including the chief of police. He then proceeds to reconstruct the events according to the police reports. The chief and his assistant are utterly confused as they cannot tell from the behavior of the "Judge" whether he is willing to help them with the cover-up or whether he is there to expose it. Through a carnivalesque type of reversal, Il Matto makes the chief and his assistant re-enact the supposed raptus that led the anarchist willingly to commit suicide. In their re-enactment it is clear that an external force was required in order for him to make the jump. Various inconsistencies in the police reports are pointed out in a grotesque mode by Il Matto until the announcement of the arrival of a journalist sharply interrupts the reconstruction.

In order to justify his presence in the chief of police's office without "leaking" the news of the government review of the case, Il Matto-Judge disguises himself as Doctor Piccinni of the scientific police. His new persona is a former captain of the bersaglieri and fervent warmonger a la doctor Strangelove, complete with wooden leg and arm, and a patch over his glass eye. His mission in Milan is to make a scientific analysis of the bomb put in the bank which originated the Pinelli case. As the journalist begins asking questions of the chief of police, with farcical precision enters Bertozzo who happens to know the real

Doctor Piccinni and is impatient to unmask the impostor. He is prevented from doing so by the chief and his assistant who think of themselves as accomplices in the "Judge"'s disguise. In order to justify a now discovered disguise, "Piccinni" confesses that he is a bishop in charge of the Pope's security who had wished to maintain a concealed identity so as not to publicize the connections between the Vatican and the police. Under the guise of the bishop, Il Matto warns the journalist of the cathartic effect of scandal: revelation of corruption aids in supporting a decrepit state by making the citizens feel happy that at least the transgressions will be uncovered, even if the State will remain the same. In the meantime, Bertozzo, who has been forcibly silenced by his colleagues, breaks free and, in a thriller-like move, points a pistol at all present, orders a guard to handcuff everyone to a coat-rack, and then proceeds to unmask the now bishop as the certified insane-man. The next level of deceit emerges as Il Matto claims to possess a detonator capable of making a bomb in the room explode unless he is freed and allowed to bring to the press the evidence he has so far accumulated. The final edition of the play ends here. The first edition continues, and it is important to analyze this first version as it exploits the deceit en abyme structure fully.

In the original version, after the guard releases him, the lights suddenly go out and Il Matto's screams can be heard as he precipitates from the infamous window. The "handcuffed" officials express their deep regrets for such an untimely death, while

pointing to their bound condition as proof of nonresponsibility. Then the slim-wristed journalist frees herself from the handcuffs and proceeds to shake everyone's free left hand before departing. In an attack of overzealous propriety Bertozzo slips his right hand out of the handcuff in order to salute her correctly thus revealing that he as well as the other policemen in reality were not at all chained. As the spectators may think they have reached the rock-bottom of deception, a fat, bearded man enters the scene claiming to be the reviewing judge sent from Rome. Angered by what they think to be the resiliency of *Il Matto*, the officials throw themselves upon him attempting to tear off his disguise, only this time there is no disguise. Thus, like Gogol's play, this first version is also circular in structure, even at the semantic level; the beginning and closing lines include the key word "disguise".

At first glance the structure of the play seems to rest on the customary deceit en abyme, but on a closer look some important differences stand out. Whereas in his early plays, the turns of events were based indirectly on the real (i.e. a situation like that of *Il Lungo's* adventure with bureaucracy or with politicians most likely did not occur but could happen if one pushed society's channels to their extreme limits), in the later works, counter-information based directly on the real is of utmost importance as a supporting structure of the play. Unlike the revisitations of Poer Nano, for example, demystification occurs not only as far as point of view is concerned but there is also a preoccupation with demystifying real events laden with deceit; in

this case the "flight" of the anarchist; in the play on Chile the not-so-concealed role of the C.I.A..

In addition to the demystification of point of view and events in L'anarchico, a third level is evident: i.e. the demystification of the artistic form of theater, accomplished mostly by open references to the character of disguise and deception which distinguishes this art form. However, going back to Marx's metaphor, Fo in this play intermingles the "farce of politics" with the "politics of farce" to such an extent that they are constantly contiguous, leaving the spectator wondering whether the author is pronouncing himself on life or on the theater.

In the introduction preceding the prologue, Fo clarifies that the main issue he intends to deal with is the role of the State in society. Following a Leninist analysis, he points out that the rise of the institution of the State is historically to be attributed to the irreconcilability of class antagonisms, so that the State expresses the supremacy of one or some classes over the others (Mazzotta II, p. 138-39). This, however, is accomplished under the guise of mediation; the State appears to be a structure standing above classes and regulating the conflicts between them for the sake of a more harmonious coexistence. Fo chose the events surrounding Pinelli's death and the underlying issues of the strage di stato as emblematic of this basic deception of the State. A moment of crisis within the fairly smooth functioning of the structure reveals its underlying deceit.

In the prologue, the first act of disguise is the

transposition of the contemporary Milanese events to New York, in the nineteen-twenties. Apparently Fo will deal with the death of an anarchist by the name of Salsedo, "accidentally" fallen from the fourteenth-story window of police headquarters (Mazzotta II, p.141). This transposition could be interpreted in various ways: as a safeguard against censorship, and/or as a means of pointing out the universality of the role of the State, so that Pinelli's story will not be interpreted just as a Milanese miscarriage of justice. Fo warns the spectators (in a manner somewhat reminiscent of Pirandello):

Qualora apparissero analogie con fatti e personaggi della cronaca nostrana questo fenomeno è da imputarsi a quella imponderabile magia costante nel teatro che in infinite occasioni ha fatto sì che perfino storie pazzesche completamente inventate si siano trovate ad essere a loro volta impunemente imitate dalla realtà (Mazzotta II, p. 141).

In the earlier plays usually a sung prologue introduced the major themes and the ambience of the plays, such as the chorus of street sweepers in L'uomo nudo e l'uomo in frac, and the chorus of the balordi in Gli arcangeli. In L'anarchico the prose prologue indicates the events that will be told and the first lines spoken by commissioner Bertozzo, addressing a suspect, reveal the main mechanism of the play: disguise. "Commissario - Ma non è la prima volta che ti travesti allora. Qui dice che ti sei spacciato due volte per chirurgo, una volta per capitano dei bersaglieri./...tre volte vescovo../una volta ingegnere navale" (Mazzotta II, p. 142). Il Matto is now being charged with an impersonation of carnivalesque consequence - he is reversing his

role to that of a psychiatrist. His previous record also shows a taste for unusual contiguities in which a captain of the bersaglieri stands side by side with a bishop.

At the level of plot these contiguities can be interpreted in various ways. If we follow Il Matto's strategy of exposing the "strange bedfellows" created by the power of the State, we can read the disguises as a metaphor for the elasticity of the forms taken on by that structure. If we adopt the point of view of the commissioners who are being investigated, the disguises would be mainly a sign of goodwill on the part of the judge, to protect his own against a nosy journalist. If we look at it from the perspective of Bertozzo, disguise is the result of a pathology on the part of Il Matto. If we accept the underlying discourse on the relationship between farce and the State, disguise is the essence of both, and thus there is no need for a logic in the contiguities. Again, as in the scene at the bakery in Gli arcangeli there are multiple points of view on the issue of deception, but here the audience who has heard the introduction and the prologue would be encouraged to focus on the primary aspect of the demystification of the State.

The first few lines of the play introduce the contiguity between the State and mental illness. The linguistic codes governing these two categories are at the base of comic structures in the first two scenes of the play, as far as language is concerned. In fact, the code of the State, in its various articulations ranging from the bureaucratic jargon directed to the

citizens, to the internal, relaxed lingo used by bureaucratic colleagues, to the idiosyncratic linguistic styles adopted by various "types" within the State (the good cop/the bad cop) is placed in a parallel position and at times mixed with a pop version of the code of psychiatry. *Il Matto* begins by exhibiting a high competence in the language of the law. He comments on his police record, he cites verbatim the penal code articles protecting the mentally disturbed (Mazzotta II, p. 144). When challenged as to the source of his knowledge, he claims he has received lessons, while in an asylum, from a paranoid court clerk (a symbolic embodiment of the contiguity). In his monologue on the high rewards earned by judges, *Il Matto* even reproduces the sounds of an adjourning court:

"Eccellenza...s'accomodi...silenzio, in piedi entra la corte"
(Mazzotta II, p. 144). A grotesque twist follows as a ceremonious court clerk inquires of the Judge whether he has lost a bone, only to be assured by the Judge himself that he has no bones at all (due to old age the audience concludes).

On the pole of pop psychiatry stands *Il Matto's* explanation of hystriomania, his grotesque rendition of Freud's "la parcella salata è il più efficace dei toccasana tanto per il medico che per l'ammalato" (Mazzotta II, p. 143). He goes so far as to appropriate the gestures of the psychiatrist as, after reminding Bertozzo that his profession leads to many "alterazioni psichiche," he lifts the commissioner's eye-lid to check his reaction. He then proceeds to mimick the behavior of a paranoid seeking

sanctuary from the perils of city living - honking drivers and bus doors that slam the passenger in (Mazzotta II, p. 145). The grotesque is invoked in his solution: he will stay safely away from it all, in the police headquarters, aiding the officers in the interrogation of suspects, using less than mild methods of evincing the truth.

The fraternal chatting style of bureaucrats is evoked by *Il Matto* as he picks up the phone in Bertozzo's office. He uses slang words for demotion, for bureaucratic intrigue, for favors and protections taking place within the various branches of the State (Mazzotta II, p. 146).

In the second scene the mixing of the two codes becomes even more evident than in the first. As *Il Matto*-Judge enters the commissioner's office he remarks that the officer is massaging his hand, a gesture that "could be variously interpreted by psychiatrists, but always a sign of pathology". After advising him to seek professional help, *Il Matto* proceeds to inject the code of the State telling him to "confess" he has dealt a blow to a colleague (Mazzotta II, p. 149). Further mixing of the two codes results in a grotesque solution as *Il Matto*-Judge reveals he too has a "tic": his jugular vein acts as a lie detector pulsating when someone is hiding the truth.

Again the codes of the State and that of psychiatry are placed side by side as *Il Matto* reads the police reports written in bureaucratese and then gives a 'psychological' sounding definition of "raptus".

The scene ends with Il Mattos's appeal to the police to let the public feel their humanity, to let themselves, for once, get in touch with their inner emotions, to show that they too could not escape feeling sympathy for the railroad worker as his profession unleashed subconscious yearnings for choo-choo trains, for the bliss of childhood and innocence (Mazzotta II, p.159).

Throughout the whole play Il Matto is the pivot of the action. This matto has a rich genalogy; in a certain sense he is one of Fo's early "naive" characters who has been enriched with the popular tradition of the "madman" the one who is allowed transgression and the questioning of a dominant logic. A similar combination of the candid/mad character was Giovanna la Pazza in Isabella in 1965.

The carnivalesque tradition assigns great importance to the figure of the Fool, in fact in the reversed world of the Carnival the Fool is the king of the festivities. In the Middle Ages even the low-clerics chose the figure of the Fool as a symbol of protest against the dominant structures. Thus especially in France there were the festum stultorum, and festum fatuorum.²⁴ Closer to Fo's Lombardian roots was the bosinada, a yearly traditional denunciation of all evil deeds that took place during the year in the city of Milan, delivered by a bosino, an inhabitant of the outskirts of Varese or from the Brianza.²⁵ This character was similar to the Fool, as it represented the logic of the countryside versus the logic of the

city. Paolo Ferrari draws some parallels between the structure of denunciation present in the bosinada, and the one adopted by Fo in L'anarchico (Ferrari, pp. 78-80). Also in the Italian popular tradition one must mention Bertoldo, the peasant who goes to court and in spite of his unrefined appearance astonishes everyone with his rigorous logic. Piero Camporesi traces the remnants of logic reversal that still exist in Bertoldo (as codified in the Renaissance by Giulio Cesare Croce) to its origins in the medieval popular oral saga of Marcolfo, a character who was more desecrating and less conciliatory with power than Bertoldo (Camporesi, pp. 6-17).

Moving from the Italian popular theater to Shakespeare, we find also that the figure of the Fool appears frequently as the bearer of truth, in a world based on deception.²⁶ The same can be said for Pirandello, whose best-known madman, Enrico IV, develops an anti-authoritarian discourse around the polarity of reason and unreason.²⁷

Fo's Matto is multifaceted: in giving way to a sort of madness he exposes the lack of logic of the institutions, and ultimately makes an argument for a type of rationality that favors the needs of the oppressed. Ironically, the bearer of theatrical disguise is in charge of the whole operation of demystification - a demystification that, while focusing on the question of the State, concurrently touches three levels: the ideological, the political, and the theatrical.

The first level concerns mostly the acquisition of a

proletarian viewpoint on the State, which is preliminary to the elimination of fear of it. The most pressing task in this respect is the exposure of its aura of impartiality and universality which inspires awe in the citizen.

A very vivid example of this preliminary operation can be seen in *Il Matto's* portrayal of the judges, characters which he claims he would love to impersonate. With a technique reminiscent of the fabulatori style, *Il Matto* sets up a comparison between the impact of old age on a regular worker and on a judge. For the former, old age signifies expendability: the old factory worker is blamed for slowing down the assembly line, the old miner is inefficient because of silicosis, even the old accountant should be sent home as he gets his columns mixed-up. For the judge, instead, old age brings greater rewards, as the most important posts are assigned to the elderly for their alleged wealth of experience (Mazzotta II, p. 144). However, to contradict the institutional view, *Il Matto's* description of the judges is the following:

Vedi dei vecchietti di cartone tutti impaludati...
cordoni, mantelline di ermellino, cappelloni a tubo con
le righe d'oro, che sembrano tante comparse del
Fornaretto di Venezia, traballanti, con delle facce da
tappo della Fal Gardena...Con due paia di occhiali
legati con la catenella, che se no li perdono...non si
ricordano mai dove li hanno appoggiati. Ebbene 'sti
personaggi hanno il potere di distruggere o salvare uno
come e quando vogliono (Mazzotta II, p. 144).

Here the reversal of a commonsensical code is complete, its contamination with the code of the theater is inextricable. Age is shown in its relativity: it confers the status of worn-out

machinery on the regular worker, whereas it confers an air of Solomonic wisdom on the judge. The anachronistic vestments aimed at inspiring awe for the institution of justice and at suggesting its historical continuity, are degraded to the ranks of costumes worn by extras in an amateur production of a minor play. The shortcomings of age are emphasized by the use of an everyday image that could remind one of a grandfatherly figure: the spectacles on a chain as a safeguard against forgetfulness. This image of familiar sweetness, however, is exorcised by the observation that such "characters" (again a theatrical term) are in charge of people's lives and deaths.

In dealing with the issue of demystification of point of view Fo seems to prefer the monologue form to the quick exchanges of the varieta tradition. For example, *Il Matto's* observation of the behavior of judges continues as he rehearses the correct demeanor for the judge he is to impersonate. He gives the typology of judges' walks in the form of a monologue: "Camminata artritica, ma con dignità/ Ecco così, col collo un po' torto../da cavallo da circo in pensione/...No, meglio ancora la 'scivolosa' con lo scattino finale../..E la 'ginocchia di budino'../..oppure quella rigida a saltabecco..." (*Mazzotta II*, p. 147). And then he continues in the same vein, choosing from a repertory of voices, temperaments, idiosyncrasies.

The grotesque of strange contiguities that brought together the code of psychiatry and that of the State, also brings together the code of the Stage and that of the State. As *Il Matto* reads

from the police report written in a highly bureaucratic language he makes the police re-enact the "scene" of the anarchist's accident. The words he uses are battuta, sceneggiata, melodramma. He even mentions the highly melodrammatic actress Franca Bertini and later he cites the famous comedian Totò, carrying out at a linguistic level the metaphor of the farce as the mirror of the essence of bourgeois politics.

A disguised form of monologue is also used later concerning the impartiality of the State toward witnesses. As the journalist has been questioning the chief of police on the reason why the testimonies of the retired workers, confirming Pinelli's alibi, were discarded, *Il Matto* (Doctor Piccinni) launches first into a description of old retired workers playing cards. It is a multivoiced monologue in which the old men are heard insulting one another and accusing each other of forgetting their cards (Mazzotta II, p. 170), much in the same style as the polyphonic monologues in Mistero Buffo. Then he contrasts this first type of witness with the Grade A witness, alias the old rich tycoon, just emerging from his sauna and complete with Mercedes-Benz and driver. In contrast to the treatment reserved to old working class witnesses, the State would swear by his testimony as shown in the trial of the Vajont engineers who exhibited characteristics similar to those of the old tycoon (Mazzotta II, p. 171). This again is a semi-monologue.

This form reaches the limit of parodic invective when *Il Matto-Bishop* rails against the borbonic Italian State that does

not see the liberating function of scandal:

...Ma guarda invece quelli (i paesi) più evoluti! Lei si ricorda dello scandalo Profumo in Inghilterra? Il ministro della guerra coinvolto in un giro di prostitute, droghe...spionaggio: Crollò forse lo Stato? la Borsa? Nient'affatto, anzi la Borsa e lo Stato non furono mai così forti come dopo quello scandalo. La gente pensava 'Sì il marcio c'è, però viene a galla.' Noi ci nuotiamo in mezzo e lo beviamo pure, ma nessuno viene a raccontare ch'è te al limone. E questo è quel che conta (Mazzotta II, p. 178).

As far as the aspect of counter-information of the Pinelli case is concerned, Fo seems to prefer the quick exchanges of the varietà as the theatrical structure best suited for its representation. The whole process of showing the incongruities in the real police reports can be seen as creating a series of farcical situations.

The first police version of an alleged "raptus" seizing the anarchist is dismantled by Il Matto's expedient of making the police experience their own professional equivalent: a kind of carnivalesque reversal. The anarchist was threatened by the police with being fired from his job during their interrogation and in addition they employed one of those devices of trickery ("commonly used by the police" according to the chief) in which they asserted that another anarchist friend of his had confessed to the planting of the bombs (Mazzotta II, p. 152). Similarly, Il Matto-Judge informs them that the authorities of the central government have decided to use them as scapegoats to quell a furious public opinion. Thus, they too will lose their jobs, as their friends in high places have "recanted". As they grow

increasingly desperate Il Matto encourages them to throw themselves out of the window, but only to demonstrate that such flight cannot be accomplished without the intervention of an outside force. This structure is highly reminiscent of the beffe set up in Fo's earlier plays, only this time they are based on a real occurrence.

Other incongruities are also handled with the mode of the grotesque. In observing that the window was open at midnight on December 12, Il Matto questions the logic of such chance occurrence by suggesting a grotesque explanation, i.e. that, like in the Norwegian summer, the sun had not gone down until 1 a.m. As the officials try to patch up their story, suggesting that they were not cold even though they were wearing only jackets, Il Matto comments:

Ah sì? Quella sera il servizio meteorologico ha dato per tutta l'Italia temperature da far barbellare un orso bianco, e loro non avevano freddo, ...anzi primavera! Ma che avete un monzone africano personale che passa di qui ogni notte, o è la corrente del Golfo che viene su per il tombone di San Marco e vi passa sotto casa con le fogne? (Mazzotta II, p. 164).

Here exotic images ranging from cold ones like the polar bear to warm ones like the African monsoon and the Gulf Stream current are placed side by side, in a carnivalesque style, with the all too familiar images of city sewers and weather reports, lending an even more paradoxical meaning to the commissioner's claims.

The mad logic of the police versions is further emphasized when the guard announces that he had tried to prevent the anarchist's suicidal leap, but unfortunately he was left with only

a shoe in his hand. Taking advantage of the cue, like in a varietà, Il Matto offers various explanations for the fact that the anarchist landed wearing both shoes: 1) he was a tri-ped 2) the guard, with a faster-than-light speed was able to put the shoe back on the anarchist's foot before he reached the ground 3) the anarchist was wearing galoshes, even if this contradicted the notoriously nonconformist dress code of anarchists (Mazzotta II, p. 165). Thus Il Matto under the guise of the champion of logic, like the good soldier Schweik, makes the context explode.

Another device of counter-information is the interspersed string of hints Il Matto-Judge disseminates about the past histories of the police commissioners. The real police officials involved in the anarchist's death had had posts in Mussolini's jail bureaucracies, in particular the chief of police had been director of an internment camp for anti-fascist prisoners. Thus at the level of plot (as in The Inspector General), Il Matto keeps the officials suspended in the belief that he is a "democratic" judge by throwing out hints that the chief of police seems familiar: "Matto - Lei mi è come dire../quasi familiare.../come se l'avessi già conosciuto../tanti anni fa. Non è che lei per caso è stato al confino?" (Mazzotta II, p. 151). Having received a negative response, Il Matto comments on the unlikelihood that a chief of police could have been interned in a fascist camp. To maintain the suspense high, Il Matto-Judge continues staring at the chief of police and finally says, "Ma no, non è possibile!

Basta con le allucinazioni!" And then, casually counting aloud the pages of the police reports, after the number "ventisette, " he meaningfully lets drop not "ventotto" but "Ventotene", the name of the town in which the camp was located (Mazzotta II, p. 151). Fo's mission of stressing the continuity between the Fascist State and the "democratic" one is thus accomplished in a mode reminiscent of the thriller, emphasizing the element of discovery rather than pure statement of fact.

The question of continuity of the bourgeois State, whether its form be a fascistic one or a democratic one is also very important for the conclusion of the play.

The circular ending present in the original version makes one think of the final scene of Gli arcangeli where the spectator was left suspended between the ambiguity of dream and reality, the "happy ending" being a very open theatrical device, whose "seriousness" was undermined by a process of learning about the structures of deceit in which the spectator had participated all along. Similarly in L'anarchico both the original ending that sees the appearance on the scene of a real judge and the 'approved' final version that stops at the anarchist's departure to give the press evidence of the cover-up, may on the surface appear as "happy endings" or at least endings in which the villains stand to lose. Again, as in Gli arcangeli the "optimistic" resolutions have been all along undermined, this time by the gradual build-up of counter-information. Il Matto's solution of going to the newspapers has been discredited by Il Matto-Vescovo's

analysis of the cathartic function of scandal that assures the continuation of the institution. Hopes of justice arising out of the investigation of a "democratic" judge have been dispelled all along as the state machinery has been shown to perform a very partisan function on the side of the capitalist class, rather than a mediation among classes.

Thus, an evolution in a Marxist direction has taken place on Fo's part in relation to his portrayal of bourgeois politics. In Gli arcangeli the critique stopped at the level of exposure of the corrupt behavior of politicians and their trappings of power. Here, instead, the whole institution of the State, as a superstructure is being confronted: its links to the bourgeois economic base are shown as unmodifiable and a solution to the injustices perpetrated by it coming from within also appears unlikely.

Having disseminated hints and analyses all along, Fo makes the audience draw their own conclusions. Neither of the endings are easily 'digested' as the grotesque points to the multifarious links and faces of the State - the task of debating a solution outside of the institution itself is left to the discussion period following the play. Hence to the domain of political and theoretical analysis linked to practice in the class struggle.

In referring to the anarchist's death in the introduction of the play, Fo had said:

Sulla morte del compagno non si piange, così facendo si rischierebbe di sopportare ogni cosa. Poichè è un compagno caduto al nostro fianco, dobbiamo fortemente

sentire il significato della sua morte. E non ci si commuove perché con un atto di commozione riusciamo a 'digerire' lo spettacolo e a sentirci irrimediabilmente la coscienza a posto, non dimentichiamoci mai che al quarto piano egli ci finì per le sue idee politiche, sulle quali possiamo proporre il nostro dissenso, ma per via delle quali egli era con noi nella lotta comune per rovesciare un ordine sociale (Mazzotta II, p. 139).

The person most qualified to give a grotesque, non-cathartic account of the anarchist's death, due to his flamboyant personality, is Il Matto-Dottor Piccinni. He starts by reporting a widespread rumor that in the course of the brutal interrogation, the anarchist had been dealt a blow that paralyzed him. An ambulance had been called right away (thus explaining the fact that an ambulance had arrived even before the fall), but in the meantime the police attempted to revive him by opening the window and leaning him outside for fresh air. Piccinni continues: "Si dice fossero in due a sorreggerlo.../e come succede spesso in questi casi, ciascuno fidando nell'altro.../lo tengo io? Lo tieni tu? Patapum è andato di sotto!" (Mazzotta II, p. 169). The grotesque here is obtained by the contrast between the seriousness of the crime and the non-chalant language used by Piccinni.

The discourse on theater, the third level of demystification, is carried out throughout the play. In the prologue we are informed of the transposition, and of the fact that life has been known to surpass artistic invention; in the first lines we are introduced to the centrality of disguise, be it due to pathology, to the stage, or to the State. The play is also punctuated by Il Matto's asides where he calls the audience's attention to the fact

that they should be making a transposition of the events to New York and the twenties. The fourth wall of the naturalist theater is further broken down when the chief of police summons his infiltrators in the audience. Promptly, actors sitting among the spectators respond, then Il Matto hastens to clarify that those were only actors, but that real life police agents were likely to be sitting among the audience, keeping an eye on the "subversive elements" (Mazzotta II, p. 174).

The contamination between farce and the politics of reaction has reached its climax in this warning delivered by Il Commissario, but in reality issued by Fo, the revolutionary playwright.

The boundaries between the fictionality of theater and the essential nature of bourgeois society become indistinguishable in the form of the farce, as this latter element is chosen as the appropriate mirror reflecting the modus operandi of a decaying class.

The confusion of limits between truth and fiction respects the grotesque gusto for a free play of boundaries, and its aversion for exactness and singleness of meaning as pointed out by Bakhtin. Fo's predilection for the multiple, be it the structure of the deceit en abyme, the polyphonic monologue, or his combination farce/politics of reaction is a central feature that must be highlighted especially if one is to understand Fo's specific contribution in the ongoing debate on the "political" theater.

CHAPTER III

KNOWLEDGE, POLITICS AND THE THEATER OF DARIO FO AND FRANCA RAME

1. Knowledge and militancy

Throughout his entire artistic career one of Fo's dominant concerns has been the production of knowledge as well as entertainment. However, while this pursuit has been a constant one, there have been changes and shifts of emphasis in the type of knowledge yielded by his works. For example, the Cain of Poer Nano amused radio audiences with the exposition of a story told from an alternative point of view. The knowledge it delivered was not of a factual type; rather it was intended to stir the imagination to defy stereotypes and sterile common sense. Similarly, the streetsweeper of L'uomo nudo e l'uomo in frac spoke from a marginal position. The string of deceptive situations in which he was swept led him (and the audiences) to question the existence of a monolithic form of truth and reality.

Moving from the farces to the plays, as the layers of deceit confronting Il Lungo of Gli arcangeli became more complex and explicitly man-made, the naive/shrewd protagonist acquired a negative kind of wisdom that demystified the mores of the bureaucracy and of politicians.

By the time *Il Matto of L'anarchico* appeared on the stage Fo had had some experience in intergrating factual counter-information of the historical or contemporary kind within the structure of his plays. *Isabella, tre caravelle e un cacciaballe*, with its framework of a play-within-a-play, gave the audience historical documentation of the actual career of Christopher Columbus. The common myth of the idealistic seeker of unknown routes was supplanted by information about the navigator's inclination towards piracy, professional opportunism and ambitions of grandeur. The King of Spain, long regarded as an enlightened sponsor of voyages of discovery, emerged as an aspiring mercantile entrepreneur, bent on warmaking and obscurantism for the sake of acquiring greater wealth. Even information about the Court's washing habits and marital practices was offered, all couched in an extremely grotesque form. But the tableau from the past was relevant to contemporary issues, and thus many of the lines uttered have a characteristically double point of reference, the past and the present.

A more contemporary type of counter-information permeated *La signora è da buttare*, a chronicle of the U.S.A.'s rise to world power punctuated by episodes illustrating major events like the Kennedy assassination, the Vietnam war and the Civil Rights Movement. Unlike its counter-informational antecedents, however, *L'anarchico* featured an additional dimension - the knowledge it expounded had been acquired in the course of militant practice, thus making clear the link between militancy and knowledge. The

text itself had developed step by step with the investigations undertaken by the revolutionary left in the Pinelli affair. It was modified according to the suggestions of people participating directly in that struggle. Written and performed in such a way as to stir rage, it led to militant action. It was staged in places of struggle such as occupied factories and neighborhood social centers. Hence, at every step of the way the question of knowledge of a different type was tied to political action, with the play itself performing the task of demystification and the discussion that followed providing the arena for an exchange of experiences and debate over theoretical questions. In a sense, Fo's approach to the question of the relationship between theory and practice, a thorny one for Marxists, can be summarized by Mao TseTung's dictum: "In order to know the taste of a pear you have to change it by eating it."

All of Fo's and Rame's productions from L'anarchico (1969) to the end of the seventies can be defined by their emphasis on militancy. Counter-information about Pinochet's coup was given in Guerra di popolo in Cile, with the warning that such a situation could arise in Italy. Fedayn gave testimony to the development of the Palestinian struggle with the use of oral histories collected from people directly involved in it. In Non si paga, non si paga the playwright predicted the practical consequences that the P.C.I.'s policy of historic compromise was to have on proletarian families, the famous lotte per l'autoriduzione.¹ Even questions internal to the revolutionary movement, such as the

attitude toward drug consumption, were taken up by Fo, who provided scientific and social investigations of the issue as well as biting satire of mores and fashions of the left.²

In the seventies Fo and Rame took active part in the revolutionary movement not only with the writing and performance of plays but also by fund-raising for political prisoners, striking workers and other struggles. With the occupation of the Palazzina Liberty in 1974 they even gave their physical theatrical space to the needs of the neighborhood and of revolutionary organizations (Binni, pp.181-190).

Outside of the plays themselves, Fo and Rame took issue both with the P.C.I. and with organizations of the revolutionary left over the question of what type of art promoted and strengthened class struggle. Criticizing the former, Fo noted the division that the party made between art and politics. Pointing to the example of the P.C.I.'s Festivals dell'Unità,³ the playwright criticized the practice of engaging popular stars to provide entertainment and draw "the masses" with songs of a clearly bourgeois content which were usually followed by speeches by a party cadre delivering the political line. According to Fo, in this manner the P.C.I. reinforced the idea that art stands above the class struggle (Binni, pp. 184-5).

Answering a critic from the leftist organization Avanguardia Operaia who had charged him with excessive reliance on spontaneous popular traditions, Fo stated that revolutionary culture is not something so alien to the exploited classes as to

require its creation from scratch by the party, as Avanguardia Operaia insisted. Rather, the oppressed themselves have developed and continue to develop art forms antagonistic to the dominant culture (for example the Chilean murals whose technique was then popularized by the painter Matta) and thus the task of revolutionary artists is to promote and develop them (Binni, pp. 160-63). Fo also stressed the need for artists to be independent from the dictates of political parties, because their respective fields of competence are different.

In the eighties, looking back at the period 1969-1979, Fo has firmly upheld the validity of the concept of a militant theater even while recognizing particular shortcomings. For example, he admitted to a tendency toward oversimplification in portraying society's contradictions on the stage, and to the attitude that revolution was certain and just around the corner. According to Fo, both of these characteristics were wide spread in the revolutionary movement at that time, and in writing for that "market" he fell into the same tendencies.⁴

The year 1979 marked a turning point for the revolutionary movement in Italy, triggered by the April 9th arrest of militants and leaders of the revolutionary left in response to the 1978 kidnaping and killing of Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades. At the time of the kidnaping, Moro was the Secretary General of the Christian Democratic party, he had been Prime Minister several times and was the Christian Democratic leader most open to the "historic compromise" with the P.C.I.. After the Moro kidnaping,

the tendency toward increased State repression that had started a few years earlier with the Legge Reale reached its climax with the institution of supposedly temporary emergency legislation aimed at "terrorism" but which in reality was used to decimate the ranks and leadership of the revolutionary left, regardless of their stand on the question of immediate armed struggle.⁵

Following these events, a period of political backlash ensued, depriving Dario Fo and Franca Rame of a mass revolutionary movement with which to link up. In a 1984 interview, they stated that their continuing connection with the struggle of political prisoners and the fight for better living conditions have been the determining factor in their ability to maintain a revolutionary stance in their works, as opposed to other leftist intellectuals who, in the heat of repression and overall social backlash, have renounced their previous ideals altogether.⁶

Although the ties of their theater with the political struggles still occupies a prominent position in their works, since 1979 the two have produced some works that have a long-term ideological bearing on these struggles rather than a direct one. The remake of John Gay's The Beggar's Opera, parts of Fo's giullarata, Fabulazzo Osceno, the staging and rewriting of Stravinsky's L'Histoire du Soldat, and the farce Coppia aperta are part of this trend.

What can be described as the main novelty in the couple's works of the eighties are the co-authored feminist plays such as Tutta casa, letto e chiesa II, "Io Ulrike grido" (part of

Fabulazzo Osceno), La madre, Lo stupro, Coppia aperta and their latest play, Quasi per caso una donna: Elisabetta I. In this latest production Fo's habitual emphasis on point of view related to position in society (situation) has been expanded particularly through the co-authorship of Franca Rame. Thus the gallery of strong women that Fo had developed from the beginning of his career (Enea of Settimo: ruba un po' meno, Isabella and Giovanna la Pazza of Isabella, the respective Antonias of Tutti uniti and Non si paga, non si paga have acquired a feminist perspective based on the input of the direct, personal experience of a woman playwright.

In order best to explore the specific contributions of Fo and Rame to political theater, the link knowledge-experience-practice will be singled out in the next two sections. Again, the focus will be on the dramatic texts themselves.

2. Brecht and Fo: The Marxification of the theater or the
theatralization of class struggle?

The link between theater and knowledge had been elaborated in a systematic way during the Enlightenment by Denis Diderot, who focused on the intellectually cognitive and politically useful function of art. While philosophers like Rousseau had stressed the theater's function of forming the audience into a community, overcoming existing social divisions, more than a century later Marxist oriented artists seized upon the pedagogical aspects of theater in order to further class struggle. When referring to Marxist oriented political theater, Bertolt Brecht is the playwright that is broadly recognized as setting a model in the West. Thus, in examining Fo's work, it is worthwhile to compare and contrast it with Brecht's.

While Fo has declared himself the heir of a far reaching popular tradition, Brecht's roots lie in the modernists' efforts to destroy bourgeois tradition, especially in its most blatant expression - naturalism. In the first decades of this century, some major theater artists following a modernist tendency, such as Meyerhold, Mayakovsky, Piscator, and Brecht, embraced Marxism as the social ideology equivalent to their revolutionary efforts in the field of art. The main target for modernists was unquestionably naturalism, while the Marxists were generally more cautious in their condemnation. In fact, they sometimes declared naturalism to be the best vehicle for the portrayal of reality, as German Social Democrats did throughout the first decades of the

century.⁷ Nonetheless, however shaky and ambiguous, the alliance between modernism and Marxism continued well into the twenties, until its final condemnation in the 1934 Congress of Soviet writers as a bourgeois, decadent manifestation.

The first salvo against naturalism on the stage had been fired in 1896 by Jarry's Ubu Roi; following that event, increasingly, all over Europe, many artists began transgressing the codes established by naturalism. The approach of the modernists, however, was not a homogeneous one either in its aims or in its philosophical sources. David Caute, for example, in his study of the troubled relationship between modernism and Marxism, makes a distinction between modernists drawing their inspiration from the Enlightenment, with its emphasis on the rational, and those inspired by the Anti-Enlightenment as championed by Nietzsche.⁸ A common target of modernists from both tendencies was the naturalists' claim that art should be a reflection of objective reality. In this respect it is useful to note that owing to a narrow reading of Marx's scattered comments on art and literature, Marxist orthodoxy at the beginning of the century, and even later, concurred in defining art as a superstructure that merely reflected the economic base. Thus, the Marxist proclaimed "realism" to be the artistic vehicle most likely to convey truth and knowledge about society.⁹

Given the importance that modernist techniques had in Brecht's formulation of a political theater, Eugene Lunn's summary

of common modernist tendencies can serve us as an analytical tool. Aesthetic self-consciousness or self-reflexiveness is the first characteristic common to the modernists. For the theater, this meant the intentional revelation of drama as theatrical construction as opposed to the illusion of reality created by the fourth wall of naturalism (Lunn, p. 34). Many of Pirandello's plays, and especially Sei personaggi, are a prime example of such tendency. As far as Marxist political theater is concerned, it was Meyerhold who made the greatest contributions (Lunn, pp. 53-55). With his constructivist model of mise en scene the Soviet director defied the traditional illusionist conventions of bourgeois theater. The theatrical space was filled with cubes, scaffolding and other objects alien to the traditional notion of props. Actors and objects were continuously moving and interacting while the flow was interrupted by spotlights, film sequences, projections, and popular music. In juxtaposition to Stanislavsky's model of naturalist acting, Meyerhold's biomechanics depersonalized and stylized gestures to correspond to certain emotions, while steering clear of imitation. For example, set physical movements symbolized one class or another. Court jesters, circus acrobats and clowns were introduced on the stage to emphasize the links with popular tradition (and here Fo is certainly indebted to the Russian director). This "constructed" character of the theatrical performance was to be seized by Brecht as a way of expressing the "constructed" character of society and of class relations, as opposed to one's habitual perception of

them as natural.

Simultaneity, juxtaposition and montage are other features in common between the different currents of modernists (Lunn, p. 35). Both in Italy and in Russia the Futurists were the most outspoken innovators who seized upon the newly discovered relations between time, space and motion to rebel against classical models. Sequential time expressed in a traditional linear flow was challenged by the modernists who favored separate unconnected scenes and incompleteness. One of the effects of their techniques was to "defamiliarize" the expected connections between things, thereby clearing the way for new and deeper ones. Brecht's division of a play into discrete unconnected scenes and his ideas of estrangement are part of these modernist challenges to tradition. Paradox, ambiguity and uncertainty were other transgressions emphasized by modernism (Lunn, pp. 35-36). It was when dealing with concepts in this series that the widest gap between modernists of the Enlightenment and Anti-Enlightenment traditions was reached. In fact, the former set the paradoxes in ways suggesting possible solutions, while the latter pointed to their intrinsic and unalterable presence in the human condition.

Finally, dehumanization and the demise of the integrated individual subject were important characteristics of modernist works in the portrayal of human beings (Lunn, p. 37). This un-organic bent in the portrayal of individuals and their social and natural surroundings ran exactly counter to what Marx had praised in Balzac's realism. It is not surprising, then, if

orthodox Marxists often criticized modernists for their pessimistic, alienated "distortions" which prevented them from creating "positive heroes." This was in fact one of the recurring criticisms directed at Brecht.

Upon closer examination, many of the transgressions made by the modernists are related to a novel way of apprehending reality. They can be said to have arisen as a response to a number of dramatic changes that occurred at the turn of the century in science and in social life, all changes that necessitated cognitive tools different from realism. Bertolt Brecht acknowledged these changes, calling the present era the Scientific Age and confronting the question of how the theater would have to be modified to fulfill the needs of the "Children of the Scientific Age." In the Short Organum for the Theater (aptly named after Bacon's scientific work), Brecht pointed out the increased complexity reached by the level of science and by human organization which required a complex manner of representation and reception¹⁰. By 1928, Brecht had found in dialectical materialism the type of "science" capable of explaining social phenomena and of putting people in rational control of them. From then on Brecht's efforts were directed towards infusing the theater with Marxism.

The links between theater and politics had been clarified for Brecht by the work of Meyerhold and Piscator. For example, Brecht's famous concept of the epic theater in actuality was first applied to the play Fahnen (Flags) that had been staged by Piscator in

1924 in Berlin. The play dealt with the Chicago Haymarket riots and trials of 1886 in a way alien to traditional naturalist drama. The main action was broken into by narrative (thus disregarding the traditional Aristotelian division between epic and drama), while explanatory devices such as films, slide projections and addresses gave the audience necessary background information. In later plays a multilayered revolving stage allowed the public to see simultaneous events that could not be portrayed in their connection with traditional naturalistic devices.¹¹ These innovations were necessary for the theater at a time when social forces more than ever defined people's lives. In this respect Piscator stated:

...This period [the Twentieth Century], that through its social and economic necessities has deprived the individual of 'humanness' without replacing it with the 'humanness' of a new society, has raised a new hero on the pedestal - Itself. No longer is the individual with his private, personal fate the heroic factor of the new drama, but time itself, the fate of the masses has become such....If Antiquity placed him (the individual) in relation to Fate, the Middle Ages in relation to God, Rationalism to the forces of Emotion..., then the present time cannot view him otherwise than in his relation to society and social problems - i.e. as a political being (in Ewen, p. 151).

The narrative bent of Piscator's theater deeply influenced Brecht, but as Massimo Castri has pointed out, Piscator's focus on socio-economic forces was superseded by Brecht who emphasized the portrayal of human beings' alterability as well as their ability to change and control society (Castri, p. 119-43). Thus one can say that Piscator stressed the deterministic element of Marxism

while Brecht emphasized the voluntaristic one.

For Brecht the change that was required of the theater was not solely confined to subject matter; it implied a new aesthetics of production and reception. His systematic summation of the difference between Aristotelian and Epic drama can best convey his proposal for a new aesthetics:

DRAMATIC THEATRE	EPIC THEATRE
Plot	Narrative
Implicates the spectator in a stage situation	Turns the spectator into an observer, BUT
Wears down his capacity for action	Arouses his capacity for action
Provides him with sensations	Forces him to take decisions
Experience	Picture of the world
The spectator is involved in something	He is made to face something
Suggestion	Argument
Instinctive feelings are preserved	Brought to the point of recognition
The spectator is in the thick of it, shares the experience	The spectator stands outside, studies
The human being is taken for granted	The human being is the object of the inquiry
He is unalterable	He is alterable and able to alter
Eyes on the finish	Eyes on the course
One scene makes another	Each scene for itself
Growth	Montage
Linear development	In curves
Evolutionary determinism	Jumps
Man as a fixed point	Man as a process
Thought determines being	Social being determines thought
Feeling	Reason

(in Willet, p.37).

In the above, one can see a convergence between Marxist epistemology and Brecht's prescriptions for the new theater. To those who reproached him for sacrificing entertainment for the

sake of pedagogy he responded that there was no intrinsic contradiction between the two. He extended his claim to assert that without a certain knowledge of different branches of science and social science it would even be impossible for the playwright to engage in his activity (Willet, p. 73-74).

Marxism demanded a critical attitude toward society; it warned the oppressed never to accept reality at face value as a "natural" occurrence, but rather, it directed them to investigate socio-economic causes, with a view to changing society through class struggle. Similarly for his theater, 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. According to Brecht, in fact, estrangement consisted in "taking from that incident or character that which is self-evident, known or obvious and arousing about them wonder and curiosity" (Ewen, p. 218).

Brecht's aesthetic of production and reception of the work of art can be interpreted as affecting the audience on two levels as far as the question of knowledge is concerned: 1) the epic theater as a process producing knowledge about a particular character or event, thus effecting a didactic outcome in a limited field; 2) the epic theater as a training ground for the acquisition of a dialectical materialist outlook, a world view necessary for the analysis of society at large. Brecht's Marxism had been largely influenced by the German philosopher Karl Korsch, who by the early

thirties had broken with Soviet orthodoxy. His brand of Marxism stressed a dialectical view of the relationship between human action and historical necessity, in many ways similar to the writings of the young Marx of 1844-48. The focus on the human element can be seen in Brecht's considerations of the relationship of estrangement to the representation of history.

Estrangement (Brecht said) means to 'historicize', that is, consider people and incidents as historically conditioned and transitory...The spectator will no longer see the characters on the stage as unalterable, uninfluenceable, helplessly delivered over to their fate. He will see that this man is such and such, because circumstances are such. And circumstances are such, because the man is such. But he in turn is conceivable not only as he is now, but also as he might be--that is, otherwise-- and the same holds true for circumstances. Hence, the spectator obtains a new attitude in the theatre, the same attitude that a man of the twentieth century has with respect to Nature. He will be received in the theatre as the great 'transformer,' who can intervene in the natural processes and the social processes, and who no longer accepts the world but masters it (in Ewen, p. 222).

Thus, the spectator will be confronted with a new attitude by the play itself, he/she will be forced to face the issues not from the point of view of empathy and acceptance but rather from the point of view of transformation, making theater a producer of critical knowledge and method rather than of sentiment and catharsis.

In contrast with the orientation of the Agit-Prop Theater¹² and later militant models, the type of knowledge produced by the play was not necessarily geared toward immediate action in the political arena. The transformation of the audience was mainly an

ideological one that might lead to a social practice consistent with it. Immediate action was not the main aim of Brecht's dramaturgy. In this respect, Brecht and Fo stand very far apart. Whereas the former put on stage mainly complex, philosophical issues concerning the whole historical period of capitalism, the latter, in the main, has chosen contemporary, on-going struggles whose outcome could be directly influenced by the audience's direct political participation. At a broader level, Brecht saw himself as a bourgeois artist who had taken up the cause of the proletariat. Fo has instead sought to elaborate a model of artistic production and social commitment through the active participation of the artist and of the ideal addressee in the immediate struggle.

Apart from this difference on the question of practice, many commentators have acknowledged Fo's indebtedness to Brecht, mostly in the use of the devices producing estrangement. 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 (Artese, p. 99). 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 (Artese, p. 110).

Part of the different outcomes of the works of these two Marxist oriented playwrights, I think, depends on a different

approach to the question of knowledge. Writing at a time when Marxism was still seen as an all-encompassing philosophical system, fully capable of explaining all social phenomena, Brecht sought to make the theatre adhere to Marxist principles in its own specific modes and devices. Conversely, one could say that Fo has sought to theatricalize the subject matters of class struggle as perceived through Marxist analysis. In doing this he has searched through the traditional forms of expression of the theater, updating and renovating them, whereas Brecht sought a clean break from tradition (at least Western tradition).

Fo's theater began at a time when the unified, all-encompassing "scientific" character of Marxism had been largely eroded. Different and irreconcilable models of Marxism confronted each other in the world: the Soviet and the Chinese models. "Western" currents of Marxism, from Gramsci to the Frankfurt School were challenging orthodox Marxist views on the function of art in society, taking into particular consideration the impact of the artistic medium on the finished product. Later, at the high point of Fo's militant theater, 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. Although stating that ideology is fundamental in giving direction to the work of any playwright, Dario Fo and

Franca Rame have increasingly placed emphasis on the militant character of their theater. In a 1983 interview, in the midst of 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.¹³

Like Brecht's theater, Fo's plays fulfill a demystifying function, but there is no direct equivalence between critical tools necessary in viewing events on the stage and those necessary to analyze daily life. In a way, although Fo's theater delivers counter-information, it does not train ideologically as Brecht had theorized for his own dramaturgy. Fo utilizes a series of "types", principally the naive/shrewd characters inherited from the popular tradition, but even while unmasking deception they do not make their spectators follow a Marxist epistemological route.

By contrast if we take up the works of Brecht's maturity, such as Life of Galileo,¹⁴ we can see that the audience is given all the elements enabling it to undertake a Marxist analysis. The scientist's "psychological" and social makeup is revealed from the first scene--a sensual man driven by a thirst for knowledge and for a comfortable life (Brecht, p. 218). The naturalist flow of time is defied by fifteen quickly succeeding unconnected scenes, with boards and choruses that summarize what is about to happen and define the main contradictions. The human ability to alter the

world and to be altered is underlined by the different choices Galileo makes at different points of the play. Representatives of different social strata ranging from feudal landlords to Venetian merchants, all with clearly conflicting class interests, are seen in their interaction with the scientist, coming to obtain scientific inventions useful to their business or a sanction of their world order. The relevance of the parable to a time beyond its historical occurrence can be detected in Galileo's final self-criticism in which he denounces his recantation as a first step toward the separation of scientists from social responsibility. However, although the play was staged at the time of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, while Brecht was in exile in the U.S.A., he did not modify his parable to directly address the event.

In examining Fo's presentation of history on the stage, one is struck by the fact that even while a great wealth of factual counter-information is presented (quantitatively more than in Brecht's parables) the main source of knowledge remains the direct experience of the oppressed--their oppression is put in continuous relation with the present. In Tutti uniti! Tutti insieme! Ma scusa quello non è il padrone?, a chronicle of Italian workers' struggles from 1911 to 1922, a 1920 workers' chorus sings modern day songs against industrial pollution and layoffs just after having sung the folk song "La Poiana," truly belonging to those years¹⁶. The rhythms of the farce and of varietà, with their respective structures of the comic, govern the "Brechtian" divided

scenes, an apt representation, as in L'anarchico, of the farcical quality of bourgeois politics. The play certainly does not claim to be a training ground in Marxist outlook. As Fo has tirelessly repeated, the spectacle, through the weapon of the grotesque, must generate rage. A rage that leads to action. Thus, the audience must itself become emotionally involved.

Fo is clearly still part of the Italian tradition of comic actors (turned playwright in his case). But as Meldolesi has aptly pointed out, he is "in revolt", has seized some instruments of Marxist analysis and has put his centuries old craft to the service of the struggle. The paradoxical frameworks of the grotesque, of the farce, of the beffe, of varietà, of storytelling, enable him to capture equivalent grotesque bits of the reality of people's lives. His encounter with Marxism enabled him to place these fragments in a rational order even while using theatrical forms that are quite distant from the rational. But since only militancy and struggle can help straighten these deformed structures of society, Fo makes political action an important part of his work.

From this orientation stems Fo's predilection for keeping abreast of current events for direct experience and alternative point of view. In the early radio plays, Fo gave alternative versions of myths that color our daily perception of psychology and reality. Later on, in the militant years, he narrated the oral histories of unglorified participants in the Resistenza (Mazzotta, pp. 218-51). Fo's stress on the contemporary, on

direct experience as transfigured by theatrical art can best be seen in juxtaposition to Brecht's theories in his remake of the Three Penny Opera (1928), called L'opera dello sghignazzo.¹⁶

Brecht's Three Penny Opera, a remake of John Gay's The Beggar's Opera (1727),¹⁷ is one of the first plays in which the author experimented with the principles of the epic theater. He attempted the "literarization" of the theater with the use of titles and boards which interspersed the "performed" with the "formulated". In the original, Gay's target was Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole and his entourage, whose corruption he tried to castigate by likening him to the leader and organizer of a band of lumpen-proletarians. Folk melodies were sung by prostitutes, pimps and thieves with lyrics that poked fun at the then fashionable Italian melodrama.

In Brecht's version the emphasis shifts from the parody of corrupt officials to the exposure of business enterprises under capitalism, which again is likened to the functioning of organized petty crime. At the beginning of the play, Peachum, the director of the Establishment for Beggars, shows a prospective client the five basic prototypes of "misery best adapted to touching the human heart": a) the victim of the progress of modern traffic, b) the victim of the art of war, c) the victim of the industrial boom, d) the pitiable blind, and finally e) the young man who has seen better days¹⁸. In Fo's version, after a bloodier, updated introduction of Mackie the Knife, the lawyer Peachum addresses the audience directly to tell them not to expect easy gratification

from the spectacle but rather "scarpate nelle gengive." As in L'anarchico, the issue of the role and the techniques of the theater is developed concomitantly with the entire play. Peachum continues his instruction to the spectators:

Ora lo capirete da voi, ...io sono il personaggio meglio riuscito di tutta l'opera...anche grazie all'interpretazione che ne do come attore. Seguitemi con attenzione, poichè, io sono tra l'altro, colui che indica il significato drammaturgico dell'opera...colui che ve ne scopre le chiavi e la morale (<L'opera, pp. 15-16).

Updating Brecht's version of a curtain with the maxim "Give and it shall be given unto you," Peachum checks his "Optical persuasors". He rejects the idea of projecting an evangelical, vague maxim as people today would be more inclined to answer the following ad instead

"Date, fermo bancario, a cento giorni e vi sarà dato col 15% di interesse al netto pagamento immediato." Bisogna rinnovarsi, dare l'immagine viva del nostro tempo, se no, tanto valeva rimettere in scena il testo così come l'aveva scritto Brecht, nel '28, quando le Opere di Carità erano ancora enti utili al sistema. Oggi c'è la cassa integrazione come sistema (<L'opera, p. 19).

Following Peachum's explicit programme of renewal, Fo updates every single element of Brecht's play from the five prototypes, to Jenny's song, from the prostitute's SoHo quarters, to the warehouse where Polly's and Mackie's marriage takes place. At the level of stage writing, Fo makes explicit reference to Foucault observations on the factory as the model for all other institutions of capitalist society. Thus, he molds the spatial

sub-divisions of the play to fit that model (L'opera, p. 7). Even Newgate, the London jail, has been transformed into a "carcere speciale" that presents the same structures of a factory. In an interview Fo stated that all his ideas for updating the play were suggested by and modeled after contemporary events and personalities. His remake of Mackie, for example, relies heavily on the model of Raffaele Cutolo, one of the bosses of the camorra (a form of organized crime prevalent in the area near Naples), while his depiction of jails is based mainly on Italian and West German incarceration practices.

Fo's characteristic comic structures are maintained, the farcical element is emphasized and so is the varietà legacy. For example, as a heavy metal rock band accompanies Mackie's attempt at escaping from prison, the famous criminal remarks:

Mackie—Classica musica di evasione. Che idea formidabile che hai trovato. Ma c'era già nell'opera di Brecht?

Lockit—No, è stata rubata da un'altra opera (L'opera, p. 96).

Again Fo has set up a situation where a play on words is true in its literal and figurative sense. Also the explicit reference to "thieving" playwrights continues the ongoing discourse on the theater.

John Gay's finale had the player and the beggar, the two characters who introduced the opera, debate over the didactic propriety of giving the play a happy ending (Gay, pp. 68-73). Brecht skirted somewhat the metatheatrical approach and handled

the question in a song whose last stanza was:

You will hear (yes, all; it's rather loud)/ Mercy give
Justice quite a dreadful hiding./ This is an opera, and
we mean to do you proud./ The Royal Messenger will make
his entrance--riding (Brecht, p. 95).

After all characters have commented on the unlikelihood of such a finale in real life, Peachum delivers the moral of the story, warning the audience that "Mounted messengers from the Queen come far too seldom, / and if you kick a man, he kicks you back again./ Therefore, never be too eager to combat injustice"/ (Brecht, p. 96).

In keeping with his efforts to make the theater an arena in which the audience will be trained to recognize the world views of different classes, in his notes Brecht wrote that the Three Penny Opera was aimed at presenting a picture of bourgeois society with a Weltanschauung of its own without which it could not function:

Whenever the bourgeoisie sees its own world represented, the appearance of a Royal Mounted messenger is absolutely inevitable...without its appearance bourgeois literature would sink to a mere representation of circumstances. The mounted messenger guarantees really undisturbed enjoyment of circumstances of themselves unbearable, and is therefore a *conditio sine qua non* for a literature whose *conditio sine qua non* is lack of consequences (Brecht, pp. 109-10).

Following more closely Gay's ending, and in keeping with its efforts to use and reveal traditional mechanisms of the theater, Fo insists on a debate among the characters about the happy ending.

As various characters start clamoring for the Queen's pardon (others, perhaps more realistically, suggest that they approach Margaret Thatcher instead), Peachum reacts:

Ma scherziamo? Come si può pensare di chiudere una storia come questa con il lieto fine? Che morale ne viene fuori? (L'opera, p. 107).

After being the rebuttal that in real life, criminals with friends in high places like Mackie are most likely freed, Peachum stresses the theater's specific role:

Peachum- E anche se fosse un mondo infame come dici tu, non dimenticare che siamo su un palcoscenico. Compito del teatro non è quello di fotografare il marcio...ma di trasformarlo in concime, semmai...perché sia determinante a far germogliare messaggi di speranza, specie per i giovani (L'opera, p. 107).

Seizing on the suggestion to keep up with the times Mackie says that they should hang a young drug addict, a more fitting negative example for the youth of today. Polemicizing with Brecht's version, Mackie then refuses to sing a song begging forgiveness of everybody. But the messenger arrives, this time on a motorcycle, and Peachum cannot but comment: "Ecco come uno spettacolo viene mandato in vacca" (L'opera, p. 110).

Because of this play's particular feature of being a remake of a remake, Fo's imagination is left unbridled to develop his discourse on the theater, in a game of exposure of theatrical tricks and subtle usage of them. In his characteristically irreverent way, Fo has followed Brecht's own suggestion of treating "classics" without respect or fear. With the "Fo-esque"

combination of traditional and new forms of popular theater, Fo has confronted the paragon of Marxist political theater and reinvented it anew.

Fo's emphasis on contemporary and immediate politics can lead one to question the validity of his work when lifted outside the particular context from which it arose. In fact, one is immediately tempted to juxtapose Brecht's parables whose validity extended itself to a whole historical epoch to Fo's locally and temporally identified plays. According to Fo such an opposition would be a fallacious one because the more a theater is rooted in a particular situation, capturing the essence of its contradictions, the more it is universally applicable.¹⁹

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 centered in the work. While one can praise the playwright's modesty, one must not underestimate the difficulty of such an undertaking, in fact, for it to be effective it would require an equivalent amount of theatrical expertise and political

acumen as the original writer. A proof of such difficulty can be pointed out in the widely differing responses to the staging of different adaptations of the same play, as it occurred for the 1984 U.S. West Coast and East Coast stagings of Accidental Death of an Anarchist.

Other reflections arising from a Brecht-Fo juxtaposition concern the weight assigned to the formation of a new revolutionary subject through theater. This problematic issue has been raised by the experiences of the New Left. At the level of theatrical discourse, an assimilation of Artaud's reflections on the theater has contributed to the formulation of a theater that allows the representation of "metaphysical" needs and expression of a people. Among Marxist commentators on the theater there have been varying degrees of acceptance of a Brecht-Artaud alliance, ranging from David Caute's outright warning that "when the committed, public writer extends his hand to modernism he should wear rubber gloves, " to Massimo Castri's call for a synthesis of the two (Castri, pp. 258-59). Following a Marcusean path, the latter pointed out the primacy of cultural transformation in advanced capitalist countries, due to the insidiousness of capitalist ideology, with its formation of false needs. In Castri's view, if a political revolution were accomplished without adequately addressing the issue of the needs and creation of a different culture, such a revolution would not be a liberating one. In accordance with this analysis then, the political theater must be an instrument for the renewal of the people, a means

toward:... quell'immagine della società esistente introiettata nell'individuo e di individuazione nell'uomo di quei nuovi bisogni che serviranno come base motivazione e fine della rivoluzione" (Castri, p. 257).

Starting from different premises which assign primacy to the role of the actor, Antonio Attisani reflected on the theater as 'luogo della differenza':

"..luogo in cui la società sogna e festeggia i suoi obbiettivi, i suoi 'santi', le sue capacità e i suoi risultati, e luogo dove è possibile la religione di cui abbiamo bisogno, cioè il rapporto con gli interrogativi, i fallimenti e la residua follia, una religione che non è consolazione metafisica e motivazione sovranaturale dell'ingiustizia, ma sistema di critica e solidarietà, fusione di scienza e di umanità".²⁰

Both of these proposals reduce the pedagogical function of the theater and tend to re-emphasize its function of ritual and ground of expression - even after traversing a Marxist route. Fo continues to maintain the pedagogical primacy of the political theater, its function of denunciation of capitalist society, its value in demystifying and uncovering political deception. However, in his latest production, especially in the plays co-authored by Franca Rame, one can see an effort in the direction of addressing "new needs", of confronting questions that relate to the class struggle in a more mediated way. These new explorations have the potential of enriching the political and popular theater with a strength that includes not only a knowledge of demystification but a more problematic one that illuminates the doubts and the

tortuous process of consciousness building among the oppressed. Focusing on the condition of women, their relation to power and their specific modes of living and transforming reality, Rame and Fo continue their quest for a theater embodying a dialectical relationship between knowledge, politics and action.

3. Rame, Fo and the tragic grotesque: the politics of women's experience.

In Fo's system of representation, women have always been mainly part of the oppressed - those whose story has been told and distorted by official historiography and myth. Hence they held particular interest for a playwright dealing with alternative points of view.

From the beginning, Fo has represented women as outspoken, full of initiative, and accomplished practitioners of deceit. Breaking with tradition, however, the latter characteristic was not ascribed to intrinsic wickedness but rather to their historical exclusion from power. In fact, often Fo's women characters use their wits to outmatch the unimaginative and arrogant males who dominate their lives.²¹ In the case of the male marginal type, the pattern of naivete and shrewdness is played out in the world at large: suffice it to think of Il Lungo's journey through the universes of bureaucracy and politicians. Fo's female characters instead take their first steps in the sphere of family and personal relations - in the world of the private, rather than of the public. Little by little, in the late sixties they reach, with Enea of Settimo: ruba un po' meno (1967), the larger world of societal relations.

Fo's progression from demystifying storytelling to

counterinformation based on the direct experience of the oppressed can also be traced in the evolution of the women characters. In order to reach the final phase, Franca Rame was required to enter the field also as a playwright, vindicating the female characters' right to speak through a woman's pen. Rather important changes can be observed in the features of female characters when comparing Fo's a solo production and the later co-authored plays. This last chapter will attempt to trace the evolution while pointing to elements of continuity with Fo's overall work and to elements of novelty introduced by the specific presence of Franca Rame as a woman playwright.

Some strong women were present in Fo's very first work Poer Nano. For example, Teresina of "Il 999 dei Mille" defended her autonomy by exercising her wits against a superficial father, a bombastic and unfaithful fiance and throngs of arrogant, scorned young men who took offense at her spirit of independence (Poer nano, pp. 29-40). Fo moved to the farces, he had to confront some of the stereotypes of women built into that genre's plots. Thus jealous couples, love triangles, patriarchal fathers and husband-hungry maidens came to populate Fo's stage.

Characteristically, he used the farce's mechanisms of deceit and discovery to reveal the hypocrisy of sex roles and marital institutions. However, his critique, as already evidenced for Gli arcangeli remained ambiguous.

The issue of lack of power is addressed by early female characters in the way they confront their situation and organize their plan

of attack or defense. Yet, their mode of reaction is not specific to women: the mold of the male balordo still conditions their style of action even if their circumstances are different and for the moment restricted to the private sphere. Like the male naive/shrewd characters, the female equivalents exploit the duplicity of language making use of comic structures from the varietà, they too set up paradoxes usually overlooked by common-sense and unwittingly reveal the absurdity of dominant logical constructions. The widow of Gli imbianchini non hanno ricordi, for example, reveals her accommodating attitude toward her late-husband's wish to buy a whorehouse for the purpose of studying, first hand, the polygamous customs of oriental societies:

Vedova - Proprio così...per fortuna col fatto della nuova legge c'era in giro un'aria di liquidazione a prezzi familiari che non vi dico, e così ho trovato da comprarla anche a rate. L'unico guaio è che quelle sciagurate hanno finito per innamorarsi del mio Giorgio, e allora addio tranquillità domestica...c'è voluto proprio che morisse perché tornassero a far giudizio...a rimettersi a lavorare come si deve...sì a lavorare come facevano prima, mica posso mantenerle gratis... (Teatro comico, p. 65).

The whorehouse bought on monthly payments at "family budget" prices (owing to the Legge Merlin that closed the state licensed houses of prostitution); the prostitutes who reverse their role from dispensers of sex to subjects of romantic love; and finally, the widow's ultimatum to them to start "work" again combine to form a paradoxical and absurd environment. In it the exploitation of women is the mainstay, yet it is a woman who is an accomplice

to it and detachedly recounts the story.

Similarly, in I tre bravi Fo explores the situation of women and satirizes sex roles utilizing a plot that was very popular in 19th century farces. The story consists of the misadventures of three strongmen for hire whose cowardice is revealed by the tricks set up by their prospective employer. To the traditional structure Fo added the subplot of the three daughters of the castle owner who are kept prisoners of their strict father. Like the other farces sustained by marginal types, this one opens with a chorus of the oppressed:

Siam tre sorelle anemiche, linfatiche ma nubil
per via che non sappiam cos'è l'amor.
Siam figlie plurigeniche di un padre univedovo
che fa per lucro il bachicultor.
Quanti sospiri ci sfuggono dall'esofago
per i singhiozzi abbiam la raucedine
che prigioniere noi siam dentro questo maniero
lungi dal mondo pagano, mondano e leggero
(Teatro comico, p. 75).

Like the chorus of the streetsweepers in L'uomo nudo e l'uomo in frac, this song also targets 19th century Italian operatic language. The appropriate genteel beginnings of "sospiri" and "singhiozzi" are completed with the most prosaic and unladylike terms of "esofago" and "raucedine" in a grotesque combination.

Even though one of the three sisters plays the role of the naive/shrewd character, her modus operandi is not so different from her male counterparts. She exploits double meanings, awakens dormant metaphors and sets up situations that aid the deconstruction of mechanisms of the farce and of society (Teatro

comico, pp. 75-95).

The female character operates in modes similar to the above also in the comedies. At times she is a co-protagonist - as with La Bionda of Gli arcangeli - at other times she has the exclusive lead - as Enea, the woman undertaker of Settimo: ruba a po' meno.

Meldolesi links the increased importance of female characters in the plays to the switch in setting from countryside and provincial town to the city, the center of the economic boom. There, in the exploratory journeys made by the naive/shrewd male characters of the complex structures, appears his female counterpart: la balorda. Meldolesi writes:

I balordi fanno coppia come in tutte le compagnie, ma qui di più...la coppia testimone, nel teatro di Fo, si traveste di continuo, è la coppia di vita, la coppia di Maria e Gesù, la coppia dei genitori del P.C.I., la maschera è unica sempre (Meldolesi, p. 97).

This assessment is valid for the works until 1978. When Franca Rame starts co-authoring the plays, one can see that "the mask" of the female balorda begins to acquire the specific traits of the experience of women - thus breaking the unity to which he alluded.

Whether in the role of protagonist or co-protagonist, the women of Fo's plays, even when they have moved to the city and joined the urban balordo, maintain many traits exhibited in the farces: they are still full of initiative, outspoken, architects and victims of deceit. However, their ways of operating, even when they have exceeded the sphere of private relations, are not

different from those of their male counterparts.

Like Il Lungo, Enea of Settimo: ruba un po' meno²² is the victim of her colleagues' pranks. Her belief in communications with the dead prompts her co-workers to stage a trick whereby she "hears" from the dead the news that the cemetery has been bought by construction speculators who will install a cadaveradotto. With this latest feat of modern technology the corpses will be propelled eighteen miles outside of the city and the old cemetery will make way for a skyscraper. As the absurdities of life characteristically overtake the wildest flights of imagination it turns out that the prank foreshadowed a real development, thus Enea, as the one "who knows", is whirled into the corrupt world of construction magnates and mental institutions by forces beyond her control. Enea finds herself in many situations that were experienced by her predecessor Il Lungo: just as he was mistaken for a politician by merely wearing the clothes of one, so Enea is mistaken for a prostitute by simply trying on the gaudy attire of a passing streetwalker.

The fact that she is a woman only adds a quantitative benefit for satire: in her adventures she can also expose the oppressive attitudes of men toward women; but qualitatively her experience of being a woman does not make any difference.

Even the strong female characters of Isabella do not address autonomously the specific experience of women. The queen reveals some of the idiosyncrasies of sexual roles: she is a domineering person who must put on an image of submission to her husband for

public consumption (Mazzotta I, pp. 291-94). Yet her main function in the play is to portray a more enlightened approach to science and technology than Philip I. She exposes his propaganda against the Arabs and the Jews as obscurantism for the purpose of expropriating their riches and financing wars that would allow him to pay his debts. The approach of Isabella is a more rational one, she has a shrewd sense of the financial net in which the feudal class is entrapped and is willing to ally with the emerging mercantile class in order to escape it. As for Giovanna La Pazza, her role is that of a bearer of truth, one that the authorities can tolerate because there is a guarantee that the "sane" will interpret the truths she utters as the distorted products of a sick mind. Furthermore, in her class position she is safe from persecution. Giovanna La Pazza undoubtedly served as a model for *il Matto* of L'anarchico, the gender difference was easily overcome by the fact that Giovanna did not act in a way that specifically addressed the condition of women. By contrast, Franca Rame's later interpretation of a "mad" prostitute in Tutta casa, letto e chiesa connected the question of a different logic to that of a different living condition and experience.

Moving to the women of the period of militant plays, the characters can be divided into two main categories: the first group includes the direct testimony of women utilized by Fo in reinterpreted "biographical" monologues especially used in the messe da campo, the second grouping includes the descendants of the naive/shrewd characters (female version) now charged with the

task of delivering counterinformation.

The characters of the first category are an important development, as they express Fo's increased reliance on knowledge generated by direct experience and can be seen as predecessors to Franca Rame's later production. For example, in the messa da campo the couple did in Brescia after the bombings of the neo-fascists, a woman character based on a real woman's experience, Mamma Togni, made her first appearance (Binni, p. 106-14). She had been a partisan in the Resistenza, lost both husband and a son to the fascists, and was known for her determination to continue fighting against them, at a time when the government and some sectors of public opinion were giving them a platform.

The outstanding characteristic of Mamma Togni was her courage, which expressed a consistent rebellion, regardless of age, against a lifetime of exploitation and repression.

The episode starts with Mamma Togni snatching the microphone from a speaker of the M.S.I. who is addressing the people in the square. Among those present there were many former partisans. Thus she addresses them:

Perchè se voi avete il fegato e il cuore di semolino bollito...parlo a voi uomini e donne di Montù Beccaria, io vi dico, che non ci sto a farmi insultare el meo fio che l'hanno ammazzato proprio come se fosse l'altro ieri e mio marito che nel '23 a bastonate gli stessi fascisti gli hanno fatto vomitare i polmoni (Binni, p. 109).

During her subsequent trial, in her cross-examination, she refused to take advantage of the "easy outs" patronizingly set up by the judge. She assured the court that she had not passed by the

square just by chance, rather, she had gone there intentionally and against the advice of her "legalitarian" comrades. Also, the blow she inflicted to the neo-fascist speaker with the microphone was hardly an accident:

No, no che fortuito, gliel'ho dato proprio giusto di volontà, che ce l'avrei dato volentieri anche in testa se viene ancora 'sto maiale di fascista. E il giudice "Ma la prego non si esprima così...capisco che lei è sconvolta..." (Binni, p. 112).

As the monologue continues she proudly recounts her work as the most experienced nurse of her partisan formation, all the escapes from fascist encirclement and finally the death of her son with her subsequent "adoption" of all other young partisans. This latter gesture had already been done by mothers portrayed by Gorki and Brecht in their respective novel and play Mother in the context of the fight against the Czar. But in Fo's monologue the stress on using speech patterns and modes typical of old mothers makes the action seem ever more vivid and real.

Another point of reference for this Mamma Togni is the Madonna-under-the-cross episode of Mistero Buffo. In both cases the invectives address concrete issues of the motherly condition, but in the latter character, the mater dolorosa is also herself immersed in a historical process.

In Mamma Togni's reconstruction of the trial, the grotesque was used best to express women's refusal to act within models assigned to them by men: thus her use of "unladylike" language and her "unfeminine" inclination toward violence against the oppressor are transgressions sustaining the comic. Similarly in Fedayn, another

spettacolo d'intervento (Mazzotta II, pp. 336-39), the testimony of an Arab woman, who is a liberation fighter, reaches the highest point of the grotesque when she describes her marriage ceremony and celebrations. These required that the wife show her submission by letting the husband step on her foot. The protagonist, however, had different plans:

...Io mi scansavo abbastanza bene, ma lui ha barato, mi ha dato uno spintone e poi, trach una pestata. E allora io, patatrach! Gli ho restituito un pestone a mia volta, che quasi resta senza fiato. Tutti gli invitati sono scoppiati a ridere, ma i parenti suoi no. Non ridevano affatto. "Beh, si vede che non sono spiritosi!" ho pensato io a non ci ho fatto caso (Mazzotta II, p. 337).

In Fo's reinterpretation of her testimony one can see emerging the familiar pattern of the naive's perception of reality ('...Beh, si vede che non sono spiritosi!'), a trust that the spectators are trained to see contradicted by later developments of the situation. The grotesque element, however, becomes more subdued as the Arab woman recounts a later episode from her life. After becoming a communist fighter, she was entrusted with a mission to eliminate a local chief of police who was responsible for increased repression in her district. She was to use the same technique that Judith used on Olophernes, in the biblical story. The preliminary phases of her planned seduction are not narrated with great reliance on the grotesque: although the paradox is presented of the "male hunter" being in reality the "hunted", this role reversal does not cause great hilarity (Mazzotta II, pp. 338-339). The only instance of the grotesque connected with carnivalesque reversal is expressed when she describes the last

phase of her mission:

Ho preso un cuscino, ho affondato la pistola nell'ovatta, sono andata al letto dove dormiva il capitano e gli ho sparato in testa, senza neanche tremare, come se gli portassi il caffè "Quanto zucchero?" (Mazzotta II, p. 339).

The grotesque here is created by the accostamento of an activity which is not usual to women - killing - and a traditionally servile female action, the proverbial "making the coffee". Yet when the oppressed herself is the one who consciously sets up the paradoxes, some of the "carefree" comic effects of carnivalesque reversals are lost in a favor of a more tragic dimension.

Like their male counterparts, the female naive/shrewd characters are also entrusted with the dissemination of counterinformation, especially in the farces. Greater attention is paid to women's objective place in society which oftentimes puts them in an antagonistic position to economic and political power. For example, housewives as "budget managers" of working class families are the ones who directly feel the consequences of the P.C.I.'s politics of historic compromise, which allowed those in control of the economy to raise prices while not increasing wages. Thus, Antonia, the protagonist of Non si paga, non si paga finds herself participating in the self reduction movement and hiding it from her husband, a "legalitarian" P.C.I. member. By the end of the play, however, even he is forced to change his views because of the paradoxical situation. In the course of the struggle he is also forced to recognize his male chauvinism and attempt to

correct it (Nepoti, pp. 106-110). Unlike the Arab woman, especially as portrayed in the last phase, Antonia is not particularly a "conscious" fighter. She still retains a great deal of the candor of the traditional naive/shrewd characters and thus the grotesque situations she unwittingly causes have more of a "carnavalesque" connotation to them.

The Antonia of Tutti uniti is perhaps the female character that drew the greatest amount of criticism as a portrait of a "politicized" woman. She is the etourdie who becomes involved in the activities of the Italian Socialist Party from 1911 to 1922 via her relationship with a socialist, Norberto il Sassofono, the man she fell in love with and later married (Mazzotta II, p. 29-76). The play is divided in tableaux illustrating major episodes of the class struggle of that period: the Lybian war, intervention in World War I, the occupation of the factories. As expected of her role, Antonia is the catalytic agent for the release of counterinformation concerning the history of those years, and particularly for the exposure of the class-collaborationist role played by the main currents of the Socialist Party. The controversy centers exactly around her catalytic role: Paolo Puppa asserted in his critique, that there was no character development that could justify her change from naive police informer to socialist militant of the revolutionary wing (Binni, pp. 32-49). In a sense then, she was a catalyst in its original meaning: she made her surroundings change without changing herself. Fo replied to his criticisms that Antonia was

not a naturalist character but a "type" - the etourdie - and thus she need not follow traditional routes of character development. He did not portray her from a condescending male point of view as the "superficial and vain" chatterbox who is swept by love into the revolutionary movement. Rather her stereotypical "gender" traits were part of the etourdie's arsenal that made the situations explode, at the beginning unconsciously and later, through acquired consciousness, by plan (Binni, p. 43).

In the year 1975 the issue of the specific forms of oppression of women came loudly to the fore in that particular segment of the revolutionary movement Fo and Rame most often addressed. In fact, after years of internal struggle and rumbling against the male oriented structures and hierarchies still existing in revolutionary organizations, the women of Lotta continua at a convention held in Rimini took steps to form separate organizations. These newly formed groups would specifically address the problems of women while trying to create forms of struggle and of cooperation that best reflected women's experiences. This development did not remain an isolated one: in fact, following suit, in most organizations of the revolutionary left, the women took up the practice of dual membership (in the traditional mixed organizations and in specifically feminist ones).

Fo's and Rame's theater felt the effects of this move, especially at a time when their own plays were increasingly relying on "knowledge" generated by direct experience. Thus Franca Rame began co-authoring some of the plays, especially those in which women's issues were prominent.

In an interview, Franca Rame related her belabored relationship to writing. For many years she relied on and "tormented" Dario Fo to produce female characters that represented in a more accurate manner women's specific experiences. In spite of Fo's attempts, such characters failed to come into being, and spurred by frustration and the necessity to forge links with the feminist movement, by 1977 she started to co-author some of the plays.²³ Until the late seventies Franca Rame had been a very important member of the theater collective, but had not directly written the dramatic texts. She was the main actress and she also gave active political direction to the collective. In fact, she was responsible for keeping ties with organizations and was the founder and main force behind Soccorso Rosso Militante, an organization set up to aid political prisoners. As far as the creation of the plays themselves, Fo had always emphasized Rame's theatrical acumen, a result of her lifelong experience in the theater, and found her criticisms and suggestions indispensable in the different phases of production.²⁴

After her move to co-author the plays one can observe a shift in the female characters. Increasingly they bring on the stage the specificity of women's experience, a more complex approach to the

question of power and an increased role of the tragic, resulting in some modifications of the grotesque.

These developments coincided also with a new phase in the revolutionary movement: as some forces were moving more resolutely towards the formation of an armed political party, others started to re-evaluate former simplistic and utopian analyses. In this latter grouping, also given the pressures of the women's movement, a whole new discourse began to circulate on the "private" and the "political". The ideas of the French "nouveaux philosophes", especially Foucault's contributions on the issues of power and knowledge, also found a receptive audience among this segment, as testified by their impact on the rekindled revolutionary movement among the youth, especially strong in Bologna and in Rome.

In this climate, full of ferment and of openings to non-strictly Marxist class analyses, Franca Rame co-authored her first important work Tutta casa letto e chiesa.²⁵ This work was preceded by a play titled Parliamo di donne which had encountered serious criticism by the feminist movement because while it put on stage a number of women's situations, it did not address them from a specifically feminist viewpoint (Valentini, pp. 173-74). By contrast Tutta casa letto e chiesa, especially in its second edition,²⁶ was a gallery of women's experiences carried out by etourdies, conscious feminists and tragic characters like Medea and Ulrike Meinhoff. The work portrayed the experiences of women belonging to different classes: from the factory worker of "Il risveglio" to the middle class housewife of

"Una donna sola"; from the prostitute of "Monologo di una puttana in manicomio" to the peasant mother of "Michele lu Lanzone". Some critics have defined the show as a "Mistero Buffo al femminile" but the comparison has only a limited validity. As Mistero buffo the play is acted by only one performer, with a few props, and it too consists of an alternation of multivoiced monologues bound together by the running commentary of Franca Rame. However, unlike Fo's modern day giullare who recounts the story in third person, the fact that Franca Rame is a woman storyteller makes a difference. Indeed, it is harder to separate the narrator from the subject that is being narrated, as both partake of the same experience of oppression. The main difference from the previous work can be found in the texture of the grotesque, in the increased importance of the overt tragic element as experienced by the women who are conscious of their specific condition and are fighting to change it.

As observed in the "direct testimony" characters of the militant plays, the grotesque, with its carnivalesque emphasis on role reversals, dominates the parts dealing with the transgressions of traditional women's roles. "Il mondo alla rovescia" challenges the subordinate positions that have been imposed on women. Thus carnivalesque paradoxes govern the experiences of the solitary middle class housewife of "Una donna sola". The coexistence of naive and shrewd features that characterized the previous types becomes rather the progression from lack of consciousness to acquisition of consciousness of

their oppression in the female characters. This process is in turn linked to their discovery of the deception of male-created myths about women's roles and results, finally, in rebellion against them.

The roles intended for the "donna sola" are those of faithful wife, content homemaker surrounded by the comforts of modern technology, nurturing caretaker and dedicated mother. Yet her marriage is loveless--shaped by her husband's supremacy; the gadgets of modern life are alienating and preclude communication; her "feminine" sensitivity must be directed to the care of an invalid sex maniacal brother-in-law; and even her baby makes only demands without being able to communicate with her. In this completely isolated condition she turns to her neighbor, who is unseen and unheard on the stage, to confide and recount her disillusionment and her frustrating attempts at adaptation or transgression. Finally as the situations increasingly crowd in on her, leaving no space for her existence, she resorts to violence, shooting a peeping tom, disposing of her maniacal brother-in-law and waiting, rifle in hand, for her husband (Tutta casa, pp. 17-36).

The alternation between conscious and non-conscious in the "donna tutta sola" left a great amount of space for a type of grotesqueness similar to that unleashed by the naive/shrewd type. With "La Medea" the story is different. She is perhaps the character that has reached the highest degree of consciousness of her status as woman and she is the one least prepared to

compromise. Consequently, her mode of the grotesque greatly departs from the traditional "amusing" carnivalesque role reversals, even while she points to the injustice and irrationality of gender roles and expectations.]

"La Medea" is the reinvention of the Greek myth from a woman's point of view. Like many of Fo's villains from Poer Nano, Medea has been viewed as a wicked cruel creature, the spiteful assassin of her own children. The monologue, a multivoiced one, is delivered in an invented dialect of the Center-south regions of Italy. It starts with a Greek-like chorus of women trying to calm down Medea who has just learned that Jason is about to marry a younger woman. They say:

Accorre! Accorrite! Aiuta! Medea rinchiusa s'è derentro la sua casa, colli so dua figlioli. Alte grida becera come impazzuta!...Tutta è stravolta dalla gelusia, che non si capacita che l'uomo suo Giasone, con donna più giovane s'abbia accasare. Non intende raggione di sua casa sortire (vole) e li figliuoli abbandonare (Tutta casa, p. 101).

As she inveighs against men who use and discard women at will, unmindful of the sacrifices they have made for them, the chorus replies that it is a law of nature:

No è natura, è il naturale: l'omo dura più a lungo a invecchiare...lui l'omo col tempo staggiona, noi si appassisce. Noi femmene si gonfia...si avvizzisce...lui l'omo matura e s'insavisce. Noi potere si perde e lui n'acquisisce. Questa è la legge dellu munnu... (Tutta casa, p. 105).

The juxtaposition between what happens to men and women in old age is the fruit of a direct experience of the women of the chorus, witness the insisting opposition between "lui l'omo" and

"noi si". The "direct experience" vantage point delivers a more tragic vision than that of a distanced witness of paradox. For example, *Il Matto's* juxtaposition between the impact of old age on workers and on judges, grotesquely recounted by an "outside" presence yielded an "unproblematic" type of hilarity. The injustice could be corrected with the elimination of the present class order. The chorus speaks with a "Greek fatalistic" mode which later will be reproached by "Medea", but the issues they suggest, the evocation of a different body, make the paradox hardly a hilarious or unproblematic one.

The justification of Jason's behavior made by the chorus further inflames Medea:

Desgraziate che altro non siete! Ora m'avvedo bene donne mie, che la migliore penzata che l'omo ha fatto a vantaggio soio è d'averve bene allevate alla soia dottrina...voialtre ne ripetete la lezione e ve fate contente, chinate state nun ve ribellate (Tutta casa, p. 105).

Having taken stock of the insidious nature of false consciousness, Medea will continue in her rebellion. The tragic paradox is that in order to undo her oppression she must sacrifice an important element of her own identity - her children:

Necessità e che 'sti figlioli a mia, abbino a morire, perche tu Giasone e le tue leggi infami, abbite a schiattare! Armete amiche mie 'sta mano mea, spigni Medea desperata lo ferro nella carne tenerella delli figli fanne sangu, dolce inzuccherato...E no tremare quando crideranno "Madre! Pietà! Pietà!" e fora dalla porta tutta la gente faranno crido: "Mostro e cagna scellerata! Madre for de natura e zozza!" Ed eo ne dirò chiagnendo: "Mori, mori! pe' fa nascere una donna nuova..Mori! Pe fa' nascere na donna nova!"... (Tutta casa, p. 110).

The question of power is addressed here in a way that is much more problematical than in previous works. In rebelling against her oppression, Medea, subject to her husband, must betray the trust her children have in her. Whatever little power she has left as mother must be distorted and made unnatural by her drastic act. Yet, there is no other way she can see open to make possible the birth of a new woman. Interestingly, the re-elaboration of Greek myth from a feminist point of view has been a common practice among feminist writers, the most recent works being Christa Wolfe's Cassandra and Marie Cardinal's "Clytemnestra" in La Passe Empiete. The suitability of these myths consists in their stark presentation of the question of power. As most leftist feminists, Rame does not see the end of women's oppression as a mere result of acquisition of power, as defined and structured by generations of males. A new paradigm must be created from within the experience of women. In the case of "Medea" even gender specific experiences such as motherhood must be challenged and re-established anew if a genuine new order is to be created.

In her introduction to the work, Rame had characterized it as a comic show, one that relied on laughter because for thousands of years women have cried, and crying (in the theater through tragedy and catharsis) immobilizes reason and action. The grotesque and the laughter it generates, she continued, drive into the brain the nails of reason (Tutta casa, pp. 12-13). This programmatic declaration, echoing Fo's usual theories, must be taken somewhat critically in relating it to the work itself. In the play, the

grotesque dominates, as in Fo's production, but it has acquired new features that link it more overtly to tragedy. The satire of those in power has given way to the presentation of dilemmas confronting those seeking to rebel and establish new paradigms. Thus the grotesque has acquired a greater articulation and a more problematic direction. This break in the continuity of Fo and Rame's work should be acknowledged as an enrichment, as an experimentation with different modalities, and as such should be presented to the audience, not just as a reiteration of the traditional modes and programmes of Fo's theater.

In Tutta casa letto e chiesa one can see a continuous reference to the traditional devices of Fo's laughter and critique - the farce, carnivalesque reversals, varietà. However, Fo's traditional forms of the grotesque are not always the appropriate instruments to shape the raw materials that are women's experience. In fact new ones are found, chief among which is a new brand of tragic grotesque. Farce and carnivalesque reversals successfully exposed the specific power structures of capitalism, "naive" characters were able to make the situations explode. When the subject matter of the plays becomes more complex and tortuous, when the full consciousness of the oppressed is required to make breakthroughs in ideological questions, the grotesque itself needs restructuring.

For example, in "Io Ulrike grido" (Tutta casa, pp. 143-50), a piece about the State's "suicide" of Ulrike Meinhoff, one can see a tension between the elements of a new type of grotesque and

the persistence of old modes, that sometimes constitute a weak spot in the work. In the piece, after defiantly identifying herself mocking the authoritarian style of state bureaucracies, Ulrike continues her monologue to counter, by means of her voice, the sensory deprivation of her cell. She sets up an extremely conscious paradox between the lack of color with which the State is punishing her and the excess of color in which capitalism forces those in the outside to live:

Che grottesco, a me togliete ogni colore e fuori il vostro mondo fradicio e grigio l'avete dipinto a tinte sgargianti, perché nessuno se ne accorga, e costringete a consumare tutto a colori. Avete colorato di rosso sgargiante gli sciroppi al lampone, il cancro non importa, di arancio brillante gli aperitivi...come pagliacci impazziti tingete perfino le vostre donne: rosa garanza sulle guance, azzurro pervinca e violetto sulle palpebre e rosso cinapro sulle labbra... (Tutta casa, pp. 144-45).

Then in order to defy the silence of her cell she proceeds to recreate the sounds of the factory, of the street on the outside world, grotesquely ending up thanking her jailors for depriving her of those mechanical, inhuman sounds. This new style of bitter juxtaposition, voiced in a highly subjective manner, is not carried through to the end of piece; in fact it clashes with the tone of the conclusion which still reflects Fo's traditional "didactic" and optimistic tendencies.

Ma non ci potete mai proibire di sgnignazzare di tanta vostra imbecillità, imbecillità classica di ogni assassino. Pesante come una montagna è la mia morte...Centomila e centomila braccia di donne l'hanno sollevata questa immensa montagna e addosso ve le faranno franare con una terribile risata (Tutta casa, p. 148).

The coexistence of elements of the old with elements of the new continues also in later plays and monologues co-authored by Rame and Fo. In Coppia Aperta,²⁷ especially in the segment "Coppia aperta, anzi spalancata" the farce is used to illustrate the various distorted routes man's power over women takes, even when L'uomo is a "comrade" invoking the end of the oppressive nuclear family. "La donna" is brought into the web of distortion against her will, but is the one who through it acquires greater consciousness of her position as a woman in society. She embodies a mixture of naivete and lucidity. As she recounts her story a posteriori, from the position of having acquired greater consciousness, her naivete is different from the original naive/shrewd characters of previous productions. Describing an outburst of the undirected rage that characterized her initial reactions to her husband's escapades, she says:

Donna-Avevo appena aperto una scatola di pomodori pelati...da 5 chili gliel'ho versata in testa...e gli ho calcato giù, trachete! il barattolo fino al mento. Pareva Lancillotto pronto per il torneo sponsorizzato dalla Cirio...Poi approfittando del suo momento d'imbarazzo gli ho infilato una mano nel tostapane acceso (Coppia aperta, p. 11).

Here the weapons used by La Donna seem carefully chosen to underline the change they undergo from instruments of imprisonment into the housewifely mold to weapons of rebellion. The Kitchen, woman's domain by the force of tradition, has become an impregnable battlefield in which men cannot but lose.

Later, Rame will utilize a traditional grotesque accostamento to define L'uomo's conception of the open

marriage:

Donna-Eh sÌ, bisogna dire che la coppia aperta ha i suoi svantaggi. Prima regola perché la coppia aperta funzioni deve essere aperta da una parte sola: quella del marito! Perché se è aperta da tutte e due le parti c'è corrente d'aria (Coppia aperta, p. 14).

A feminist framework governs the choice of the comparison, unlike other shrewd/naive types.

In the last segment of Coppia Aperta, "Lo stupro", Rame returns to the tragico-grotesque mode. The monologue is the recounting of a gang rape in a van, as experienced by the victim (Coppia aperta, pp. 29-31). There are no props; the actress must create the environment and the scene with her words. Her inability to move or scream is counterbalanced by the lucidity with which she chronicles the men's strategically coordinated movements. The lack of voice is compensated by the sound of a radio (switched on to cover her possible screams) which broadcasts romantic pop songs that ironically highlight her condition. No tearful or emotional language is used to recount the experience, a glacial objectivity replays the different phases of man's most extreme effort to assure woman's submission.

Another monologue, La madre, written exclusively by Rame (Riverside Studio Workshops, pp. i-xvii), deals with the dilemma of a "progressive" mother whose son has been arrested and jailed as a new member of the Red Brigades. In contrast with Gorki and Brecht's 'mothers', joining her son's movement is problematic for the mother in this contemporary version. She must confront the State from a position of social isolation and frustration as the

State and the people stigmatize her as the mother of a "terrorist". By the end even the role of mother undergoes a redefining reconsideration. At the beginning of the monologue, she makes a plea to the audience to use their imagination, to picture themselves in her position (a call that Brecht would have clearly abhorred). Her situation is that of a mother who has just learned from the news that her son has been apprehended by the police in a shootout with the Red Brigades members. She then proceeds to retrace all the different stages in the raising of her child in order to discover where she, as a "mother", could have gone wrong. Relying on the technique of the grotesque she recalls all the precautions she took while raising her child, to protect him from developing violent tendencies. Taking the latest psychological theories as her Bible, she tells the audience:

Io al mio bambino ho lasciato rompere piatti e bicchieri...l'ho tenuto il meno possibile nella culla...l'ho lasciato giocare con la sua cacca quanto ha voluto...eppure è diventato un violento. E non si è accontentato di entrare a far parte di qualche banda di teppisti...incendiare qualche pullman...bastonare qualche passante...violentare qualche ragazza, così per sfogo...che tanto lì anche i giudici sono tanto comprensivi...no terrorista è diventato (La madre, p. iii).

While utilizing the framework of speech patterns of the zealous and plaintive mother, Franca Rame directs her polemic against the State that closes its eyes to fascists and rapists. Her next target are the former comrades who, during the times of repression, recant their beliefs and declare themselves for law and order, forgetting that at one time they were clamoring the

loudest against the State (La madre, p. iii-v). As though speaking to them, she points out that it was most likely not an ill-digested Lenin that led her son down the road to armed struggle, but the corruption and the unchangeable character of the government and of its economic sponsors. Performing a task of political counterinformation, she continues her narration with the description of the special jail for political prisoners where her son had been brought. There her remaining trust in the fairness of the state is further shaken as she experiences all the repressive measures aimed at the prisoners and their relatives. When finally she is able to see her son, he has obviously undergone severe beatings and perhaps torture (La madre, p. xiii).

Her specific experience as a mother emerges most strongly at the end as she recounts a dream. In past productions, dreams were dramatic structures favored by Fo to introduce ambiguity and polyvalence in the conclusion; here the nightmare emphasizes the dissolution of the role of mother as wanted by the State. In the dream she is holding her five-year-old son in court; he is on trial, and the judge appeals to her to convince him "to talk". If he wants to benefit from the special law for the pentiti²⁸ he must denounce his comrades, even give names he has heard without knowing anything about them. The judge is kind enough to forewarn her that the law works against newcomers like his son; rather it favors old-time hardened terrorists, who in "talking" can give long lists and details. Then in the dream a gust of dusty wind envelops the scene temporarily hiding the child. When she duly

recovers his tortured body (which could also have been that of her young drug-addicted neighbor) she tells the judge:

L'ho preso signor giudice! Ho catturato mio figlio! Ho fatto il mio dovere di cittadina democratica che ha fiducia nelle istituzioni! Oh, mi dispiace...L'ho stretto troppo! L'ho strangolato! E morto (La madre, p. xvii).

As in "Medea", the role of mother is put in relation to power. In "Medea" the backdrop was the general power of men over women, in La madre the power of the State as articulated also in sexual roles, including that of mother. In both cases, the formation of a new woman is handled in a complex manner, one in which resistance to oppression is not of itself sufficient. The political discourse aimed at exposing and demystifying the causes of oppression is blended with a subjective struggle, a process of tortuous consciousness-raising which is both liberating and problematic.

Particularly in La madre one feels the vacuum that has been left by the crisis in revolutionary theory and organization. This vacuum is the cause whereby one can denounce the instruments of oppression while the path to be followed in the struggle to overturn them remains unclear. Fo and Rame castigate those who in the period of crisis within the Marxist movement turn away from struggle and denounce their former beliefs; instead they stress the necessity to continue the struggles against oppression. Their seemingly pragmatist stance at a time of great ideological crisis in the Marxist movement, does not prevent their latest works, even

when dispersive and unfocused, from addressing the "dark times" in the international situation and in the revolutionary movement. By so doing, they are a contribution, in a political sense, towards grappling with both the problems of ideology and revolutionary practice.

In the co-authored plays the political element has been more thoroughly blended with complex ideological questions, which require the creation of new instruments of representation. Rame's brand of tragic grotesque is one of them. It can best express a different kind of knowledge, one gained by women's experience, one that exceeds simple reversals. In a sense, Franca Rame's contributions can be said to have enriched the notion of popular and political theater by introducing into them issues and modes of expression specific to the oppressed. In this case, this newly acquired knowledge concerns women - a sector whose needs must be addressed if the theater is to play a vital and militant role. However, this could also mean a first step toward the introduction of other sectors of knowledge that have not yet been touched by strictly Marxist instruments of criticism. Thus, one can hope that as Fo and Rame's theater continues to maintain its links with the struggles of the oppressed, it will be receptive to and enriched by other experiences and novel modes of expression.

If one were to essay a balance sheet of Fo's and Rame's contributions to Italian theater and to Marxist aesthetics one would have to make two seemingly converse statements. On the one hand, they can be said to have brought revolutionary politics into

the Italian stage; on the other, they can be said to have recovered the effectiveness of the specific modes of the theater when dealing with a subject matter mediated by Marxist analysis. Upon closer scrutiny, these two assessments are not mutually exclusive: rather they confirm the validity of the couple's practice of developing concomitant discourses on the theater and on society in their plays. Owing to their ability to address both of these levels, their theater has been successful in re-inventing suppressed theatrical forms of the popular tradition and in giving a theatrical space to the issues of the oppressed.

Chapter I

¹ In Italian Christmas folklore, "La Befana" is the equivalent of Santa Claus. She is a magical old lady who rides on a broomstick and delivers presents to children on the night of January 6th, the Epiphany. Until the recent past this figure has been accompanied by elaborate folkloric events, including in Tuscany "Le Befanate", in which entire towns would participate in dramatizations and parades featuring the Befana.

² All information here is gathered from the Fo archives located at Centro Teatrale La Comune, Viale Piave 11, Milano, Italy. The archives consist of systematic clippings from the press, from 1952 to the present, manuscripts of the dramatic texts, all editions of Fo and Rame's plays, all published critical works on them and unpublished university theses. In addition, audio-visual aids including video-tapes, records and tapes of performances are also collected in the archives. The newspaper and magazine clippings used here come from sources such as Gente, Qqqi, Tempo, Grazia, and Gioia.

³ Marina Cappa and Roberto Nepoti, Dario Fo (Rome: Gremese, 1982), p. 7.

⁴ Attilio Brilli, La satira: storia, tecniche e ideologie della rappresentazione (Bari: Dedalo Libri, 1979), p. 11.

⁵ Jessica Milner Davis, Farce (London: Methuen, 1978), p. 7.

⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and his world (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1968) pp. 24-34.

⁷ Dario Fo and Jacopo Fo, Poor nano (Milan: Ottaviani, 1976).

⁸ Emilia Artese, ed., Dario Fo parla di Dario Fo (Cosenza: Lerici, 1977), p. 8.

⁹ Claudio Meldolesi, Su un comico in rivolta: Dario Fo, il bufalo, il bambino (Rome: Bulzoni, 1978), p. 29.

¹⁰ Umberto Eco, Diario Minimo (Milan: Mondadori, 1963), pp. 85-96.

¹¹ The Holy Bible. Revised Standard Edition (New York:

Thomas Nelson and sons, 1952), p. 3.

12 It is important to take notice of the prominence of the body in fo's rand of humor because, as will be seen later on, it connects him to the popular tradition of the comic, especially to the "tradizione carnevalesca," as explored by Bakhtin.

13 According to Goffredo Fofi, in his introduction to Follie del varietà, the avanspettacolo, with its character of direct exchange between the actors and the spectators, served to soften the traumatic impact that an "authoritarian" form of communication such as cinematography had on popular audiences. In Stefano de Matteis, ed., Follie del varietà (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1980), p. 3.

14 Luciano Ramo, Storia del varietà (Milan: Garzanti, 1956), pp. 15-27.

15 Franca Angelini, Teatro italiano del 900 da Pirandello a Fo (Bari: Laterza, 1976), p. 120.

16 Sandro De Feo, In cerca di teatro (Milan: Longanesi, 1971), p. 153.

17 Goffredo Fofi, Il teatro di Totò (Milan: Più libri, 1976), p. 21.

18 Chiara Valentini, La storia di Dario Fo (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1977), pp. 39-51.

19 Another well known trio, I Gobbi, (composed of Vittorio Caprioli, Franca Valeri and Alberto Bonucci), engaged in a cabaret style, political rivista. Their productions dealt with the issue of fascism and the ambiguous character of the Italian government in the early fifties. Their approach tended to be rather intellectual when compared to the approach of Durano, Fo and Parenti. To highlight the difference between the two trios, Fo's group was called I Dritti.

20 Franco Quadri, introduction to Le commedie di Dario Fo (Turin: Einaudi, 1966), p. xv.

21 Article "Farsa", in Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani (Milan: Rizzoli, 1932).

22 Paolo Toschi, Le origini del teatro italiano (Turin: Einaudi, 1955), pp. 183-185.

23 Mario Apollonio, Storia del teatro italiano (Florence: Sansoni, 1958), Vol. 1, p. 128.

- 24 Renato Simoni, "Segue una brillantissima farsa, " Il Dramma, April 1948, pp. 119-124.
- 25 Franco Ferrari, unpublished thesis, Università degli Studi di Genova, 1974-5, pp. 92-93.
- 26 Eric Bentley, The Life of the Drama (New York: Atheneum, 1979), p. 241.
- 27 Cesare Segre, Teatro e romanzo (Turin: Einaudi, 1984), pp. 27-50.
- 28 Dario Fo, Teatro comico (Milan: Garzanti, 1962), p. 207-238.
- 29 Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, Il comico del discorso (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1977), p. 141.
- 30 Jaroslav Hasek, The Good Soldier Svejk trans. C. Parrott, (New York: T.Y. Crowell Co., 1973), p. 8.
- 31 Dario Fo Le commedie di Dario Fo ed. by F. Quadri (Turin: Einaudi, 1966), pp. 4-91.
- 32 Martin Esslin, The theatre of the Absurd (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), pp. xix-xx.
- 33 Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (New York: Grove Press, 1959).
- 34 Giovanni Boccaccio, Il Decamerone, L. Salinari, ed. (Bari: Laterza, 1966), p. 128.
- 35 The Farse Cavaiole were farces that originated in the Campania region in the sixteenth century. The target of ridicule were the inhabitants of Cava dei Tirreni, especially in their attempts to "better" themselves through instruction and industry. The author Braca is the best known playwright of the genre: his farces differ greatly from those of the tradizione erudita in the concreteness and wealth of detail with which they express the day-to-day concerns of the people. The best collection of these farces is found in Achille Mango ed. Farse Cavaiole (Rome: Bulzoni, 1973).
- 36 Sem Benelli, La cena delle beffe (Milan: Treves, 1910).
- 37 Augusto Frassinetti, Misteri dei Ministeri (Parma: Guanda, 1952).
- 38 According to Olbrecht-Tyteca, dormant metaphors are those expressions that having originated as metaphores have lost

their status of metaphor due to common and often inappropriate use. They are generally understood only as normal, everyday linguistic expressions. The term "awakened metaphors" then, implies a paradoxical usage of the expression that reveals its metaphorical essence. She gives the following one line example to illustrate a possible comic outcome of an awakened metaphor: "un tale che ha visitato un'isola deserta in cui mai mano d'uomo aveva messo piede" (Olbrecht-Tyteca, p. 284).

Chapter II

¹ In 1968 Dario Fo and Franca Rame dissolved their theater company and founded "L'Associazione Nuova Scena" whose programme states: "Ci poniamo al servizio delle forze rivoluzionarie non per riformare lo Stato borghese, ma per favorire la crescita di un reale processo rivoluzionario che porti al potere la classe operaia." They remained in this association until 1970. During this period they worked closely with the A.R.C.I., the P.C.I. sponsored cultural association, and they sought alternative theatrical spaces in the case del popolo. An extensive treatment of this period and of Fo-Rame disagreements with the P.C.I., which eventually led them to leave Nuova Scena, is found in Lanfranco Binni, Attento te!...Teatro politico di Dario Fo (Verona: Bertani, 1975), pp. 225-262.

² In October 1970, Fo, Rame and other comrades founded the "Collettivo Teatrale La Comune" whose declared aim was not only to constitute an alternative to the bourgeois theatrical circuit but also to that of the P.C.I. Again an extensive treatment of this period can be found in Binni, pp. 262-374.

³ Antonio Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, selections edited by Hoare and Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), pp. 55-104.

⁴ The Italian term giullare corresponds to the French jongler and refers to those traveling artists who in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance used to perform in the public square or in the courts. Many debates have arisen among scholars, critics, and other experts as to the modes employed by these artists, their relationship to popular audiences, their degree of attrition with the institutional forms of art. Part of the problem in resolving these debates is the fact that there is very little written material left by these artists, (who were more in the oral tradition) and even when there are descriptions of them as in Ludovico Muratori, it is very difficult to reconstruct their function and their style. Cesare Molinari includes under the term giulleria: "la varia genia dei cantastorie, dei canterini, dei giocolieri, dei saltimbanchi, dei buffoni, dei matti." He claims that:

La giulleria rappresenta il momento in cui il teatro professionistico riassumeva in se 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...
They performed, then, all those functions that today are carried out by the mass media (see Cesare Molinari, "Il detto dei villani e Matazone di Calignano," in Biblioteca Teatrale n. 4, 1972, pp. 1-19).

In explaining a piece from Mistero Buffo, the birth of the giullare, Dario Fo gives his perspective on the issue:

Sono intrinsecamente satiriche tutte le forme in cui si esprime il giullare, per il fatto stesso che egli, lo dice il Muratori, nasce dal popolo e dal popolo prende la rabbia per ridarla ancora al popolo, mediata dal grottesco, dalla ragione, perché il popolo prenda coscienza della propria condizione. La nascita del giullare la racconto in Mistero Buffo. È una giullarata del Duecento che ho trovato in una biblioteca di Ragusa, in siciliano. Il villano è schiacciato dalla protervia del padrone, il quale vuole portargli via la terra che ha reso fertile con anni di sudore e offeso dalla sua resistenza lo punisce violentandogli la moglie davanti ai figli; un oltraggio che per il villano è gravissimo, lo colpisce nei legami ch'egli ritiene sacri, è un oltraggio che nessuna forma di vendetta può lavare. Quel villano troverà la salvezza in una reazione che nemmeno lui avrebbe mai immaginato, nel diventare giullare, appunto, per aprire gli occhi al popolo, insegnandogli a capire i sorprusi del padrone (in Artese, pp. 51-53).

To reiterate the conflictual function of the giullare Fo often mentions the Edict of Toledo of 1466, banning the giullari.

⁵ Dario Fo, "Isabella, tre caravelle, e un cacciaballe" Compagni senza censura (Milan: Mazzotta, vol.2 1970), pp. 7-8.

⁶ Dario Fo Le commedie di Dario Fo ed. Quadri (Turin: Einaudi, 1966), pp. 211-322.

⁷ Suzanne Cowan, "The militant theatre of Dario Fo" Diss. University of Minnesota 1977, pp. 180-5.

⁸ Pier Paolo Pasolini, La poesia popolare italiana (Milan: Garzanti, 1960).

⁹ "Polyphonic" here is borrowed from Bakhtin's terminology concerning the novel. In defining the novel Bakhtin says:

The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages, and diversity of individual voices) artistically organized. 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 (from The Dialogic Imagination (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, pp. 262-3).

This description of the novel fits Fo's discourse, particularly in the monologues.

10 Emblematic of the struggle between the Serious and the Comic in Medieval times is Umberto Eco's Il nome della rosa. The plot itself, is based on a series of murders that take place in an abbey in 1327 and the investigative efforts of a Dominican friar Guglielmo di Baskerville and his assistant Adso. The dichotomy between seriousness and mirth is highlighted by the discovery that the murders are linked to a quest for Aristotle's second volume of poetics, the one on comedy. Jorge di Burgos, the blind librarian who is at the source of many of the crimes that have taken place in the abbey, is the perfect incarnation of what Bakhtin calls the "agelastic" mode, the obsessive banishment of all laughter. For a review of Eco's book linking it to the Medieval polarity between the Comic and the Serious see: Gian Paolo Biasin, "World Literature Today" review of Umberto Eco's Il nome della rosa (Univ. of Oklahoma, summer 1981), Vol. 55, n.3, pp. 449-50.

11 Enciclopedia Garzanti dello spettacolo (Milano: Garzanti, 1976), p. 421.

12 Again the term is borrowed from Bakhtin, in particular reference to the novel. Michael Holquist's explanation of the term can best render its meaning:

"Dialogism is the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia. Everything means, is understood, as part of a greater whole - there is constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others" (in glossary to Bakhtin's The Dialogic Imagination p. 426).

13 Sylvie Debevec Henning "La Forme In-formante: a reconsideration of the Grotesque" Mosaic vol. XIV/4, Fall 1981, p. 107.

14 Giuseppe Cocchiara, Il mondo alla rovescia (Turin: Boringhieri, 1963).

15 Bent Holm, Dem omvendte verden Dario Fo af den Folkelige Fantasi (Grasten: Drama, 1980).

16 Alfredo Civita, Teorie del comico (Milan: Unicopli, 1984).

17 Luigi Pirandello, On Humour (Chapel Hill: Univ. of N. Carolina Press, 1967).

18 W. Moewlyn Merchant, Comedy (London: The critical idiom, Methuen, 1962).

19 Barnard Dort, "Fo un acteur epique" in Travail theatral (Lucerne), n.15, 1974, pp. 113-7.

20 "Culture populaire et travail militant: Dario Fo e le collectif 'La Comune'" in Cahiers du cinema Paris, no. 250, 1974, pp. 11-25.

21 Michele Straniero, I giullari e Fo (Rome, Lato Side, 1978).

22 Investigations conducted by the left revealed that the bombing of the Banco Nazionale dell'Agricoltura was not an isolated instance but part of a program engineered and carried out by right wing elements and later blamed on the left. In fact, similar crimes had occurred previously but no one had uncovered the role played by different state organs such as the Armed Forces, secret services, paramilitary international organizations and the police.

With the investigation of the Pinelli case a whole picture emerged of sponsorship and protection of the right wing elements by certain sectors of the government and even C.I.A. involvement. The goal of the systematic campaign of violence and terror was to destabilize the country by creating a climate of tension and fear (hence the terms strategia della tensione and strage di stato), that would be blamed on the left and that would justify repression against it and an eventual seizure of all organs of State power by the armed forces.

Dozens of books give extensive documentation of this strategy, notably Camilla Cederna Pinelli: una finestra sulla strage (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1971) and Marco Sassano La politica della strage (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1972).

23 Nikolay Gogol, The theater of Nikolay Gogol (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980).

24 Piero Camporesi, La maschera di Bertoldo (Turin: Einaudi, 1976), pp. 6-30.

25 Paolo Toschi, Le origini del teatro italiano (Turin: Einaudi, 1955), pp. 287-293.

26 William Shakespeare, "King Lear" in The tragedies of

Shakespeare (New York: Random House, 1963), pp. 689-786.

27 Luigi Pirandello, Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore - Enrico IV (Milan: Mondadori, 1976), pp. 126-219.

Chapter III

¹ The struggles for self-reduction were wide-spread in Italy in the period 1974-1979. They arose as a result of the economic crisis and included mainly the squatters' building occupations, public transportation and utilities self-reduction. In some instances they included "la spesa proletaria", i.e. payment by women shoppers of an amount deemed fair for the groceries purchased as opposed to the prices charged by the stores.

² Dario Fo, La marijuana della mamma è la più bella (Verona: Bertani, 1976).

³ " Festivals dell'Unità " are fundraising events organized by the P.C.I. for their newspaper L'Unità. Typically they are organized in almost every town or city in the summertime and they include elements of popular entertainment as well as political addresses.

⁴ From a personal interview with Dario Fo held and taped in Milan on June 23, 1984.

⁵ Among the Italian "emergency laws" that have caused greatest indignation (including their condemnation by the European Parliament of Strasburg) is Article 90. This article restricts the civil rights of people suspected of "political terrorism": it assigns them to specially-built jails and it provides for continuous searches of both visitors and prisoners. According to the provisions of the emergency legislation those who are suspected of having committed crimes of "insurrection against the State" (including mere advocacy without proof of criminal action) can be held prisoner for a maximum of 12 years without trial. Under the auspices of this legislation, an estimated 3, 000-3, 500 citizens have been held captive, many with proven records of non-adherence to the concept and practice of the "armed party". Due to the harshness of the emergency legislation many Italian activists have been forced to seek political asylum in France and to carry out from there their struggle in support of the political prisoners. Both Dario Fo and Franca Rame have organized fundraising events and performances in support of the political prisoners and of the exiles. Many books have been written on the subject, especially by liberal defenders of civil rights (called "garantisti"), among which are Giorgio Bocca's Il caso 7 Aprile :Toni Negri e la grande inquisizione (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1980). The background materials used here are from the pamphlet Italy 1980-1 After Marx, Jail, (London: Red Notes, 1981).

⁶ Personal interview with Dario Fo, June 23, 1984.

⁷ Massimo Castri, Per un teatro politico (Turin: Einaudi, 1973), pp. 34-44.

⁸ David Caute, The Illusion (London: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 110-112.

⁹ Eugene Lunn, Marxism and Modernism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 10-33.

¹⁰ John Willet, Ed. and Trans., Brecht on Theater (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), pp. 179-208.

¹¹ Frederick Ewen, Bertolt Brecht - his Life, his Art, and his Times (New York: The Citadel Press, 1967), pp. 149-151.

¹² The Agit-Prop theater was aimed at producing agitation and propaganda about political issues that needed the immediate involvement of workers. It was used prevalently in the Soviet Union in the Twenties, in Germany during the years of the Weimar Republic and later in the U.S., especially in the Thirties.

¹³ Dario Fo and Franca Rame: theatre workshops at Riverside Studios, London (London: Red Notes, 1983), pp. 59-60.

¹⁴ Bertolt Brecht, Life of Galileo (collected plays, edited and translated by Manheim and Willet) (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), pp. 1-98.

¹⁵ Dario Fo, "Tutti uniti! Tutti insieme! Ma scusa quello non è il padrone?" in Compagni senza censura Vol.II, (Milan: Mazzotta, 1973), pp. 29-77.

¹⁶ Dario Fo, L'Opera dello sqhignazzo (Milan: F.R. La Comune, 1982).

¹⁷ John Gay, The Beggar's Opera ed. by C.F. Burgess, (New York: Crofts Classics, 1966).

¹⁸ Bertolt Brecht, The Threepenny Opera (New York: Grove Press, 1949), pp. 3-10.

¹⁹ Personal interview with Dario Fo, June 23, 1984.

²⁰ Antonio Attisani, Teatro come differenza (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978), p. 35.

²¹ In traditional Italian theater, there were also strong female characters who relied on intelligence in pursuing their goals. Mirandolina, the protagonist of Goldoni's La locandiera, belongs to this category. However strong the implicit condemnation of women's oppression, even these 'positive' models ended up reconciling themselves to "a woman's place" tradition. In fact, for example, Mirandolina, after having shown the foolishness of Il

Cavaliere di Riparatta's misogyny, with bourgeois common sense steps back into her class and gender lines by marrying Fabrizio. By doing so, she renounced the autonomy she enjoyed as a widow, and maintained the social equilibrium by marrying someone belonging to her own class.

²² Dario Fo "Settimo: ruba un po' meno" Le commedie di Dario Fo ed. by F. Quadri, (Turin: Einaudi, 1966), pp. 91-208.

²³ Franca Rame "Da Isabella a Parliamo di donne" Teatro politico di Dario Fo intro. by Jean Chesneaux, (Milan: Mazzotta, 1977) pp. 143-4.

²⁴ Personal interview with Dario Fo, June 23, 1984.

²⁵ Franca Rame and Dario Fo, Tutta casa letto e chiesa (Milan: La Comune, 1981).

²⁶ Franca Rame and Dario Fo, Tutta casa, letto, e chiesa (Milan: F.R. La Comune, 1981).

²⁷ Franca Rame and Dario Fo, Coppia aperta (Milan: F.R. La Comune, 1984).

²⁸ The laws on the pentiti are part of the "emergency legislation" initially applied to those suspected of belonging to the "armed party" and later extended to Mafia and Camorra suspects. According to its provisions, (which present some similarities with the practice of 'plea bargaining' widely carried out by U.S. courts) immunity or light penalties, regardless of crimes committed, is assured to those suspects who "repent" and give information about others in the organization. A great deal of scandal was caused by the immunities granted to the pentiti like Peci and Fioroni who confessed to a number of assassinations and yet received no jail sentence, while stiff penalties were often given to suspects against whom there was scarce evidence of wrongdoing.

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