Accidental Death of an Anarchist Study Guide

Accidental Death of an Anarchist by Dario Fo

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Dario Fo's *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (1970) responds to events unfolding in Italy in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Generally, it looks at police corruption and suspicions regarding the government's collusion in this corruption. More specifically, it addresses the actual death of an anarchist who was being held in police custody following the bombing of a Milan bank that killed sixteen people and wounded about ninety. The police asserted that the anarchist's death was a suicide, that the man threw himself from a fourth-floor window in despair at being found out for his crime. At the subsequent inquest, the presiding judge declared the death not a suicide but an accident. Most Italians believed that the death was the result of overly harsh interrogation techniques, if not a case of outright murder on the part of the interrogators.

Accidental Death of an Anarchist is mainly about police corruption, underscored by the play's focus on impersonation, infiltration, and double-talk. A fast-talking major character, the Maniac, infiltrates a police headquarters. Posing as an investigating judge, he tricks the policemen into contradicting themselves and admitting that they are part of a cover-up involving the death of an anarchist. In infiltrating police headquarters by misrepresenting himself (impersonation), the Maniac reminds audiences of how most political groups in Italy, particularly left-wing groups, were infiltrated by police agents who acted as informers. The Maniac's flip-flop of point of view and statement achieves much the same effect as his impersonations do. His confusing speechifying leads to the police contradicting themselves, so that the Maniac, in all of his deceptions and distortions, is a precise reflection of what the play is designed to expose.

Accidental Death of an Anarchist is one of Fo's most popular plays both within and outside Italy. It has played around the world over the years to millions of people, a popular choice of directors who want to point to corruption in their midst. Pluto Press (London) put out the first English version, translated by Gavin Richards. In 1992, Methuen published a fine set of volumes of Fo's plays, which included *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*.

Author Biography

Nationality 1: Italian

Birthdate: 1926

Dario Fo is one of Italy's most important and well-known literary figures, along with his partner and longtime collaborator, Franca Rame. He was born in San Giano, Italy, on March 24, 1926, the son of Felice (a railroad stationmaster) and Pina (Rota) Fo. Initially, Fo considered a career in architecture, but before he had quite finished this course of study, he discovered that he was far happier working in theatrical circles. By 1950, Fo had decided definitely on a career on the stage and began to compose plays prolifically. In June of 1954, Fo and Rame married; they have three children.

Running throughout Fo's career are certain constants. His plays are usually farcical with a satirical bite, and they tend to employ popular elements, such as slapstick. This said, there are also discernible stages in Fo's career. At first, he concentrated on creating comical farces and revues, some of which were broadcast on radio. Then, Fo's plays began to resemble more typical dramas, at least in the sense that they became less episodic and less strictly comical in effect. Later, Fo's greater engagement with Italian politics in his plays became evident. Indeed, by the time of *Morte accidentale di un anarchico* (*Accidental Death of an Anarchist*), Fo was so deep into Italian politics that he began gearing his plays toward working-class audiences instead of more typical theatergoers. He continued to attract people of all social strata to his plays, yet he began to reflect, theatrically, his sense that his life as an artist is best led in the service of those holding the least amount of social and political power in Italian society. *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* was first produced in Milan in December of 1970; it was staged on Broadway at the Belasco Theater in November 1984.

Fo is a highly influential figure in theatrical circles in and outside Italy. He has written hundreds of pieces across genres (songs, screenplays, plays) and media (stage, radio, film). His plays, which number more than forty, include *I sani da legare* (□A Madhouse for the Sane,□ 1954), which characterizes certain government officials as fascist sympathizers, and *Mistero buffo* (1969), a controversial improvisational play, based on the Gospels, that disparages both church and state. *L'Anomal bicefalo* (□Two-Headed Anomaly□), produced in Milan in 2003 but not published or translated into English, is a scathing satire of Italy's prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi. Fo has always been an actor in his own work; indeed, he is as well known an actor as he is a writer. He is as beloved and respected by some as he is detested and feared by others, such as those who disagree with him politically. He has even been arrested and put on trial for subversion, and he has been beaten up by rogue political foes, a fate also suffered by his collaborator, Franca Rame. Fo is, in short, a presence to contend with, an artist whose influence and genius are reflected in his having been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1997.

Plot Summary

Act 1, Scene 1

Accidental Death of an Anarchist opens in a room in a police station, where Inspector Bertozzo is interviewing the Maniac, reviewing his arrest record. He notes that the Maniac has been arrested many times for impersonation, the same reason for his arrest this time. The Maniac points out that although he has been arrested, he has never been convicted of a crime. He tells the inspector that he is insane, that he cannot be charged because he is mad. The inspector, incredulous, continues posing questions to the Maniac. The Maniac evades the inspector's questions and denies any real wrongdoing. For example, in response to the inspector's accusation that the Maniac has not only been impersonating a psychiatrist but also actually seeing patients and charging them substantial sums, the Maniac points out that all psychiatrists charge too much. The inspector replies that the specific charges are not the real issue; rather it is the question of impersonation. He points to a visiting card the Maniac has been distributing, which states that the Maniac is a psychiatrist. The Maniac quibbles over a point of punctuation, telling the inspector that, given the placement of a particular comma on the card, he cannot be said to be misrepresenting himself at all. Utterly frustrated, Inspector Bertozzo tells the Maniac that he can go.

The Maniac leaves the room, as does the inspector, for the latter is late to a meeting. The Maniac then pokes his head back into the room and, seeing that it is empty, enters and begins rifling through papers he sees on the inspector's desk. They are arrest sheets. He destroys whatever arrest sheets he feels deserve to be destroyed, leaving intact those he believes describe truly heinous crimes.

Next, the Maniac moves to the inspector's file cabinets. He is about to set fire to the whole lot of them, when he notices a dossier whose name he begins to read out loud, as follows: □Judge's Report on the Death of the . . .□; □Judge's Decision to Adjourn the Inquest of . . . .□ The Maniac's words would alert the audience to the play's major topic, the death of a suspected anarchist whom most persons in Italy believed was innocent of the crimes for which he was being interrogated when he fell to his death from a window at a police headquarters. The phone rings, and the Maniac answers. It is another police inspector, calling from the fourth floor. The Maniac's words make it clear that the audience is to recall the inspector who conducted the interview with the (real) anarchist who fell or was pushed from a fourth-floor window.

The Maniac's words also make it clear that this second inspector wishes to speak to Bertozzo because he has heard that a judge is coming to the station to ask questions about the anarchist's death. The Maniac pretends that Bertozzo is in the room and making rude comments about the fourth-floor inspector. He tells the inspector that Bertozzo is saying that he might as well accept the fact that his career is over. From the Maniac's side of the conversation, it is clear that the inspector is becoming incensed, highly insulted by what he believes is Inspector Bertozzo's rude and flippant reaction to

his concerns. When the Maniac hangs up, it occurs to him that he might impersonate the expected judge. He begins to practice characterizations of a judge.

At this point, Bertozzo reenters the room. He tells the Maniac to get out of the station and is surprised when the Maniac informs him that someone is looking for him to punch him in the face. Sure enough, the fourth-floor inspector arrives outside Bertozzo's door, and the audience sees an arm stretch out to punch Bertozzo in the face.

Act 1, Scene 2

The Maniac, a Constable, and the fourth-floor inspector, who is referred to as Sports Jacket, are in a room at the police station. The Maniac's behavior is mercurial. At one moment, he questions the inspector and Constable severely, as if he knows they are somehow responsible for the anarchist's death. This makes them very nervous. At other moments, however, he appears to be on their side, suggesting that while they might not have told the entire truth about the event, they are right to present themselves as innocent of any wrongdoing. Although they are somewhat befuddled, the two police officers trust in the judge's good intentions.

Then the Maniac, still acting as a judge, asks for the Superintendent to be called into the room. The Superintendent arrives, angry at the peremptory way in which he was summoned. Once he sees that a judge is present, he calms down. The Maniac begins questioning the Superintendent. He asks him to review the item of evidence that says that the anarchist fell from the window because he was seized by a raptus, a state of suicidal anxiety pursuant to extreme desperation. Sports Jacket and the Superintendent begin explaining the events that took place immediately before the anarchist's death, saying that while their line of interrogation and methods might have caused the anarchist's raptus, these methods had not been unreasonable. As the Maniac continues questioning the men, they begin to contradict themselves on many details, such as the precise time of the anarchist's raptus. The Maniac is finally able to declare that the men lied to the media, their superiors, and the original inquest judge. Completely flustered, the two men become even more helpless in the face of the Maniac's mad patter and questions. The act ends with the two policemen completely perplexed, singing an anarchist song in concert with the Maniac.

Act 2, Scene 1

The action begins with the same assembled characters. The Maniac is questioning the policemen about the anarchist's fall from the window. Was the anarchist leaning out for air? Considering the weather, why was the window open at all? Once again, there are discrepancies in what the policemen said at the inquest□that is, what is on record□and what they say to the Maniac. The Maniac is able to get them to begin changing their stories and contradicting themselves. Throughout, real facts and statements from the historical inquest and actual newspaper interviews are used.

A journalist, Maria Feletti, arrives at the station to interview the Superintendent about the anarchist's death. The policemen want to send her away, but the Maniac encourages them to allow her to ask questions. The men say that the Maniac must then leave, as his presence will only give her confidence; she must not know that a judge is interested in questioning them, too. The Maniac persuades them to let him stay, saying that he will impersonate a forensics expert. He wants to stay, he says, to help them manage the Journalist's questions. The Journalist's questions, like those of the Maniac, are peppered with facts and reports from the actual historical inquest and the real interviews with the Milan officials involved in the case. She focuses on discrepancies in the policemen's stories. First, she asks about the nature of the anarchist's fall. There were no broken bones in the body, she says. One expects broken arms and hands in a person who has fallen from a window, because the person would try to break his or her fall. The lack of broken bones suggests that the anarchist was already dead before he fell. The Maniac agrees with her, to the consternation of the assembled policemen.

Next, the Journalist asks the policemen about the mark that was discovered on the anarchist's neck. It was not consistent with the fall. Is this evidence of a blow to the back of the neck that killed the anarchist? She believes this might be so, because an ambulance had been called for the anarchist before he is said to have fallen. Was the ambulance summoned because he had been given a terrible blow? If he died from the punch, perhaps he was then thrown out the window to make his death look like an accident, she conjectures. At this point, the Maniac begins speaking of the flimsiness of the anarchist's alibi, as if to aid the policemen, yet his intention is instead to discourse on the plight of the working class. According to the Maniac, the anarchist's friends, who vouched for his presence at the time of the bombing, could not possibly remember accurately because they are old, used up from too much work, even malnourished and senile.

Bertozzo enters the room. He has with him a copy of the bomb that was set off in the bank in question. When Bertozzo catches sight of the Maniac, he is about to blurt out that the Maniac is not who he says he is, but the Superintendent and Sports Jacket prevent him from speaking. They believe he is going to say that the Maniac is a judge, which would be disastrous, given what they have told the Journalist. In fact, all Bertozzo knows is that the Maniac cannot be the forensics expert he is claiming to be, because Bertozzo is acquainted with the expert.

The Journalist begins talking about the bomb. Why was a second bomb found at the site of the bombing destroyed? Why was it not saved as evidence? If it had been saved, they would have a □signature□ of the bombers, she says. This suggests a cover-up on the part of the police. As she puts it, the anarchist and his group were a ragtag band of dreamers, incapable of planning any such event and certainly not equipped to make such sophisticated bombs. Bertozzo, to the dismay of the Superintendent, agrees. He says that the bomb most likely was made by paramilitary professionals. This idea leads the Journalist to present a common theory, namely, that the bombing was organized by fascists with police support, in order to discredit left-wing organizations and frighten the people into voting for the type of government that is highly supportive of police controls. The idea is that a frightened populace submits to strong, controlling leadership, willingly

giving up freedoms in return for perceived safety. As before, the Maniac pretends to be helping the policemen but instead leads them to contradict themselves.

The play ends both comically and seriously. Comically, the Maniac runs through a number of impersonations in the last moments of the play. Less comically, the Maniac speaks of scandal. He says that scandal does not necessarily bring about justice, that it does not inevitably end the careers of those involved in it. Rather, he says, it provides a brief outlet for public anger that then dissipates quickly, so that the status quo is reestablished. The play ends with the Maniac's announcement that he has recorded everything that has transpired and will send copies of his recordings to all media outlets and higher authorities.

Act 1, Scene 1, Part 1

Act 1, Scene 1, Part 1 Summary

The play begins in the middle of Bertozzo's increasingly desperate attempts to get the Maniac to make a legal statement - he (the Maniac) has been charged with illegally impersonating a psychiatrist, and Bertozzo is intent on getting him to confess. He confronts the Maniac with his arrest record, saying he's been charged a number of times for impersonating figures from a lawyer to a bishop to a university lecturer in psychology. The Maniac answers every accusation with a cheerful admission that yes, he has posed as everything Bertozzo suggests, explaining that he suffers from a mania for performing as someone else and adds that the fellow actors in his little life plays are real people who don't *know* they're actors. He also says he has every right to impersonate everyone he's ever impersonated, having spent a great deal of time in a lunatic asylum. While there, he says, he also carefully studied such subjects as law, religion and psychology. He then points out that he may have been arrested many times but he's never been convicted, and indicates that he understands why Bertozzo is so eager to have him make a statement (see "Quotes," p. 127). Bertozzo, intrigued in spite of himself, asks if the Maniac has ever impersonated a judge. The Maniac speaks at length of his desire to do exactly that, saying judges have the best job in the world - just as every other sort of worker is retiring, deteriorating, or dying, a judge is reaching the prime of his life and career (see "Quotes," p. 131). As Bertozzo becomes increasingly angry and frustrated, the Maniac reminds him that he (Bertozzo) is bound by law to treat him (a diagnosed madman) with respect, or he is subject to punishment. The Maniac also lectures Bertozzo on grammar, pointing out that the careful and specific placement of commas and other explanation marks legally protects him from criminal accusations of fraud. Bertozzo pleads with the Maniac to make a statement, offering to release him go if he does. In his turn, the Maniac pleads to be allowed to stay, saying life out in public is far too dangerous and eventually threatening to jump out the window if Bertozzo doesn't allow him to stay. Bertozzo shoves him out the door, without having made a statement, and then goes out himself to attend a meeting for which he's already late.

Act 1, Scene 1, Part 1 Analysis

This first section of the play is essentially exposition to lay the groundwork for what follows. The most important element of this exposition, for several reasons, is the portrayal of the Maniac, whose self-description as a kind of performance addict sets the "stage" (pun intended) for his increasingly bizarre series of impersonations throughout the play. These impersonations, as becomes clearer later in the action, are part of the play's thematic exploration of what is truth and what is lie. The irony, of course, is that the character who is the most outrageous liar (the Maniac) is also the character who is both aware of, and insists on telling, the truth.

The Maniac also embodies the play's thematically relevant focus on layers of reality. As he himself says, he's an actor involving "real" people in his plays. Does that make his "plays" more real than they would be otherwise, if his plays were cast entirely with actors? The other angle to this is that the audience is, of course, aware that they're watching a play - and as if that weren't enough, later in the action (Act 2, Scene 2, Part 3) the characters themselves indicate that they're aware that they're *in* a play and that the audience is present. All of this suggests that the author's thematic intent, at least in part, is to create the sense that there are many layers to reality and experience, and perhaps that there is no real truth at all—only perceptions and attitudes resulting from circumstance. This idea is also present in the play's plot, which consists mostly of characters adding and removing layers of lies and/or fantasy to the truth of how the Anarchist of the play's title ended up dead.

Another key element of this expositional section of the play is the amount of foreshadowing it contains. The reference to the Maniac's desire to impersonate a judge, for example, foreshadows the fact that he does exactly that throughout much of the play beginning in Act 1 Scene 2. Meanwhile, the reference to the Maniac impersonating a bishop foreshadows the fact that he does so again in Act 2. Perhaps most importantly, however, the reference to jumping out the window foreshadows references to an action at the core of the play's mystery, an action referred to for the first time in the following section. The "accidental death of the anarchist" investigated throughout the play resulted from jumping (or being thrown, depending on whose truth is believed) out a window. This reference, combined with the Maniac's (semi-serious) threat to jump, suggests that the Maniac himself is a kind of anarchist, a term which carries with it the connotation, in contemporary society as well as in the perception of the bureaucrats in the play, of an individual devoted to changing, if not destroying, the status quo. In that sense, the Maniac can definitely be seen as an anarchist, since he seems determined to destroy the status quo, of which there are two levels: First, that of the self-preserving lies spoken by Sports Jacket, the superintendent and the various judges inquiring into the death of the Anarchist; and second, that of self-interest and self-promotion, the line of action taken up by the journalist.

Act 1, Scene 1, Part 2

Act 1, Scene 1, Part 2 Summary

After Bertozzo goes out, the Maniac comes back in through another door to collect his papers and records. He goes through his arrest records and rips most of them up, then looks through another stack of papers on the desk. He reads the top page aloud: "Judge's Report on the Death of the—" As he begins to read, he is interrupted by the ringing of the telephone. He picks it up, pretends to be Bertozzo's assistant, and speaks with an inspector from an office upstairs, who later turns out to be Sports Jacket. The Maniac tells him a judge is being sent from Rome to look into the accidental death of an anarchist who fell from a window in the office of the superintendent. Over the phone Sports Jacket informs him about the documents that the judge will need, documents which happen to be the stack of papers on Bertozzo's desk. The Maniac tells Sports Jacket the documents will be ready and the message about the imminent arrival of the judge will be passed on to Bertozzo, and then speaks of how Bertozzo thinks mockingly of him (Sports Jacket). Sports Jacket apparently responds with threats of violence and hangs up. Once the Maniac hangs up he becomes quite excited, convinced that he now has an opportunity to fulfill his dream of impersonating a judge. After deciding on the right physical characteristics for his impersonation (the right walk, the right voice, the right expression in the eyes, etc.), he goes through the documents on Bertozzo's desk and discovers several important papers. These include a report from another judge explaining his reasons for adjourning the original inquiry into the Anarchist's death, and an investigation of the Anarchist's friends in Rome, including the dancer who led a group of similarly minded anarchists.

The Maniac puts on a hat and coat from a hat-stand, assumes the character of the judge, and prepares to go. Just as he's leaving Bertozzo returns, and for a moment doesn't recognize him. He finally sees who he is, however, and throws him out of the office, ignoring the Maniac's warnings about the angry man called Sports Jacket. A moment after the Maniac has gone out, however, Bertozzo calls a Constable to bring him back - he (Bertozzo) has discovered that the Maniac has taken the Anarchist's papers. As he's calling out the door he gets punched in the eye from someone outside in the hall—apparently Sports Jacket. The Maniac pops his head back in, reminds Bertozzo he was warned, and pops back out.

Act 1, Scene 1, Part 2 Analysis

This section of the play puts its central plot element, the Maniac investigating the death of the Anarchist, in motion, as well as one of its two primary structural elements: that of the mystery story (see "Style - Structure" for a definition of this stylistic element). Several significant pieces of information presented in this section are key components in both these elements. These pieces include the facts that the Anarchist died under undefined circumstances, that there's been an inquiry into these circumstances, and

that there's about to be an investigation into the inquiry. The latter is the job the judge from Rome is apparently being sent to undertake but is the job the Maniac, posing as the judge, actually performs.

The contents of the papers on Bertozzo's desk are a key source of all this, and other, information. Some of the papers that are particularly important include the judge's report, which is revealed in Act 2 by the journalist to be a source of judicial fraud, and the investigation of the Anarchist's Roman contacts, a report also used by the journalist as evidence of a cover up. The references to these documents foreshadow the key roles they play later in the action.

Again in this section, the nature and details of the Maniac's disguise function on several levels. The first is as a source of comedy, as he tries out what are essentially funny voices and funny walks in order to give the most satirically relevant portrayal of a judge. The second is to foreshadow the elaborate detailing Sports Jacket and the superintendent go through as they create their version of what happened the night the Anarchist died. In the same way as the Maniac tries and discards various specifics in order to create his version of a truth, Sports Jacket and the superintendent try and discard an equal variety of specifics in order to arrive at a version of the truth that will help them keep their jobs. This, in turn, relates to the third level of function to the Maniac's attempts at disguise - to reinforce the play's thematic statement that there are layers and degrees of truth in many lies, and that defining what is true and what is false is, to say the least, a complicated and very tricky operation.

Act 1, Scene 2, Part 1

Act 1, Scene 2, Part 1 Summary

This scene begins with the Maniac, in character as the judge from Rome, issuing orders to Sports Jacket and mocking him for having just struck Bertozzo. He tells Sports Jacket to fetch the superintendent and tell him to come immediately. Sports Jacket goes out, and the Maniac busies himself putting the papers he obtained from Bertozzo's desk relating to the death of the Anarchist up on the walls. The superintendent returns, angry at being ordered about by Sports Jacket and also angry with him for hitting Bertozzo, who has been in the superintendent's office complaining. When Sports Jacket tells him the judge (the Maniac) is there to begin the inquiry, the superintendent becomes much more polite and submissive. The Maniac presents the facts of what happened the night of the Anarchist's death (see "Quotes," p. 145), quoting from the superintendent's report that claims the Anarchist suffered a raptus, or a sudden and suicidal anxiety attack provoked by extreme stress. The Maniac then says he wants to determine what triggered the anxiety attack and demands that Sports Jacket and the superintendent re-enact, as accurately as possible, what happened that night.

Sports Jacket and the superintendent first attempt to soften what they said and did, but the Maniac insists they stick to what they put into their report. As they re-enact their confrontation with the Anarchist, the Maniac calls their logic into question (see "Quotes," p. 147) and repeatedly asks at what point the Anarchist experienced his raptus and jumped out the window. Finally, he quotes from a later report by the superintendent, in which the superintendent admits there was no real evidence against the Anarchist, leading the superintendent to say weakly that he and Sports Jacket just made a mistake. The Maniac accuses them of being too aggressive, reminding them exactly what they did (see "Quotes," p. 150).

The superintendent and Sports Jacket protest that they were only employing "the tricks of the trade" in order to get to the truth, but the Maniac suggests they should be charged with having driven the Anarchist to suicide. They protest, but he tells them the public is very angry, the higher officials in the police force are furious, and that plans are being made for their punishment. Increasingly desperate and fearful for both their jobs and lives, Sports Jacket and the superintendent plead with the Maniac (who, it must be remembered, they still believe to be a powerful judge) for advice on what to do. He advises them not to wait for the humiliation to come and jump out the window, pushing them towards it as they protest there's still hope and telling them they've been seized by a raptus.

Act 1, Scene 2, Part 1 Analysis

The play's plot, focused on the Maniac's interrogation and manipulation of Sports Jacket and the superintendent, begins in earnest in this section. The important thing to note

here is that in his intense, merciless and manipulative questioning, the Maniac is putting the two self-serving bureaucrats through exactly the same process as they apparently put the Anarchist through. There can be little doubt here that the Maniac is doing this deliberately - if the Anarchist felt the pain, so must his torturers. On another level, and perhaps a more personally important one (at least to the Maniac), the Maniac seems determined to expose Sports Jacket and the superintendent to the truth, and indeed expose the world to that same truth. This is evidenced by the fact that at the end of the play he produces a tape recorder upon which he's recorded everything that's been said. It's ironic, of course, that to do that he has to lie to them - his story that their conflicting stories have gotten them into trouble is, as revealed later, a total fabrication.

On a technical level, this is where the play's farcical style kicks into gear (see "Style - Structure" for a definition of farce). To be specific, this section of the play is the point at which the characters begin to act with increasing desperation and urgency to achieve their goals - the Maniac to get to the truth and the superintendent and Sports Jacket to conceal the truth. The opposite agendas of these characters make up a textbook definition of dramatic conflict - two or more characters acting in complete opposition to each other.

At this point it's interesting to note the emotional context of these opposing forces. It's very possible, for example, that as the action of the play progresses and Sports Jacket and the superintendent become increasingly desperate, angry and nervous, the Maniac is becoming increasingly joyful and playful. The text and dialogue indicate he's having a great time. The others, however, are not. This adds an additional layer of tension to the play's core conflict. Not only are the characters in tactical and intentional opposition, they are in emotional opposition as well.

Act 1, Scene 2, Part 2

Act 1, Scene 2, Part 2 Summary

When he sees the Constable coming in, the Maniac pulls Sports Jacket and the superintendent back from the window, joking about how desperation can make people do strange things. This can be interpreted as a deliberate jab at Sports Jacket and the superintendent driving the Anarchist to jump out a window. Sports Jacket and the superintendent complain that they were driven to do what they were about to do by the government's lack of faith in them, and its apparent determination to scapegoat them for the Anarchist's death (see "Quotes," p. 155). At that point the Maniac says it was all a joke, saying he employed "the tricks of the trade" to show them that their methods were uncivilized. This leads Sports Jacket and the superintendent to remind the Maniac (who is still, at this point, pretending to be a judge) about the second version of their report, which describes how the Anarchist, after his apparent raptus, calmed down and was quite peaceful for four hours. They add that he actually threw himself out the window at midnight, as documented by reports from a passing journalist.

The Maniac ironically congratulates them on the way they've cleared their names and examines the second report. This indicates that the Anarchist was aware that his group of friends in Rome was full of police spies, that he warned the dancer (who was the head of the group), that the dancer ignored the warnings, and that he and the Anarchist had a falling-out. The Maniac realizes there are some details missing from the story—specifically, how Sports Jacket and the superintendent talked the Anarchist out of his raptus. The Maniac offers several suggestive hints as to what they might have done, things they actually didn't do but which they need to write into their report in order to help explain the four-hour gap between the raptus and suicide. The superintendent and Sports Jacket are, at first, reluctant to contribute to the lies that the Maniac is perpetrating, but the Constable says he saw them do things the Maniac is suggesting that they did (which, of course, he didn't since they didn't actually do them). Becoming increasingly excited, the Maniac urges Sports Jacket and the superintendent to go along with his plan, at first mocking them for changing versions of their story without thinking the process out but then convincing them that they'll be able to forge a new, positive relationship with the public if they follow his lead. He begins to sing a popular song, and after a moment Sports Jacket and the superintendent join in.

Act 1, Scene 2, Part 2 Analysis

The action of this scene, building to the Act 1 climax of the singing of the song, is an excellent example of how a pair of plots and/or stylistic choices can be intertwined to considerable dramatic effect. Specifically, the information about the death of the Anarchist that comes out in this section functions on the levels of both mystery and farce, deepening the former and escalating tension in the latter. In other words, every time a piece of information comes out it adds a layer to the truth of what really

happened as well as a layer of increasing desperation to the desire of Sports Jacket and the superintendent to cover that truth up. The actions of the Maniac also function on both the mystery and farce levels. He is fulfilling the role of detective here, probing and manipulating in order to get to the truth about not just what happened that night but also about what Sports Jacket and the superintendent have said about it. In doing so, he drives them into increasing frustration and desperation.

At this point, an additional layer of comic technique comes into play - that of satire, a genre of comedy in which attitudes and weaknesses of an individual, group, or society as a whole are exaggerated to indicate how empty, ridiculous, or in this case dangerous, they truly are. The target of the satire in *...Anarchist* is bureaucracy - individuals and/or organizations whose ostensible job is to serve the public, but more often than not, at least in the perspective of the play, are more interested in serving themselves and their jobs. What's particularly worth noting here is that in this case, farce technique (creating circumstances in which characters are forced to act in increasingly desperate ways to preserve a truth) is used to satirical effect, showing the extreme lengths to which bureaucrats like Sports Jacket and the superintendent will go in order to protect their positions—their so-called "integrity." In short, technical skill is used here and throughout the play to make and reinforce an important thematic point.

The final moments of the act create a strong sense that Sports Jacket and the superintendent have fallen under the Maniac's control. It seems apparent that an audience would go into the intermission with a powerful desire to wonder what's going to happen next—what will the Maniac's control lead Sports Jacket and the superintendent to do?

Act 2, Scene 1, Part 1

Act 2, Scene 1, Part 1 Summary

This act begins at the moment when the previous act ended—with the Maniac, Sports Jacket and the superintendent coming to the conclusion of their song. The Maniac congratulates Sports Jacket and the superintendent for coming up with a story that will answer any and all lingering questions about the Anarchist's death, but then asks again what happened in the moments just before the Anarchist jumped out the window. Sports Jacket, the superintendent and the Constable all agree that the Anarchist was laughing, and everyone interrogating him was simply joking with him. The Maniac himself jokes that the higher-ups are going to change the motto of the police service to reflect this change in interrogation techniques, recalling how during another so-called "joking" interrogation those being questioned were crying out for the interrogators to stop, since they felt they were about to die ... from laughing.

The implication here is that those being questioned were in fact being tortured, an implication supported by the superintendent's comment that everyone involved in that interrogation was imprisoned. The Maniac insists (ironically) that joking interrogations are the way to go (see "Quotes," p. 168). He then asks how it was possible that the window in the office was open (allowing the Anarchist to jump) in the middle of a December night. The superintendent explains that everyone in the room was smoking and that the weather was mild. The Maniac mocks him for the stupidity of his explanation, and the superintendent expresses his concern that it seems the Maniac/judge is there to condemn them, not help them. The Maniac reassures him, and together they examine the circumstances of the Anarchist's jump, but the lies the superintendent and Sports Jacket come up with to explain what happened are so ludicrous that the Maniac mocks them with a ridiculous explanation of his own.

Just as an argument over who is really helping whom is about to erupt, the men are thrown into a nervous frenzy by a phone call announcing the arrival of an aggressive female journalist. The Maniac reminds the others that they're all in the same boat—if she finds out that he (the Maniac/judge) is there conducting an inquiry, all their jobs will be lost. He assures the nervous superintendent and Sports Jacket that he's on their side, telling them he's going to assume another identity. When they question whether he'll be able to carry it off, he tells them he does it all the time (see "Quotes," p. 174) and takes on the identity of the chief of the forensics department in Rome. When the superintendent points out that there's a real forensics chief, the Maniac says that's alright and that if something goes wrong, the real chief will get the blame.

Act 2, Scene 1, Part 1 Analysis

There are two interesting things to note about this section of the play. The first is a certain darkening of tone, in that the questioning of the Maniac becomes a little more

pointed and impatient, while the responses of Sports Jacket and the superintendent become both fearful and hostile. This manifests itself in the implications of torture, in the increasing desperation and obvious falseness of the explanations offered by the bureaucrats, and by the Maniac's mocking of both them and those explanations.

The second noteworthy element of this section is the farcical frenzy into which the characters are all thrown by the imminent arrival of the journalist. It's important to note the reasons behind these reactions. For the Maniac, there are several aspects to his reaction: joy at the opportunity to assume another disguise, eagerness at the opportunity to destroy another self-serving, self-important personage (the journalist), and malicious glee at having been presented with another opportunity to make Sports Jacket and the superintendent squirm. For their part, Sports Jacket and the superintendent are, frankly, terrified that everything they've done to preserve their jobs and "integrity" will fall apart, and that the "judge" will somehow betray them.

The other main reason this section of the play is important is that like the introduction of Sports Jacket and the superintendent, the introduction of the journalist simultaneously deepens the mystery and heightens the farce, raising several questions. What information does she bring to the mix? What information will she bring out? What with that information, any or all of it, will she do to increase the emotional desperation of the superintendent and Sports Jacket to defend themselves? How will her presence effect and/or challenge the Maniac? How much more bizarrely will any or all of them act in order to achieve their increasingly important goals? The answers to many of these questions arise in the following section, easily the most farcical of the play.

Act 2, Scene 1, Part 2

Act 2, Scene 1, Part 2 Summary

The journalist comes in and is introduced to the superintendent, Sports Jacket and the Constable. The Maniac, for his part, has disguised himself with a false mustache, a patch over his eye (which he says conceals a glass eye), and a glove (which he says conceals a wooden hand). The journalist hurries along with her questions, saying her article has to be ready in time for the late edition of her paper. She first asks the superintendent why he's been nicknamed "The Window Straddler" by other anarchists who have been interrogated by him and who say he makes them sit on the window ledge with their legs hanging out while bullying them into considering suicide. She also presents evidence that the dead Anarchist was dropped out the window and didn't jump, and that a phone call for an ambulance was made several minutes before the Anarchist's death. Finally, she suggests that the judge conducting the initial inquiry into the incident calculatedly dismissed evidence that the Anarchist had an alibi at the time of the bombing of which he was accused. The implication is that the Anarchist was tortured and the wrongdoing of the police was covered up by the legal system.

As each piece of evidence is presented, the Maniac comes up with a logical explanation for it, receiving congratulations each time from the superintendent, Sports Jacket or both. At one point, the Maniac's (alleged) glass eye is knocked out, and lies on the floor forgotten until Sports Jacket slips on it and falls. The Maniac picks it up, but soon afterwards accidentally swallows it as he would swallow a pill. Meanwhile, the journalist reveals that a court official stated the death of the Anarchist was an accident, and adds that the Maniac's explanation would fit in with that verdict. Her implication, however, is that the court official is as corrupt as the judge who dismissed the alibi evidence. The Maniac, however, argues persuasively that the judge was absolutely right, suggesting that those who provided the alibi were old, senile, lower class, and poor—and therefore could not be considered reliable. As the journalist, with a sense of triumph, is drawing the conclusion that class prejudice is behind what happened to the Anarchist, the Maniac comes out from behind a desk and reveals he's now got a wooden leg. At that moment Bertozzo, now wearing an eye patch (as the result of being punched by Sports Jacket at the end of Act 1 Scene 1), enters.

Act 2, Scene 1, Part 2 Analysis

As previously discussed, the appearance of the journalist adds an extra layer of tension to both the mystery and farcical elements of the plot in that she presents new factual evidence that deepens the mystery and, as a result, increases the emotional pressure on the characters. This in turn makes them act in a more desperate, and therefore more farcical, fashion. The sense of farce is heightened and embodied by the bizarre disguise adopted by the Maniac, with its various aspects (particularly the false eye, hand and leg) functioning as symbols of the increasing bizarreness of the cover-ups he suggests

and which are eagerly agreed to by Sports Jacket and the superintendent. An interesting point to note here is that thanks to the evidence presented by the journalist, it seems that the entire legal system is involved in the cover-up, for reasons defined by the theories of the Maniac in the final moments of the play.

Meanwhile, the final moments of this section, in which Bertozzo returns, send both the farce and the mystery into their climactic confrontations. It must be remembered that he doesn't know anything that's been going on, not even that the inquiry is being conducted. The Maniac took the phone call from Sports Jacket in Act 1 Scene 1 Part 2, but never passed the message on. All Bertozzo knows, or rather all that he will know when he actually begins participating in the action in the following section, is that the Maniac is in charge. This leads him to action (discrediting the Maniac) against which the other characters act in deliberate, desperate opposition, given that the livelihoods and successes of all of them (including the journalist and the Maniac himself) depend upon keeping up the charade. In other words, Bertozzo's entrance here sends the action of the play thoroughly and frantically into farce territory.

A somewhat unusual element in this scene is the Maniac's extended, very detailed, almost ranting speech about the alibi judge's attitude towards the poor. On first glance, it may appear as though this sudden near hysteria is a manifestation of the Maniac's madness. On closer examination, however, it becomes clear that its point is not that the poor are unreliable and unworthy, but that the authorities consider them to be that way. This, in turn, is a component of the play's core thematic message, that authority and bureaucracy are far more interested in what appears to be the truth (especially if it protects their position) than in what actually *is* the truth. In the case of the Maniac's speech, this truth seems to be that those without power, status or influence are, in fact, just as worthy of respect and or attention. It's important to note the eagerness with which the journalist seizes on this theory. Again, at first glance it seems as though she is on some level living up to the Maniac's ideal of truth observing, telling, and living. Late in the play, however, it's revealed that all she really wants is a good story. This means that her reaction here has more to do with her belief that the authorities' disregard of the poor would make for just that kind of story than it does with an actual belief in social justice.

Act 2, Scene 1, Part 3

Act 2, Scene 1, Part 3 Summary

Bertozzo is greeted by the superintendent, explaining that he's bringing in a copy of the bomb that exploded at the bank in Milan (in the plot allegedly perpetrated by the Anarchist, the dancer, and their colleagues). Bertozzo imagines that he finds the Maniac (still in his disguise) familiar, and protests when he (the Maniac) is introduced as the forensics expert from Rome, saying he knows the real expert. The superintendent and Sports Jacket insistently and physically attempt to persuade him to go along with the charade, reminding him if the truth gets out of what happened to the Anarchist all their jobs will be lost.

Meanwhile, the journalist attempts to get Bertozzo to answer the question of why another undetonated bomb, also found in the debris of the robbed bank, was taken away and detonated somewhere else rather than preserved for analysis. Bertozzo tries to explain, but is held back by the superintendent and Sports Jacket as the Maniac steps forward and offers his explanation (see "Quotes," p. 188). Sports Jacket shakes the Maniac's (wooden) hand in congratulations, and accidentally pulls the hand off.

As the Maniac is screwing it back on, Bertozzo comments that the actual bomb was too complex a construction to have been made by incompetents like the Anarchist and his friends. Again, the others try to get him to shut up as the journalist comments that this fits in perfectly with her theory that the bomb was in fact constructed by revolutionaries with ties to the national military, and that to deflect attention, the government fabricated a case against, and went after, the Anarchist, the dancer, and their friends. She goes on to suggest that at least some of the Anarchist's colleagues were, in fact, police agents, assigned to infiltrate the group and set them up to be framed. The superintendent has no qualms in telling her she's right, adding that the government has spies everywhere, including in the audience. He gestures, and voices from the audience cry out in agreement. The journalist asks why, if the Anarchist and his friends *were* responsible for the bombing, none of the police agents did anything to stop it. The superintendent claims they were all away when the plans were being made. The Maniac congratulates him (probably ironically) on the cleverness of his explanation. The superintendent shakes his wooden hand, the hand comes off, and the maniac replaces it with that of a woman.

Act 2, Scene 1, Part 3 Analysis

Once again, mystery and farce intertwine in this act as information provided by both Bertozzo and the journalist combine to simultaneously deepen the mystery and send the characters into frantic, truth-concealing action. It's quite significant that throughout this section and the section that follows, Bertozzo is physically assaulted by Sports Jacket and the superintendent in order to get him to be quiet. This action embodies and

symbolizes the thematically essential way that truth, throughout this play, is assaulted in order for the bureaucrats and glory seekers (i.e., the journalist) to preserve their status and/or increase it. Another manifestation of this thematic exploration is the increasingly bizarre elements of the Maniac's disguise, with the switching of the false male hand for a false woman's hand symbolizing the ease with which the truth can be manipulated. It's probable that the Maniac knows and understands the thematic point he's making by doing the switch, an idea supported by the moment in which the superintendent relates briefly but directly with the audience. In other words, as a character, he knows he's in a play, which means the Maniac, who knows more truth than all the other characters combined, must also know he's in a play. This, in turn, means that he probably knows the symbolic value of everything he's doing, which therefore means that when he switches hands he knows he's embodying the truth-switching everybody is so blatantly and recklessly engaging in.

It's also important to note here that the journalist, in her observation about the presence of spies and government agents, is right on the money, as evidenced by the superintendent's surprisingly easy agreement with her. This sense of government-as-watchdog was a powerful presence in Italy at the time the play was written, but the point must be made that this point extends far beyond the play's immediate context. In the same way as its satirical comments on the dangerous foolishness of bureaucrats can be seen as applying to bureaucrats in general, the reference to government omnipresence makes perhaps a more chilling point about widespread self-serving potential for totalitarianism in governments in general (see "Style - Setting" for a further discussion of this aspect to the play).

Act 2, Scene 1, Part 4

Act 2, Scene 1, Part 4 Summary

The journalist produces documentation recounting the fact that out of several recent bombings, many have been found been linked to the government that arranged for the bombings in order to discredit anti-government (anarchist) factions. The Maniac accuses her of being blatantly provocative (see "Quotes," p. 193), and as Bertozzo is struggling to convince the Superintendent of the Maniac's true identity, the Maniac comments that the journalist seems to be seeking a scandal for its own sake. The journalist agrees with him (see "Quotes," p. 195), but the Maniac comments that the only reason the public wants scandal at all is to help them forget about how miserable life is otherwise (see "Quotes," p. 196). Bertozzo breaks free of the superintendent and Sports Jacket, runs to the Maniac and struggles to pull off his wooden leg. The superintendent and Sports Jacket attempt to restrain him as the Maniac is explaining to the journalist that he's not, in fact, a forensics expert, but rather a bishop from the Vatican in charge of relations with the police. The superintendent, Sports Jacket, the Constable and the journalist all immediately buy into the Maniac's latest disguise at the same time as they silence Bertozzo. The Maniac quotes a medieval pope, who commented that scandal was a good thing because on its basis a new, more trustworthy state would be founded, and goes on to explain with increasing excitement and at great length the truth of the statement (see "Quotes," p 202).

Bertozzo finally breaks free of those attempting to restrain him, pulls out a gun, and forces the superintendent, the journalist, the Constable, the Maniac and Sports Jacket to handcuff themselves to a nearby pole. He then produces the papers certifying the Maniac as both a lunatic and a criminal and hands them to the others—all react with dismay as they read them. Their dismay escalates even more when the Maniac pulls out the bomb brought in by Bertozzo, announces that he's installed a triggering device, manipulates Bertozzo into unlocking his handcuffs, and announces he's also got a tape recorder that's recorded everything. For Sports Jacket, the superintendent and the Constable, this means their careers are over. For the journalist, it means she's lost a good story—perhaps the best of her career. For Bertozzo, it means he can be charged with cruelty to the mentally disabled, a crime first mentioned by the Maniac in Act 1, Scene 1, Part 1. For his part, the Maniac draws the play to a close by vowing to copy and distribute the tape, saying that nothing's as important as having a good scandal (see "Quotes," p. 206).

Act 2, Scene 1, Part 4 Analysis

The mystery and farce elements of the play reach their joint thematic and dramatic climaxes in this concluding section. Truth (Bertozzo) confronts deception (the Maniac); that truth is then confronted by another truth (the Maniac's tape recorder), and all of it reveals the play's core truth - that no-one has pure, uncorrupted motives. Everyone

professes to be acting in order to protect the high ideal of the truth, but in actuality, none of them completely are. Sports Jacket, the Constable and the superintendent are all acting more to protect themselves, the journalist is acting to promote herself, and Bertozzo is acting to gain revenge the Maniac—the man who hurt and humiliated him and who is the only character (ironically because he's an unrepentant liar), that emerges with an intact sense of, and responsibility to, the truth. It's ironic, and perhaps a very pointed commentary that the Maniac's climactic disguise is that of a bishop. This is his biggest lie yet, one into which everyone but Bertozzo eagerly buys into and which might therefore be considered a suggestion that at least from the author's point of view, the church is a source of some of the biggest lies in society.

The various comments about scandals that draw the play to its close can be seen as exploring the play's core theme relating to the relationship between truth and insanity, albeit in a somewhat twisted way. The points about the public's relation to, and attitude towards, scandal do seem to make sense—paying a great deal of attention to the troubles of another is an undeniably easy and popular way to avoid paying attention to one's own. On another level, however, there is also a profoundly ironic question being asked here: Is there value in revealing a scandalous truth, such as that of what happened to the Anarchist, if all it serves to do is distract the public from living their own truths? Where does the madness lie: in those who are distracted from their truths, or in those who are determined to reveal or live the truth no matter what the cost or consequence? This is the play's essential, existential paradox, and perhaps the reason the Maniac is in fact insane. He sees the truth and tries to live it, but realizes that ultimately any revelation of the truth leads, on some level, to more lies.

Characters

Inspector Bertozzo

Of the three upper-echelon police characters appearing in *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, Inspector Bertozzo spends the least amount of time on stage. He has a role at the play's beginning, as the policeman interviewing the Maniac for impersonating a psychiatrist. He sees that the Maniac has been arrested many times for impersonation and does not believe the Maniac's claim that he is mad and therefore not responsible for his actions. He seems intent on finding a way to make a charge against the Maniac stick. However, after enduring enough of the Maniac's double-talk, he becomes utterly exasperated and tells him to leave the station.

In act 2, Inspector Bertozzo returns as an important element in the play's closing farce. He knows that the Maniac is not the forensics expert that he is pretending to be and wants to expose him to the Superintendent and Sports Jacket. They forestall any revelation on the part of Bertozzo, as they believe that he is going to reveal the Maniac to be a judge, which would be disastrous, given that they have told the journalist that he is a forensics expert. Bertozzo must put up with a great number of kicks□every time he opens his mouth to protest the Maniac's deception, the Superintendent and Sports Jacket must prevent him from doing so. These farcical kicks are more than just slapstick, however; they are designed to remind the audience of the physical abuses the anarchist endured during his interrogation. Like the other police officers, Bertozzo is wary of the journalist's questions, yet they, more so than he, are targets of her questioning.

Constable

The Constable is present in most of the play but has a fairly small role, speaking only occasionally. When ordered to do something by a superior, he follows orders immediately. However, he is not above a certain self-preserving caution, in that when he is questioned pointedly by the Maniac he is unwilling to commit himself by speaking plainly and also unwilling to show clear support of any superior whom the Maniac, as judge, appears to suspect of wrongdoing.

Maria Feletti

Known as the Journalist in Fo's play, the Feletti character arrives at the police station to ask questions about the growing scandal concerning the death of an anarchist suspect in police custody. At first, Sports Jacket wants to send her away, but the Maniac convinces him that he can use her to his benefit.

The Feletti character is a faithful representation of an experienced journalist: polite, cool, and hard-hitting in her questions. As Italians following the Pinelli case would have

realized, this character is based on a real journalist, Camilla Cederna, who was then a reporter for the Italian weekly *L'espresso*. Cederna, like Feletti of *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, uncovered real evidence of police corruption, not only with respect to the Pinelli case but also more broadly, in terms of Italian law enforcement and governmental establishments. Contrary to the Maniac, the Feletti character believes that scandal is beneficial, leading to real change and having the potential to deliver justice through the exposure of lawbreakers.

Maniac

The Maniac is the pivotal character in *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. The part was acted by Fo himself in the original staging of the play. The character of the Maniac eclipses all other characters in every sense. He has by far the majority of lines, and he is by far the most interesting element of Fo's drama. Indeed, that it is difficult to distinguish between the police figures as personalities does not matter much, as the Maniac is the play's heart and soul. Onstage from the play's beginning to its end, the Maniac uses speech and actions to directly reflect the manipulations that the play is designed to expose.

At the beginning of *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, the Maniac is in a Milan police station□the setting of the play□because he has been arrested for impersonating a psychiatrist. The inspector questioning him (Bertozzo) decides to let him go, however, because the Maniac's fast talking is just too much to bear. But the Maniac does not leave the police station; instead, he decides to continue with his impersonations. Specifically, he decides to impersonate a judge who is scheduled to arrive soon. In this guise, he questions several policemen and station officials about the death of a suspect, a case that has attracted much attention. In the course of his impersonation, the Maniac tricks the policemen and officials into revealing that they are part of a cover-up concerning the details of the suspect's death. (Before the play's end, the Maniac will impersonate two others, a forensics expert by the name of Captain Marcantonio Banzi Piccinni and a Vatican *chargé d'affaires* called Father Augusto Bernier.)

The Maniac is such a strong character in *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* because he embodies what he brings to light in his role as judge. First, as one who impersonates another, he reminds Fo's audiences that a common practice of the time was to send out police spies to infiltrate political groups. Second, as a character whose fast talking tricks the corrupt policemen, he is a trickster who gives them a dose of their own medicine. Even more specifically, the Maniac represents a dishonest interrogator, a policeman whose questioning amounts to coercion, entrapment, and abuse. Last, in the way that he consistently contradicts himself, he reminds audiences of the discrepant testimony of the police at the inquest and hearings that followed the real-life anarchist Giuseppe Pinelli's death. He is a reflection, in other words, of the distortion of facts for which the policemen involved in the actual case became known. For example, as quoted in Tom Behan's *Dario Fo*, a real-life Milan police officer is on record as speaking as follows at a hearing about whether or not he heard another officer say something when Pinelli was being interrogated:

I'm not able to rectify or be precise about whether I heard that phrase because it was repeated, or because it was mentioned to me. As I believe I've already testified to having heard it, to having heard it directly; then, drawing things together, I don't believe that I heard it. However I'm not in a position to exclude that it may have been mentioned to me.

The Maniac is a manifestation of the madness surrounding him and all Italians during a time of corruption, unrest, and strife in Italian life. Still, as a farcical figure, he attests to Fo's belief that political theater with a serious intent need not be dry.

Sports Jacket

Sports Jacket is the policeman who, early in the play, calls Inspector Bertozzo's office and ends up having a conversation with the Maniac. In this conversation, the Maniac learns that a judge is being sent to ask questions about an anarchist suspect who died while being interrogated. Once he is impersonating the judge, the Maniac spends a great deal of time questioning Sports Jacket, with the result that the officer is exposed as being involved in an elaborate cover-up regarding the suspect.

Fo's audiences would have understood that Sports Jacket is a representation of a real officer involved in the real-life event on which the play is based. Specifically, Sports Jacket represents Luigi Calabresi, an officer who had been in the fourth-floor room of the Milan police station when the anarchist Giuseppe Pinelli plunged from the window. Calabresi sued a Milan publication for libel when the publication intimated that he had been wrongfully involved in the anarchist's death. Fo's costume for Sports Jacket refers to this trial, as Calabresi wore rolled-neck sweaters and sports jackets throughout. Calabresi also frequently rubbed his right hand during the trial, an action that many people believe indicated that this hand delivered the brutal blow to the back of Pinelli's neck. Fo's Sports Jacket delivers a punch to Inspector Bertozzo, and thereafter he often rubs the punching hand.

Because Sports Jacket believes that the Maniac is a judge who has been sent to investigate the death of the anarchist, he is by turns wary, nervous, belligerent, pleased, or relieved, depending on the nature of the Maniac's questions and moods. Apart from this, Sports Jacket tends to display brutal behavior, at least as far he can within the context of the play's amusing farce. Clearly, Fo wants to suggest that there was indeed a police officer at Milan headquarters who went too far in manhandling Pinelli, dealing the anarchist the terrible blow on the back of the neck that left the mark the pathologists found on his corpse.

Superintendent

The Superintendent of the play is much like Sports Jacket. He reacts defensively when the Maniac, as judge, poses questions that appear to suggest a suspicion of wrongdoing on his part; he is pleased when the Maniac seems to be supporting what he did when he interrogated the anarchist; he is nervous when he cannot quite figure out

what the Maniac is up to in his questioning. As in the case of Sports Jacket, the Maniac succeeds in tricking the Superintendent into incriminating himself.

Objects/Places

The Maniac's Papers

These papers contain documentation of the Maniac's history of madness as well as a list of his "crimes" of impersonation. Bertozzo uses them as evidence against the Maniac, while it's the Maniac's retrieval of them from Bertozzo's desk that catalyzes the event that sets the action of the play in motion. In other words, if he hadn't gone back to get the papers, the Maniac wouldn't have answered Bertozzo's telephone; wouldn't have learned about the impending arrival of the judge to conduct the inquiry into the Anarchist's death; and wouldn't be inspired to impersonate the judge.

Bertozzo's Papers

These papers are similar in function to the Maniac's papers in that both sets contain incriminating evidence. In the case of these papers, they incriminate Sports Jacket and the superintendent in the Anarchist's death, as well as the judge that conducted the first inquiry into their role in the incident. Later, the Maniac uses them as evidence in his "court of inquiry" into the actions and lies perpetrated by Sports Jacket and the superintendent.

The Bank

In the play's back-story (events before the story actually begins), a bank in Milan was bombed and several people were killed. The Anarchist of the play's title was accused by the police of being involved, and was in the process of being interrogated when he died. Late in the play the journalist formulates the theory that the bombing was actually staged by the authorities in an attempt to discredit the Anarchist and his friends.

The False Eye

This is the first of three main components of the Maniac's most bizarre disguise: that of a forensics inspector from Rome. Like the other components of this disguise, also discussed in this section, the eye symbolizes the bizarre lengths to which people like Sports Jacket and the superintendent will go to disguise the truth. Also, it specifically symbolizes the way that people are so willing to "see" new truths with false eyes—in other words, seeing what they want to see in the way they want to see it.

The False Hands

This is the second of the three main components of the Maniac's disguise. At various points throughout the second act, Sports Jacket and/or the superintendent shake the

false hand in congratulations for the Maniac having come up with a good story to protect them. This symbolizes the way in which they embrace falsehood over the truth. The fact that at one point the handshake is so eager that the false hand actually detaches itself symbolizes the way falsehoods can easily fall apart, while the fact that the Maniac replaces the first hand with another one symbolizes how one lie can easily be substituted for another. There may also be a visual pun here, in that Sports Jacket and the Superintendent congratulate the maniac on the way he's "HAND-ling" the situation.

The False Leg

This is the third main component of the Maniac's big disguise in the second act. In addition to symbolizing the extremity of the lies and stories told by the Maniac and embraced by Sports Jacket and the superintendent, the fact that Bertozzo attempts to rip the false leg off him symbolizes Bertozzo's attempts to get the Maniac to tell, live and be his true self. The irony is that the Maniac, as previously discussed, uses his lies and disguises as weapons in his fight for the truth. There may also be another visual pun here, in that without the Maniac coming in and offering more truths, Sports Jacket and the superintendent don't have a "LEG" to stand on.

The Bomb

The bomb brought in by Bertozzo as the play draws to its climax is a symbol of the truth that the Maniac is struggling to get the other characters to see. The Maniac's description of the bomb and the process of dismantling it represents the complex layers of lies and misdirections at work in the report on the death of the Anarchist. His final *boom*, a representation of the sound the bomb would make, represents what would happen to Sports Jacket, the superintendent, various judges, and the police and legal system in general if the truth beneath those lies and misdirections was ever uncovered.

The Window

The window in the superintendent's office, where most of the play's action takes place, is also the window from which the Anarchist fell on the night he died. Whether he was pushed, jumped or dropped is one of the play's key questions. Meanwhile, the Maniac, as part of the game he's playing with the superintendent and Sports Jacket, mockingly pushes them towards the same window, commenting as he does so that despair can make people do extreme things. He's clearly referring to the Anarchist, but it seems that neither Sports Jacket nor the superintendent gets the point. Finally, in Act 1 Scene 1 Part 1 the Maniac threatens to jump out a window if Bertozzo doesn't allow him to stay in the safety of the office. Because the Maniac is always playing games, it's doubtful whether he actually intends to jump. He is, however, still desperate—perhaps only to gain some kind of victory over Bertozzo, but desperate nevertheless. All of this suggests that windows in the play are a symbol of desperation.

Bertozzo's Handcuffs

Bertozzo's handcuffs, which he uses to force the Maniac and the other characters into submission, are another symbol of desperation. They also symbolize Bertozzo's increasingly urgent desire for control.

The Maniac's Tape Recorder

The tape recorder is the final tool the Maniac employs to force the other characters into telling and facing the truth of their experience. He's used lies and disguises throughout the play, but with the appearance of the tape recorder, which symbolizes an incontrovertible truth, truth proves to be the ultimate, and only truly effective, weapon against the self-serving desperation of bureaucracy.

Themes

Reform versus Revolution

Those who wish to change society may think that instituting reforms is the way to go about it. Reformers have faith in existing structures and believe that these structures need only be perfected□or corrupt elements within them be rooted out□for desired changes to come about. Others who wish to change society for the better believe that what is called for is revolution, a radical restructuring of society and its institutions. Revolutionaries tend to think that reforms are mere bandages on never-healing sores, leading to temporary alleviation of a persistent problem, such as poverty, but never eliminating it. They believe, in short, that existing structures must be dismantled and that entirely new ones must take their place.

Fo's *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* is infused with revolutionary zeal, as is evident at the play's end, when the Maniac discourses on scandal. To the Maniac, scandals such as exposés of police corruption do little to bring about real change. Rather, scandal allows people to let off steam, with the result that the powers that be are in a stronger position than before. The implication is that scandal might lead to some reforms but never to true revolutionary change. In the following excerpt, the Maniac pretends to be translating the words of a pope who knew very well how scandal could be used to strengthen his position:

MANIAC: Did you know that when Saint Gregory was elected Pope, he discovered that his subordinates were up to all kinds of skullduggery in an attempt to cover up various outrageous scandals? He was furious, and it was then that he uttered his famous phrase: *Nolimus aut velimus, omnibus gentibus, justitiam et veritatem*.

JOURNALIST: I'm sorry, your Eminence . . . I failed Latin three times. . . .

MANIAC: It means: 'Whether they want it or not, I shall impose truth and justice. I shall do what I can to make sure that these scandals explode in the most public way possible; and you need not fear that, in among the rot, the power of government will be undermined. Let the scandal come, because on the basis of that scandal a more durable power of the state will be founded!'

A bit later in the play, the Maniac speaks of scandal again:

MANIAC: They've never tried to hush up these scandals. And they're right not to. That way, people can let off steam, get angry, shudder at the thought of it . . . 'Who do these politicians think they are? "Scumbag generals! "Murderers!' And they get more and more angry, and then, burp! A little liberatory burp to relieve their social indigestion.

Fear and Submission

During periods of social unrest or general crisis, the political scene in a nation becomes tense. Different groups believe they have the answer to the nation's ills or a way to deal with the crisis and threat, and each group attempts to wrest control from those in power. The coalition in power naturally wishes to retain control and will often go to great lengths to do so. During the time period in which Fo wrote *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, Italy was undergoing just such a period of extreme social unrest, when those in power wondered if they would be able to maintain authority and control.

Particularly disturbing to the authorities was the growing influence of certain groups whose politics were □far□ left, calling for a radical restructuring of society, not simply reform. In an effort to discredit such groups in the eyes of the general public, members of the Italian police force□some say with the support of the government□began sanctioning the activities of agents posing as far leftists and committing terrorist acts in their name. Bomb after bomb exploded in Italian cities, and the general public began to believe that order was escaping them. This fear on the part of the general public was precisely what was sought, as a fearful and uncertain public is a public unlikely to commit to major change at the governmental level for fear of yet more chaos. Fomenting chaos and encouraging fear are standard tactics of the corrupt and manipulative. Entirely dishonest, this is nevertheless a sure way to influence voters' behavior.

At many points in the play, in which information is cited from actual documents, Fo's characters convey these various ideas. In the following excerpt, for example, the Maniac speaks of a plot to discredit □the Left□:

MANIAC: At the start you served a useful function: something had to be done to stop all the strikes . . . So they decided to start a witch-hunt against the Left. But now things have gone a bit too far.

In the following excerpt, somewhat later in the play, Fo's fictional journalist cites actual facts concerning the makeup of the activist group to which the (real) anarchist belonged. Of the ten members of the group, four were infiltrators, as the Journalist points out:

JOURNALIST: OK. So let's take a look behind that façade. What do we find? Out of the ten members of the [anarchist's] group, two of them were your own people, two informers, or rather, spies and provocateurs. One was a Rome fascist, well-known to everyone except the aforementioned pathetic group of anarchists, and the other was one of your own officers, disguised as an anarchist.

The Journalist speaks again along similar lines still later in the play:

JOURNALIST: *(Taking some papers from a folder)* . . . And I suppose nobody's told you either that out of a total of 173 bomb attacks that have happened in the past year and a bit, at a rate of twelve a month, one every three days□out of 173 attacks, as I was saying *(She reads from a report)* at least 102 have been proved to have been organised

by fascist [rightist] organisations, aided or abetted by the police, with the explicit intention of putting the blame on Left-wing political groups.

The Relationship between Truth and Insanity

The play's core theme is embodied in the character of the Maniac, a somewhat paradoxical combination of fanatic truth teller and contented liar. His very existence raises the question of what is in fact madness: does it truly mean being dissociated from reality, or does it mean simply seeing reality in a different way from everyone else? The Maniac certainly sees life differently from the other characters in the play, but because he sees and acts on the truth, albeit in a bizarrely extreme (or extremely bizarre) fashion, the audience is put in a position of wondering what madness really is. Does the Maniac's passion for lies and disguises and manipulative games make him crazy? Or is the increasingly desperate determination of Sports Jacket and the superintendent to embrace even his most outrageous masquerades, in the name of self-preservation, the play's true madness? It would seem that the author's intent is to suggest the latter, but perhaps there's an even deeper layer of meaning here. The point must be made that nowhere in the play is the truth of what happened to the Anarchist specifically defined. This suggests that the author's point is, in fact, that there is NO truth—everything is madness, every person is mad, existence is mad, questioning madness is mad, and madness in fact is sanity, if sanity is defined as "normal" perspective, attitude, and vision. Perhaps in this context it's possible to see the Anarchist as a symbol of clear, honest truth, and his death a representation of the death of truth in a world obsessed with image, lies, and self-defense. In any case, whatever the ramifications of this theme, its meaning and relevance extend far beyond the boundaries of its Italian socio-cultural setting. Questions of what is mad, what is a necessary lie and what is a true, livable, valuable truth permeate every society, every institution, every life, and perhaps even every death, Anarchist or no.

Corruption

No living character in this play is free of corruption. Sports Jacket, the superintendent and the Constable are the most obviously corrupt active characters, since they seem prepared to do anything or say anything in order to preserve their reputations. The journalist at first seems to be uncorrupt, but in her second-to-last line of the play she bemoans the loss of a good story, which means that her desire to find the truth has become corrupted by her desire for a good story, and presumably by the increased prestige that would result from telling it.

Bertozzo's desire for justice against the Maniac is corrupted by his desire for revenge against the Maniac for humiliating him and getting him punched in the face. Even the Maniac is not immune. His admirable desire to get to the truth of the Anarchist's death, and confront those responsible for it with that truth, is corrupted by the development of a desire to humiliate those responsible (Sports Jacket and the superintendent). Yes, he is significantly less corrupt than the other characters, but the fact remains that in spite of

his apparent virtuousness he is not immune to temptation. There is the possibility here that part of the author's intent here is to suggest that no-one is immune to temptation—except maybe the Anarchist himself, the unseen, possibly framed but undoubtedly victimized source of the play's only un-deniable truth ... that he died.

Style

The Trickster

The Maniac is a variant of a trickster figure, a character who acts mad or simple but who is actually invested with more sense than anybody around him. Tricksters fool those who are vain or who believe themselves cleverer than everybody else. Tricksters are quite often lesser societal figures tricked by those more elevated. They belong to the ranks of the common people, appearing in stories as an assertion of their worthiness in the face of an elite group's disdain and ignorance. Every nation has literary traditions employing trickster figures. One very well-known trickster series in the American literary canon uses animals as characters (as do so many trickster traditions). This series is Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus stories of Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox. Harris compiled these stories from those of African American storytellers, building on original African traditions. In the American context, these African American stories of seemingly weak characters winning out over stronger figures reveal the slave's or newly freed slave's assertion of his own wisdom against an elite that usually refused to see it.

Fo employs the trickster Maniac in *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* most probably in order to foster a sense of empowerment in his audiences. After all, the play addresses an event pointing to covert police criminality and likely governmental support of such wrongdoing. To know that one is being fooled by one's leaders or to believe that they are corrupt is to feel helpless, powerless, confused. Why vote if one is voting for crooks? If one's leaders are dishonest, why should anyone be honest? The clever trickster figure in Fo's play effectively exposes the lies and collusions of the corrupt police officers, conveying a sense that the truth can indeed be known and justice can indeed be served.

The Bawdy and Slapstick

Fo's employment of bawdy humor and slapstick action is, like his use of the trickster Maniac, a populist component of his play□an element designed to appeal to all audiences and not simply to elite ones. Bawdy humor focuses on bodily functions, such as the fun Fo derives from the lustily farting Maniac: □Yes, you can tell him that too: Anghiari and Bertozzo couldn't give a [sh□□t]! *(He lets out a tremendous raspberry [fart])* Prrruttt. Yes, it was Bertozzo who did the raspberry. Alright, no need to get hysterical . . . !□ Slapstick humor is similarly body oriented, as it involves characters tripping or falling□somehow being made ridiculous (without any lasting harm coming to them). An example of slapstick in *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* is when Bertozzo receives a big punch in the face from the inspector, who believes Bertozzo has sent the raspberry his way. Bawdy and slapstick humor is considered populist because it is humor that anyone can appreciate□such as a derisive fart.

Alienation Effects

Playwrights with strong political convictions such as Fo tend to employ and develop dramatic techniques that distance the audience from the work. These techniques might be called alienation effects, after the language of the playwright who pioneered many distancing methods, the German Bertolt Brecht. Brecht thought it important to alienate the audience from the play being performed so that they would think critically about what they were watching. For example, he would present characters performing more or less typical, everyday actions in his plays, but he would make sure that the acting was just stilted enough so that the audience would see these actions in a new light. What is strange about things so many of us do? he wanted his audiences to ask. What if things were done differently? How might the world change for the better? Two of Brecht's most famous plays are *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*.

Other distancing effects besides acting techniques that are not quite realistic are, for example, self-reflexive strategies. This means that a playwright includes moments when the play refers to itself as a play. For example, the actors might refer to themselves as actors, or the actors might speak directly to the audience, destroying the illusion of □reality on stage□ and reminding the audience that a play, something made up, is taking place. Moments such as these disturb the audience's identification with the actors and story, encouraging viewers to evaluate what is transpiring. Here is a self-reflexive moment from *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*:

JOURNALIST: And I suppose you have plenty more of these very well-trained operatives scattered around the Left groups?

SUPERINTENDENT: I see no reason to deny it, Miss. Yes we do.

JOURNALIST: I think you're just calling my bluff, there, Superintendent!

SUPERINTENDENT: Not at all . . . In fact you may be interested to know that we have one or two right here in the audience tonight, as usual . . . Watch this.

He claps his hands. We hear a number of voices from different parts of the auditorium.

VOICES: Sir . . . ? Yessir . . . ! Sir . . . !

The MANIAC *laughs, and turns to the audience*.

MANIAC: Don't worry□they're all actors. The real ones sit tight and don't say a word.

As this excerpt demonstrates, Fo has his actors speak directly about and to the audience.

Point of View

Because this is a play, considerations of point of view must be discussed in terms other than first person, third person, etc. There is no narrator; therefore there is no narrative voice and no traditionally defined point of view. This means that point of view must be considered in another way—specifically, what is the author's point of view? The action of the play, its themes and its style, suggest that the author intends not only to make the audience laugh, but to make the audience think—and about several things. These include the nature of truth; the nature of those who claim to be committed to its pursuit but who are actually dedicated to concealing it; and the nature of a society that allows (and even encourages) those who speak the truth to be silenced the way Sports Jacket and the superintendent silenced the Anarchist and Bertozzo attempts to silence the Maniac.

Finally, there is the sense that the author is making a point about the way those who conceal and/or manipulate the truth (Bertozzo, Sports Jacket, the superintendent, the journalist) are allowed and/or seen to be successful. In fact, the author seems to be a kind of anarchist and/or maniac himself, at least the sort of anarchist/maniac presented by the play. He, like them, seems to be struggling to make an honest, realistic voice heard above the clamor of those who would serve and save themselves at the expense of con-fronting some uncomfortable realities. The question is, of course, whether an audience would be willing and able to hear what he has to say, or whether they would see themselves as being condemned as the bureaucrats in the play are. Perhaps ultimately the author's point of view is that petty officials like Sports Jacket and the superintendent, and media members like the journalist, wouldn't be the way they are if the public at large didn't let them get away with it.

Setting

Very often in literature, in plays and poems and fiction and non-fiction alike, a specific incident or situation can be seen as manifesting a universal truth, while the universal can add broader and deeper implications and understanding to the specific. This means that in the case of *...Anarchist*, the most important component of the play's setting is not the fact that the play is set in Italy but that it's set within the walls and attitudes of a bureaucracy. The location names and character names may be in Italian and some of the references might be to famous Italian places or situations, but in the end the emotional, intellectual and thematic action of the piece is universal. Everywhere in the world, there are self-saving, self-serving, self-important petty officials like Sports Jacket and the superintendent. Everywhere in the world there are self-righteous crusaders like the journalist. Everywhere in the world, there are people fighting for a broader perception or understanding of truth like the Anarchist and the Maniac.

There is the sense that audiences watching the play will, and are indeed intended to, identify those in their experience as individuals or as a culture who behave in the same way as Sports Jacket, the superintendent, or the Maniac. They will see in the characters

onstage the butt-coverers, the butt-kickers, and the butt-kissers (to use crudities similar to those used by the author in many of his works, not just this one) in their own worlds. In other words, the setting of the play is, in fact, a setting in the audience's life, and as such functions well to bring the play more effectively into the thought-provoking realm it's so clearly intended to inhabit.

Language and Meaning

The first point to be made about the use of language in this play is that because the piece was originally written in Italian, the element of translation must be taken into account. This particular translation has a definite British feel, manifested mostly in certain word choices. That being said, the point must be made that these choices in no way affect the overall impression conveyed by the language, which is that of a carefully manipulated parody of bureaucratic bafflegab, words used by individuals in politics and/or business to self-servingly obscure and manipulate truth. Parody is a genre of comedy where an aspect of an individual or community is exaggerated in order to make fun of it. In *...Anarchist*, the Maniac's exaggerated use of such language parodies (mocks) those whose livelihood depends on its serious usage—Sports Jacket, the superintendent, to a lesser degree the journalist. The parody is made even more pointed by the way that these characters take the Maniac and his increasingly extreme use of language with simultaneously increasing earnestness. This makes thematically relevant points about the ultimate foolishness of concealing a truth in the name of self-preservation, and about such small-minded, self-serving bureaucrats in general.

The second point to be made about language in this play relates to the fact that this is a play, and a primary focus of any consideration of language use must be the way(s) in which it's used by the different characters as dialogue. The key point to consider in this context is the way in which the dialogue spoken by the Maniac seems clearer, wiser, more articulate and more perceptive than that of any other character. This is a key component of the play's central thematic point about the relationship between truth and madness. By giving the Maniac the sanest voice in the play, the author is making the clear thematic statement that those living and working and functioning in the parameters of a mad society (the various police officers, the journalist) are unable to see the truth of their madness, or the madness of their truth. Only an outsider like the Maniac, someone who thinks and lives and exists outside the box of "normality", can in fact see their normality for the madness it is. By contrast, the language and dialogue used by the other characters indicates the ease with which they can be manipulated, in that they're constantly agreeing or supporting whatever the Maniac suggests. The exception to this is Bertozzo, who uses language that consistently contradicts that of the Maniac. Because he is ultimately as self-serving and self-protective as Sports Jacket, however, the superintendent and the journalist, his constant contradictions function in the same way as their constant agreement—as a manifestation of how easily they, and the truth in their mad world, can be manipulated.

Structure

There are two primary structural patterns at the core of this play's action. The first is that of a murder mystery, in which the essential purpose of the narrative is to uncover and reveal a truth behind a suspicious death. Events in the plot and structure serve to, and are defined by, moments at which aspects of that truth are revealed. In this case, the death in question is that of the Anarchist, meaning that the function of the Maniac can be defined as that of a detective—his probing and questions peel away layers of lies and manipulations to unveil facets of a truth that, ironically, is never fully defined. The journalist and her questions perform a similar function, with the actions of both characters in pursuit of that truth motivating and defining the plot and its' structure.

Meanwhile, the emotional tensions aroused and intensified as the result of these actions (the increasing determination of the Maniac and the journalist to get at the truth, the intensifying determination of Sports Jacket and the superintendent to conceal it) simultaneously motivate and define the play's second primary structural pattern—that of a farce. This is a genre of comedy where characters act in increasingly desperate ways, and for various desperate reasons, to conceal a truth which becomes increasingly difficult to hide. The difference between the majority of this kind of play and ... *Anarchist* is that in many farces, the truth being concealed is known by the audience from the beginning (which husband is having the affair, who's carrying the suitcase of money, etc). This means that the sense of suspense engendered by the play's narrative results from the audience (and the characters) wondering when that truth will be revealed.

With *... Anarchist,* that truth is *not* known by the audience, only by Sports Jacket and the superintendent. The sense of suspense in the piece, therefore, is two fold, triggered by wondering not only when and/or whether the truth will be revealed but what that truth is. In this context, it becomes possible to see how the two structural patterns intertwine, with the murder mystery structure compounding the narrative tension triggered by the farce structure, and the farce structure lending a suspense-increasing emotional context to the murder mystery. In other words, as the Maniac and the journalist draw closer to the truth, Sports Jacket and the superintendent become increasingly desperate to conceal it, meaning that the Maniac and the Journalist have to try harder, meaning that Sports Jacket and the superintendent have to try harder, and so on and so on.

Historical Context

Social Unrest and the □Hot Autumn□ of 1969 in Italy

Politicians who were voted into Italy's parliament in the 1960s and 1970s had much to answer for. Italy's working class was fed up□with dangerous working conditions, long hours, low pay, expensive and uninhabitable housing, poor benefit packages, and more. Mobilizing, the working classes began to march and strike. Left-wing organizations, furthermore, were flourishing and gaining power, including those on the Far Left, favoring revolution over reform. The autumn of 1969 in Italy is known as the □Hot Autumn□ of working class and student protest, as unrest had reached a height. On October 15, fifty thousand workers demonstrated in Milan, and on November 28, one hundred thousand engineers demonstrated in Rome. Other disturbances and changes were afoot as well. This was the time, for example, of feminist agitation, so that in November a law legalizing divorce in Italy was passed.

Contributing to the political and social heat of the time was the fact that, as in the United States and elsewhere, radical political organizations on both the left and the right of the political spectrum were turning to terrorism. As the Communist-inclined Weather Underground was blowing up buildings in the United States, similar underground organizations were doing the same in Italy. Indeed, as the Journalist says in *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, 173 bomb attacks occurred in Italy in the space of little more than a year during this time. The anarchist who died at Milan police headquarters and whose death is the subject of Fo's play had been arrested on suspicion of carrying out a Hot Autumn bombing at the National Agricultural Bank in Piazza Fontana in Milan on November 12, 1969.

Giuseppe Pinelli and Pietro Valpreda

Giuseppe Pinelli and Pietro Valpreda were two anarchists arrested in the aftermath of the Hot Autumn Piazza Fontana bombing of November 12, 1969. Pinelli, a forty-one-year-old railway worker, was married with two daughters. Valpreda was a ballet dancer. Within seventy-two hours of his arrest, Pinelli was dead under suspicious circumstances. According to police statements, he had thrown himself from a window while being interrogated. However, there were discrepancies in the policemen's stories and in the evidence. At an inquest, suicide was not concluded; the death was deemed an accident. Neither Pinelli (posthumously) nor Valpreda was ever convicted of the bombing, nor were any other suspected persons, all of whom were members of neofascist organizations. Working against those trying to convict Pinelli was the sense that he was not the type of activist to carry out such an attack. This idea, that the bombing was carried out not by amateurs but by paramilitary agents, is expressed in *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, when the Journalist characterizes the group to which the anarchist of Fo's play belongs:

JOURNALIST: So what did you do? Even though you were well aware that to construct□let alone plant□a bomb of such complexity, would take the skills and experience of professionals□probably military people□you decided to go chasing after this fairly pathetic group of anarchists and completely dropped all other lines of inquiry among certain parties who shall remain nameless but you know who I mean.

A plaque dedicated to Pinelli can still be seen in Piazza Fontana, as most Italians believe he was a victim of police brutality.

Critical Overview

Fo was already a major cultural figure in Italy when *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* was staged. Indeed, his credibility and influence were such that he was provided with copies of actual inquest and police documents as he was composing his play. *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* opened approximately one year after Giuseppe Pinelli's death, in December 1970, and it was a major hit all over Italy as it toured and played to thousands. Italian support of the play suggests the degree to which Italians were critical of authorities at the time.

Although another of Fo's plays, *Mistero buffo*, is considered his most popular in Italy, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* is said to be his second most popular. Outside Italy, it is Fo's most-performed play, partly owing to its searing indictment of police corruption and strong suggestion that a similarly corrupt government body is underwriting this corruption. As Tom Behan indicates in *Dario Fo: Revolutionary Theatre*, directors around the world who want to respond to corruption in their own midst have turned to *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* to galvanize their audiences to political action, despite the great risks involved in doing so:

Fo claims that *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* has been the most performed play in the world over the last 40 years. Its pedigree certainly is impressive: productions in at least 41 countries in very testing circumstances: fascist Chile, Ceausescu's Romania and apartheid South Africa. In Argentina and Greece the cast of early productions were all arrested.

Because Fo allows changes to be made to his script, foreign directors can include material that makes the play relevant to their particular local situation. Of course, if *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* were not as well written and entertaining as it is, it would not be such a favorite choice of the world's directors and drama groups. What has made Fo's and this play's reputation, finally, is his great skill as a dramatist and theatrical innovator. However, many of Fo's innovations are, paradoxically, adaptations from past theatrical traditions. Joseph Farrell discusses this paradox in □Dario Fo: *Zanni* and *Giullare*,□ from the essay collection *The Commedia Dell'Arte: From the Renaissance to Dario Fo*:

The affection for, and identification with, figures from Italian theatrical tradition, be it *Arlecchino* [Harlequin] or the *giullare* [a performer who would travel from village to village], are perfect illustrations of one of the most striking and paradoxical features of the work of Dario Fo□his relentless search for models from the past with whom he can identify. If on the one hand Fo is customarily seen, and indeed goes out of his way to present himself, as the subversive, the iconoclastic revolutionary, . . . at the same time his theatrical style is based not on any avant-garde, but on the approaches and techniques practiced by performers of centuries past.

As Farrell writes, the □figure of the *giullare*,□ which □provides Fo with a focus and a model□ for much of his work, □is a quintessentially medieval figure, who flourished

approximately from the Tenth to the Fifteenth centuries, in other words in the period before the blossoming of *Commedia dell'arte*.□ Still, the tradition of the *commedia dell'arte*□from which the figure of the Harlequin derives□is also an important source of inspiration for Fo. Troupes of professional actors made up the *commedia* groups. They would perform for common people in village squares as soon as they would for aristocrats on polished stages, improvising dialogue within the set limits of stock plots.

In the essay collection *Studies in the Commedia Dell'Arte*, Christopher Cairns explores Fo's relationship to *commedia* tradition in his essay □Dario Fo and the *Commedia Dell'Arte*.□ He points out that Fo's interest in this tradition's figures and techniques developed only after he had immersed himself in the tradition of the *giullare* for many years. Fo's newfound interest, however, resulted in the curious discovery that he had been implementing *commedia* techniques all along:

In London in 1988, Fo admitted that he had come late to the formal study of the *commedia dell'arte*, but had found with some surprise that he had been involved in similar theatrical practice (with different roots, in variety, the circus, the silent film) already for many years.

In a comment on the *commedia* aspects of Fo's play *Harlequin* (1985), Cairns describes the relationship between tradition and innovation so characteristic of Fo's work in general:

The extraordinary vogue for the *commedia dell'arte* as a performance language in the contemporary theatre has given rise to two distinct conventions. First [there is] the 'archaeological' reconstruction of the working methods, costumes, masks and relationships between the well-known stereotype characters, refined and polished to a high degree of professional performance. . . . Secondly, we have the adaptation or 'selection' of styles from past traditions of *commedia* for modern uses: a bringing face to face with contemporary social and political causes of a deep-rooted European theatrical tradition, particularly since the 1960s. It is to this second *modern* convention that Dario Fo's *Harlequin* belongs.

Thus, many critics do not hesitate to argue that there are *commedia* elements in those of Fo's plays written even before his formal study of the tradition.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Dell'Amico is a lecturer in the English Department of California State University, Bakersfield. In this essay, she explores Fo's play as a work of political theater.

The Italian actor and playwright Fo is known as a practitioner of political theater. Political theater, it is important to note, is not theater that lectures an audience on a particular political belief system (or at least it is not supposed to do that). Political theater is theater that attempts to heighten the critical consciousness of its audience. In other words, dramatists with a political bent are interested in furthering audience members' ability to sort through the complexities of modern life so as to make informed decisions about weighty issues; they are not interested only in entertaining their audiences. Thus, despite the entertaining farce of Fo's *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, watching the play is more than just an enjoyable event. It is also a political event, as the play encourages its audience to think critically about events that were unfolding at the time in Italy.

Particularly important to playwrights interested in heightening the critical faculties of their audience members are dramatic methods that enable such effects. Some of the most commonly employed of such methods are associated with major theorists of political theater, the German playwright Bertolt Brecht foremost among them. Certainly, Fo is influenced by Brechtian theory and practice. One cornerstone of Brechtian practice is the distancing of viewers from the dramatic events unfolding onstage. To distance viewers means to employ methods that impede their ability to lose themselves in the drama, thus encouraging them to step back and think about the issues being raised by the play. The political playwright interested in distance will destroy the so-called invisible fourth wall of theater, so as to encourage a critical and evaluating mindset. The invisible fourth wall of theater is the one between audience and stage. It cannot be seen as can the other three walls of the stage (the two side walls and one back wall), but it is still there. It is there in the sense that most actors and playwrights conceive of drama as something that unfolds in front of an audience, strictly without its participation. The goal of most playwrights and theatrical directors is to create an airtight illusion: the lights go down, the curtain rises, action begins, and viewers lose all sense of themselves as thinkers as they identify with the characters and become absorbed in the story.

Playwrights who wish to destroy this fourth wall between the stage and the audience do so in numerous ways. One way is to have actors address the audience directly, occasionally or often. This direct address bridges the fourth wall, reminding viewers that a play calling for their evaluation is being performed. One scene in *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* suggests precisely such a strategy, although each individual director of the play decides, ultimately, if and when such effects will occur. At this point in the play, the Maniac has hit on the idea of impersonating a judge. To this end, he begins to try out various personas. Should the judge have a limp? Should he wear glasses? Experimenting with one persona, he says, □Well, look at that! Brilliant! Just what I was looking for!□ This □look at that□ is a ripe moment for the actor to address the

audience—to look at the audience while speaking and break the illusion erected by the fourth wall.

In reminding the audience members that that is what they are—an audience at a play—the actor achieves a self-reflexive moment. That is, any time a work of art calls attention to itself *as a work of art*—reflects on itself as artifice—a self-reflexive moment occurs. Self-reflexivity is another major way to distance an audience. Every time the play comments on itself as a play, illusion is broken, the fourth wall is dissolved, and the audience is alerted that something that someone has created—and could have done differently—is being presented.

Self-reflexive strategies are very important to most practitioners of political theater, on principle. After all, these dramatists are always interested in reminding their viewers of the way they are often led to make political choices against their own interests: they are duped by those in power to vote in ways that further the interests of those in power, not their own interests. In other words, thanks to the way the powerful can use language and manipulate emotions, people believe that they are helping themselves when they are actually serving the interests of those who have fooled them. In this way, they have been divested of true understanding, of accurate critical insight into the nature of the world, the political process, economics, and so forth. They are in the grip, in short, of an illusion; master illusionists have fooled them. Political playwrights employ self-reflexive strategies because they are against real-world political illusion. They do not want to present important ideas to the audience obliquely, without their knowing that this is taking place. They do not want to abuse their power to influence and mold thoughts, as some politicians and political parties do. Political playwrights keep their audiences alert and distanced from characters and events so that audiences understand that this is the way to approach all important things in life: critically and skeptically.

Fo employs self-reflexive moments throughout *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. For example, from the very first moments of the play, when the major character, the Maniac, is introduced, the play makes reference to itself. This is so due to the nature of this character. The Maniac is a master illusionist, an impersonator of anybody he wishes to impersonate. He has been arrested for pretending to be a psychiatrist, and this transgression is but the latest in a long line of masquerades. The Maniac, in short, is very much like an *actor*. The play's self-reflexivity in this regard can be clearly felt in the following words from the Maniac's first major speech in the play: "I have a thing about dreaming up characters and then acting them out. It's called 'histrionomania'—comes from the Latin *histriones*, meaning 'actor.' I'm a sort of amateur performance artist." In commenting on himself as an actor, this character is being self-reflexive. He is reminding audience members that a play is taking place, preventing them from losing themselves unthinkingly in the action.

Moments such as these are not the only reason why there are few opportunities to identify with the Maniac and so lose sight of the fact that he is an actor going through his paces. Also ensuring that moments of identification are few, or that identification is at least shallow, is the way in which Fo casts the character as a mercurial figure. That is, the Maniac changes from one persona to another throughout the play. The Maniac's

character is also hyperactive, speaking continuously and quickly and jumping from thought to thought. The effect of such acting is jarring, uncomfortable, which is to say, again, that no audience member is likely to sit back in his or her chair and be absorbed into the world of the play.

Also characteristic of much political theater, including *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, is its populist dimension. That is, playwrights such as Fo actively work against the notion that plays with serious intent are written for an educated elite and are beyond the understanding and enjoyment of the average person. This accounts for the plain, idiomatic language of *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* and its slang. Above all, Fo wants to write plays that will appeal to the very people he believes can most benefit from his work—the nonelite. (Interestingly, Fo encourages translators of his works to use local slang in place of his own, so that all audiences of his plays will have a worthwhile experience. Despite the play's having been written in language directed at Italians conversant in 1960s and 1970s Italian slang, an American translator in the twenty-first century is welcome to tinker with the script as she or he thinks fit. To allow such freedom with one's script is, of course, a populist gesture as well. Fo is not so taken with his genius and power as an artist as to not let anyone change what he has written.)

Closely related to political theater's populism is its desire to educate and empower. This desire is evident in *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* in various ways. For example, the Maniac recites laws in his speeches, imparting legal savvy to the audience. The Maniac's mad methods also highlight the illusionist methods of those of the political elite who are dishonest. That is, he is always mincing words, squabbling over the meaning of sentences, focusing upon a minute item of punctuation, encouraging other characters to revise statements so as to obfuscate the true nature of what they are saying, and so on. The Maniac, in other words, is a character who demonstrates how the truth can amount to a lie in the mouths of those who know how to manipulate language.

The comic slapstick and bawdiness of *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* do not obscure its serious intentions. Of great concern to Fo were various covert activities being carried out by the Italian police at the time, probably in concert with the Italian government (in the late 1960s and early 1970s). Specifically, left-wing groups were being blamed for bombings orchestrated by neofascist organizations. The Italian police would then arrest prominent left-wing agitators so as to discredit these groups in the eyes of the Italian public. The impetus behind such wrongdoing was that leftist ideologies, and not rightist (neofascist, for example) ideologies, constituted a real threat to the continued existence of the government, as Italy was experiencing a period of widespread and deep-seated discontent. This is not to say that extremist leftist groups did not set off any bombs; they did. Nonetheless, agents whose goal was to alarm the public committed a number of these acts so that voters would hesitate to enact any real political change in the fear that too much change at the governmental level would only further destabilize the country. The event of the anarchist who fell from a police headquarters window is a historical one—and one that most Italians now believe is incontrovertible proof of police and governmental wrongdoing of the time.

Source: Carol Dell'Amico, Critical Essay on *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2006.

Quotes

"...a spotless record just waiting to be sullied - it would make anyone's mouth water." The Maniac to Bertozzo, Act 1, Scene 1, Part 1 p. 127.

"You see them up there, little old men like cardboard cutouts, silly wigs on their heads, all capes and ermine ... with two pairs of glasses on cords round their necks because otherwise they'd lose them ... And these characters have the power to wreck a person's life or save it, as and how they want: they hand out life sentences like somebody saying "Maybe it'll rain tomorrow" ... they make the law and they can do what they like ..." Act 1, Scene 1, Part 1 p. 131.

"...let's not start behaving like children. We need to keep on our toes ... we're in the hot seat now ... with all these bloody journalists running round making insinuations ... telling lies ... and don't try to shut me up, because I believe in speaking my mind ..." The Superintendent, Act 1, Scene 2, Part 1 p. 144

"On the evening of the ... the date's immaterial ... an anarchist, a railway shunter by profession, was right here in this room, being interrogated as to whether or not he had been involve din the bomb attack at the Milan Bank of Agriculture, which caused the death of sixteen innocent civilians. And here we have your precise words, Superintendent: 'There was strong evidence pointing in his direction'!" Act 1, Scene 2, Part 1 p. 145.

"Since it's obvious that the bomb on the railway must have been planted by a railway-man, but the same logic we can say that the bombs at the Law Courts in Rome were planted by a judge, the bombs at the Monument to the Unknown Soldier were planted by a soldier, and the bomb at the Bank of Agriculture was planted by either a banker or a soldier, take your pick ..." The Maniac, Act 1, Scene 2, Part 1 p. 147-148.

"You arrest an innocent citizen more or less at random, then you abuse your powers by detaining him beyond the legal limit, and then you go and traumatize the poor man by telling him that you have proof that he's been going round planting bombs on railways; then you more or less deliberately terrorize him that he's going to lose his job; then you tell him that his ... alibi has collapsed; and then ... you tell him that his friend and comrade in Rome [the Dancer] has confessed to the bombings in Milan." The Maniac, Act 1, Scene 2, Part 1, p. 150.

"Those bastards in the government ... first they give you a free hand ... 'let's have a bit of repression, create a climate of subversion, the threat of social disorder ...'" "You bend over backwards for them, and then ..." The Superintendent and Sports Jacket, Act 1, Scene 2, Part 2 p. 155.

"People would be happy to forgive all your cretinous blunders if they could only see two decent human beings behind it all - two policemen who, just for once, allowed their

hearts to rule their heads ..." The Maniac to Sports Jacket and the Superintendent, Act 1, Scene 2, Part 2 p. 164.

"You have no idea how many completely innocent parties move heaven and earth just to get themselves arrested and brought to this station ... they ... disguise themselves as revolutionaries just so's they can be interrogated by you ... and at last have a damn good laugh! Get a bit of enjoyment, for once in their lives!" The Maniac, Act 2 Scene 1 Part 1, p. 168.

"It'll be child's play for me, believe me. Criminal psychopathologist ... Head of Interpol ... Head of forensic ... take your pick ... any time the journalist gets you in a tight corner with a particularly nasty question, you just give me a wink and I'll join in ... The important thing is to keep you two in the clear." The Maniac, Act 2, Scene 1, Part 1 p. 174.

"You see, Miss, a bomb of this sort is so complex ... Look at all these wires ... two detonators ... the timing mechanism ... the firing mechanism, all sorts of little levers ... as I was saying, it's so complex that they could very well have hidden a second delayed-action time bomb inside it, and you'll never find it unless you wanted to spend all day taking it apart piece by piece ... and by that time, Boom!" The Maniac, Act 2, Scene 1, Part 3, p. 188.

"What are you trying to suggest, Miss ... that if the police, instead of wasting their time with a raggle-taggle bunch of anarchists, had concentrated on more serious possibilities - for example paramilitary and fascist organizations funded by big industrialists and run and supported by leading figures in the armed forces - then maybe we'd have got to the bottom of all this?" The Maniac, Act 2, Scene 1, Part 3, p. 193.

"A scandal of that scale would actually do credit to the police. It would give the average citizen the sense of living in a decent society for once, where the system of justice was a little less unjust." The Journalist, Act 2, Scene 1, Part 4, p. 195.

"Your average citizen doesn't actually *want* all the dirt to disappear. No, for him it's enough that it's uncovered, there's a nice juicy scandal, and everyone can talk about it ... as far as he's concerned, that is real freedom, the best of all possible worlds ..." The Maniac, Act 2, Scene 1, Part 4 p. 196.

"Scandal is the fertilizer of social democracy ... people can let of steam, get angry, shudder at the thought of it ... and they get more and more angry, and then, BURP! A little liberatory burp to relieve their social indigestion." The Maniac, Act 2, Scene 1, Part 4, p. 202.

"... the important thing is to have a good scandal ... so that the Italian nation can march alongside the Americans and the English, and become a modern and social-democratic society, so that finally we can say: 'It's true - we're in the shit right up to our necks, and that's precisely the reason why we walk with our heads held high!' " The Maniac, Act 2, Scene 1, Part 4, p. 206.

Topics for Further Study

Accidental Death of an Anarchist employs many elements typical of farce. Research the characteristics of farce and write an essay on Fo's play as a farce.

Research trickster literatures and write an essay comparing and contrasting figures from two different traditions, such as a Native American tradition and the African American Uncle Remus tradition.

Research one of the American terrorist groups of the 1960s or 1970s, such as the Weather Underground or the Symbionese Liberation Army. What were their political beliefs and goals? Did they consider people acceptable terrorist targets? Who were the leaders of these organizations? What happened to them? Compile your findings into a report with appropriate subheadings.

What were the political beliefs of anarchists such as Giuseppe Pinelli? Where did anarchist theories first develop? What are the basic tenets of anarchist politics? Present a report to your class that dispels misconceptions about anarchists and explains their core political ideals.

At the time of writing *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, Fo was running a drama group called La Comune. Research La Comune within the context of contemporary events in Italian social and political life. In an essay, explain how the group's ethos and goals are responses to what was happening in Italy at the time.

Compare and Contrast

Late 1960s to early 1970s: Italians are mobilized by radical political philosophies calling for drastic changes to cure such ills as low wages and poor working conditions in factories.

Today: Italian workers wonder whether the considerable gains won following the protests of the 1960s are threatened by the developments of a globalizing world economy. They worry that greater competition among nations will lead companies to cut worker salaries and benefits in order to remain competitive.

Late 1960s to early 1970s: Countercultural youths, like the hippies, protest against what they perceive as repressive elements within Italian life, such as the premium placed on sexual abstinence before marriage. Italian feminists also stage protests.

Today: While the most extreme positions held by counterculture enthusiasts are rejected, Italian society is radically different. For example, women are now integral in the professional workforce, and contraception is widely practiced.

Late 1960s to early 1970s: The Roman Catholic Church begins losing some of its power within Italy, as is seen in the Italian government's legalization of divorce in 1969.

Today: While most Italians identify themselves as Roman Catholics and thousands of mourners poured into the streets following the death of Pope John Paul II (1920-2005), less than half the population attends church regularly.

Late 1960s to early 1970s: The business tycoon Silvio Berlusconi builds a massive complex of apartments just outside Milan, called Milano 2. Some say that he won this project with secret help and backing from a powerful anti-Communist organization known as Propaganda 2.

Today: Berlusconi, elected twice as Italy's prime minister, is subject to charges of bribery, and a new term, *Berlusconismo*, begins circulating in Italy. The term refers to a way of life in which an Italian lives in a house built by Berlusconi, shops at markets owned by Berlusconi, eats at restaurants owned by Berlusconi, watches television stations controlled by Berlusconi, and so on.

What Do I Read Next?

Fo's most popular play is *Mistero buffo*, which means □The Comedic Mystery.□ It features the comedic antics of a jester in the medieval tradition of the □jongleurs,□ traveling entertainers whose performances flouted the authority of church and state. It has been seen by millions of Italians and shows Fo's grounding in popular storytelling traditions. This one-man show satirizing landowners, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Italian government was first performed by Fo in 1969.

The *Complete Plays of Vladimir Mayakovsky*, translated by Guy Daniels, contains Mayakovsky's *Mystery-Bouffe* (1918), an inspiration for Fo's own *Mistero buffo*. Mayakovsky, a Russian writer who engaged in subversive socialist political activities, was one of Fo's many influences, thanks to his revolutionary zeal on the part of Russia's then-disenfranchised peasants and lower classes.

The *Uncle Remus* tales first published by Joel Chandler Harris in book form in 1880 were told to him by African American storytellers. These are tales employing trickster figures like the Maniac.

The four plays of *Female Parts: One Woman Plays* (1981) were written by Fo in collaboration with his longtime partner, Franca Rame. Rame acted in these plays when they were first produced.

Further Study

Brecht, Bertolt, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, edited and translated by John Willett, Eyre Methuen, 1964.

Willett's compilation of Brecht's writings on theater is a thorough introduction to the dramatist's evolving concerns in his influential career as a writer and director of political theater.

Cardullo, Bert, and Robert Knopf, eds., *Theater of the Avant-Garde, 1890-1950: A Critical Anthology*, Yale University Press, 2001.

This anthology assembles the statements, manifestoes, and opinions of major drama theorists and practitioners, some of whom, like Bertolt Brecht, influenced Fo.

Hirst, David L., *Dario Fo and Franca Rame*, St. Martin's Press, 1989.

Hirst's book is a comprehensive general introduction to the works and collaboration of Dario Fo and Franca Rame.

Mitchell, Tony, *Dario Fo: People's Court Jester*, Methuen, 1986.

A well-known Fo scholar, Mitchell provides insight into how Fo's political convictions inform his works. Photographs that capture the farcical and daring nature of Fo's theater are included.

□□□, ed. *File on Fo*, Methuen Drama, 1989.

Mitchell has compiled excerpts from writings by critics on Fo and Rame and by Fo and Rame themselves. Mitchell's choice of excerpts is useful and fair, as he includes evaluations both critical and admiring.

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Behan, Tom, *Dario Fo: Revolutionary Theatre*, Pluto Press, 2000, p. 67.

Cairns, Christopher, "Dario Fo and the *Commedia Dell'Arte*," in *Studies in the Commedia Dell'Arte*, edited by David J. George and Christopher J. Gossip, University of Wales Press, 1993, p. 1.

Farrell, Joseph, "Dario Fo: *Zanni* and *Giullare*," in *The Commedia Dell'Arte: From the Renaissance to Dario Fo*, edited by Christopher Cairns, Edwin Mellon Press, 1989, pp. 1-2.

Fo, Dario, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, translated by Ed Emery, in *Dario Fo: Plays 1*, Methuen, 1992, pp. 127, 136, 137, 152, 176, 190, 191, 193, 198, 200, 202.

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's"For Students" Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently

studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man–the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

"Night." Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the "Criticism" subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on "Winesburg, Ohio." Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. "Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition," Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. "Richard Wright: "Wearing the Mask," in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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