Motifs and Methods in Fo's Theatre

CHAPTER III

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Mistero Buffo: The Gospels According to the Giullari

Dario Fo’s Mistero Buffo (1969) consists of 12 non-sequential monologues delivered in the subversive style of itinerant medieval minstrels. Fo subversively retells the apocryphal Gospel stories from a peripheral point of view. In this process he demystifies and deconstructs the popular Christian legends thereby giving them a down-to-earth semantics, devoid of any estranging glorifications. Etymologically the title means an ironic “grotesque performance” (Fo, Plays 11) or a farcical religious representation. Fo explained his socio-political stance regarding Mistero Buffo:

I didn’t want to conduct an archeological exercise with Mistero Buffo. Now what I and other comrades, with whom I conducted the research, were concerned about was the need to show that another culture exists. It is true that the ruling class culture exists, by this doesn’t mean that there isn’t valid culture you can work upon in order to re-appropriate it, to carry forward the idea of proletarian culture.... We must start from the production of an autonomous culture of the oppressed which is made up of criticism and struggle. (Behan, Revolutionary 97)

It was this cultural aim of establishing a proletarian counterculture to the hegemonic mainstream culture that works as the
propeller in Dario Fo’s theatrical initiatives. For this purpose it was a prerequisite to rewrite the already existing meta-narratives on religion and culture. By the radical re-reading of the ecclesiastical gospel stories Fo shows the world that Christian tradition is capable of reading from a peripheral point of view. Instead of choosing the Biblical heroes as protagonists, Fo assigns the onlookers like the drunkard, fool, madwoman, etc. the leading roles. This is a subversive technique in retelling the gospels in order to demystify and de-glorify the entire mainstream narrations.

The title of this group of vignettes, Mistero Buffo, is suggestive of the experimental Russian constructivist dramatist Vsevolod Meyerhold’s (1874-1940) theatrical adaptation of Vladimir Mayakovsky’s (1893-1930) poetic paean to the Russian Revolution, entitled Mystery Buffo, written and performed in 1918 with an alarming cast of 2,865 performers on stage (Brown John, Oxford 393). Meyerholdian theory of theatrical collectivism prompted Fo to adopt the technique of improvisation in general and Commedia dell’Arte in particular. However, so far as Dario Fo is concerned, the similarities end here only. Dario Fo’s Mistero Buffo is a solo performance thoroughly and throughout.

Unlike his other plays, Dario Fo begins Mistero Buffo with a Shavian prologue and proceeds in a Pirandello like lecture-cum-demonstration method. In this subversive reading of the Scriptures by the marginalized, Fo follows two major traditions of the giullare and the Commedia dell’Arte. The giullare or jongleurs were itinerant
practitioners of alternative theatre in the Middle Ages who would turn up in town squires or carnival sites to tell the people the saga of their sufferings. As the 18th century Italian Scholar Muratory described, "the jongleur was born from the people, and from the people he took their anger in order to be able to give it back to them, meditated via the grotesque, through 'reason', in order that people should gain greater awareness of their own condition." (Fo. Plays. 1. 1)

The giullare or jongleurs who were the theatricians of the people represented a non-mainstream counter-culture by performing dramas that were both grotesque and sardonic. The language in these performances used to be highly connotative and the latent politics of these performances were subtly subversive. They employed unsophisticated, uncivilized language of vulgarity and slang in their scathing critiques of priestly hypocrisy and feudal exploitation.

Following the Commedia dell'Arte tradition, Fo makes use of masks, dialect (Mistero Buffo was written in the 15th century Padano/Lombardian dialect of Northern Italy) and grammelot, "which is an onomatopoeic device based on the use of sounds, where the real words make up roughly the 10 per cent of the whole and the rest is a montage of seemingly senseless voice which however, contrive to indicate the meaning of the situation" (Fo. Tricks 43). According to Dario Fo the comic mysteries were the spoken and dramatized newspaper of the people of middle ages through which the misdeeds and hypocrisy of the religious patrons as well as the corruption and exploitation by the rulers were exposed. Dario Fo skillfully continues
the subversive counter informative narrative methods of the jongleurs with the linguistic stylistic devices of the Commedia dell'Arte in his treatment of contemporary of social issues. In short, in *Mistero Buffo*, methodologically Dario Fo is traditional but thematically extremely contemporary. Fo is at his best in semantic inventiveness, stylistic improvisation, linguistic archaism and dialectism in *Mistero Buffo*.

In *Mistero Buffo* Fo explores the possibilities of a radical rereading of the Christian Gospel stories from the point of view of the unprivileged. In a way this is a subaltern counter reading of the ecclesiastical narrations. He advocates a kind of liberation theology that proclaims that the Gospel must no longer be distorted and turned into an ideology sanctioned by the Church and useful to a thin, excessively wealthy upper stratum alone, and it should be for liberation *from* an overall system of oppression and liberations *for* the self realization of the people, enabling them to determine for themselves their political economic or cultural destiny (Kung 62).

Fo's, the declared atheist's, fearless religious iconoclasm not only shakes the conventional believers, but also the Vatican centered Catholic religious establishment also. In terming *Mistero Buffo*, after its premiere broadcast by the Italian national television in 1977 as, "the most blasphemous show in the history of the television" (Michael). This view was expressed by the official Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano*. Another staunch supporter of Vatican, Franco Zeffirelli, said about this play: "Satire about the Church and the papacy's bad worldly deed is as legitimate as any form of satire, but it
is a different matter when it’s extended to the subject of the gospels. I don’t think it’s right to elaborate the contents of the gospels in a satirical way" (Jenkins, Artful 118). This reaction of the religious super heads reveals their failure to acknowledge the possibility that Christian tradition is capable of being interpreted in a radical life affirming way.

 Rejecting the notion of grand narratives for scriptural texts, Fo irreverently narrates the points of view of the poor and the disinherited. His protagonist in ‘The Marriage at Cana’ is not the Archangel, whose is the official megaphone, but a drunkard who happened to be a eyewitness witness for the miracle. The story of the Resurrection of Lazarus is told from multiple points of view of various onlookers, including the one who’s pocked had been picked amidst the miracle. Similarly a gambling fool is the protagonist of the monologue piece that describes the Last Supper.

 Through a perfect combination of story telling, miming, monologues, dialogues and gestures Fo reworks on the medieval theatrical remains thereby turning them into a powerful contemporary political drama by timely insertion of fuming topical issues and social maladies. He seeks rewriting sacred issues of theology through parody, irony and farce to present the deep-rooted suppression of popular culture and language. With its intermittent allusions to Medieval Ages and sensitive portrayal of the sufferings of the working class, Fo’s Mistero Buffo is a journey from past to the present then to past only to come again back to the present socio political scenario.
On this aspects of inseparability between past and present in *Mistero Buffo* Domemico Maceri elaborates.

His return to the Middle Ages is also an attempt to recover the vital sources of theatre in a prehistoric society before the mass media turned culture into merchandise in the hands of the rich and the powerful to control the working class. Applying the knowledge he gained as a result of his study, Fo creates a number of vignettes on topics with an ecclesiastical background to show not only the corruption and repression of the Church but also the political implications of its power. Stressing popular, comic, and irreverent elements of medieval mystery plays and religious cycles Fo attacks the repressiveness of Catholic church and the land owning class, using the language of the Italian peasants, whom he see as representative of peasants all over the world. (11)

By anchoring on popular traditions and dialect Fo reiterates that the non-mainstream cultural interpretations were deliberately deleted from history and academia by the ruling elites of Feudalism and Catholicism. He tries to recapture this layman's version of history and Gospels through *Mistero Buffo*. Religious eclecticism, feudal exploitation and human sufferings are the main themes of this play.

Fo's wicked and piercing social satire often amounts to shocking blasphemy and articulate subversion. He subverts to make the world more upright, he blasphemes to make the religion more religious. His
carnivalesque extremities are the by-products of the negligence suffered by the marginalized, his unapologetic blasphemous outrages are to attack the ceremonious, hierarchic, mystic Catholicism that looms large invisibly over the life of the whole Christendom. For Fo’s audience he is the modern-day giullari and for Fo the contemporary downtrodden are the medieval peasants. This economic equation and class resemblance helps him to maintain an immediate rapport with his working class audience. He elaborates on their problems, with a comical twist, in their languages. This sort of emotional, linguistic and ideological closeness with the working class enables Fo to raise their political consciousness against the repressive, exploitative establishments, both of religion and politics.

Fo’s class interpretations of several most sacred evangelical themes through the lens of social criticism makes Mistero Buffo wickedly funny and politically sharp, while highlighting the scopes of alternative narration of the Gospels. “He upholds the dignity of the down trodden” (Nobel Press Release) by providing an alternates perspective to the reading of the Gospels. He uses laughter and satire as weapons in lampooning Catholicism and scourging the authority. He takes up the point of view of the victims or the underprivileged in this reinterpretation of evangelical legends. On the other methodological and thematic specialties of Mistero Buffo, Ron Jenkins elaborates:

If there is a single work that embodies the essence of Fo’s epic clown, it is Mistero Buffo, Fo’s masterpiece. It
provides a key to understanding the extraordinary techniques to animate the texts of his large cast plays. Fo influences every story with the rhythmic drive of Jazz improvisation, the immediacy of newspaper headlines and the social scope of a historical novel. There is a Marxist slant but it is far subtler than the cartoon politics that are often found in the commercialized adaptations of Fo's plays in the US. (13-14)

Fo's politics, Jenkins adds, are skillfully embedded in the comic structure of his material. Instead of blatantly proclaiming his opposition to economic injustice Fo creates stories that create tension between freedom and oppression. He then orchestrates his comic climaxes so that they coincide with the victims liberation from servitude, so that laughter and the defeat of tyranny are simultaneously linked in the audience's mind.

Scratching people's consciousness and leaving a burning sensation in their hearts, Fo like a giullare, toured from town to town, factories to streets uttering unpleasantness openly. His radical rereading of the sacred texts begins with The Flagellant's Laude, one of the vignettes, which serves as a choric introduction to Mistero Buffo performances. The Flagellants' hymn remotely resembles T.S.Eliot's female chorus in Murder in the Cathedral. Whereas Eliot revitalizes Catholicism through the play, Fo dismantles the official version of the Gospel teachings.
Uttering masochistic implorations to the poor people to beat themselves, the Flagellants roam along the streets attracting people to the site of comic mystery performances. His laudatory verse is overflowing with references to Christ’s sufferings and the deceits he experienced and the tales of exploitation of those who sweat and toil. His refrain, “Ahiii, beat yourselves, Beat yourselves! Ahiiiah!” is a conscientization call to remind people of their robbed status and thereby aims to urge them to take up armed in rebellion against the oppressors. He praises Jesus Christ for undergoing all the sufferings on behalf of the entire humanity. He curses the rulers, usurers and the exploiters of the farmers in medieval Feudal System. He cries aloud:


And you rulers, you usurers,
You will suffer misfortune,
Enriching yourselves with ill-gotten gains. Beat yourselves!

For you have spat in the face of Christ,
You who have out squeezed, as a person would crush grapes,

The money of those who sweat and toil. (15)

Fo’s giullare is not afraid to be frank in his provocation of the rulers. His identification of the exploited with Jesus Christ gives the giullare enough moral courage to sabotage the deceivers of Christ and exploiters of humanity. This subversive element in the medieval
theoretical exercise vividly explains the existence of a non-official counter-culture of the mass that was conveniently deleted from academic syllabi. Fo journeys back to the Middle Ages to unearth this dormant subversive counter culture. Thematically this brief hymn deals with the priestly deceit and feudal exploitation. Fo here uses the method of choric lamentation at the loss and suffering.

*The Slaughter of Innocents* deals with the Gospel related to the birth of Jesus Christ. While the ecclesiastical versions emphasize the celebrations that followed the infant Christ’s birth, one of the medieval versions of the legend the on birth of Christ reiterates the bloody consequences such a birth had brought to general human beings. Here, Fo uses a magnificent status of Madonna and the Child, as stage a prop, not for attracting the audience with the complexities in the operation of the devise. On the other hand he believed that “the statue could be present as something purely indicative and symbolic, and the player would have space to develop and emphasize the dramatic content of the human condition of desperation, hunger and pain (Fo, *Plays 1* 17).

The story of the birth of Jesus Christ is retold from the perspective of a mad woman who lost her baby in the baby hunt ordered by Herod, the king of Galilee, when he heard the prophecy of Jesus Christ’s birth. The crazy woman, whose baby had been killed by the Roman soldiers, finds a lamb in a sheep pen, takes it in her arms and goes around telling everyone that it was her own baby. This make belief effort doesn’t stop her form cursing the Eternal father for
bringing about a bloodbath by sending his son to the earth. Her outrageous blasphemy embodies common man's deep-rooted hatred towards the Father.

While people hold Jesus Christ as a representative of common man, the Eternal Father represents impositions, and is held responsible for introducing divisions among people, allocating privilege to certain groups of people and for handing out suffering, desperation, subjection humiliation and mortification to the rest (Fo, *Plays I* 18). So God, for the medieval jongleurs, is an instrument of control and an embodiment of partiality. But Christ, for them, was one among them who tried and suffered at the hand of the authorities to bring them back people their lost spring. Fo identifies Christ with the people. He is a subject. But God is a control mechanism and an instrument of the rich to subjugate common man.

In this monologue on the story of Christ's birth, Dario Fo ponders on themes of war, providential design, motherhood and the cruelty of the establishment. For Fo, war is always a fully futile exercise that delivers prolonged agony and sufferings only. In the following scene from this vignette, Fo is trying to tell the world of the futility of war through a conversation between two soldiers on the plot of baby hunt in Galilee.

Soldier I: I joined up in order to kill enemies, to kill men.

Soldier II: And presumably send a few women tumbling in the hey as well, eh?
Soldier I: Yes, may be .... But only if they were enemy
women. But he we are killing innocents.

Soldier II: What do you mean! Aren’t people innocent in
war too? What have those people ever done to
you? Have they ever done anything to you,
those poor souls whom you kill and maim, to
the sound of your trumpets? (21)

The soldiers go for indiscriminate slaughter of babies in whole
Galilee in their attempt to murder the Infant Christ. The poor woman’s
only baby was killed. This turns her crazy and shakes her belief in the
concept of the benevolent God. She becomes a spokeswoman for all
the deprived mothers. She spares no words in her blasphemy
addressed to the Eternal Father:

God, awesome in your heartlessness.... You ordered this
slaughter... you wanted this sacrifice in exchange for
sending down your son a thousand babies killed for the
sake of one of yours, a river of blood for a cup! You should
have kept him with you, this son of yours, if he was going
to cost us poor souls, such a mighty sacrifice. Ah but in the
end you to will see what it means to die of heartbreak, the
day when your son dies! In the end, you too will
understand what a mighty and awesome affliction you have
visited on mankind for all eternity. No father on earth, no
mother, how wicked, could ever have had the heartlessness
to impose such a thing on his own son. (23-24)
Fo’s grieved mother in the play refuses to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ as it brought them irreparable losses only. Even the invincibility of god is questioned here by implying the pain of motherhood would not even spare the providence from curse.

_The Morality Play of the Blind Man and the Cripple:_ While the official versions of the Gospels depict people flocking around Jesus Christ seeking an opportunity for getting miracled, Fo’s protagonists, the Blind Man and the Cripple unsuccessfully try to avoid seeing Christ for the fear of getting miracled by him. This fourteenth century piece of a giullare theatrical performance is centered on the theme of dignity where refusal to be the subordinate of a master is considered to be the declaration of individual freedom. This vignette reinforces the idea that the concept of freedom is not a novel modern one. Interestingly enough self-respect and freedom were core themes of medieval popular performances, which the blind man reiterates here:

*Dignity does not lie in straight legs, or eyes that see; dignity is not having an employer to subject you. True freedom is the freedom of not having bosses -- not only I should be free, but I should live I a world that is also free where others do not have bosses either. (Plays 1 27)*

In an attempt to attain self-sufficiency the blind and the cripple join together, pool in and share each other’s ability thereby becoming an independent whole. The lame riding on the blind’s back, guide each other’s echoes movements. Their interdependency and inseparability echoes Samuel Beckett’s Puzzo and Lucky duo in _Waiting for Godot._
Throughout this vignette, Jesus Christ is not shown, but he was being described by the cripple who, riding on the blind’s back happens to see him. Christ was being tortured and led to the Calvary Hills for crucifixion. The very sight of Jesus Christ fills the blind’s mind with shudder. He implores the blind to runaway from the place to avoid the great danger of getting miracled. He rightly foresees a potential threat in Christ’s presence. Getting relieved of their fortunate infirmities means losing their way of living. Once they are cured of their handicaps, they could beg any longer and people would say them to go to work. To work means to toil under an exploitative master forfeiting their individual freedom of movement and expression. The sense of dignity in them prevents them accepting a master figure over their life so they try to run away as far as possible.

The Blind Man: Let’s go. We must avoid meeting this saint... I’d rather die. Oh mother! Let’s go... Let’s go at the gallop. Grab hold of my ears and lead me as far away you can from this city! Well even leave Lombardy... well even go to France, or to some other place this Jesus, Son of God will never get to.... I know, we’ll go to Rome! (31)

Their attempted departure to Rome, the Head Quarter of Catholicism is ironic enough. This dialogue is suggestive of Christ’s aversion to the institutionalized religion. Fo humourously implies that Rome will be the last place to be visited by the Christ!

In spite of all efforts to flee the place, Christ’s compassion removes the couple’s infirmities. But this miracle leaves them in utter
desperation. Their infirmities had assured them of their individual freedom. Interestingly enough Christ’s miracle makes them lament:

The Cripple: Oh poor me... Now I'll have to go and work for an employer, sweating blood in order to eat... oh most wretched of the wretches! I'm going to have to go and find me another saint who will do me the favour of making me a cripple once again.... (34)

For subversive presentation of the consequences of Christ’s miracles conveys a deeper political message that a physically fit individual, being a mere means of production, under an exploitative social system has to be ready to be exploited (Domenico 13). So the best way to protect one's dignity and freedom is to remain as a handicap in an exploitative system.

Fo's retelling of The Marriage at Cana has been described as the most scandalous one by the conventional believers of Christianity. Fo’s account of the Marriage at Cana, as narrated by a drunken guest, is “an affirmation of life and the need to enjoy it” (Hood xi). Fo reads Gospels from a peripheral point of view. Here a drunkard, who was present at the miracle of transforming water into wine by Christ, narrates the events from a Dionysian point of view. His account of the event is irreverent devoid of any glorifying aspects. Even though he was an eyewitness, an Archangel who appears at a public place, to give out the official version of the event, challenges the drunkard’s eyewitness accounts. The Archangel’s account of the event mystifies the whole episode and alienates the miracle from the people. The
drunkard presents the whole episode realistically where Jesus is presented as Bacchus, the god of happiness, of drunkenness; and even as a jolly boisterous kind of God.

For Fovian Jesus, as presented by the jongleurs of Middle Ages, life is a celebration, not a temporary abode waiting for rewards and punishments in the heavenly kingdom. The official Christianity considers people sinners and the whole religious rituals are oriented towards the exorcising of sins form people lives. It defies celebration, as three are always chances of slipping into sins. People are taught that they are on the earth to suffer; everybody cannot be rich; rebellion against exploration is sin; and so on. To receive all humiliations and dehumanizing treatments with humility is godly. Expressing anger at injustice amounts to sin thereby missing the chance to reach the heaven. But:

...when the drunkard tells the familiar tale, his emphasis is an on the delight of the feast, the food and drink and other physical needs, and on the “tragedy” when the wine eventually turns into vinegar. For the drunkard the wine solves everything and would have even prevented the fall of mankind. (Maceri 11)

The drunkard chases away the authoritarian Archangel who tries to prevent him from speaking and even breathing. While the angle was trying to give the official, edited and modified version of the events at Cana in a boring polished elegant, aristocratic diction; the boisterous drunkard narrates the whole incident in a lively,
straightforward, strong rustic dialect in a colourful and comically exaggerating way. His whole focus is on the life like aspect of the event. In Folk tradition and culture wine plays an important part and the accidental turning of wine into vinegar is tragic enough. The jongleur drunkard reports the common talk at Cana before the arrival of Christ.

'Oh. Oh.... Ah the wine turned into vinegar! How terrible! I've heard it said that a rained - on bride is supposed to be a lucky bride, but being rained on by vinegar would make her the kind of bad luck you are want to keep away from.' (42)

To save the bride's family from the shame of not supplying wine in the wedding banquet, Jesus Christ not only did the miracle of turning water into wine, but he does the unexpected also. "Jesus got up on a table, and began pouring wine for everybody, Drink, good people, be happy, get drunk, don't save it till later, enjoy yourselves...!" and all of a sudden, he remembered his mother: "Oh holy mother! Oh Madonna! Mother, I forgot, excuse me! Here, here's a drop for you too, drink a bit yourself"(43). After narrating this incident, the Drunkard questions the official stand of Christianity on drinking.

And just imagine, there were still same damned rabble going round saying that wine is the creation of the devil, and that it's a sin, and that its an invention of the most diabolical order. But do you think if wine had really
between inventions of the devil, that Jesus would have
given same to his mother to drink? To his very own
mother? (44)

Thematically, the *Marriage at Cana* is a celebration of folk
tradition of life full of wine, enjoyment and happiness. Heaven is made
on this earth itself with eternal celebrations. Waiting for a life after
death is to neglect the earthly happiness. Fo’s subversion of turning
Jesus Christ into a Bacchus is symbolic enough to emphasize the
teaching of Christ to lead a life full of enjoyment on this earth itself.

*The Birth of the Villeyn*: The thematic origin of this vignette is a
12th century fresco of a jongleur. It tells us of the disturbing reasons
behind the metamorphosis of a poor peasant into a jongleur. Along
with the exposure of the land grabbers, this piece takes up the theme
of dignity also. Fo inserts allusions to contemporary instances of
exploitation into this medieval story. Throughout this vignette there is
a tension between freedom and oppression and the innate desire for
liberation from servitude. This is one of the most comical of all other
vignettes in *Mistero Buffo*. For making this more entertaining than
explicitly political, Fo has his own reasons:

I am not [here] interested in politics as I am in justice.
What I hope to do id to involve the audience in a sense of
moral indignation against injustice, not with the theatrical
equivalent of political pamphlets, but with entertainments
that have a sense of religion. (Jenkins, *Artful* 112)
The villeyn was not born as an artist of the people. Rather he was made a megaphone of the people with a single agenda of cautioning his countrymen by propagating tales of exploitation of the working class. Before he became a jongleur, he had been a hardworking peasant, and that it was Christ who changed him to a jongleur. A landowner, who raped the peasant’s wife in front of him and his children, grabbed the poor peasant’s small piece of land. Unable to undergo the trauma of shame his wife committed suicide. Later the children died of distress. The peasant was going to end his life when Christ arrived at his hut. Listening to his story Christ advises him:

You should not remain here struck to your land. You should move around the country, and when people throw stones at you, you should tell them, and help them to understand, and deflate the great bladder of a landlord. You should deflate him with the sharpness of your tongue, and drain him of all his poison and his stinking bile. You must crush these nobles, these priests, and those who surround them notaries, lawyers, etc. (53)

Being a humble illiterate peasant he did not have enough intelligence and power of speech. Cherish provides him both and prescribes him the modus operandi of his future propaganda. In this way the jongleur performance of the 12th century can be rightly called a crude gait prop theatre.
Precisely, it was this advice of Jesus Christ that is taken up by Dario Fo. Just like a jongleur of the middle ages, Fo uses laughter as a sharp weapon to deflate and destroy the exploiters. The jongleur was not only a comedian, but also a propagator of seeds of dissent among the mass. His sojourns were political campaign for a radical change in the social structure. His revolutionary speech, "these rules must be broken, they must be crushed"(54) signifies a clarion call for the proletarian revolution. "Christ turns the peasant into a giullare and instructs him to spread the message of his oppressions. Thus the mission is not religious but a political one and Christ brings not a message of peace but of a sword.

The Birth of the Villeyn reveals another treacherous aspect of providential design. On the landowner's complaint of getting tired of labouring, God approaches Adam for another rib, which the latter out rightly refuses. Then God makes an ass pregnant with air, which after nine months gives out a tremendous fart giving birth to a villeyn. This lowly origin signified his eternal doom. Then an Archangel comes down and declares the protocol to the master of the villeyn.

By order of God, you from this moment, will be the boss, the grater one, and he the villeyn, the lesser one. Now it is written and laid down that this villeyn shall live on bread and row onions, broad beans and boiled beans and spittle. (56)

Through this powerful vignette Fo shows how the powerful control the poor with their biased narration of creation aimed at
maintaining the class equation and thwarting attempts of rebellion in future. The villeyn is presented as vulgar and repelling creature right from his birth. This deliberate derogative, under the guise of religious instructions are to blackmail and to exploit his labour at the maximum. Whenever the villeyn, under the pressure of insufferable living conditions, starts rebelling, the priests mediate with master and villeyn with constructed stories of soul and the sure possibility of ultimate salvation of the villeyn once he undergoes all the sufferings.

The religion, represented through the priest, tells the rebellious villeyn:

No! Stop! Do you want to ruin yourself? You have suffered all your life, and now, shortly, you are going to die. You have the possibility of going to heaven now, because Jesus Christ told you that since you are the last among men you should enter into the kingdom of heaven..... And now you want to ruin everything? Think what you are doing, don't get rebellious! And wait for after-life. (63)

Fo shows that religion is a tool for blackmail in the hands of the corrupt clergy and exploitative landowners. They nip the seeds of rebellion in the bud using the stories of soul and heaven. This vignette is a pungent satire on the abuse of religion by the clergy and the landed gentry. Fo urges workers all over the world to break open the shackles of religious beliefs and refuse to accept the exploiter's versions of the social conditions. The underlying theme of this
vigorous vignette is that religion is never a means of salvation but an instrument for maintaining the status quo that is in favour of the rich.

The Resurrection of Lazarus narrates the episode of Christ’s miracle from the different points of view of the bystanders. Fo refuses to attach any mystical elements to this story of resurrection. Even Christ, the epicenter of the incident is never shown at all. It is like a live commentary from the spectators themselves. Instead of showing Christ’s great deed, Fo focuses on the activities and comments of the mercenary, the gatekeeper, the vender of chairs, the sardine seller, and through the lamentation of the man whose pocket had been conveniently picked amidst the holy deed.

Fo’s spectators at Lazarus revivification flinch back at the repulsive sight of Lazarus rising with a decayed body full of maggots. They do mind the offensive stink. Fo’s intention is to demystify the supernatural descriptions attached to this Gospel story. The principle theme of this piece is a satire of everything that passes for the moments of mystery. This is achieved by playing out an event that, among people, passes for a miracle. Fo says that “the satire is aimed at the miracle mongers, the magicians, the conjurors religions including Catholicism” (Plays 1 64). Fo maintains that the origin all miracle stories is God’s love and sympathy for the mankind. But institutionalized religions supernaturalize the events to glorify them.

A ticket was required to go to the resurrection site. No standing on the cemetery walls was allowed for a free view of the miracle. Ladies and others who may swoon at the sight of revivification can get
a chair rented for just two pence! People could enjoy "tasty sardines" while watching the miracle. Close proximity to the tomb is purely on first-come-first serve basis not according to your height. Even atheists are allowed to watch the spectacle. Beware of pickpockets!! Betting on the success of miracle is not prohibited.

This type of radical subversive retelling of the Gospel stories give them a fresh down-to-earth meaning. The scene is lively with all its disturbances. Fo refuses to give a meticulously orchestrated aura to the entire incident. The people's response is material and naturalistic, not a pious, choric expression of wonder followed by a hymn in praise of god as often seen in the official versions of the Gospel stories. Fo employs the method of demystification in all his rereading of the scriptures. The live, short, spontaneous responses from the spectators reveal this:

'Well done, Jesus!'
'I've won the bet. Let's have the money, Hey, don't mess about..''
Don't mess about...'
'My purse! They've stolen my purse! Stop, thief!
'Jesus, well done!'
'Stop, thief!'
'Well done, Jesus! Well done Jesus..!'
'Stop, thief!' (70)

*Boniface VIII*, another vignette, fearlessly exposes the avarice, pompousness and cruelty of the Papacy as an institution. Through
this provocative piece Fo tries to drive home the point that the internationalized Christianity is no longer Christly. Just like the other historical repressive systems like Feudalism and Capitalism, Catholicism has also become an instrument of control and oppression in the hands of the corrupt clergy. Pope Boniface VIII, who had reduced the church to a whore, mercilessly muffles dissenting voices. Boniface tamed the dissenters like the Franciscan monk, Jacopone da Todi, of the Poor Brotherhood by chaining him in his own excrement for five years (Plays 1 71). The pope used to sit on the monk Segalello da Parma, of the Sackcloth Order, who demanded that the dignity of the church should be founded on the dignity of the poor (Plays 1 72). Pope Boniface had gone up to the extent of organizing an orgy on Good Friday, 1301 including bishops, cardinals and prostitutes to ridicule the critics and the reaffirm his superior authority in matters related to religion.

By portraying the most notorious, scandalous, merciless Pope Boniface, Fo reiterates that institutionalized religions have always been instruments of control. The dissociation between Christ's teachings and the church signifies the hijacking of religion by the elite. The poverty and sufferings of Jesus Christ is pitted against the affluence and luxury of the Church heads. Consequently the Church becomes a malady and Christ becomes a remedy. In Fo's estimation To save Christ, it becomes necessary to demolish the church. Fo was never against Jesus Christ. All his attacks were directed against the abuses of religion by the institutionalized Catholicism. The pontiffs of
Christianity are portrayed as betrayers of Christ. So Pope Boniface VIII of medieval ages is a symbol of the deteriorization of the church. He could not even recognize Christ when he says:

Who is that? Who...? Who's that with the cross? Jesus? Ah, Christ! Jesus Christ, Look, look what a terrible state he is in! Now I see why they call him 'poor Christ'... Good heavens... Look at the state of him. Damn! Let's get moving! I don't like looking at things like this. (82)

But to make an impression among people, Boniface unsuccessfully tries to appease Christ by temporarily leaving his pompous ornaments and apparels. He even rejects charges of cruelty towards monks by saying:

Jesus, Jesus, look into my eyes. I love you and I have always had nothing but good feelings for the monks....

(He turns to the imaginary CLERIC)

Go and get me a monk, quickly

(To Christ)

I love them

(To the Cleric)

Where then you supposed to go and find monks?

Go to the prison! It's full of them! (83)

The off stage Christ refuses to accept his hypocrisy and gives him a kick. This reveals the real mentality of Boniface VIII.

Christ! Kicking me?! My, Boniface! The Prince! Ah, right! Rabble....! Ne'er-do-well! I tell you, if your father gets to
hear of this... Wretch! Donkey of all donkeys! Listen, I
don't mind telling you that it will give me great pleasure to
see you nailed up; and this very day I'm going to get
myself drink! I am going dancing... dancing! And I'm going
with whores!!! Because I, I am Boniface..., I am a plume!
Cloak, mitre staff, rings... and every thing! Look how they
glisten... Rabble! I, I am Boniface! Sing! (84)

The megalomania of the ecclesiastical heavy weights, pompous
lifestyle of the clergy, cruelty towards the poor men of other
congregations and exploitation of the poor in the name of religion are
the major themes of Boniface VIII.

In general discourses Marxism and religion occur
oxymoronically. By bringing together the seemingly dichotomic
religion and the philosophy of dialectical materialism, Fo undertakes a
mission that most of the Marxists reject or avoid. But the keen social
observer in Fo could not neglect the influence of religion in the lives of
common people. Meanwhile he had to integrate these opposite
worldviews too. Fo explains this unique mission in Mistero Buffo as:

Speaking of religion, as did the jesters, I wanted to speak
about politics, while also making a play out of it. I came to
religious theatre almost as a polemical reaction to the
comrades I was working with, who considering
superficially, branded the people's religious problems as a
distortion with no cultural or political significance. The
people's relationship with the divine, with their own
religion, with the religiosity of things is a problem which, regrettably Marxists have never understood and have dodged. (Farrell, *Harlequins* 90)

**Accidental Death of An Anarchist: Tearful Laughter**

*Nolimus aut velimus, omnibus*  
*gentibus, justitiam et veritatem.*  

(“Whether they want it or not, I shall impose truth and justice”)  

Pope Saint Gregory (Fo, *Accidental* 200)

Dario Fo’s *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* is a typical agitprop play that intentionally unveils unpleasant truths about the repressive measures of the authoritarian Italian state apparatuses. It exposes the state sponsored strategy of manufacturing terror to maintain the power *status quo* in the wake of popular unrest. Fo resolutely interrogates the men-in-power for their unconstitutional and immoral suppression of popular protests. This propagandist play vividly demystifies the apparently incomprehensible political maneuverings of a manipulative regime that frequently attempts to selective manslaughter to cover up their devastating failures on socio-economic fronts.

*Accidental Death of an Anarchist* is the most disturbing of Fo’s theatrical repertoire that provoked centres of power in Italy in an unprecedented scale. By all yardsticks of political theatre, this is a typical documentary drama that deftly and directly summarizes the tumultuous socio-political situation prevailed in Italy in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This play can rightly be called a skillful theatrical
rendition of a particular period in Italian history. Without any artistic pretensions this embarrassing theatrical intervention deliberately claims many resemblances to real events and persons in naming the sufferers and those who inflicted the suffering. Basically this play is not designed to be an entertainment piece, but is conceived by the author as a sharp political ammunition that would trigger and intensify a once-suppressed political agitation against the rulers.

Devoid of its rampant verbosity and biting humour, Accidental Death of an Anarchist is a dramatic documentation of a series of political occurrences in Italy. For a comfortable devouring of bitter realities, Fo sprinkles flakes of humour here and there without risking the loss of its ideological sharpness. The play is highly matter of factual, inflammatory in content, controversial in execution and piercing in its effect. In spite of its specific topicality and locale, the concerns Fo expresses here are of undoubtedly universal in appeal and transcendental in significance till the repressive state machinery acts hand in glove with exploitative capitalist interests. It is this aspect of universality that ensured a worldwide appeal on the play.

When society regenerates, art rejuvenates itself; when exploitation becomes rampant, protests become more direct. Drama, being an inseparable component of human life, becomes more direct and elevates itself to the level of a documentary, informing people what is happening around. On this automatic elevation of dramatic art to the status of documentary Raymond Williams notes:
Drama is always so central an element of the life of a society that a change in its methods cannot be isolated from much wider changes, while people's feelings essentially are shut up in rooms the drama will stay them... While society is generalized and separated from the life of the individual drama pursues contemporary reality, not as a human need, but as a general report, as in the rise of documentary as method. (187)

Accidental Death of an Anarchist becomes a documentary out of a historical necessity when the Italian political establishment alienated itself from the people. In such confrontational circumstances, art works, especially drama, immediately cases to be an instrument of entertainment. Fo's play critically analyses the political phenomena which surfaced in the form of anti-people measures by the establishment. Confidently and valiantly proclaiming to be anti-establishmentarian, many times the dialogues in the play acquire the register of journalistic reporting. Before going into this documentary aspect of Fovian play, a brief look at the socio-political events of the day of Italy would be helpful.

Dario Fo's theatrical reconstruction of the concrete incidents that culminated in the death of Giuseppe Pinelli, a railway worker, accused to be an anarchist, virtually demystifies the state strategy of continually maintaining tension in order to suppress the dissenting voices. A historical conceptualization of the play is absolutely necessary for a better understanding and critical appreciation of the play.
In the grass root level, Italy was undergoing a political transition throughout the second half of 1960s. In no time, capitalist monopolists and the imperial agents headed by the CIA and neo-fascists rightly understood this undercurrent of Italy's stealthy slides towards the possibility of a socialist revolution. This important undercurrent surfaced now and then in the form of massive labour strikes in the factories of the monopolies, vibrant student movements in campuses and a general public mood in favour of a radical change in the political set up of the country.

After prolonged massive general strikes amidst innumerable difficulties, the trade unions in Italy achieved an overwhelming victory by getting the Labour Charter signed on 11 December 1969. This new Magna Carta of the labourers signified a successful culmination of a series of labour strikes, which was known as Autono Caldo or “Hot Autumn” (Fo, Plays I 211). This collective movement was also known as Lotte Operale or “Workers Revolt”. The forcefully attained Labour Charted was a consolidation of demands put forward by about 1.5 million striking industrial labourers wholeheartedly supported by the students with a fresh revolutionary consciousness.

Describing the politically volatile situation, Tom Behan reports the opinion of Giovanni Malagodi, the then leader of Labour Party, who expressed his disgust at the workers' protest movement as:

Milan is living through hours of disorder provided by violent and seditious minorities who use creating obstructions and generating tension and fear. Milan's
schools are picketed by extremists, who are stopping classes from taking pace. Leaflets are being distributed which openly defy the law, inciting violence and insulting democratic institutions. Small marches are continually criss-crossing the city and it seems that the only goal is to paralyse public life even further. The authorities appear to be dormant during such a grave situation, while a climate of fear is spreading among public opinion. (Revolutionary
65)

The conservative leader's remarks epitomises the social democrats' impatience and irritation at the agitative politics of the left. Malagodi was unintentionally expressing the fear of the authority, by this statement, in the midst of public protest. He was actually rejecting and devaluing the protesting public; by calling them a "violent and seditious minority". When the students supported the cause of the agitating workers by boycotting their classes en mass, the political right termed it as "picketing" of the schools. Actually "a climate of fear" was not spreading among the public opinion but among representatives of a repressive establishment.

As elsewhere in the globe, in its ultimate effect the consolidation of labour force in Italy posed a great threat to the global imperialism. In the fight against the rising proletarian revolutionary tendencies, the neo-fascists as well as their imperialist big brother the United State of America decided to act together. It was their dire need to de-popularise the emerging mass movement. Consequently, the agents of
American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Italian Social Movement (MSI), the neo-fascist legacy of erstwhile Nazi Party along with the Italian Military spies infiltrated into various small anarchist and communist groups. Fo documents this historical fact dramatically:

Maniac: And let's not forget that our railway man was well aware that the anarchist groups in Rome was Choc-a-bloc with spies and police informers... I believe he himself had said as much to the dancer: The police and fascists are using you as a way of creating a climate of social disorder. Your group is full if paid provocateurs... who seem to be able to do what they like with you... and the Left is going to carry the can for all this....(159)

It felt being in his anarchist group in Rome, as me know, there are always more plain-clothes police than were real anarchists. (165)

All the infiltrators were given every possible logistic and political support by the secret service wing of the Italian military establishment. This concentrated plots of the CIA, the MSI and the Italian Military carefully executed a sabotage of the popular uprising by carrying out a series of bomb blasts in public places throughout Italy in the 1960s and 70s. All these bomb outrages were tactically credited in the account of fake insurrectionist, anarchist communist groups like ORAI (Organizzazione Rivoluzionaria Anarchica Insurrezionalista), CAFA (Cooperativa Artigiana Fuoco e Affini), PNC (Proletarian Nuclei for Communism), and so on. Within a short span of
less than one year 173 bombs were blasted in the different parts of the country (Plays I 193).

Immediately after each blast, following a meticulously planned propaganda exercise, the corporate media headed by the FIAT run La Stampa and the MSI would step into the scene trumpeting the involvement of communists, anarchists, and other radical outfits in the serial blasts. This unholy axis of fascists and corporate monopolies assured the maintenance of a “Strategy of Tension” (Hóod, Intro. Plays I xi). Under the pretext of terror the state could clamp down on all dissenting anti-establishment movements in the country. About this cunning political tactics, that followed after each state massacre, later on Dario Fo wrote:

What we are witnessing is an incredible repetition of what happened back then. In the face of the growth of a deeply peaceful world protest movement, the system replies by trying to drag it into a spiral of violence. Therefore we get bombs. And people look for excuses to beat up and arrest demonstrators hoping that some young people will engage in violent confrontations. And to make sure that this happens you can bet your bottom dollar that agents provocateurs are already at work. (Beware 2)

Through the Accidental Death of an Anarchist Dario Fo attempts to register a plain political statement that in order to maintain the status quo, the state gets into the shoes of the anarchists and deliberately creates utter disorder in public life. All these are done
to cover up its failures in checking economic instability and assuring protection for the workers. As Javed Mallik rightly noted, Fo's political farces embodies a new radical movement in drama which regarded theatre as "a place where the oppressed classes in society are made conscious of the injustices, and their predicament, to intervene actively in life" (68). By undertaking this political and cultural mission, Fo rigorously maintains that each acts of brutality of the state is a reflection of its internal instability. This vulnerability of authoritarian state is a persistent theme in Dario Fo's plays.

Accidental Death of an Anarchist dramatizes the consequences of a bomb explosion in the Banca Nazionale dell'Agricoltura (National Bank of Agriculture), at Piazza Fontanna in Milan in the midnight of 12 December, 1969. Sixteen people were killed and another hundred were injured in this bomb outrage. On the same day another unexploded bomb was retrieved from the premises of Bank of Commerce in Milan. A third bomb was detected and deactivated at the monument of the unknown soldier in Milan.

Soon after the Piazza Fontana explosion, pamphlets were distributed throughout the state by the Italian Socialist Movement (MSI), accusing the anarchists and announcing the arrival of red terror. Ignoring the persistent disclaimers by the anarchists and the New-Leftists, the Italian police started a communist, socialist-anarchist witch-hunt. The police and judiciary took the bomb attacks as a screen to subside and finish the unwanted, troublesome, oppositional, insurrectionist, revolutionary elements in the country.
The anarchists' accusations of the involvement of fascist organization in the bomb blasts were unheeded to.

The next day Giuseppe Pinelli, a Milanese railway worker was arrested, taken to police HQ in Milan and falsely accused of planting the bomb and homicide at the Milan Bank. The police found another scapegoat in Pietro Valpreda, a choreographer by profession for the second bombing attempt. On the fourth day in police custody Pinelli mysteriously 'fell' from the fourth floor window of the police interrogation room in the presence of six policemen.

The custodial death of the anarchist invited a spate of protest demonstrations in the streets and criticizing articles in the press. Adriano Sofri the charismatic leader and editor of the radical left publication *Lotta Continua* (On with the struggle), accused Luigi Calabresi (the Inspector in Sports Jacket in *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*), the interrogation officer of pushing Pinelli to death. Sofri's focused media propaganda and the consequent political campaign made Pinelli a martyr and compelled the authorities to charge sheet Calabresi.

Passing shivers through the spines of the representatives of the deaf authoritarian political establishment, Calabresi was assassinated in front of his house on a fine morning in May 1972. Consequent interrogations revealed that Pinelli and Valpreda were innocent and exonerated, but only after undergoing twenty-two years of judicial custody! Justifying the stand taken by Sofri and other Left-wingers, on July 1st 2001 the Italian police convicted Carlo Maria Maggi and
Giancarlo Rognoni, both former heads of the neo-fascist group *Ordine Nuovo* (New Order) for ordering the massacre at Piazza Fontana and Delifo Zorzi for carrying it out. By then Valpreda had spent 22 horrible years in Italian prison! This is the brief political background of the play.

Though the disclaimers and accusations of the left-wingers were unheard by the authorities and corporate media in 1969, in 2001 Frances Kennedy of *The Independent* had to indict the Italian establishment for all the murkiest massacres of late 1960s and early 1970s. He wrote, after the 2001 Italian Supreme Court judgment.

Piazza Fontana has become a byword for cover-ups, attempt to put investigation off the trail and the involvement of foreign secret service. The Piazza Fontana was a first sign of the 'Strategia Della Tensione' (Strategy of Tension) that led to the terrorist years... the strategy emerged from the fears that Italy, with its strong Moscow-funded communist party and trade unions might be the "soft underbelly of western Europe". Elements within the government and the secret services cultivated rightwing extremists, providing arms and later protection. Scattered acts of violence were to be blamed on the Left, to create public fear and pave the way for a state of emergency and authoritarian rule. (10)

This view had already been expressed by Dario Fo in his play, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, as far back as 1970 when he spoke
through his Maniac mouthpiece.

**Maniac:** ...it wouldn't be very hard to discover that the main intention behind the massacre of innocent people in the bank bombing had been to bury the trade union struggles of the Hot Autumn and to create a climate of Tension so that the average citizen would be so disgusted and angry at the level of political violence and subversion that they would start calling for the intervention of a strong state! *(Accidental 194)*

This belated admittance by the media of the state's involvement in manufacturing terror vindicates the stand held by the leftwing agitators of the time. So does it justify the necessity of Fovian type uncompromising and iconoclastic theatre.

Reviewing *Accidental Death of An Anarchist* Lance Morrow identified Fo's preoccupation with the theme of state massacre that in its deeper reaches Fo's maniac comedy is a splendid thesis on the mentality and mechanics of official tyranny. Fo is examining something more sinister than Watergate ever was. Fo is thinking of "a dark, sanctioned thuggery – the kind that kills – and of an endless manipulation of the record, the facts of the past dissolving and reforming themselves into new shapes like the cloud that Hamlet and Polonius discovered. Certain psychological and moral circumstances, Fo knows, bring about an irrevocable extinction of truth" *(70)*.

In *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* Fo undertakes a systematic deconstruction of the official accounts on the death of Giuseppe
Pinelli. This demolition of the state perpetrated falsehood is achieved by an imaginatively reconstruction of the events that happened in the interrogation room of Police Head Quarters in Milan. Fo's tool in this fight against falsehood is the Maniac. This methodically mad fool behaves like "Karl Marx in masquerade" (Morrow 71). His every clownish action is constructed in such a way as to "oppose or contradict every dramatic action that could be constructive of social, political or psychological stability and order" (Wing 145). Using this technique of reconstruction Fo achieves his goal of putting across the quintessential and presumably most dangerous idea of raising hell up and down the people's mind, waving torches and screaming anarchy.

The Maniac is Fo's mouthpiece in the play. He resembles a Shakespearian Fool in his eccentricities and mannerisms. He could provide logical and etymological explanation of his psychological affliction as "histrionomania" (127) or 'the actors' syndrome'. He has an obsession with dreaming characters and acting them out. In his 'theatre varite' his co-actors and audience are the real people. And he always acts out (for others it is impersonation) the role of figures of authority.

Fo's assignment of the lead role to a Maniac is highly symbolic. This act of the author is an example of deliberate theatrical subversion. In a world where an individual's importance is only in accordance with his power to purchase; in a world where political events are shrouded in mystification; where everything is manipulative; a person of normal mindset could not comprehend this
topsy-turvy system. Only a schizophrenic would be able to make out the system. This is a subversion of the normality. Using such an intelligent, hysteric, humorous and quick-witted Maniac, Fo thoroughly interrogates the whole repressive murderous government. The Maniac angrily outbursts at the silliness, stupidity and procedural irregularities of the Italian police as:

**Maniac:** ...First you arrest an innocent citizen more or less at random, and then you abuse your power by detaining him beyond the legal limit, then you go and traumatize the poor man by telling him that he's been going round planting bombs on railways: then you more or less deliberately terrorize him that he is going to lose his job; then you tell him that his card playing alibi has collapsed. (150)

The official version of the tragic death of Pinelli claimed that he threw himself out of the window out of a sudden 'raptus'. Fo, like others, refused to accept the official version. If at all the anarchist really threw himself out, Fo's dramatic intervention questions the police resorting to psychological terrorization of the victim that put him in a traumatic state. The whole responsibility lies on the shoulder of the state if anything happens in such a mental state. Fo makes it clear that the state cannot evade responsibility of the death of the railway worker. He makes this point clear by putting the blame on the government through the police Superintendent, who is the representative of the state.
Maniac: You see, you see, Superintendent amazing, he effect of 'raptus'? And whose fault would you say it was?

Superintendent: Those bastards in the government... Who else?... First they give a free hand... 'Let's' have a bit of repression, create a climate of subversion, the threat of social disorder.' (155)

Fo makes use of subversive humour throughout the play to refute the claims of the police. After infiltrating into the Milan Police Head Quarters, the Maniac impersonates Professor Marco Maria Malipiero, First counsel to the High Court, Rome and makes the bunch of stupid men-in-uniform believe that he was there to reopen the case of the accidental death. During the course of his interaction the Maniac convinces them that he was trying to save them by inventing a more convincing report on the anarchist's death.

To ridicule the law and order system Fo uses subversive humour. His ironic statements on the police-people relationship aptly convey the intended message to the audience. To dilute the allegation of psychological torture by the police, the Inspector in Sports Jacket reiterated that he and his men were interrogating the culprit jokingly. He said that even the accused enjoyed his short stay in their station. Then the Maniac ironically comments:

Maniac: ....You have no idea how many completely innocent parties move heaven and earth just to get themselves arrested and brought to this station! You think they are anarchists, communists, autonomists,
trade unionists... No, the truth is they're all just poor, sick maniac depressives, hypochondriacs, gloomy people who disguise themselves as revolutionaries just so's they can be interrogated by you... and at last have a good damn laugh! Get a bit of enjoyment, for once in their lives.

(168)

Through these types of ironic and subversive methods Fo implies the brutality of police interrogative methods. Wielding this technique of paradox, Fo thoroughly dismantles the official version of the events leading to the anarchists' death and simultaneously tries to put together the lost threads of reality hidden amidst the loopholes of the fabricated official narration. The inconsistencies and discrepancies of the report are targeted by Fo to tell the people the reality. “This is an example of great theatre in which the wild inventiveness of the writing blends harmoniously with the aim of counter-information” (Quadri).

Quadri is right in his opinion that with a rapidly mounting pace and entertainment, the false and conflicting versions of the outrageous police report is laid bare by Fo to consolidate public opinion against the authorities. Meanwhile, as an activist he never disassociated form the day-to-day struggles of the working class. He always remained a people's theatre personality “contributing to the working class movement by being present in it, changing with it and its struggles and real needs” (Mitchel, People's 99).

Fo intentionally mixes the unmixable aspects of seriousness and
buffoonery in this play. This mingling of the grave with the jovial is one of the many methods used by Fo. But his intellectuality is always conscious of the risk of excessive buffoonery at the cost of its thematic seriousness. He moralises while wildly tickling us. His mouthpiece in the play, the Maniac is “mad but not stupid” (205). Fo has a clear pre-conceived idea in creating a comic farce out of a tragic event.

Fo swims against the stream by achieving a total reversal of making the other characters and the audiences follow the mad guide in their mission of finding out the truth. When the whole system is abnormal, Fo's Maniac maintains envious normality by ensuring calculative steps to whip the callousness of the regime. On this technique of reversal of generating anger through laughter Fo said:

We realized that indignation is really a means of catharsis, liberation and letting off steam... The play was conceived in a grotesque style to avoid any dramatic catharsis. If we had created a dramatic play instead of comic grotesque and satirical play, we would have created another liberatory catharsis. But this play doesn't allow you this outlet, because when you laugh, the sediment of anger stays inside you, and can't get out. It's no wonder dictatorial government always forbid laughter and satire first, rather than drama. (Meldolesi 178-79)

Fovian iconoclasms don't stop with the police and the legislative arms of the establishment alone. He, with equal vehemence, attacks the holy cows of modern government, namely, the judiciary. The
unshakable impartiality generally attached to judiciary is a virtual mirage, according to Fo. Just like any other wings of the repressive state apparatuses, judiciary is also an accomplice to the injustice done.

The degeneration of judicial machinery is among one of the persistent themes in Fo. In this theatrical retaliation against the state sponsored terror regime, Fo fearlessly expresses his dissent and accuses the judiciary collaborating with the oppressors.

Superintendent: I'm really grateful to you... It is eally good to know that the judiciary is a policeman's best friend!!!

Maniac: You might even say 'collaborator'....(159)

Fo not only ridicules the absence of impartiality in the judiciary, he even questions the logic behind engaging over aged men in the process of delivering justice which requires a sharp, analytic and intelligent exercise of the mind. In a system where workers are fired when they turn 50 or 60, over the assumption of not fit for work physically and mentally, it is ironic enough that gerontions are getting promoted to the higher ranks of judiciary at this stage. Fovian subversive humour doesn't spare the gerontocratic judiciary also:

Maniac: ...best job in the world. First of all they hardly ever retire... For a judge it is quite the opposite, the more ancient and idio...(He corrects himself)... syncratic they are the higher they get promoted, the classier they get! And these characters have the power to wreck a persons
life or save it, and as how they went they hand out life sentences like somebody saying: 'My be it'll rain tomorrow ...
' Fifty for you; thirty for you... only twenty for you, because I like your face! (131)

As far as Dario Fo is concerned, the establishment is not the sole entity responsible for the persisting decay in our social life, but the deplorable passivity of the mass on things happening around them are also responsible. People's social indigestion and indignation at the establishment don't get translated into a political agitation. This political impotency as well as withdrawing to their respective protective cocoons emboldens the authority.

By hitting at this peoples' political passivity, Fo aims to shake them up from their destructive insensitivity to socio-political occurrences. Politicization of the mass can be identified as one of the themes of Fovian agitprop theatre. He provokes them politically by inflicting biting satire sandwiched in humour. Fo identifies that even if the atrocities of the authority agitate people at times, soon their anger gets vanished with a liberatory burp; after every scandal comes up. For the people, its enough to have scandals. Fo's Maniac attacks the people of their political passivity as:

**Maniac:** They [the authorities] never tried to hush up these scandals. And they are right not to. The way people can let off steam, get angry, shudder at the thought of it...'what do these politicians think they are? 'Scumbag generals!' 'Murderers!' And they get more

106
or more angry, and thin burrrp! A little liberatory burp to relieve their social indigestion.

Superintendent: ...That would be like saying that scandal is the fertilizer of social democracy! (202)

Dario Fo's 1968 disengagement with the bourgeois mainstream theatre has to be understood as the culmination of his understanding of Marxian ideology that encouraged him to act for the proletariat. Since then Fo's theatrical endeavors were streamlined to mobilize the working class behind revolutionary organizations. He conceived his theatre to be a throw away theatre, which won't go down in bourgeoisie theatre, and is useful like a newspaper article, debate of political action (Mitchel, People's 101). His proletarian concerns not only replaced his theatre to the streets, workshops, factories, school gates, etc., it also provided him fresh materials to attack the imperialistic interests of the exploitative capitalism.

Exploitation of the working class by the monopolies is a recurrent thematic concern in Dario Fo. By depicting the pitiable conditions of working class, Fo exposes the crocodile tears of social democracy that offers, "reforms by bucketful" (196). It drowns the proletariat with promises of reforms that would never come. Actually these promises of reforms are a check dam to prevent the workers energy and anger flowing towards revolutionary movements. Fo depicts the deplorable condition of the working class in factories. Fo's Maniac protagonist questions the Journalist:
Maniac: Do you live in the real world miss Feletti? Instead of going off to Maxico, Cambodia and Vietnam, one day why don't you try visiting Marghera, Piombino, Rho or Sesto san Giovanni? Do you have any idea of what condition a worker is in, these days, by the time he gets his pension? (And from the latest government statistics it appears that fewer and fewer of them actually do!) They're squeezed dry, worn to a frazzle. Hardly an ounce of life in them. (183)

Fo touches on the 'commodification' of life under capitalism where not only the labourers are exploited to the maximum both physically and psychologically, but also an individual's value is determined by his power to purchase from the market. On the basis of his purchasing power citizens are categorized into "Class I, Class II, Class III" and so on (182). Fo's critique of capitalism is more relevant in today's world of privatisation and globalisation where maximum profit is achieved by minimum engagement of labourers.

Fo deliberately leaves the play open ended ensuring the freedom of its adaptation by directors across the world. Technically speaking, Fo's deliberate refusal to give a definite ending to the play comes out of his desire to provide the world a wider framework of an agitprop play – wherein local issues and concerns of the deprived class could be fit in and performed to satisfy the local audience. This aspect of open-endness in dramatic structure makes the play easy to adapt local political issues. Fo's play remains extremely relevant in the back
drop of post-September 9/11 “war on terror” followed by indiscriminate prosecution of the suspected elements in the society.

Laughter is a precise and powerful political weapon for Dario Fo. Even after the play, laughter remains as an irritant that could provoke revolutionary thought and action. Fo’s method of elevating laughter to the status of a propagandist strategy is to ridicule and denounce the miscarriage of justice system. His radical Marxian ideology provides him enough courage and material for fearlessly provoking the gigantic repressive state machinery. He purposefully mixes the grave with the trivial as a method for evoking laughter and inciting insurrection against the authority. On Fo’s deliberate selection this dramatic mode Sarah Hemming observes:

Accidental Death of an Anarchist combines caustic satire with broad slapstick and it also contains a cracking central part in the shape of the so-called Maniac whose apparently innocent enquiries reveal the extent of police duplicity. The impact of the piece depends in the tension between its farcical style and its disturbing contents. But while the farce is so precisely engineered that it can still reduce an audience to tears of laughter. (13)

Fo’s raisonneur, the Maniac reins the course of this “brilliant and savagely funny piece” (Hemming 13). In this vigorous oust-spoken dramatic piece, Fo humorously attacks corruption and the deceit by the establishment. Fo’s juxtaposition of contrasting theme and style leaves the audience shudder with horror instead of wriggling with
laughter in the end. They burst out tears only to sweat with anger later on.

Fo’s Maniac in effect becomes a propagandist repeatedly telling people to think again and again. In this brilliant theatrical exercise in political correctness, Fo simultaneously elicits laughter and assures the arousal of political, social and historical consciousness among his audience. His deeper commitment to the proletarian ideology coupled with a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies of state response to peoples’ protest movements turns the play into a true agitprop. Through this farcical retelling of a particular instance of state sponsored massacre, Fo explains the mass the complexities that underlie in seemingly comprehensible political phenomena.

Fo, as a dramatic method, abstains himself from philosophizing concrete political realities. He calls a spade a spade. Had he attempted abstract philosophization of the politics behind the death of Pinelli, the play would have ended up in academic circles only. Fo’s farcicalization of a tragic incident had an extraordinary and immediate effect among his audience. Their perplexing passivity towards the political happenings around them is shaken forever. For this purpose he deliberately make use of extensive farcical style throughout the play. Fo believed that theatre must be a vast mechanism that makes people laugh at what they see on stage, avoiding the liberating catharsis that can result form watching the drama enacted. A riotously funny, satirical, grotesque show doesn’t permit you that liberation; when you laugh the sediment of anger stays inside you;
laugher doesn’t allow you to be purged (Hirst, 1989. 27).

The initial enthusiasm and jovial mood of the audience is finally and tactfully transformed into a suffocating wrath at the corrupt authorities. Fo having achieved his political aim of shaking the prevailing criminal apathy and indifference among the people, leaves them in a state of repressed anger at the authoritarian brutalities. This is the political aim of his method of “combination of slapstick humour and biting social commentary” (Time 1).

In Accidental Death of an Anarchist, Fo employs the method of subversion. He inverts the tragic content into a farce designed to prevent the therapeutic catharsis that would still leave the audience in their fatal passivity. Fo identifies the antidote to catharsis. Humour is the best provocative tool as far as Fo’s theatre is concerned. He skillfully applies the unfailing logicality of the Maniac to obliterate the illogicality of official cover-ups related to the death of the anarchist. The bastion of authority is infiltrated into, by Fo’s Trojan horse, the Maniac, to demolish the concept of the invulnerability of authorities’ power fortresses.

Thematically speaking, Fo’s black farce, The Accidental Death of an Anarchist is a political manifesto of the suppressed. He exposes the political intentions of state sponsored terrorist outrage to bridle the rising socialist revolutionary tendencies in Italy. Fo tells the world, with all ideological clarity, that the unholy nexus of corporate monopolies, fascist organizations and the political establishment become instrumental in suppressing the libratory dreams of the
proletariat. The brutal exploitation of labourers in factories is another thematic concern for Fo. Finally, Fo’s *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* is a vindication of the Leftist ideology in the liberation of the downtrodden.

**Can’t Pay? Won’t Pay!: Incitement for Market Disobedience**

In the early 1970s Italy was undergoing a severe economic depression. To overcome this, instead of inventing correctional administrative measures, the Italian government sought to offer a free hand to the industrialists in labour related affairs. Consequently, industrial corporatism started imposing stringent regulatory measures on labourers. This included massive cuts in labour ratio, lowering of production expenditure to the maximum, sacking of labourers *en masse*, reduction in work-days, increasing productivity using minimum time and labour, speeding-up of work-lines, raising price rates and so on (Fo, *The Comedy* 67-68). Even after the successful working class struggles of late 1960s, which culminated in getting the Labour Charter, signed in 1961, the plight of the working class in Italy remained worse.

The “Hot Autumn” struggles were a consolidated protest movement of the working class wholeheartedly supported by the students and the liberal intellectuals of the country. But this unity and momentum could not be maintained for long. The economic depression worsened the already hard lives of the working class. As a part of *Laissez faire* policy, the government declined to interfere in the matters regarding pricing mechanism, lengthening of working hours,
reduction in labour strength, etc. When the government and corporate industrialists acted hand in glove, the prices of essential commodities and services soared up to an unprecedented height. Natasha Williams has described the economic uncertainties and instabilities of this period as:

A major recession was taking place by mid 1974 and the prices of essential foodstuffs such as pasta, sugar and milk increased by 50 percent. A few days later the state announced that the main electricity would be cut for thirty minutes everyday, despite the fact that nighttime temperatures were already at zero degree. As a result of all these socio-political events, monthly inflation statistics spiraled out of control as interest rates rose to levels unseen in Europe since the Economic Depression of the thirties. This continued raises in the prices of basic commodities played greater havoc with the lives of people surviving on fixed salaries, than had a decade of terrorism. For even at the height of violence and anarchy, it was possible for ordinary people to continue with their daily routine, but now rampant inflation posed a threat of different kind. (177)

The workers, who were the ultimate sufferers of this economic instability, looked forward for the intervention of trade unions for the improvement of their conditions. However, instead of inciting agitation, the trade union bureaucracy offered simplistic explanations
for the whole affairs, and often they played adjustment games with the
exploitative managements and the inefficient establishment. More
over, Enrico Berlinger, the leader of Italian Communist Party (PCI)
advised the party cadres to load a peaceful austere life in the national
interest as “more austere society can be, and must be, a more equal,
better ordered and more just society, which is really more democratic
and free, and definitely more humane” (Natasha 177). These simplistic
explanations and political mediations were not convincing to the
working class. This led to widespread dissatisfaction and incredulity
towards the Communist Party of Italy (PCI) and the trade unions
controlled by it.

In protest against the trade union bureaucracy, the factory
workers started forming independent Factory Councils signifying a
major political shift where the major trade unions started loosing their
clutch on newly politically conscious working class. This new-Left
questioned the revisionist tendencies of the PCI. In turn the
parliamentary Communist Party derogatively labeled the extreme left
organizations as ‘Maoists’ and political ‘louts’.

The basic theme of Can’t Pay? Won’t Pay! is the frustration and
spontaneous rebellion of the people against the rising cost of living
and essential services. But on a broader political perspective the evils
and absurdities of capitalism the more compelling and unifying topic
of Can’t Pay? Won’t Pay! (Behan, Megaphone 259). The civil society
had no other scope but to act unanimously against the uncontrolled
price hikes. The people on their own started to refuse to pay the hiked
prices of commodities in the market.

This protest movement, autoridizione or "self-reduction" began with the non-payment of enhanced prices and bus and train fares in 1974 (Natasha 176). The insensitivity of the trade union bureaucracy headed by the PCI at the rising rate of unemployment, spiraling prices of essential commodities and services and regular layouts and closures in factories compelled people to initiate a self-planned protest movement. People started paying what they felt a decent price or sometimes no payment at all! This people-led civil disobedience movement against inflation and exploitation was termed as "proletarian expropriation" by the leaders of conservative political parties and the corporate media. A sensitive artist could not dissociate himself from such a boiling political climate of his country. Dario Fo's intuitive theatrical genius came out with the play Can't Pay? Won't Pay! in support of the peoples' protest movement.

The play, Fo said, "deals with solidarity among people ground down by profiteering, with the struggle against the arbitrary hiking up of prices, and it also pillories selfishness and idiocy" (Fo, Tricks 158) of the mainstream revolutionary parties. As the play had an unfailing contemporary flavour and fervor when The Commune preformed the play in Pauda, in 1974, an unbelievable audience of 4,500 thronged at an occupied factory with 2,000 being left outside for lack of room!

Tom Behan illustrates further on the success of Fo's theatre repertoire dedicated for the working class as follows:
The late 1960s and of the early 1970s — the Era of Collective Action — as described by Paul Ginsberg in his *History of Contemporary Italy*, were the years in which Dario Fo wrote and performed some of his most enduring and influential plays like *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, *Mistero Buffo*, and *Can't Pay? Won't Pay!* This was the first time one of Fo’s plays (*Grand Pantomime with Flags and Small and Middle-sized Puppets*) where contemporary class struggle, and the nature of the class society were central themes. Another of the central themes of the play, used reputedly over the coming years was working conditions, a theme very close to the heart of many workers in the audience. (*Megaphone* 251-2)

Unable to put up with the rigidities and deception of the Communist Party, Fo had already said adieu with mainstream left-wing politics leaving *Nouva Scene* and formed a new group, *La Commune* (The Commune). Great artists are the most sensitive lots; they inescapably are an integral component in the mass political movements of their era. Political developments within the civil society propel artistic talents. Fo, being an activist artist, always maintained a close collaboration with the organized and unorganized worker's movements in Italy. *Can't Pay? Won't Pay!* is a direct outcome of Fo’s intimate engagement with radical working class movements. “Behind this satiric presentation is another more fundamental economic and political reality: that the intelligent man is being driven through
unemployment into a profession he despises; and that the unthinking police an ally of the bosses in their oppression of the worker.” (Hirst, 1989, 58)

Can't Pay? Won't Pay! is an effort at consolidation of the working class to encourage them to express their bitterness at the exploitative capitalism and inflatory pricing. In building up this resistance theatre, Fo acknowledges his interrelations with the workers that helped him to make the play sharper and politically agitative. He speaks on the genealogy of Can't Pay? Won't Pay!

Although the material composition of the text is to be attributed to me alone, from the reading of the first draft to actual performance, the script was discussed many times. And not just with the collective [The Commune] alone, but above all with both groups of workers and the political vanguards of several Milan factories, who intervened in great numbers during the meeting to revise the script. And following these debates we realized there were gaps in the text that certain scenes had to be constructed differently. The comrades' really constructive criticism convinced us to change and rewrite all of the concluding section. (Behan, Revolutionary 29-30)

The setting of Can't Pay? Won't Pay! is Milan where many groups of non-indoctrinated apolitical housewives shed all timidity and barge into departmental stores, take what they need, paying only what they could afford. This rebellion of the politically less conscious
women against inflating pressures gather much relevancy when their politically conscious husbands, including communists are reluctant to act being ‘responsible citizens’. Fo’s female protagonist, Antonia is actively involved in this anti-establishment civil disobedience movement while her communist, afraid-to-act husband, disapproves all such movements as extremist outrages.

Antonia, as the curtain unfurls, is seen staggering into her apartment room burdened with many plastic bags overflowing with foodstuffs. She is being helped to carry the bags by Margherita, who in turn is very anxious to know how Antonia could afford a massive shopping amidst the suffocating inflation. Antonia unsuccessfully tries to convince her by fabricating stories about winning a lottery, heavy discounts and even a secret help by her rich lover. Finally she tells Margherita about the raw in the supermarket where the women finally decided to non-payment by declaring: “We’ve had enough. From now on we decide the prices. We’ll only pay a fair prize and no more. And (if) you don’t like it, we’ll knick the stuff.” (5)

The play is an imaginary embodiment of the acts of collective reaffirmation of citizens’ rights and resistance by the deprived class. Fovian political intuition foretells the necessary outcome of peoples’ anger. Alberto Blandi, reporter to La Stampa is quoted making this comment after watching Can’t Pay? Won’t Pay!: 

[It] Deals with the very vital and current issue of civil disobedience, in the form of battle against increase in market and services prices, new instances of which are
continually being reported in the newspapers. But what is outstanding about it is that Fo, with the sensibility and awareness that make him one of the most extraordinary figures in Italian theatre, has imagined these episodes before they actually happened. Then reality began to imitate art. (1974)

In the following scenes, the women's desperate attempt to hide the loot from their principled husbands, incidents of cross-dressing, phantom pregnancies, labour pains, premature deliveries, improvisational dialogues, absurd movements and interactions take place. “All these bizarre incidents are grounded in the notion of festa, which not only stokes its arcical energies, but determines its comic outcome. The fundamental action of the play can thus be defined as getting pregnant with the revolution through the irresponsible carnival of spontaneous action” (Walsh 214). Fo attempts at grotesque humour, spontaneous wit and unexpected entries and exists even through widows to make the play a hyperactive one with an unimaginable pace. On the thematic thread of Cant't Pay? Won't Pay!

Fo explained:

As in old Neapolitan and Venetian farces...here the starting point, the fundamental impetuous is hunger. The initial, instinctive solution in which everyone takes care of himself in resolving the atavistic problem of appetite develops into a need to work collectively, to get organized and fight together. (Mitchel, People's 131)
On hearing the arrival of her communist shop-steward husband Giovanni, Antonia conceals things here and there, including a bagful of groceries down Margherita’s coat, making her ‘pregnant’ all of a sudden. In her attempts to convince Giovanni of Margherita’s hidden pregnancy, Antonia echoes feminists in her description of the fate of women in patriarchy. She bursts herself out:

Antonia: Typical, it is down to us. Run the house, do the washing, have the babies and book the beds...You give us the pay packets, ‘You’ll have to manage with that,’ insist on your conjugal rights, god forbid you should go without that, then we get pregnant, surprise, surprise, surprise, ‘well, go on the pill’, and not a thought for the poor woman who’s a Catholic who has double feature might mares, starring the Pope looming up and warning her: ‘You’re smug, you know, you should bear children. (26)

Fovian concern with the exploitation of women in patriarchal capitalist system is echoed clearly when Giovanni agrees to says that “we exploit them as surely as we are exploited by our boss!!” (35). The ‘women-question’ has always made Fo to incorporate feminist arguments wherever he gets an opportunity. His co-authored anthology of feminist plays, a Women Alone & Other Plays (Rame) elaborates problems women face in the patriarchal society.

Some times after Antonia’s departure to Margherita’s house under the pretext of borrowing something for dinner, a Sergeant jumps into Giovanni’s room through the window, on the search for the
stolen goods from the supermarket. Fo's comic genius not only allows his caricaturized representative of the authority an unexpected entrance through unusual places, his subversive sense presents the Sergeant as an ardent supporter of Maoist style of revolution. Holding the batten of law in his hand he defies the law of the country and delivers an erudite speech on the need of revolution to suspicious Giovanni, who has been a standing member of the communist party for twenty years. Holding a Little Red Book the Sergeant tries to politicize the timid communist:

**Sergeant**: Oh yeah, Have you? What if the law is purely for the benefit of the rich? Eh?

**Giovanni**: Then you have got your democratic procedure, Laws can be reformed, you know?

**Sergeant**: Oh really? Reform? Reform? Don't make me laugh. We've been hearing that for 30 years. Reforms. No mate. If people want change they'll have to do it for themselves. They'll have to wet the shackles of capitalism and iron fists of oppression with the boiling blood of Karl Marx. 'Where the broom does not reach, the dirt will not vanish itself. (21)

Fo's technique of subversion in interchanging the mentalities of the communist and the Sergeant, a tool for state oppression, is to ridicule the parliamentary communists who, instead of propelling a revolution, wait for evolutionary socialism through reforms. This degeneration of radical communist socialist idea into Fabian socialist
concept was of the reasons of Fo's dissociation with the CPI in 1968. According to Fo in pursuit of parliamentary communism, the PCI has scarified the radical ideology of revolutionary communism. Fo transforms Giovanni, the communist into an obedient dog of the establishment, while his wife exhibits more revolutionary zeal than the official communists.

After the Sergeant's ceremonious departure quoting Mao, "A revolution is not a tea party nor is it doing embroidery" (22), Antonia comes back with Margherita only to find that an Inspector who came again for a second round search in their apartment room. On Antonia's dictation, Margherita pretends to be in labour pain to escape a physical frisk check.

In spite of protests from the women the Inspector in turn makes the matter bad to worse. He takes Margherita to a maternity clinic in an ambulance, only to show the benevolent nature of his carabineri. He suggests a "baby transplant" to avoid the risk of baby death in premature delivery. The implausible twists and turns in the events are major sources of pure laughter. Amidst this laughter Fo misses no opportunities for making fun of the authorities. His satire on the over-surveillance of the citizens by the establishment is expressed through his female protagonists. She questions the logicality of the police searching houses while there is a whole world of exploitation lying out there in the society, especially in workplaces. The police and the government do not address all these injustices. This argument is expressed through the female protagonist who talks
Antonia: In our case sweating eight houses a day on the assembly line, like animals, and in your case making sure we behave and - most of all _ pay the right price for everything. You don't ever check for example, that the bosses keep their promises, pay what they have agreed, that they don't kill us with piecework, or by speeding up the line, or screw us with their three-day weeks, that they comply with the safety regulations and pay the proper compensation, that they don't just up the prices, chuck us out in the streets or starve us to death. (28)

The ruthless exploitation of labourers in the factories is always a major thematic concern for Fo. While the exploitative capitalism is interested in accumulating their profits, the government refuses to control them. But whenever the capitalist interests are at stake, the establishment unfailingly wields its arms of oppression against the working class. Fo always questions the immunity to exploit and governmental non-intervention enjoyed by the industrial capitalism, through his plays.

Even though Can't Pay? Won't Pay! is largely a conventional farce, it is equally a political commentary and a criticism of Catholicism. This play is a prefect combination of heavy political message and slapstick comedy. The comic incidents at times reach the extremes of lunacy. This is a pointedly political work that highlights
the plight of ordinary Italian workers during the economic crisis of 1970s (Davis 187). In this provocative political play a tension between revolutionary ideology and parliamentary democracy is generated.

As already pointed out, what is more disturbing for Fo is not the brutalities of the government and the ruthless exploitation by the capitalists but the criminal indifference shown by the communist party towards the genuine protest movements. The reactionary stand taken by the trade union bureaucrats is simply a deplorable duplicity of a communist Party, According to Fo. Can't Pay? Won't Pay! depicts the deliberate abstention of the communist party from expressing solidarity with the civil disobedience movements. Giovanni, who often offers philosophical and political explanations to justify his non-participation in the movement, represents the reactionary mainstream communist party in Italy. His, and his party's stand is on and often questioned by Luigi, Giovanni’s colleague. Luigi, as shown below, often exposes the non-active mode of the PCI amidst the mounting discomfiture among the working class:

**Luigi:** Who organized these women today? Not the unions. The women rioted because they can't take anymore. See these hands? They want what’s theirs. But your union leaders and your precious party tie them behind your backs. And that’s then the army take over. Not when you are on the offensive, but when you are being led up to the garden. (52)
Through this play Fo deliberately provokes the communist leadership and trade union bureaucrats, who instead of grabbing the opportunity by inflaming peoples anger at the capitalist exploitative social set up, disapproves their spontaneous protest movements. The official line said that the striking people were "layabouts, these louts, ultra-leftists [and they] play right into the hands of the ruling class."(13) It is rightly said that Fo's popular and urgent farces were written and performed to express outrage at the ways of a capitalist society and to provoke strong reactions (Brown John, Oxford 522). Fovian satire provocatively addresses contemporary Italian communist as "reformist git" (44). "Fo believes that satire and invention is the best way of combating tyranny and although he is a man of the Left, he has not always pleased the communist Party" (McCarthy 17).

Stuart Hood elaborates on the Fovian attack on the historical failure of the communist party of Italy to understand the new generation and the contemporary political undercurrents.

Significantly the main upholder of law and order is a communist shop steward, who disapproves his wife's rebellion against the rising cost of living... The communist party was too inflexible to cop up with the new faces in politics: young people, women and workers rebelling against the old industrial and political structure. (Intro. Women Alone xii-xiv)

Dario Fo, with Can't Pay? Won't Pay! incites people to be hyperactive rather than becoming submissive to the system as well as
to any enslaving political party. In its deeper reaches this pay is a "splendid theater on the mentality and mechanism" (Morrow 70) of voluntary insurrection of desperate people against the exploitation as well as the merely moralizing trade union bureaucracy. Fo contemplates on the necessary realignment in the concept of responsible citizen and irresponsible state machinery. Fo consistently exposes the marginalization of mass interests by the political elites, and ponders on the necessity of the emergence of a resisting community. This idea is expressed through Luigi when he says:

Luigi: ...What's quite clear is that it's no good working people waiting for the government to do something, the union's intervention and a good word from your party. We have to stop expecting a white paper from the government and a strongly worded declaration of intent from the union every time we want to turn around and have a piss! If we don't do things for ourselves then no one will. (37)

Dario Fo always scorns the role of religion on the improvement common man's lot. He strongly argued that even religions that promise post-death salvation are of no use in this world of exploration. This view is expressed by Antonia when she tells:

Antonia: Most people are descent underneath. Not everybody, of course. But people like us, working people having a job making ends meet. People like that are on our side, as long as you show them you won't let the boss kick in your teeth, that you are prepared to fight for your
rights, and don’t want for St. Peter leave his pearly gates and come down and do it all for you! (45)

To be precise, Can’t Pay? Wait Pay! is a polarization theatre that aims at educating the mass politically as “Fo believes in the importance of knowing oneself, which allows the self’s authenticity and then enables one to be the master of one’s destiny.” (Marceri 9)

The inconvenient intervention of religions in individual's private lives is another persistent theme in Fovian alternative theatre. Being a staunch atheist by practice Fo cannot but question the logicality of religion in contemporary life. Here he criticizes the Vatican policy on abortion and on the use of contraceptives unmindful of the sufferings of the womenfolk in exploitative industrial capitalism. Not only does Fo’s female protagonist Antonia reject Vatican’s dictums on contraceptives, but also she questions the prevailing discrimination against women in the church hierarchy:

**Margherita:** How can you drag the Pope into this business?

**Antonia:** Well, he is always dragging us into his business, isn’t he? “Do this, do that, all you woops keep of my grass’. Why can’t women be priests? You can be a good priest Margherita. You are a good listener. (45)

Fo’s criticism on Catholicism is not to reinstate and internalize it by carrying out a cleansing mission. However, through his theatrical images Fo tries to question the very existence of religion. For Fo, just like the exploitative capitalism, Catholicism is also an instrument of
control and suppression of the individual. If Sophocles’ theatre reiterated the inescapability of Fate in individual’s life, Fovian theatre is a counter-demonstration of the inescapability of class struggle in the present day world of explorative capitalism. Fo held the view that not only does capitalism squeeze the last drop of blood from the workers; it also destroys the future of the children of the proletariat also. These lines declare this concern of Fo.

 Antonio: ...our kids chocked on the scrap heap, a whole generation of them without the hope of getting a job. The fight lying waste and who is standing up to them. Him and his party. Like a dead haddock. I’ve enough of it. (78)

 Can’t Pay? Won’t pay! is a typical agitation theater where different socio-political questions are raised using methods of farce, satire and even excessive buffoonery. Fo’s genius at subversion is displayed here again. The topicality of the burning issues raised in the play assures a profound influence on contemporary audience. Fo’s interrogation of exploitative capitalism, suppressive patriarchy, spiraling rate of unemployment, inconvenient intervention of religion in individuals’ private lives, hijacking of revolutionary ideology by the parliamentary communist groups etc., turn this play a political manifesto in all sense, just like the Accidental Death of an Anarchist is.

 Archangels Don’t Play Pinball: Rehearsal for Becoming Political

 Archangels Don’t Play Pinball belongs to the second period in Fo's career as a dramatist. This period is called the bourgeoisie period
(1959-1968) by critics. Explicit political intention is missing in this phase. Throughout this period Fo was developing his own peculiar brand of "explosive satire, which found its voice more and more in the grotesque expression of the domination and exploitation of the proletariat by the ruling class, and in its reference to popular culture" (Montgomery, 206). This is a quick moving expressionist farce, where confusing bedroom situations and pompous bureaucratic hierarchy are in the firing line of Fo's sharp satirical tongue. Fo, the future radical's favourite issues of class struggle and exploitation of the working class is conspicuously absent in this carnivalesque dramatic piece.

Natasha Williams traces the thematic origin of this grotesque piece. In late 1950s the pinball machines had caused much excitement throughout Italy. The pinball machine, like Hollywood films and Coco Cola, deemed to be a part of the new Americanized pop culture. Consequently it caused much alarms in the religious pulpits and boardrooms so much that the interior ministry proposed to ban it altogether (65). Fo takes up this topical issue and enlarges it including contemporary television evangelists, current politicians and the entire Italian officialdom. For the first time, Fo's later archetype model of theatre protagonist, the giullare appears in this play in the form of the leading character of this play, Stretch.

Stretch is a member of a group of unemployed young Milanese petty criminals. His gang mates play a trick on him by marrying him off to a fake Albanian beauty, who is actually a prostitute, in a mock
marriage ceremony. Stretch then tries to get his identity papers in order so that he can draw a disability pension, only to find that he has been registered as a hunting dog in the official record - a bureaucratic error. This error could only be rectified by going to a kennel, and posing as a dog (Emery, Website). **Archangels Don't Play Pinball** follows Stretch's attempts to extricate himself from the desperate demi-monde of pranks and petty crime, get his papers in order, and find an identity for himself. This includes impersonating as a politician whose trousers he steals on a train, and re-encountering the prostitute, who is now posing as the politician's wife. At the end, he discovers everything has been a dream, although not manipulated as he thought by the archangels in a game of human pinball.

Fo's carnivalesque spirit makes him bold to present a live dog on the stage as well as attempting to *deus ex machina* during the performance of **Archangels Don't Play Pinball**. This is a powerful drama where Fo plays with free mingling of the contemporary with the historical and the allegorical. "As this play is a collector's item...though it is not explicitly political...instead of satirizing actual cases of terrorism of police corruption, Archangels offers a generalized farcical world of haves and nave-nots (Wardle). As the present researcher focuses on the radically political plays of Dario Fo, a detailed analysis of this play is not undertaken here.

A comparative analysis on the thematic and methodological analysis of selected plays of Dario Fo is given under in the form of a table.
### Table-II

**Thematic and Methodological Analysis of Dario Fo’s Plays**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Plays (Year)</th>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Theatrical Devices (Methods)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td><strong>Archan~els</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Don’t Play Pinball</strong> <em>(1959)</em></td>
<td>• Bureaucratic inefficiency, procedural formalities, and corruption.&lt;br&gt;• Immorality of politicians.&lt;br&gt;• Polarisation of wealth.&lt;br&gt;• Nepotism, the world of haves and have-nots.</td>
<td>• Commedia dell’Arte method, Zanny wits, acrobatics.&lt;br&gt;• Subversive delivery.&lt;br&gt;• Extended monologues.&lt;br&gt;• Songs&lt;br&gt;• Absurd, carnivalesque.&lt;br&gt;• Dens ex machina&lt;br&gt;• Expressionistic farce.&lt;br&gt;• The giullari tradition.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td><strong>The Seventh Commandment : Thou Shall Steal a Bit Less</strong> <em>(1964)</em></td>
<td>• Police brutality on workers.&lt;br&gt;• Over taxation, inflation.&lt;br&gt;• Corruption in politics and bureaucracy.&lt;br&gt;• Attack on Catholicism, media.&lt;br&gt;• Industrial monopoly.</td>
<td>• Docudrama.&lt;br&gt;• Farcical, comic and didactic.&lt;br&gt;• Carnivalesque.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td><strong>Dump the Lady</strong> <em>(1967)</em></td>
<td>• Satire on American imperialism.&lt;br&gt;• Anti-war</td>
<td>• Commedia dell’Arte clownish show.&lt;br&gt;• Episodic plot.&lt;br&gt;• Symbolic, didactic.&lt;br&gt;• Farcical, grotesque.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td><strong>Grand Pantomime with Flags and Small and Middle sized Puppets</strong> <em>(1968)</em></td>
<td>• Anti – Fascist ideology.&lt;br&gt;• Capitalistic exploitation.&lt;br&gt;• Unholy nexus of corrupt politicians, religion, industrialists and police.&lt;br&gt;• Suppression of common people.&lt;br&gt;• Revisionist tendencies in the</td>
<td>• Puppetry and Sicilian masks.&lt;br&gt;• Morality type characterization.&lt;br&gt;• Personification of fascism, imperialism and communism.&lt;br&gt;• Allegorical tone.&lt;br&gt;• Songs, music.&lt;br&gt;• Commedia dell’Arte method.&lt;br&gt;• Episodic plot.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td><strong>Mystero Buffo</strong> (1969)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|   | - Feudal exploitation of the peasantry.  
|   | - Hippocratic Catholicism with its pompous irrelevant priests and ecclesiastical rituals.  
|   | - Libratory message in Christ's teachings. | - Commedia dell'Arte Method, clownish giullari.  
|   | - State sponsored terrorism and massacres.  
|   | - Official cover-ups of truth.  
|   | - Unholy nexus of politicians fascists, police and judiciary.  
|   | - Pubic complacency at injustice and corruption.  
|   | - State totalitarianism and police brutality.  
|   | - Raising people's consciousness.  |
|   |   | - Direct address to the audience.  
|   |   | - Grammelot.  
|   |   | - Episodic plots.  
|   |   | - Improvisations.  
|   |   | - Illustrations, sketches and projection.  
|   |   | - Story telling method.  
|   |   | - Extended monologues addressed to audience.  
|   |   | - Counternarration  
|   |   | - Shawian prologues.  |
|   | - Exhaustive exploitation of labourers in industrial capitalism.  
|   | - Workers struggles.  
|   | - Unholy nexus of politicians, industrialists, fascists and police.  
|   | - Political conscientization of the working class.  | - Commedia dell'Arte style.  
|   |   | - Flash back technique.  
|   |   | - Subversive presentation.  
|   |   | - Revolutionary songs.  
|   |   | - Didactic.  |
| 7. | **United We Stand I Altogether Now! Oops, Isn't That the Boss?** (1971) |   |
|   | - Communist party.  
|   | - American imperialism.  
<p>|   | - Right-wing terrorism.  |   |
|---|------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
|    |                        | Police brutality.    | Docu-dramatic.       |
|    |                        | Sectarianism.        |                     |
|    |                        | Suppression of the working class. | Docu-dramatic. |
|    |                        | State massacres      | Grotesque, comic.    |
|    |                        | Sectarian and revisionist tendencies in the communist party. | Didactic, comic. |
|    |                        |                     | Grammelot            |
|    |                        |                     | Counterinformative.  |
|    |                        | Fascism             | Abstract, morality drama. |
|    |                        | Peoples protests.   | Improvisational, commedia dell'Arte. |
|    |                        | Feudal and capitalistic exploitation of the proletariat. | Audience debate at the end. |
|    |                        | Exploitative industrial capitalism. | Improvisational dialogues. |
|    |                        | Police brutality.   | Comic grotesque situations. |
|    |                        | Impoverization of the proletariat. | Revolutionary songs. |
|    |                        | Reformist tendencies in the Communist Party. | Direct involvement of the audience. |
|    |                        | Bureaucratic tradeunionism. |                     |
|    |                        | Importance of spontaneous civil disobedience. |                     |
|    |                        | Critique on the institution of family. | Mime, story telling techniques. |
|    |                        |                     | Improvisations.       |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Unholy nexus of industrialists, politicians, judiciary and the police.</td>
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<td>• Hypocrisy of the media.</td>
<td>• Grotesque, comic farce.</td>
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<td>• Religious moralizing, anti-prohibitionist.</td>
<td>• Abstract</td>
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<td>• Caricaturist.</td>
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<td>• Hypocrisy and Pompousness of the ecclesiastical order.</td>
<td>• Didactic.</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td><strong>John Padan Discovers America</strong> (1991)</td>
<td>• Religions Inquisition.</td>
<td>• Commedia dell'Arte counter-narrative.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Racism and Slavery.</td>
<td>• Jongleur narrative, giullarisque clowning.</td>
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<td>• Politicization of the aboriginals.</td>
<td>• Acrobatics, caricaturist.</td>
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<td>• Imperialism.</td>
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<td>• Episodic plot.</td>
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