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Accidental Death of an Anarchist

Two nights only! Free performing!

October 28 & 29 at 8pm

A riproaring evening of River campus performance groups

December 1-10

by Tracy Letts

To be fair, I think you should be very clear about the ground rules with your next jester.
Welcome to UR International Theatre Program’s 16th season. This year, we welcome — in addition to a bumper crop of talented freshmen (and a new University President!) — a brand new faculty member: Gordon Rice, our Production Manager. We’re also welcoming some wonderful additions to our staff: Assistant Technical Director, Kellen McNally, and Props Master, Carlotta Gambato.

The season we have planned is as diverse as it is challenging. At a time when our nation’s political life is fractured and fraught, what better way to kick off the year but with a masterful political satire. Dario Fo’s all-too-accurate vision of the absurd ways our bureaucrats and politicos try to spin their crimes and misdemeanors could hardly be more timely. Fo’s weapon is laughter, but it’s not without a real foundation of indignation and anger. Anger and comedy of a different kind appear in Tracy Letts’s, An Enemy of the People. Letts, a Steppenwolf Theatre Company member, taps into that rich vein of theatrical americana: the Texan Gothic, with a tale of dysfunction and violence mixed with a dark, dark humor that would make Tarantino proud.

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Our Spring season presents audiences with two fascinating works: Gertrude Stein’s Dr. Faustus Lights the Lights is a retelling of the Faust myth in Stein’s remarkable and unique way. Stein’s dramatic works are being rediscovered by artists from Robert Wilson to the Wooster Group, and guest director Noel Salzman’s production promises a vision of this masterpiece that is both emotionally searing and theatrically exciting. If Stein’s language is baroque, the Austrian playwright and novelist Peter Handke’s The Hour We Knew Nothing of Each Other is fractured and fraught, what better way to kick off the year but with a masterful political satire. Dario Fo’s all-too-accurate vision of the absurd ways our bureaucrats and politicos try to spin their crimes and misdemeanors could hardly be more timely. Fo’s weapon is laughter, but it’s not without a real foundation of indignation and anger. Anger and comedy of a different kind appear in Tracy Letts’s, An Enemy of the People. Letts, a Steppenwolf Theatre Company member, taps into that rich vein of theatrical americana: the Texan Gothic, with a tale of dysfunction and violence mixed with a dark, dark humor that would make Tarantino proud.

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Program information written & compiled by Patricia Tahan.

get with the program!•
The UR International Theatre Program continually brings new, challenging, and exciting theatre to Rochester. We can’t do it without your support. Become a patron of the arts, and a supporter of new, exciting work and fresh talent, by making a donation to the Program today. Even the smallest amount can make a difference. Call 273-5159 to find out how you can contribute... (and every donation is tax-exempt to the fullest extent of the law.)

This production has been made possible through the combined efforts of ENG 170 & 270 (Technical & Advanced Technical Theatre) and ENG 290 (Plays in Production)


special thanks
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Dario Fo was born on March 26, 1926 in San Giano, Italy. His father, Felice, was a railway station master, and his mother, Pina Rota, was descended from peasant lineage. In his childhood, he was exposed to fantastical stories told by his grandfather and by local tradesmen in the village of Porto Valtravaglia, as they went about their daily business. These experiences of storytelling laid the foundation upon which Fo built his life’s work.

In 1940, Fo began studying at the Brera Academy of Arts in Milan. It was also in 1940 that Italy joined forces with the Nazis in World War II. In 1944, Fo was drafted into Mussolini’s Republic of Salò army, but he deserted and spent the remainder of the war in hiding. When the war ended, Fo began taking classes in Milan again, at the Brera as well as studying architecture at the Politecnico. With the fall of Fascism, artists who had been banned under its regime began producing work once again. Fo dove into this re-emerging art scene, devouiring the works of the newly-liberated artists, meeting with painters and writers, and becoming an avid theatre-goer. It was during this time that he first tried his hand at theatre with a (now lost) piece called *The Thieves Decide Us*, which he performed with his friends.

After a break-down in 1949, Dario Fo abandoned his study of architecture. In the following year, he met actor Franco Parenti. Parents, having seen Fo’s series of monologues entitled *Poor name* (*Poor Little Thing*) which told traditional Biblical stories from the perspective of the victimized villain, invited Fo to perform with his company. In 1951, Fo, Parenti and actor Gino Strada formed a theatre company called *The Uprights*. At first, Compagnia Fo-Rame was one of the performers in their cabaret, *A Poke in the Eye*. Rame, who was from a family of famous travelling performers, had met Fo two years earlier when they were both cast in Parenti’s staging of *Seven Days in Milan*. In 1954, Dario Fo and Franca Rame wed at the Saint Ambrose Basilica in Milan. A year later, *The Uprights* disbanded, Franca gave birth to her and Fo’s son, Jacopo, and the family moved to Rome.

The Fo family returned to Milan in 1958 and began the Compagnia Fo-Rame. Dario was the company’s writer, director, designer, as well as an actor, and Franca served at the main text-collaborator and lead actress. The company staged two of Dario’s one-act plays, *Thieves, Mannequins and Nude Women* and *Comica finale that year, and the next year his *Archangels Don’t Play Pinball* debuted. Archangels began a period in Fo’s career - later called his “bourgeois period” - in which he wrote comedy that was mostly consumed by the middle-class (or bourgeoisie). With their fame growing throughout Italy, the Fos were invited to do a program on a new television channel in 1962. Their ratings were so successful that they were invited to join a hugely popular Saturday night variety show on the main channel. There they presented biting, contemporary satirical pieces. Despite the programs jump in ratings, the Fo’s material was continually subject to cuts by the censor. In protest, Dario and Franca walked off the sets—an action that prompted an uproar from viewers, cementing the couple’s popular fame.

Following a series of comedic plays, including *Isabella, Three Caravels and a Con-man* and *The Lady’s Not For Discarding*, Fo broke away from his “bourgeois period.” In 1968, he turned his focus to political farce and to the working-class. He began performing his works, not in big-city theatres, but rather in “alternative venues” such as warehouses and factories, often under the auspices of the Communist Party’s cultural organization. He and Franca disbanded the Compagnia Fo-Rame and created a theatre cooperative called *Nuova Scena*. The cooperative only lasted for two years, dissolving in 1970 due to the Fo’s rift with the Communist Party. Dario and Franca then founded their second cooperative, *La Comune*. *La Comune* produced its work in a largely improvisational method, constantly revising and updating the scripts, which served mostly as dramatic outlines, to reflect issues that were current. *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* was one of the company’s first and most celebrated works, and was regularly updated, often with information and quotes directly from the ongoing inquest proceedings.

Dario Fo and Franca Rame, both politically far-left, had been victims for some time of harassment from the right-wing Italian government. Their phones were tapped, they were subject to police shadowing and arrest. Since 1970, Franca had been working to provide support to imprisoned left-wing activists and their families through an organization called Red Aid. Far right and neo-fascists had been historically targeted. It was later proven that this was done with the tacit consent of the Italian police. The motive was to punish her and her husband, for their ceaseless activism and uncompromising scrutiny of the right-wing government. Despite the brutality of this message, neither Dario Fo nor Franca Rame would be silenced.

During the period between 1974 and 1997, Dario Fo and Franca Rame wrote and produced more than twenty new shows and numerous revisions and revisions of old work, gaining huge international acclaim. In 1997, Fo won the Nobel Prize in Literature. The press release that the Swedish Academy issued upon the award remarked, “With a blend of laughter and gravity, [Fo] opens our eyes to abuses and injustices in society, and also to the wider historical perspective in which they can be placed. Fo is an extremely serious satirist... His independence and clear-sightedness have led him to take great risks, whose consequences he has been made to feel, while at the same time experiencing enormous response from widely differing quarters.”
Kimberly Glennon (Costume Designer) is pleased to be working again with the UR International Theatre Program. She is currently the resident designer of the Classical Theatre of Harlem (CTH). She received the 2003 OBIE Award and an American Theatre Wing nomination for CTH’s The Blacks: A Clown Show. In addition, she has been nominated for 6 Audelco Awards for Excellence in Black Theatre. She recently designed As You Like It for The Juilliard School, Nerdis: A Software Satire for the American Musical Festival in New York City, Medea for CTH, and the upcoming tour of If This Hat Could Talk, directed by George Faison. She has also designed for The American Place Theatre (dir. Wynn Handman), Baruch College and the Cherry Lane Theatre's original production of Sixteen Wounded. Her next project is Fanny House Of A Negro, directed by Billie Allen.

Aaron Black (Lighting Designer) has worked at the University of Rochester on several previous shows, including Hamlet, 'Tis Pity She’s a Whore, and Pseudoselph. New York credits include the NY Premiere of Keith Reddin’s Almost Blue (Flatiron Playhouse); Dream on Monkey Mountain and Mother Courage and Her Children (The Classical Theatre of Harlem); Magic Flute (St. Michael’s); HamletMachine and Cloud 9 (Loewe Theatre); The Waiting Room (Fifth Floor Theatre) and Noor Like an Eagle (Lion Theatre). Mr. Black has worked in regional theatre and opera companies throughout the US including A Christmas Carol (People’s Light and Theatre); Medea (ART); Top Girls (Warehouse Repertory Theatre); Turn of the Screw (Washington University Opera Dept.) and several productions at the North Coast Shakespeare Festival including Quilters, Macbeth, Our Town, and Twelfth Night. Film, television and commercial credits include Art Director for the Primetime Television Special Shania Twain! Up Close and Personal; the independent films Three Way (Art Director) and The Man who Killed Everybody (Lighting Director); the television pilot Fletcher’s Place Television (Art Director) and designs for various corporate trade shows and family entertainment parks. Mr. Black holds a MFA from NYU Tisch School of the Arts.

Obadiah Eaves (Sound Designer) This marks Obadiah’s tenth year designing for the University of Rochester. He has designed sound and composed music for the world premieres of works by such playwrights as David Mamet, Woody Allen, Suzan-Lori Parks, and Jon Robin Baitz. Other work includes Birdie Blue (Second Stage), Moonlight and Magnolias (Manhattan Theater Club), The Argument, Beautiful Child (both at Vineyard Theatre), The Bald Soprano/The Lesson (Atlantic), Hamlet, References to Salvador Dali Make Me Hot (The Public/NYSF), and Blues Clues Live (Radio City and tour). He won the 2005 Lortel Award for Outstanding Sound Design for his work on Nine Parts of Desire (Manhattan Ensemble Theater, Geffen Playhouse), and an Audelco Viv Award for Fucking A (The Public/NYSF). His music for television can be heard on HBO Family, Nickelodeon, Discovery, and The Learning Channel, and he has appeared as a session violinist and mandolinist in numerous film and television scores. His band, Big Hair, has released two nationally distributed CDs.

The university of rochester international theatre program presents

ACCIDENTAL DEATH OF AN ARCHITECT

by Dario Fo

adapted, directed and set design by Nigel Maister

the maniac............................Jonathan Stulberg
under secretary bertozzo...............Ryan Bedard
the sergeant..........................Chris Clingerman
deputy secretary pissani.............John Rectenwald
secretary.............................Evan Hart
maria felleti..........................Shannon Carter
and

a senator from a senate sub-committee

production staff

production stage manager......................Mike Caputo
assistant stage managers....................Ashley Anderson/Props
............................................Emily Butzi
Production stage manager....................Bridget Mayne/Costumes
............................................Emily Pye/Sound
master electrician..........................Jeff Monheit
assistant master electrician...............Julia Cosse
audiovisual engineer........................Alex Blakeney
assistant director..........................Patricia Tehan

this production lasts 2 hours and 30 minutes, including one 15 minute intermission
Satire

Satire is a category of art with blurry edges. It draws from literary and dramatic backgrounds including comedy, parody and tragedy. Though it can use elements found in any or all of these, satire is different. What separates satire from other genres is the way in which it airs the dirty laundry of human nature in a manner that, either implicitly or overtly, cries out to the audience to change the world they live in.

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it would equally serve in a fricassee or a ragout.

— Jonathan Swift, A Modest Proposal

The concept of satire as we know it today traces its bloodline back to the Greeks and Romans. Also known as Greek Old Comedy, it is one of righteous horror at the depravity of the world, at which the poets Horace and Juvenal are particularly credited with. The poets Horace, and Juvenal are acting at her instigation; they have kicked the men out of shame. Further south in West Africa, the Ashanti people fear satire everywhere and attacks it through laughter. Juvenal’s satire, in contrast, is one of righteous horror at the depravity of the world, at which the poets Horace and Juvenal are particularly credited with.

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The Wasp is a piece about the situation of women in society. The Berliner Ensemble invites Fo to stage a production at Brecht’s famous theatre. He prepares an adaptation of Glasperlenspiel which is rejected on account of its political content. But Fo and Rame if granted entry to the US and perform at Harvard among other venues. Dario puts on The Lady’s Man, a piece about the situation of women in society.

Satire is a ubiquitous literary genre. In ancient Arab culture, poets produced satire as a form of weaponry — they would write satiric verses about enemies and ride into battle, hurling the verses at the opposition like verbal spears. This satire (hijj) was believed to be fatal. The Celts of Ireland had a similar belief in the lethal effects of satire. Legend held that when a poet unleashed satiric verses against a victim, three blisters would appear on the target’s skin, and he or she would die of shame. Further south in West Africa, the Ashanti people fear satire as a punishment so much that suicide is a preferable alternative.

MANIAC: What kind of questioning was taking place?
DEPUTY: Just light-hearted.
MANIAC: Light-hearted? Sure you hadn’t roughed him up a bit? A little one two to the head?
DEPUTY: No.
MANIAC: A little happy-slappy around the ear?
DEPUTY: No.
MANIAC: [Karaté stance.] Hai!
DEPUTY: Hai!
MANIAC: Targeted pressure technique is, I believe, the official term.
DEPUTY: No.
MANIAC: No stripping naked and being forced to lie on the ground?
DEPUTY: No.
MANIAC: A little brown broun handle action on the derriere?
DEPUTY: No.
MANIAC: No police dog action?
DEPUTY: No.
MANIAC: How about ‘Bitch in the Box’?
DEPUTY: What? No!
MANIAC: ‘Waterboarding’?
DEPUTY: No.
MANIAC: Mock execution?
DEPUTY: No.
MANIAC: Sleep deprivation?
DEPUTY: No.
MANIAC: I’ve got it: electrodes to the genitals!
DEPUTY: Hai!
Kinda Jokey!

1967 Dario puts on La signora non è da buttare (The Lady’s not for Discarding) in which a circus is made the vehicle for an attack on the United States and capitalist society in general. Fo is specifically interested in material set in or drawn from the Middle Ages.

1968 They set up the Associazione Nuova Scena with a view to staging productions for working class audiences in adverse spaces and environments.

1969 Dario stages I Misteri Buffi to phenomenal acclaim. Citing political differences, Franca and Dario leave Nuova Scena and set up Collective Teatrle La Comune.

1970 Accidental Death of an Anarchist.

1971 Dario is sued by several political groups and is tormented and raped by a group of fascists who want to punish both her and her husband for their political activism.

1974-75 They stage various political shows in support of divorce and the Chilean resistance.

1976 They are invited to return to television after 15 years with the series, Il Teatro di Dario Fo. There are outcries from the church and the political right.

1979 Franca is co-author of Tutta cara, leto a chiusa (Female Body) a film which dramatizes the situation of women in society.

1980 Franca, Dario and their son Jacopo found the Libera Università di Alcatraz, a cultural and agricultural retreat and study centre. the centre has had more than 3,000 tus.

1985 November: The US Dept. grants the Fo’s a limited 6 month stay in the US. They perform at the hotel Prudential, a cultural and agricultural retreat and study centre.

1986 December: They receive honorary entry to the US and perform at Harvard among other venues.

1989 Dario becomes the first Italian director to work at the Commedia Francis.

1989 October: They stage Mitiress Buffs at the Taganka stage in Moscow.

1997 January: Dario is struck by cerebral ischemia and amputation of his eyestage.

1998 October: He puts back on his feet giving performance workshops and performing his latest play, Bibbia dei villani.

1997 Dario Fo receives the Nobel Prize for Literature for “emulating the jesters of the Middle Ages in scourging authority and upholding the dignity of the downtrodden.”
In the beginning, there was man. Man lived and worked amongst family, hunting for and gathering food as was needed. There were no laws by which to abide. There was no state. There was no accumulation of wealth or property. Yet man lived. Thus were the roots of anarchism.

Ancient Greece saw the earliest record of the word “anarchy” in 476 BCE, found in Aeschylus’s play *Seven Against Thebes*. The character Antigone uses it in her open defiance of a state decree against the burial of her brother’s body as punishment for his rebellion. Less than 100 years later, the Greek philosopher Zeno of Citium drafted the first western prototype of anarchist philosophy. He renounced the state’s overruling of the sovereignty of the individual, and believed that if people followed their instincts, government, laws, and even money would become obsolete. Other early forerunners of anarchism include pagan movements such as Stregheria in the 1300’s (who saw the ruling-class Christians as evil oppressors); pantheistic groups like the Brethren of the Free Spirit and the Ranters, both of the Middle Ages (who believed that All is One because God is everywhere and therefore beyond the concepts of good and evil); and the Anabaptists (who believed that the Holy Spirit guides the actions of all good men, therefore nullifying the need for any human law higher than that of the individual).

From the end of the 18th century, the foundations of modern anarchism began to appear. William Godwin of England published a text called, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* in 1793, in which he both presented a critical analysis of the government, as well as proposed a theory of a free society. He denounced all forms of labor cooperation – even orchestras. (Godwin was the father of Mary Shelley, author of *Frankenstein*)! Godwin’s work is praised by many as the first dissertation on modern anarchism.

The first to call himself an “anarchist” was a French man in the mid-19th century, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Proudhon was particularly anti-capitalist: he was against any and all economic profit. Instead, he called for “mutualism,” a term he coined for a bartering-based market in which the value of a good would be measured by the labor involved in its production. Concurrently, in America, Josiah Warren was producing the first anarchist periodical, *The Peaceful Revolutionist*, in which he expounded upon many of the same principles as Proudhon.

Proudhon had a great influence on another anarchist, Russian-born Mikhail Bakunin, who he had met after Bakunin moved to Paris in the early 1840’s. Bakunin rejected all forms of government, both worldly and metaphysically. He called for the immediate and complete dissolution of the government. His ideal of free and autonomous individuals clashed with the ideas of fellow revolutionary, Karl Marx, who felt that these tenets were overly sentimental and unrealistic. Bakunin, in turn, felt that Socialism and Communism were simply replacing one corrupt government with another. This eventually led, in 1872, to Bakunin’s expulsion from the First International, which was an international organization of left-wing and trade groups headed by Marx. This also created the definitive rift between the Anarchists and the Communists.

determined to their dissolution.”

Reinventing Anarchy

Anarchism...expresses the negation of all power, sovereignty and hierarchical division, and a will to their dissolution.

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1969 was a particularly turbulent year for Italy. Tensions were growing between workers’ unions and the government, marked by strikes and demonstrations that often became violent upon the arrival of police. There was also a string of bombings, placed in random locations and detonated without prior warning, designed to cause maximum loss of life, mass confusion and public terror. This tactic was known as the “strategy of tension.” It was used by right-wing neo-fascist terrorists to manipulate and terrify the public, hoping to provoke the people into a nationwide outcry for a strong, even totalitarian, government to put a stop to the mayhem. It is now believed that these groups were acting under the sanction of the government itself. The most horrific of these “strategy of tension” bombings led to the events portrayed in *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*.

Around half past four on December 12, 1969, a bomb exploded in an agricultural bank in Milan at the Piazza Fontana. Sixteen people were killed, and nearly 100 others were injured. Within hours of the blast, police arrested Giuseppe Pinelli, an anarchist. Pinelli was held and interrogated for three days in the police headquarters in Milan. A few minutes after midnight on the morning of December 16, a journalist saw Pinelli’s body fall from the window of the fourth-floor office in which he had been held.

Giuseppe Pinelli was 41 years old, married, and a father of two. He was a railway worker and a member of the Black Cross Anarchists. At the time of his death, he had been held, illegally, for seventy-two hours in the office of a police officer, Luigi Calabresi. The police insisted that Pinelli had flung himself from the window and committed suicide. The inquest into the death terminated in May 1970 when Judge Giovanni Cralzi ruled that the death was “accidental.”

However, there were a number of circumstances that made this explanation problematic. Calabresi’s office was approximately 13 feet by 11 feet, and there were five officers in the room at the time of Pinelli’s death. The window in the office opened inward, and if it had been closed (as would be expected in the middle of winter), it is inexplicable how Pinelli could have eluded all of these government officials on his way out. Another issue was that of the lack of any injuries to his hands. The instinctive reaction of a falling human is to extend the hands to cushion the impact. Since Pinelli’s hands were intact, it seemed that he must not have been conscious when his body left the window. In light of this evidence, many people believed that Pinelli’s flight was outright murder. A second widely-held theory was that his death was the result of a police cover-up of a brutal interrogation gone wrong, and that the death was unintentional.

The logistics of the death were not the only eyebrow-raising issues. The police themselves made incriminatory and contradictory statements. Many parts of *Accidental Death...* are taken directly from the investigation transcripts. For instance, one officer issued a statement that one of Pinelli’s shoes had come off in his hand as he tried to save the anarchist from leaping out. However, the journalists at the scene all reported that Pinelli was wearing both shoes while on the ground. The state of the window also

Another prominent early anarchist was Peter Kropotkin who, influenced by Bakunin, became a prolific anarchist theorist and writer, contributing the first definition of anarchism to the Encyclopaedia Britannica in 1910. Anarchists were involved in many of the great rebellions of the mid-19th and 20th centuries including the French Revolution of 1848, the Russian Revolution in 1917, and the Spanish Civil War in 1936. In Mexico in the 1910’s, Emiliano Zapata, influenced by anarchist Ricardo Flores Magon led a rebellion against land owners, burning mortgage records and property deeds, so as to return the land to the people of Mexico, who he felt were truly entitled to the land.

One of the most prominent anarchist events in US history was the Haymarket Square riot of May 4th, 1886. After Chicago police had fired at a group of workers on strike the previous day, local radicals and anarchists organized a rally, held in Haymarket Square in Chicago. The rally started off peacefully, but when the police arrived to disperse the rally, a bomb was thrown. One police officer died immediately in the blast. The police retaliated, firing into the crowd for approximately five minutes. Between the bomb and the gunfire, eleven people were killed and hundreds more were injured. In 1887, two anarchists who had been speaking at the rally, Albert Parsons and August Spies, were hanged with two other men after having been convicted of participation in the bombing. One of the most prominent American anarchists to emerge as a result of the Haymarket riots, was Emma Goldman, a much maligned figure who was instrumental in introducing feminist ideas to the movement.

While anarchism dwindled in the United States during the “Red Scare” of 1919-1920, it continued to be an active movement in Europe until World War II, where the conflict was focused on the Axis and Allied Powers. In the 1960’s and 70’s, however, anarchism saw an increase in vitality with the punk rock movement in the UK and “squatter” movements and communes in Barcelona and Free-town Christiania in downtown Copenhagen.

Today, anarchism is associated with a number of anti-war, anti-globalization, animal-rights and environmental groups, as well as with those who are involved in the desire to establish parallel structures to government bodies. Anarchists are known to have taken part in the World Trade Organization protests, as well as in anti-G8 rallies. Some are active in animal- and environmental rights groups, such as the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and the Earth Liberation Front (ELF). Many are involved with communes, which are group-living situations with shared resources and labor, and groups like Food Not Bombs, which serves free vegetarian and vegan food to the needy.

Prominent figures currently associated with the anarchist movement include American, Noam Chomsky.

**a (very) basic introduction**

anarchy (from the Greek an (or a) = "not", "the want/absence/lack of" archos = "ruler/director/chief/authority"

Peter Kropotkin
The tradition of the jester

The basic concept of "clown" implies certain physical and verbal characteristics. Clowns, though not entirely alienated from society, are not wholly a part of it either, and their appearance and manner reflect this removal from the other characters around them. Traditional clowns often wear masks or face paint. Their costumes are often either tattered and ragged, or extremely colorful. The clown will often conveniently have bizarre (or magical) items on hand, ready for him to bring out and use at a moment's notice. Linguistically, the clown employs rhetoric and argument in ways that are very different from normal speech. The pun is a common piece of verbal ammunition in the clown's artillery. Puns focus on the physical aspects of language rather than its deeper meaning; puns exploit the sound of a word rather than its connotation, thus convoluting and smashing the accepted conventions of language and logic.

The terms "jester" or "fool" can be applied to several commonly recognized historical, literary and theatrical clown figures. The court jester of medieval Europe, still seen today in theatre with characters such as the Fool in Shakespeare's King Lear, served to both entertain the king as well as point out the king's short-comings. This position allowed the fool a liberty denied to other citizens -- the liberty to question the king's authority. This reversal of authority is a feature of some civic and religious rituals to this day. In these, a clown, an impoverished peasant, an unworthy individual, or, at times, even an animal, is installed in a position of authority for a day, allowing the society a means of subverting hierarchies and venting unfettered and uncensored emotions and actions in a controlled, purgative way. Mardi Gras is one such ritual with these roots.

Another well-known Shakespearean jester figure is Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, in A Midsummer Night's Dream. The character is a conflation of two previously separate entities from Old English lore. The original Puck and Robin Goodfellow were more like boogie-men: things that went bump in the dark, nasty creatures that caused nightmares in children and adults while they slept. The Bard's Puck, in contrast, was mischievous but benign -- in the dark, nasty creatures that caused nightmares in children and adults and Robin Goodfellow were more like bogey-men: things that went bump in the dark, nasty creatures that caused nightmares in children and adults while they slept. The Bard's Puck, in contrast, was mischievous but benign -- in the dark, nasty creatures that caused nightmares in children and adults and Robin Goodfellow were always harmless. The original Puck and Robin Goodfellow (served to both entertain the king as well as point out the king's short-comings. This position allowed the fool a liberty denied to other citizens -- the liberty to question the king's authority. This reversal of authority is a feature of some civic and religious rituals to this day. In these, a clown, an impoverished peasant, an unworthy individual, or, at times, even an animal, is installed in a position of authority for a day, allowing the society a means of subverting hierarchies and venting unfettered and uncensored emotions and actions in a controlled, purgative way. Mardi Gras is one such ritual with these roots.

In Italy, the concept of “jester” (giullare) goes back to the Middle Ages, to the strolling performers known as giullari. The giullari performed in the piazzas and streets, playing to the peasant class. They would mock both Church and State, which often meant they were dodging arrest and censorship by the authorities. This was a popular and very immediate kind of theatre, with the streets for a stage, the public for an audience, and with the news or the giullari's own experiences as a script. Ultimately, this spontaneous theatre was crushed in two ways: the giullari were either executed by the government, or were conscripted into performing for the aristocracy as a court jester, where they were compelled to recite love poetry or romanticized accounts of peasant and pastoral life.

From the giullari rose the tradition of the commedia dell'arte, and one of the archetypical characters most widely associated with the concept of "clown" in the Western world. Arlecchino (or Harlequin, a character that evolved from the first zanni, starting off as a tramp from the lower-class section of Bergamo looking for work in the more sophisticated city areas. Arlecchino was constantly hungry, insatiably gluttonous, and prone to be overcome by other appetites of a more lascivious nature. Over time, Arlecchino became more refined, witty and also more devious and cunning. His appetites, however, remained as intense as ever.

It was from the giullari and Arlecchino traditions that Dario Fo drew his Maniac. For Fo, the Maniac "...has no sympathy with current moral rules, the rules of authority...he is a free spirit, a prevaricating, violent and scurrilous outsider who continually provokes the audience and who will resort to the most absurd and unorthodox methods to make his comedy especially unique.

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