

Nobel Prize in Literature 197



Dario Fo

The Nobel Prize in Literature 1997 was awarded to Dario Fo "*who emulates the jesters of the Middle Ages in scourging authority and upholding the dignity of the downtrodden*".

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Dario Fo, the dramatist and actor, was born at Lago Maggiore, and is 71. His education included studies at the Academy of Arts in Milan. He is married to the actress and writer Franca Rame.

For many years Fo has been performed all over the world, perhaps more than any other contemporary dramatist, and his influence has been considerable. He if anyone merits the epithet of jester in the true meaning of that word. With a blend of laughter and gravity he opens our eyes to abuses and injustices in society and also the wider historical perspective in which they can be placed. Fo is an extremely serious satirist with a multifaceted oeuvre. 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.

The non-institutional tradition has played a great role for Fo. He often alludes to the mediaeval jesters (*joculatores*) and their comedy and mysteries. The central work "Mistero Buffo" from 1969 is based on such historic material as interpreted by Fo. But *commedia dell'arte* and 20th century writers such as Mayakovski and Brecht have provided him with important impulses.

Another of the high points in Fo's extensive oeuvre is "Morte accidentale di un anarchico" ("Accidental Death of an Anarchist") from 1970. Its background was the right-wing extremist bomb attacks of 1969, which were blamed by the authorities and the press on the anarchists. During interrogations in Milan, an innocent suspect "fell" from a fifth-floor window. The play deals with these interrogations, which are gradually taken over by a Hamlet-like figure (*il Matto*, the Maniac) who possesses the kind of lunacy that lays bare the lies of officialdom.

Other works that can be singled out are "Non si paga! Non si paga!" ("We Can't Pay We Won't Pay!") from 1974 and "Clacson, trombette e pernacchi" ("Trumpets and Raspberries") from 1981. The latter is a comedy of errors aimed at participants in the disreputable stratagems in high places. In recent years, together with Franca Rame, Fo has dealt with women's issues in several plays.

Fo's most recent work, "Il diavolo con le zinne" ("The Devil with Boobs"), received its long awaited première in Messina at the beginning of August. It is a satiric comedy set in the Renaissance and its protagonists are a zealous judge and a woman possessed by the devil. As always with Fo, the work is directed at phenomena in today's society.

Translating Fo's texts with their topical references and use of *grammelot* the jesting language that Fo has developed based on dialect and *onomatopoeia* offers particular problems. Often translators comment on the approach adopted. One example is Ed Emery, who points out in a note to his translation of "Morte accidentale di un anarchico" that he has chosen to stay close to the original and retain Fo's allusions.



Fo's strength is in the creation of texts that simultaneously amuse, engage and provide perspectives. As in commedia dell'arte, they are always open for creative additions and dislocations, continually encouraging the actors to improvise, which means that the audience is activated in a remarkable way. His is an oeuvre of impressive artistic vitality and range.

For more details please visit:

http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1997/press.html