

SOCIOCULTURAL PERTINENCE IN TRANSLATION

Dario Fo's *Mistero buffo* and its Québécois Transfiguration

by

Jane Dunnett

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Thesis Supervisor: Annie Brisset, Ph.D.

Jane Dunnett
School of Translation and Interpretation
University of Ottawa

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to illustrate, through a case-study, the sociohistorical and ideological constraints to which the activity of translation is subject. Underlying the source text that was chosen - Dario Fo's *Mistero buffo* - there is one particular *idéologème* which can be summed up as follows: 'the people have always been exploited'. In Michel Tremblay's 1973 translation, this *idéologème* is converted into a different *idéologème*: 'the Québécois have always been exploited'.

In order to shed light on this radical transformation, both plays are first situated in their sociocultural contexts and then analysed in terms of the social discourse that prevailed at the time of their reception in Italian and Québécois society respectively. In this descriptive study the concept of 'pertinence' - as opposed to the translation's aesthetic merit per se - is employed as the chief criterion for interpreting translational shifts; the pattern of these shifts indicates that they are motivated principally by Tremblay's desire to make *Mistero buffo* correspond to the target audience's horizon of expectations.

Résumé

Cette thèse a pour but d'illustrer, à partir d'une étude de cas, les contraintes socio-historiques et idéologiques qui s'exercent sur la traduction. Le texte source choisi comme exemple – *Mistero buffo* de Dario Fo – est sous-tendu par un idéologème que l'on peut exprimer ainsi : 'le peuple a toujours été exploité'. Dans la traduction de Michel Tremblay, datée de 1973, cet idéologème est converti en un nouvel idéologème : 'les Québécois ont toujours été exploités'.

Pour éclairer cette transformation radicale, les deux pièces sont d'abord situées dans leur propre contexte socioculturel, puis elles sont analysées au regard du discours social qui dominait respectivement en Italie et au Québec au moment de leur réception. Cette étude descriptive fait appel à la notion de 'pertinence' – par opposition à celle de mérite esthétique intrinsèque – pour en faire le principal critère d'interprétation des modifications introduites par la traduction; par leur caractère systématique, ces modifications indiquent qu'elles sont principalement motivées par le désir de Tremblay de faire coïncider *Mistero buffo* avec l'horizon d'attente de l'auditoire cible.

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This thesis is very much the product of my experience in two drastically different countries, Italy and Canada, where I have spent the past six years, working and studying. As such, my debts of gratitude lie on both sides of the Atlantic.

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Introduction

Les décalages produits par le double processus de réception et de remédiation, artefacts de la ré-énonciation, accidents de parcours qui définissent l'épaisseur et l'opacité de la traduction vis-à-vis de l'original, sont des déplacements qui témoignent du travail effectué par la ré-énonciation (Folkart, 1990:353-354).

Once the myth of translation as "non-travail" (Folkart, 1991:354) has been exploded, and we admit that it is, instead, a "faire producteur" (357), the result of innumerable "accidents de parcours" (353), we have before us a vast field of enquiry, in what is still largely uncharted territory, where we can usefully uncover the various 'strata' deposited by the translation process. For it is only by doing so that we can hope to reconstruct both "ce que les traducteurs ont fait bouger" (Brisset, 1990:28) and "le bougé" (29) that constitutes the newly generated text.

Over twenty years ago, Henri Meschonnic (1973:307) set forth his 'poetics of translation' in which he observed :

Si la traduction d'un texte est structurée-reçue comme un texte, elle fonctionne texte, elle est

l'écriture d'une lecture-écriture, aventure personnelle et non transparence, constitution d'un langage-système dans la langue-système tout comme ce qu'on appelle oeuvre originale (emphasis added).

In other words, a translated work bears the imprint of the translator who has reinvented the text so that it may now stand on its own, not in subservience to the original work, but as a "traduction-texte" (Meschonnic, 1973:320).¹ Such a text – and in this respect it is no different from other textual occurrences – is the codification of all manner of information: social, cultural, aesthetic, ideological, political, etc. This information is reflected in the discursive practices of a given society at a given time, practices that can fruitfully be analysed in order to reveal what Marc Angenot (1989) describes as an 'état du discours social'.²

¹Meschonnic (1973:354) also uses the expression "traductions-oeuvres" to refer to those translations that achieve 'autonomy' vis-à-vis the source text and are accorded the same status by the target culture as 'original' works in that culture receive. This notion is counterpointed by Meschonnic's use of the terms "traduction-introduction ou traduction-traduction ou traduction non-texte" (321).

²Marc Angenot (1989:9) offers the following, much quoted, definition of social discourse: "tout ce qui se dit et s'écrit dans un état de société; tout ce qui s'imprime, tout ce qui se parle publiquement ou se représente aujourd'hui dans les médias électroniques. Tout ce qui narre et argumente, si l'on pose que narrer et argumenter sont les deux grands modes de mise en discours".

Translation and Social Discourse

The notion of social discourse has only recently been taken up in Translation Studies, with the work carried out by Annie Brisset who proposes a sociocritical approach to the analysis of translations. In her survey (1990) of theatre translation in Quebec during the period 1968-1988, Brisset examines the impact of that society's particular opinions, or *doxa*, on the discourse of the texts to be translated, a discourse which was often drastically at odds with the target culture's beliefs. The ethnocentricity of translation practices which Brisset finds coincides, of course, with Quebec's rising nationalism and its search for a self-defining identity, and can therefore be explained in terms of a 'closure' towards other literatures and other value-systems at a time when the ideology of nation-making prevailed, disallowing 'openness' towards 'foreign' cultures when the very notion of *l'étranger* was connoted negatively.

Such an approach to translation radically alters the premisses on which comparisons have traditionally been made between a source text and a target text. It shifts the focus from the *linguistic* (equivalence theories) to the *discursive* (intertextuality), from the universal to the time-and-place specific, for it demands a deep understanding of the sociological mechanisms that influence discursive formations within particular

social groups, and it presupposes that language, like all human activity, is coloured by ideology.³

We now tend to take for granted the 'cultural turn' in linguistics that the writings of critics such as Foucault (1969:67) helped bring about:

les discours sont faits de signes; mais ce qu'ils font, c'est plus que d'utiliser ces signes pour désigner des choses. C'est ce plus, qui les rend irréductibles à la langue et à la parole. C'est ce 'plus' qu'il faut faire apparaître et qu'il faut décrire.

Yet, most translation critics have persisted, until at least the late 1980s, in wishing to determine language by analysing signs – witness the *sourciers-ciblistes* polemic which revolved around whether one should translate the *signifié* or the *signifiant* of a text – rather than by taking into account the sociocultural context which gives *meaning* and *relevance* to the translation.

Nevertheless, Meschonnic (1973:320) clearly had in mind Foucault's celebrated phrase (1970:11) – "On sait bien qu'on n'a pas le droit de tout dire dans n'importe quelle circonstance, que n'importe qui, enfin, ne peut pas parler de n'importe quoi" – when he stated:

Cette notion de la traduction comme transformation [...] mène à historiciser les questions: qui traduit ou retraduit quoi, et pourquoi? Ce pourquoi est toujours le pourquoi d'un *par-qui* (le traducteur). Ce n'est pas n'importe qui, pas n'importe quoi, ni n'importe quand. Le *pour-qui* (le lecteur) est structurellement inscrit dans le texte, et dans la traduction-texte, autant que le *par-qui*.

³Cf. Eagleton (1991) for an attempt to define this slippery term. His chapter on "Discourse and Ideology" (193-220) offers some useful and provocative insights.

Mistero buffo in Quebec: A Case-Study and its Objectives

Le théâtre est moteur social dans la mesure où il réveille le spectateur par rapport aux informations fournies. Dans tous les cas, c'est l'activité propre du récepteur-spectateur qui travaille et transforme les informations que lui fournit le procès de communication dont il est partie. La communication théâtrale induit chez le récepteur une pratique active" (Ubersfeld, 1991:194).

The broad aim of this thesis is to illustrate, through a case-study, the sociohistorical and ideological constraints to which the activity of translation is subject. Underlying the source text that was chosen – Dario Fo's *Mistero buffo* – there is one particular *idéologème*⁴ which could be summed up as follows: "the people have always been exploited"; indeed, the play presents the class struggle, thereby explicitly adopting a Marxist point of view which, in the process of translation, is transformed so as to produce another, radically different *idéologème*: "the Québécois people have always been exploited"; that is, it implicitly refers to the wider context of the conflict between coloniser and colonised in Quebec and therefore subscribes to a Nationalist point of view. For, as Annie Brisset (1990:237-38) has explained:

⁴ "Nous appellerons '*idéologème*' toute maxime, sous-jacente à un énoncé, dont le sujet circonscrit un champ de pertinence particulier (que ce soit 'la valeur morale', 'le Juif', 'la mission de France' ou 'l'instinct maternel') (Angenot, 1977:24).

au contenu sémantique de la séquence originale correspond, dans le discours-cible, un idéologème pour lequel il existe aussi, dans la littérature réceptrice, une expression codifiée.

It is precisely this codification of the target culture's response to the source text that will be investigated here in order to discern to what extent the Marxist ideology behind Fo's *Mistero buffo* has either been ignored or appropriated so as to assimilate it into the discourse that prevailed in Québécois society in 1973.

A Brief Note on Methodology

Before carrying out this analysis, it was necessary to contextualise both Fo's and Tremblay's texts. The concern was clearly to identify the issues and themes which occupied most space in the social discourse of the 1960s and early 1970s, and which affected the writing of the two plays, whether consciously or unconsciously.

A number of parameters guided this survey of what, for the sociocritic, represents a potentially unlimited storehouse of documents: first, the desire to examine a broad range of material, so as to give as representative a picture of each society as possible, in its sociocultural as well as in its doxological expressions. To this end, not only have other works of literature – particularly in the field of drama – and literary criticism been included, but also newspaper articles and reviews,

historical and sociological studies of Italy and Quebec during the period studied, political commentary, even films. Second, the belief that the repercussions of what, at the time, may appear to be somewhat marginal discourses are often more far-reaching than their apparently minority circulation would appear to suggest (the example of *Parti Pris* is a case in point). And, third, the need to apprehend, in its widest sense, the cultural context which informed the work of both playwrights further oriented the choice of relevant material. The discursive patterns of Fo's and Tremblay's texts provided the initial 'clues' in what, at times, verged on 'detective work' in reconstructing the frames of reference for a word here, an expression there, a repetition or an omission. Thus, for Dario Fo the Marxist, and particularly Gramscian, influence on those sectors of Italian society which he addressed has been examined as well as the conditions which made his reappraisal of popular culture possible and even necessary. The crucial political moment in Italy's history whence *Mistero buffo* was produced is discussed together with the introduction of a new form of political theatre, which drew inspiration from Brecht's epic theatre, and which Fo adapted to the particular circumstances of post-1968 Italy - a radical theatre project, rooted in the problems of the working-class, about and for that class, theatre that entered the factories and the piazzas. As for Michel Tremblay, the rise of Nationalism is surveyed, together with the resulting emergence of a discourse that promoted the search for a Québécois identity,

through the creation of a specifically – and self-consciously – Québécois theatre, strongly supported by the use of *joual*.

Thus, Chapter One looks at Dario Fo's position as playwright and political activist, highlighting the dominant ideologies that pervaded Italian society during the late 1960s and 1970s, in particular the country's strong Catholic tradition and the counter-culture of the Left which was heavily influenced by the thinking of Marx and Gramsci. The significance of popular culture during that period is also examined. Chapter Two analyses the structure of Fo's *Mistero buffo* and its importance as a political play as well as its resonances in Italian society; Fo's desire to create 'popular theatre', based on a Gramscian conception of culture, which places itself in the service of the proletariat as part of the Marxist class struggle is also discussed at some length. Chapter Three surveys the 'horizon of expectations' of the target society, Quebec, during the early 1970s, providing an overview of the most decisive political events and literary influences of the previous decade. Tremblay's work as a playwright and as a translator is seen in the context of the new and relatively homogeneous Québécois theatre whose preoccupations centred on identity and nation-building. The macrostructural changes effected by Tremblay's translation are examined, as well as their implications for the reception of the translated play. An overview of attitudes towards theatre translation in Quebec is sketched so as to show the pressure exerted by the horizon of expectations on

translating. Chapter Four provides a detailed analysis of the theme of the Church in Tremblay's translation of *Mistero buffo*, a theme that this study has privileged in the belief that at the time it represented a highly sensitive issue in a rapidly (and only recently) de-secularised society such as was Quebec at the beginning of the 1970s, a society where – despite appearances – the legacy of the Church remained, more covert perhaps, but nonetheless present at all levels. Reactions to and against it seemed to sum up just that "état de société" of which Angenot speaks. The points of contact and the points of divergence between Italian and Québécois perceptions of religion and religiosity that emerged in translation revealed how a target culture tends to select those elements that are pertinent to its current ideological preoccupations whilst effacing those that are either of no interest to it, or which conflict with its dominant discourse, thereby confirming the general tendency observed by Brisset.

Le possible d'une époque, le possible de la traduction

This descriptive comparative study, which dispenses with the usual "discours sur la défectivité des traductions", as Berman puts it (1995:42), is informed by the conviction that it is only through a close examination of the sociocultural context of reception and its particular universe of discourse (Greimas) that the changes introduced into the target text become intelligible.

Given that "La fonction de la traduction est d'être cette transformation poétique et culturelle" (Meschonnic, 1973:319), the work of a constructive translation criticism is a work of exegesis, a painstaking attempt to chart the inexorable changes – "le bougé" – induced by the transfer of discourse from one culture to another and to understand the significance of such transformation.

Chapter One

Dario Fo, Actor, Playwright, Director – Storyteller Turned
Political Activist

[...] il teatro, più di qualsiasi altra
arte, è impregnato di ideologia.⁵

Si può parlare, in fondo, di Fo come
di una cartina di tornasole delle
vicende culturali, sociali,
politiche, del nostro paese dal '60
in poi, come di uno specchio
trasparente nei rapporti tra teatro e
società e tra cultura e potere.⁶

Fo's Apprenticeship

Born into a working-class family⁷ on March 24, 1926 in San
Giano, a village not far from the Lago Maggiore in Northern
Italy, Dario Fo was the eldest of three children. His father, a

⁵Maraini (1974:8).

⁶Puppa (1978:10).

⁷ All the 'official' biographies of Fo produced by left-wing Italian critics during the 1970s include the obligatory information concerning his proletarian background and his family's political leanings: his father is described as a "ferroviere socialista" and his mother as a "contadina". Such minor details are, however, indicators of the importance placed on class consciousness and political awareness during this period.

station master, was frequently transferred from one station to another, and so Fo's early childhood was spent in various towns close to the Swiss border, a fact which is perhaps not unrelated to Fo's later fascination with different dialects.

There is no doubt that the strong popular tradition of *fabulatori*, or travelling storytellers, which still flourished in the Lago Maggiore area had a "seminal influence on Fo's subsequent career in the theatre".^{*} In addition, the local fishermen and smugglers acted as unofficial raconteurs, according to Fo, who has been keen to trace his own aptitude for storytelling back to this prolific source, a constant reference in his own work where the form of first-person narration predominates:

Ho imparato a raccontare le storie del "Pover nano" dai fabulatori del mio paese, sul Lago Maggiore, quand'ero un ragazzo. Erano storie antiche, parafrasi della Bibbia. Mentre rammendavano le reti i vecchi pescatori raccontavano di Isacco che discute con il padre sull'opportunità o meno di farsi tagliare la testa come a un capretto: "Guarda che il padreterno t'ha fatto uno scherzo papà" [...].'

In 1945 Fo left the provinces for Milan where he went to study architecture at the Politecnico; at the same time he

^{*} Mitchell (1986:35). Regarding the form and content of the *fabulatori's* absurdist tales, cf. the chapter entitled "I fabulatori del lago" in Allegri (1990:20-31). Binini (1975:193-195), Valentini (1977:19-21) and Bianca Fo Garambois (1976:10-11) also offer examples from these stories which combined verbal inventiveness with mime, and instilled in Fo a taste for paradox and the fantastic.

['] From the Preface to *Pover nano* (Fo, 1976:5).

resumed his training as a painter (interrupted by the war) at the Accademia di Brera, an art school attached to the famous gallery. In Milan he made friends with artists, photographers and writers, some of whom were later to become very well-known (eg. Emilio Tadini, Alik Cavaliere, Alfa Castaldi, Oreste del Buono). Moving increasingly in left-wing circles he discovered Gramsci, Marx, Brecht, Mayakovsky, and Lorca, read *Il Politecnico*,¹⁰ and was generally receptive to the climate of cultural experimentation which permeated post-war Milan.¹¹ Whilst his political position

¹⁰ The novelist Elio Vittorini founded his "rivista di cultura contemporanea" in Milan on 29 September 1945 (initially a weekly review, from May 1946 until it ceased publication in December 1947, it appeared monthly). Despite the brevity of its existence, the journal was extremely influential, and counted many distinguished figures amongst its contributors (Franco Fortini, Renato Guttuso, Oreste del Buono, Italo Calvino, Carlo Bo, to name but a few). "Punto d'incontro di fermenti vivissimi ma anche eterogenei (marxisti e cattolici), 'Il P.' esprime in modo emblematico il clima culturale dell'immediato dopo-guerra". (Garzanti, 1985:757). Propelled by anti-Fascist ideals, and urging the commitment of intellectuals to the transformation of society, *Il Politecnico* encompassed a wide range of subjects, from literature (critical articles as well as fiction and poetry), science, art, cinema to philosophy, from politics to social issues. A major concern of the journal, then, was the relationship between cultural freedom and political militancy, a question which sparked off the famous "polemica", or argument, between Vittorini and the leader of the Italian Communist Party, Palmiro Togliatti, and anticipated the debate regarding culture and society which was, as we shall see shortly, to exercise the minds of so many intellectuals during the 1960s.

¹¹ As far as the development of the Italian theatre was concerned, the founding of the *Piccolo Teatro della città di Milano* in May 1947 by Paolo Grassi and Giorgio Strehler was a highly significant event. Not only did it pave the way for teatro pubblico, or state-funded theatre, in Italy, but it also introduced a radically different approach to the performance of dramatic texts. As Cowan (1977:27) explains: "In each of the plays which he directed, Strehler emphasized the theme of social responsibility or 'commitment'. [...] The importance of this subject-matter

had yet to crystallise, temperamentally, at any rate, Fo was clearly drawn to what Paolo Spriano has characterised as the "cultura di opposizione" which defined the Italian Left during this period.¹²

Disenchanted with architecture, Fo turned to the theatre (several visits to Paris had inspired a passion for cabaret), mounting his first play (*Ma la Tresa ci divide*) following the general elections of 1948.¹³ After meeting the actor Franco Parenti in 1950 he forged a highly successful partnership with him in variety shows, a partnership which lasted until 1954. In 1951, Fo wrote and performed his first solo comedy series for the RAI (Italy's national radio network);¹⁴ *Poer Nano* consisted of

appears in the interpretation given by Strehler and other directors, during the formative period of the public theatres, to the traditional classics of the Italian and foreign stage: Goldoni, Molière, and particularly Shakespeare. After the rhetorical, declamatory treatment which the classics had received for so many years, under the predominant influence of the D'Annunzian style of recitation, *public theatre restored them to their full social and historical dimension*" (emphasis added).

¹² Spriano notes (1992:81): "Chi risfoggia oggi le annate del Politecnico, del Ponte, di Società, quegli anni si avvede meglio che la sinistra italiana si esprime subito come *cultura di opposizione: opposizione al clericalismo, al pericolo di clerico-fascismo*" (emphasis added).

¹³ The victory of the Christian Democrats (DC) dashed the hopes of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) of forming a 'government of renewal' together with the Socialist Party, and cast it in the role of opposition for the next fifty years. Fo's student play took issue with what Claudio Meldolesi (1978:22) terms "la farsa della ricostruzione che, da 'nazionale', era diventata ormai, nella coscienza dei giovani, una 'beffa capitalistica'", satirising as it did the DC and the Catholic Church.

¹⁴ The series, regarded as too subversive by the radio authorities, was taken off the air after eighteen weeks. The following year, Fo staged the texts of *Poer nano* at the Teatro

familiar biblical and historical stories, retold in Milanese dialect from the point of view of the underdog – the narrator is the 'poor dwarf' of the title – so as to project Fo's vision of the 'world upside down', a world of paradox which reflects his own ingrained scepticism for received views.¹⁵

The Avanspettacolo: Anti-Revue and Anti-Establishment

Over the next few years Fo acted in revue shows such as *Coccoricò* (1952) with Franco Parenti and Giustino Durano, which afforded him the opportunity to develop his exceptional gift for improvisation and comic theatre. But it was the satirical revue, *Il dito nell'occhio*¹⁶ (co-written and co-directed with Parenti and Durano, and choreographed by the French mime, Jacques Lecoq) which was to launch him nationally: described by critics as an

Odeon in Milan.

¹⁵ Fo's anti-conventional, satirical cast of mind can already be seen at work here. In the Preface to the published version of *Poer Nano* (1976), Fo was later to write that he had been motivated by "Il giusto sollazzo di buttare all'aria le regole del gioco stabilito di una ragione che sta da una parte sola, quella del potere: Caino è cattivo, Abele è il buono, Golia è il tiranno, Davide è l'eroe liberatore... Adamo è un allocco, Eva è una intrigante puttana...ecc. ecc.! Perché, chi l'ha detto? Chi l'ha stabilito...?" This desire to challenge authority and to question the 'official myths' handed down by the ruling classes clearly anticipates his declared intention in *Mistero buffo*.

¹⁶ For a description of *Il dito nell'occhio*, cf. Mitchell (1986:39-40). For extracts, cf. Binini (1975:199-206).

"anti-revue",¹⁷ it was first performed at the *Piccolo teatro* in 1953, and then toured Northern and Central Italy for four months to considerable acclaim, achieving record box-office success.¹⁸

This experience proved decisive for Fo in more than one way. The cast had included Franca Rame, an actress whom he married in 1954 and with whom he was also to develop a fruitful professional relationship (apart from acting in all his plays, Rame has co-written several of them). The encounter with Lecoq — Fo's sole 'teacher', according to Valentini (1980:205), and one who had an enduring artistic influence on the young actor — provided Fo with invaluable training in mime and vocal technique.

The following year, Fo took part in a second revue at the *Piccolo Teatro*, *I sani da legare*, a social and political satire aimed at the Italy of the so-called *legge truffa* ('fraud law'),¹⁹ with Parenti, Durano, Lecoq and the musician Fiorenzo

¹⁷ Fo has been keen to stress that the kind of revue he performed in, the *avanspettacolo*, as it was known, is a popular form of variety theatre, in the Italian tradition of Petrolini and Scarpetta, performed before large audiences, in a style altogether different from that of French or German cabaret, where the atmosphere is more intimate, as are also the manner and tone of speech.

¹⁸ It is estimated that, during the 1953-54 season, *Il dito nell'occhio* was seen by over 180,000 spectators (Poli, 1976:84). Nevertheless it is worth recalling that the show also received a number of hostile "anti-communist" press reactions (cf. Meldolesi, 1978:37, n. 30). Furthermore, the "Dritti", as the Fo-Parenti-Durano revue company called themselves, were prevented from putting on their show in Trieste by the theatre management who had made their performance conditional on certain passages being excised.

¹⁹ The expression, coined by the Left, referred to a controversial electoral law proposed by the DC which was contrived in such a way as to assure the DC a stable majority.

Carpi.²⁰ The team repeated its previous success, playing to packed houses; this time, however, the show suffered heavy cuts at the hands of the censors and received harsh criticism from government authorities.²¹ Owing to the financial failure of the revue and to increasingly diverging interests, the Dritti disbanded, each going his own way.

After a brief hiatus in Rome,²² the Fos returned to Milan in 1958 where they set up the Compagnia Dario Fo-Franca Rame, putting on *Ladri, manichini e donne nude* (four one-act farces) at the Piccolo Teatro and, later the same year, the somewhat more substantial *Comica finale*²³ at the Teatro Stabile di Torino (directed by Gianfranco De Bosio, who, like Giorgio Strehler, had

²⁰ 1953 also marked the beginning of Fo's songwriting activity, with Carpi composing the music for all Fo's plays until 1967.

²¹ As Mitchell (1986:41) recounts: "With more immediate subject matter, the revue was more forceful in its political satire than *Il dito nell'occhio*, and ran into censorship problems [...] at a time when Mario Scelba was Minister of the Interior, and administering a repressive, violent police force made up of ex-Fascist recruits, and the new American ambassador, Clare Booth Luce, was pressurising the Italian government to stamp out the spread of communism. [...] In this political climate, in which police frequently appeared in the audience to check the cuts which had been enforced on *I sani da legare*, many critics seemed to be cautioned into giving the play a lukewarm reception."

²² Fo spent three years working as a (well-paid) screenwriter in Italy's cinema capital, but the results were unpromising. He also co-wrote and acted in *Lo svitato* (*The Screwball*), an unsuccessful satirical film directed by Carlo Lizzani (1956). The likely reason for this flop which Mitchell (1986:42) advances, was that "Fo's essentially improvisational, theatrical style of acting was at odds with the concise, naturalistic needs of the cinema."

²³ Binni (1975:207-214) provides an extract from *I tre bravi*, one of the four pieces which make up *Comica finale*, while Mitchell (1986:43-44) gives a brief description of each farce.

been instrumental in introducing Brecht to the Italian public).²⁴

Farce and Censorship: Fo's Satirical Sit-Coms (1959-67)

Over the following decade, Fo wrote and acted in a series of full-length plays "dai titoli funambolici e pirotecnici", as Paolo Puppa (1990:202) puts it,²⁵ which combined comic entertainment with social criticism: themes with increasingly political overtones, such as state bureaucracy, building speculation, the Catholic Church, and American imperialism, all presented within the conventions of situation comedy, with its predictable gags (disguised characters, mistaken identities,

²⁴ Valentini (1980:205) describes *Comica finale* as "Un lavoro dove molto più che nelle farse surreali di qualche mese prima, *Ladri, manichini e donne nude*, cominciava ad emergere la cifra del suo teatro: una insolita mescolanza di elementi popolari e colti, dove la lezione raffinata del mimo e dell'avanguardia francese si mescolava alle gag dei guitti dell'Ottocento, ai lazzi da *Commedia dell'arte*, ai trucchi del circo, a un antinaturalismo brechtiano sia pur solo orecchiato e intuito alla lontana." It is worth pointing out, here, that Fo had been able to draw on the nineteenth-century *canovacci* (rough drafts of plays which were then improvised by the guitti, or strolling players, in the tradition of the *Commedia dell'Arte*) used by Franca Rame's family, the Teatro Famiglia Rame, a well-known and long-established travelling theatre company, which performed popular farces. This was the beginning of what Binni (1975:214) refers to as Fo's "costante lavoro di ricerca 'alle origini' dei grandi momenti di creatività del popolo".

²⁵ *Gli arcangeli non giocano a flipper* (1959), *Aveva due pistole con gli occhi bianchi e neri* (1960), *Chi ruba un piede è fortunato in amore* (1961), *Isabella, tre caravelle e un cacciaballe* (1963), *Settimo: ruba un po' meno* (1964), *La colpa è sempre del diavolo* (1965), *La signora è da buttare* (1967). All these plays, except the last one, are collected in *Le commedie di Dario Fo*, vols. I and II (Einaudi, 1966).

double entendres, and plots aimed essentially at creating theatrical effects) and farce-like humour – conventions which Fo succeeded in revitalising through a combination of inventive visual devices and idiosyncratic touches, using irony and paradox to comment on Italian society. The songs which invariably formed part of Fo's plays during this period reflect most clearly his diverting didactic vocation.²⁶ The chief device was the relationship between the sane and the insane, a topos that characterises virtually all of Fo's writing. Jokes at the expense of the government of the day and anti-clerical satire meant that Fo's work was subject to constant censorship;²⁷ in addition to arousing the anger of some of the more conservative elements among the country's ruling class, it also provoked violent reactions from the extreme right: groups of neo-Fascists

²⁶ As Ghigo De Chiara remarked in the theatre journal, *Sipario*, after the first performance of *Gli arcangeli non giocano a flipper*: "Se non possedesse una buona dose di liberissima pazzia Fo sarebbe un predicatore, un moralista. Per fortuna sua e nostra egli predica facendo il pagliaccio." (Quoted in Valentini, 1980:205).

²⁷ That Fo continually succeeded in embarrassing the authorities is amply demonstrated by a scene in *Settimo: ruba un po' meno* where, for the first time on an Italian stage, the police are shown firing at workers. That the establishment took Fo seriously is also evident, for not only did it not take kindly to his satirical sallies (which outwitted the censors), but it viewed his theatrical activities with increasing alarm, as the following example suggests: after the last performance of *La signora è da buttare*, Fo was summoned to the *questura* (police station) and threatened with arrest on the grounds that his play contained "offese a capo di stato straniero". In other words, Fo was accused of insulting Lyndon Johnson (Fo's remarks had been improvised, which explains why his script had passed muster with the censors). Needless to say, *La signora è da buttare* (1967) coincided with the Italian government's attempts to quell strong anti-American feeling aroused by Vietnam. For a survey of various aspects of theatre censorship in Italy, cf. Quadri (1967).

regularly disturbed performances, hurling abuse and spoiling for a fight, and on one occasion even beating up Fo and Rame as they left the theatre; the public were routinely searched on arrival due to bomb scares and the couple themselves received countless threatening letters.²⁸ Nevertheless, these plays – performed first at the Teatro Odeon in Milan, and then in other establishment theatres throughout Italy – earned Fo a substantial middle-class following, securing his reputation as one of the most original comic actor-writers of his time, with no other performer equalling his popularity.²⁹

This was the period (1959-1967) Italian critics generally refer to as Fo's so-called "bourgeois period": "'borghese' perché è all'interno del teatro borghese, davanti ad un pubblico sostanzialmente borghese, che si agisce".³⁰ It was the period preceding his decision to break with 'official' theatre and to move into 'alternative' theatre (a convenient chronological

²⁸ Reported in Valentini (1977:88-89) who also describes the oft-quoted incident where Fo was challenged to a duel by an Italian cavalry officer for "insulting the army". This reaction to a line in *Isabella, tre caravelle e un cacciaballe* rivals in absurdity some of Fo's own far-fetched dramatic parodies.

²⁹ According to Valentini (1980:205), Fo's plays were "un fenomeno a parte nel teatro degli anni Sessanta, con la loro carica di anticonformismo e di comicità non becera e qualunquista." For a critical survey of these plays, cf. Binini (1977:24-27, 31-38 and 45); Meldolesi (1978:58-77, *passim*); Puppa (1978:36-94); Pertile (1984:172-175); Mitchell (1986:44-52).

³⁰ Binini's explanation (1975:215) reflects the schematic world-view typical of the majority of Marxist critics at the time. Fo's exit from "bourgeois theatre" is thus assimilated into a wider process of political awareness and class consciousness (ideally) experienced by society at large.

division prompted by Fo himself, as we shall see shortly, and which commentators readily adopted during the 1970s, the period when the production of critical material on Fo was at its height in Italy). In reality, Fo's theatre had grown out of his natural aversion to bourgeois *perbenismo*, or middle-class respectability, the generalised conformism of post-war Italy that was particularly evident in an industrial city like Milan. His instinctive desire to debunk authority, poking fun at the humourless incumbents of revered institutions, had always been present (as a careful study of his early works shows most clearly), although it was only in the latter half of the 1960s that Fo began to situate his attacks on the 'bourgeois state' within the ideology of the Marxist class struggle, and to theorise his position which had always been one of opposition and defiance with regard to the establishment.²¹

²¹ A number of critics have pointed out the inherently ambivalent nature of Fo's work at this time, attacking as it did the bourgeoisie yet remaining within the bourgeoisie's own institutions. Therefore, from a Marxist point of view, Fo was involved in "un processo contraddittorio" (Binni, 1975:215), carrying out an "operazione [che] non mancava di ambiguità" (Valentini, 1980:205). Valentini's comments (1980:205-206) are typical of a vision of the artist shared by many in the PCI, namely that he or she should be ideologically uncompromising: "La sua popolarità sempre più larga aveva le sue basi in un pubblico, quello dei costosi teatri della rivista, per nulla interessato all'analisi della società che Fo, sia pur in modo non certo organico, stava tentando. Dei suoi spettacoli quel pubblico era disposto a cogliere solo un aspetto, quello della grossa macchina strappa-risate, e a perdonare il resto come stravaganza non poi tanto pericolosa. La corda poteva essere tirata solo fino a un certo punto. E il punto di rottura nella voglia di Fo di passare dallo sberleffo alla satira politica è *La signora è da buttare*. [...] è quasi una provocazione al pubblico che Fo si è stretto attorno negli anni Sessanta [...]."

Following the formation of Italy's first centre-left government in 1959, a second state television channel (RAI 2) was created which was run by the Socialists. (Hitherto, television had been under the exclusive control of the ruling Christian Democrats, and heavily influenced by the Church.) Fo was invited by RAI 2 to present five of his one-act farces; subsequently, he was appointed artistic director of a television variety show *Chi l'ha visto* and in 1962 he wrote and performed sketches and songs for the most popular television programme of the day, *Canzonissima*, which assured him massive audiences.³² However, Fo's collaboration with the RAI proved to be short-lived: following the censor's decision to effect cuts on a sketch concerning building speculation, Fo and Rame walked out of *Canzonissima*, refusing to be 'blackmailed', as they put it.³³ This experience "revealed the truly conservative character of the apparent leftward opening in the DC"; it merely served to reinforce Fo's political stance and, according to Lino Pertile (1984:172), "helped him to identify his resolve not to compromise with the dominant conformity."

³² "Nelle sue trasmissioni Fo mette sotto accusa gli industriali, il clero, la mafia, parla dei problemi di vita della masse popolari; la satira rimane l'arma principale di comunicazione" (Binni, 1975:216).

³³ Cf. Binni (1975:217). Cesareo (1962), in an article on television censorship in Italy (with particular reference to *Canzonissima*), discusses RAI's official policy and the hypocritical manoeuvres taking place behind the scenes at that time, as exemplified by the experience of Fo and Rame.

During this decade Fo's interest in exploring the roots of popular culture received an important impetus from Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano, a group of musicians and musicologists who were involved in researching and reviving peasant and working-class songs which they had "exhumed", as Pertile (1984:175) stresses, "with scrupulous historical and philological rigour". In 1966, they asked Fo to work with them on *Ci ragiono e Canto*, a sort of history-of-humankind recounted through popular songs; Fo rewrote some of the material and directed the show.³⁴

Creating an Alternative Cultural Circuit: Nuova Scena (1968-1970)

The turning point in Fo and Rame's career came in 1968 when they decided to leave the so-called 'official circuit' of middle-class theatres (and, with it, the security of full houses)³⁵ in order to perform in 'alternative venues', before 'proletarian' audiences. To this end they set up the Associazione Nuova Scena,

³⁴ As Poli (1976:86) points out: "In questa operazione di smitizzazione, e poi di lotta aperta contro la società borghese, hanno sempre una funzione importante le canzoni, vale a dire la satira espressa nella sua forma più immediata e popolare: sia quelle inserite, brechtianamente, negli spettacoli teatrali, sia quelle composte indipendentemente dalle rappresentazioni, da *Hanno ammazzato il Mario in bicicletta* a *L'Armando*, *Prete Liprando*, *Veronica*, *Vengo anch'io* (queste ultime musicate e cantate da Enzo Jannacci [...]).

³⁵ These 'captive audiences', so to speak, were guaranteed through the traditional *abbonamento*, or subscription, scheme which operated in Italian theatres.

a collective theatre group³⁶ which did away with the hierarchical organisation of conventional companies, and whose aim was to use theatre as a means of raising political awareness and transforming society.³⁷ In its statutes Nuova Scena declared its willingness to serve the people, to help overturn the existing social order, to work, as the group put it,

al servizio delle forze rivoluzionarie non per riformare lo stato borghese con politica opportunistica, ma per favorire la crescita di un reale processo rivoluzionario che porti al potere la classe operaia.³⁸

The (simple) explanation offered by Fo for his rejection of institutionalised theatre was quoted *ad nauseam* in the press, and has appeared in every work on Fo since then. It is, nevertheless, worth recalling, if only because the new self-image projected by Fo stuck – as did the title of *giullare*³⁹:

³⁶ The influence of American theatre cooperatives such as El Teatro Campesino and the Bread and Puppet Theatre was beginning to be felt in Italy. On a more local level, Fo was in contact with another Milanese theatre collective, the "Teatro d'Ottobre", which had been formed after Peter Brooks had performed his anti-Vietnam play, *US*, before Italian audiences in 1967.

³⁷ Capriolo (1969) points to the danger of 'preaching to the converted' inherent in the alternative theatre circuit, but essentially praises Fo's work with Nuova Scena. The task of politically committed theatre, and its future in Italy are examined by Moscati (1969). For other examples of political theatre in Italy, cf. Scabia (1973).

³⁸ Quoted in Binni (1977:46-47).

³⁹ The term *giullare* (equivalent to the French *jongleur*) is used by Fo to describe his role of popular entertainer (cf. *infra*, Chapter Two, for a discussion of this mediaeval source). At the time it was repeated in endless interviews, providing the critics

Eravamo stufi di essere i giullari della borghesia, a cui ormai le nostre critiche facevano l'effetto di un alka-seltzer, così abbiamo deciso di diventare i giullari del proletariato.⁴⁰

The intention that lay behind this decision was however, based on a serious cultural strategy, according to Fo. As he declared in 1973, his aim was to

far vedere alla gente la dimensione vera del potere, di scoprirne la facciata. [...] Si tratta di un lavoro paziente, che può essere lunghissimo, di decine e decine d'anni. Si tratta di arrivare a gestire la rabbia del popolo. Di cominciare a proporre al popolo una visione diversa, anche sul piano culturale. In altre parole, di creare prima di tutto nella gente

with ready-made headlines; later, it was taken up in countless articles and books, and since then the 'label' has remained. It is not surprising, therefore, that several authors chose to allude to it in the title of their studies on Fo (eg. Straniero's *Giullari & Fo* and Mitchell's *Dario Fo. People's Court Jester*.)

⁴⁰ Quoted in Valentini (1977:8). The first reference in Fo's work to the *giullari* is to be found in *Gli arcangeli giocano sempre a flipper* (1959):

LUNGO. [...] Quello di farmi sfottere è un po' come il mio mestiere.

BIONDA. Il mestiere di farsi sfottere?

LUNGO. Sì. Hai in mente i giullari? (Accende la sigaretta.)

BIONDA. E... certo che li ho in mente. (Erudita, enciclopedica) I giullari erano quelli che facevano ridere i monarchici... E' giusto?

LUNGO. (ridendo) Giustissimo. E anche per me è la stessa cosa... con la sola differenza che non essendoci più i monarchici (preme sullo svarione) faccio ridere gli amici del caffè, sono il Rigoletto dei poveri, insomma... Ma l'importante è che mi guadagno anch'io il mio stipendio.

*la coscienza di essere sfruttati, di far vedere la dimensione dello sfruttamento.*⁴¹

With the support of the Communist Party's cultural wing, ARCI (Italian Recreational Cultural Association), which had a network of *case del popolo* (working-class recreational circles)⁴² throughout Italy, and the CGIL (the Italian Trades Union Confederation), Nuova Scena set out to create new audiences drawn from the working classes,⁴³ and to involve them in the political and cultural issues of the day. Rather than excluding the public from the creation of culture⁴⁴ – the sole preserve of the 'artist' – as was the case in traditional theatre,⁴⁵ the so-called "quarta parete", or fourth wall, was broken down and a 'third act', following each performance, was introduced during

⁴¹ Interview with Chiara Valentini, "Il rompicatole" in *Panorama*, 5 Aprile 1973 (emphasis added).

⁴² By issuing the audience with membership cards, Nuova Scena astutely took advantage of a law whereby the police were not allowed to enter private clubs, and was thus free to perform without being censored.

⁴³ The opportunity to perform in ARCI's *case del popolo* and in the CGIL's *camere da lavoro* (district headquarters) was clearly critical in this respect, and fulfilled two of Nuova Scena's statutory aims, namely to put on plays outside the costly (and, hence, classbound) theatre establishments and to ensure that these plays reached peripheral areas, rather than the traditional centres of culture, such as Rome and Milan.

⁴⁴ Binni (1977:47) reports that "Il momento della produzione dei testi si apre ad assemblee di 'inchiesta' con lavoratori e studenti."

⁴⁵ Political theatre run by cooperatives offered an alternative for "Tutti coloro che rifiutano gli spettacoli commerciali, digestivi, consumistici, classisti; tutti coloro che credono nella discussione, nella critica" (Maraini, 1974:20).

which the audience was invited to comment on and criticise what it had just watched.⁴⁶ This discussion period (often lasting longer than the plays themselves) invariably became the forum for heated ideological debate.⁴⁷

This was one way of eliciting audience reaction; another method was to be found in the form and content of the plays themselves. Nuova Scena's stated intention was to challenge the bourgeois conception of theatre as evasion, an anodyne consumer product to be utilised

come strumento passivo, come modo per trascorrere una serata, come digestivo, per dirla con Brecht, dove proprio lo stesso Brecht veniva e viene tradito nei suoi scopi più autentici e classisti.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Cf. Introduction to *Compagni senza censura* (1970:6-7): "Se è vera l'ipotesi marxiana che in una data società la cultura in generale è portatrice dei valori della classe dominante, ci sembra che altrettanto vera sia l'ipotesi gramsciana e leninista (e l' 'in generale' di Marx mi sembra che proprio a questo intenda riferirsi) che il potere reale la classe operaia potrà acquistarlo e conservarlo soltanto impadronendosi di tutti gli strumenti non soltanto di produzione, ma anche di formazione e informazione (emphasis added).

⁴⁷ Questions concerning the artistic merit of Fo's theatre would have been regarded as frivolous or irrelevant in an intellectual climate which demanded urgent action (yet spawned endless theorising) and where the debaters took themselves very seriously indeed. Cf. Nuova Scena's *Compagni senza censura* (Fo:1970) for extracts from some post-performance debates.

⁴⁸ Introduction to *Compagni senza censura*, signed by Associazione Nuova Scena (Fo, 1970:6), where the collective evaluates its position and surveys its achievements over the previous two years.

Plays for a Proletarian Revolution

Fo's break with the established theatre was therefore a rejection of his role as an artist within the class system, and with it a rejection of existing social structures.⁴⁹ It marked a new, unequivocal commitment to the class struggle which was to form the basis for all his plays thereafter;⁵⁰ Fo had now reached "a mature political awareness", according to Lino Pertile (1984:176). Perhaps one should add that Fo, too, was caught up in the revolutionary fervour sparked off by the events of May 1968, a theme we shall return to later.

This was a prolific period for Fo: within a short space of time he produced a series of political plays whose subjects range from the continuity of Fascist structures in the Italian

⁴⁹ "[...] provavamo quotidianamente la sensazione di essere i buffoni della borghesia, che la borghesia accettava che noi la criticassimo anche in maniera violenta, attraverso la satira e il grottesco, ma a condizione di criticarla dall'interno delle sue strutture [...] Era un modo di dimostrare che la borghesia era veramente democratica, comprensiva, eccetera.[...] Ecco perché siamo usciti dal 'teatro normale' perché abbiamo rifiutato le sovvenzioni, il ricatto più violento che abbia mai inventato il potere, i premi speciali, i teatri pagati in anticipo, gli oneri eccetera. [...] Uscendo da questa dimensione, ci siamo messi a completa disposizione della classe operaia. Questo vuol dire che quando la borghesia viene a vedere i nostri spettacoli, si sente automaticamente estranea, non è più lei la padrona, non è più a casa sua, ma ormai l'operaio è a casa sua; gli operai, gli sfruttati in genere, e voglio dire con questo che ci sono certi impiegati, una parte della piccola borghesia, gli studenti, che da noi sono ormai proletarizzati" (Fo in Artese, 1977:70-71).

⁵⁰ Franca Rame had recently joined the Italian Communist Party (1967), whereas Fo, who has always preferred to remain outside the PCI, supported its ideals, if not always its policies.

(bourgeois) state,⁵¹ the class struggle, represented chorally through work songs from various regions of Italy,⁵² a reinterpretation of mediaeval popular sources as an antidote to oppression,⁵³ the exploitation of present-day workers and the role of the media in a consumer society⁵⁴ and, finally, the paramount importance of providing education for the workers.⁵⁵ (In addition, Fo co-wrote and produced three plays with other members of the collective.)

Fo's growing dissent from the orthodoxy of the PCI line (evidenced in particular by his espousal of Maoist views) as well

⁵¹ *Grande pantomima con bandiere e pupazzi piccoli, grandi e medi* (October 1968). For a summary, cf. Mitchell (1986:54-55). For a discussion of the Sicilian puppet tradition on which Fo draws here, and his pre-Commedia dell'Arte use of mime and masks, cf. Sogliuzzo (1972).

⁵² *Ci ragiono e canto n. 2* (1968) represents a continuation of Fo's research into the roots of popular culture, rediscovering a whole tradition of songs of protest which testify to the workers' desire to rebel against the abuses of power to which they are subject. In this version Fo deliberately abandons *Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano's* philological approach and concentrates on contemporary political songs such as "Avola".

⁵³ *Mistero buffo* (October 1969). The most enduring work from this period, it is one of the best-known of Fo's plays in Italy and abroad. Consequently, it has received an enormous amount of critical attention (cf. *infra*, Chapter Two which is entirely devoted to *Mistero buffo*). For a useful account of *Mistero buffo*, cf. Mitchell (1986:10-33) and Hirst (1989:114-135). Both discuss the televised *Mistero buffo* (1977).

⁵⁴ *Legami pure che tanto spacco tutto lo stesso* (November 1969) consists of two one-act plays: *Il telaio* is a fierce condemnation of piece-work and black labour whilst *Il funerale del padrone* deals with industrial accidents, using a grotesque key to drive home the author's outrage.

⁵⁵ *L'operaio conosce 300 parole, il padrone 1000, per questo lui è il padrone* (November 1969).

as its perceived authoritarianism is reflected in a number of these plays. *Legami pure che tanto spacco tutto lo stesso*, for example, contains overt criticism of the trade unions and the PCI which is charged with 'revisionism' and

accused of collusion with the bourgeoisie and reminded of its radical revolutionary duties at exactly the moment when it was widening its power-base towards the centre and evolving the concept of the national path to socialism.⁵⁶

Fo, in turn, was strongly criticised by the PCI, which could not brook such a rebellious attitude and launched stinging attacks against Nuova Scena from its wide-circulation daily newspaper, *L'Unità*. For, as Suzanne Cowan (1977:36) points out:

It had quickly become evident that the company was able to command its own public, outside the control of the orthodox left, and that it provided its audiences with a vehicle for open political debate free of all institutional restrictions. The Party perceived this freedom, perhaps correctly, as a threat of erosion of its mass base, and reacted by bitterly denouncing the company.

In addition, there were political divisions within Nuova Scena itself and, in October 1970, Fo and Rame, together with several members of the association, formed a new theatre cooperative, "Il Collettivo Teatrale La Comune", whilst a (majority) group centred around Vittorio Franceschi remained within the ARCI network, retaining the original association's name. La Comune still adhered to the same statutes as Nuova Scena, and its general objective was the same, namely to create

⁵⁶ Pertile (1984:180). Binini (1977:57) provides some examples drawn from these plays to illustrate the kind of 'provocations' Fo was directing against the PCI.

an 'alternative cultural circuit', this time with the support of the extra-parliamentary groups that had sprung up on the extreme Left, in opposition to the Party's centralised organisation.⁵⁷

Politics On and Off the Stage: *La Comune* (1970-73)

Fo's intense theatrical production continued, as he sought to keep pace with the principal political events of the next decade, "in modo da trasformare ogni rappresentazione in un momento di presa di coscienza e di mobilitazione" (Poli, 1976:88). *Morte accidentale di un anarchico* (1970) was written in response to what has become known as the *strage di stato* (state massacre) and was based on the Pinelli case,⁵⁸ and *Pum, Pum! Chi è? La polizia!* (1972) also deals with police repression; *Tutti uniti, tutti insieme! Ma scusa, quello non è*

⁵⁷ Cf. *infra* for an overview of the complex ideological divisions amongst the Italian Left during these years.

⁵⁸ In December 1969, a bomb had exploded in the Banca dell'agricoltura in Milan's Piazza Fontana, killing sixteen people and leaving nearly one hundred injured. Pino Pinelli, the anarchist who was arrested several days later, died in mysterious circumstances whilst under police custody (one night he allegedly 'fell' from the window of the fourth-floor room where he was being interrogated). A counter-investigation into his death was carried out by the extreme left-wing newspaper *Lotta continua*. Published under the title *Strage di stato*, the report was a damning indictment of the police, the secret services and the judiciary. The performance of *Morte accidentale* coincided with the trial of the editor of *Lotta continua* and the public's growing scepticism of the 'official version of events'. For a detailed analysis of this important play, cf. in particular, Puppa (1978:199-210), Mitchell (1986:59-65). Both Mitchell (1986:98-102) and Hirst (1989:84-93) examine the British translation.

il padrone? (1971), *Morte e resurrezione di un pupazzo* (1971) and *Ordine per DIO.000.000.000!* focus on the class struggle in Italy and the compromises made by the PCI. *Vorrei morire anche stasera se dovessi pensare che non è servito a niente* (1970) and *Fedayn* (1972) draw parallels between the Italian Resistance and the Palestinian struggle for self-determination, the latter show provocatively putting on stage genuine Palestinian guerrillas. *Guerra di popolo in Cile* (1973), which was performed a month after the assassination of Salvador Allende, evokes the Chilean coup d'état.⁵⁹

In this, Fo's most militant phase, political statement in the theatre was matched by tireless activity in the field: Fo supported factory occupations, strikes and demonstrations with his interventions and improvised shows. Franca Rame, for her part, founded *Soccorso Rosso* (Red Aid) to help political detainees. Indeed, the headquarters of *La Comune* (a disused hangar in Via Colletta, Milan) had become "a nerve-centre for left-wing activism", as Pertile (1984:184) puts it. But the work of the group was constantly subjected to police harassment and neo-Fascist aggression, the most dramatic episodes of which saw *La Comune* evicted from Via Colletta; Rame abducted by a group of neo-Fascists who beat her up and raped her (March 1973); and Fo

⁵⁹ The innovatory feature of this play lies in its realistic simulation of a coup d'état taking place contemporaneously in Italy (by means of a convincing interruption of the performance), a shock tactic designed to shake the audience out of any possible complacency or passivity. For a description of this *coup de théâtre*, cf. Binni (1977:73-75).

arrested in Sassari (November 1973) after refusing to allow the police to enter the theatre during rehearsals and subsequently spending the night in a prison cell (he was released the following day as mass demonstrations in his favour were being held outside the jail).⁶⁰

Irreconcilable internal rifts within La Comune - Fo had broken with *Avanguardia Operaia*, an ultra-left group which was attempting to limit his political interventions - led to the collective disbanding in July 1973. There followed a period of reflection; continuing political interventions (the so-called "spettacoli d'intervento") in support of workers who were on trial for having clashed with the police whilst taking part in various demonstrations; and a highly successful French tour (January-February 1974) of *Mistero buffo*.

The Palazzina Liberty (1974-82)

"Il Collettivo La Comune diretto da Dario Fo" was then founded, and a permanent base sought. The decision to occupy one of the many empty buildings in the heart of Milan which the DC-run local administration had left derelict for speculative purposes (in this case, near the former wholesale marketplace) provided Fo with grass-roots support from the local residents of

⁶⁰ Cf. Binini (1975:371-373) for a reconstruction of this incident.

this working-class district who were mobilised in the effort to clear up the Palazzina Liberty and create a truly 'popular' cultural centre.⁶¹ The Fos were to remain in the Palazzina Liberty until they were eventually forced out in 1982; in the meantime, they built up a new, less highly politicised public, outside the ranks of the PCI, and returned to the more traditional format of farce to put across their views on what was at the time a burning issue, namely *autoriduzione*: thus, the appropriation of goods as a form of civil disobedience is the subject of *Non si paga, non si paga* (1974).⁶² This was followed by *Il Fanfani rapito* (1975), a fierce satire on the then Secretary of the DC, which was presented several days before local government elections and again the following year to coincide with the general elections.

The new audience was loyal to Fo's projects, even if the quality of plays such as *Il Fanfani rapito* and *La marijuana della mamma è la più bella* (1976), a farce about the use of drugs, was

⁶¹ As Poli (1976:89) comments: "E' l'inizio di un tentativo di tipo nuovo, di gestione autonoma di uno spazio culturale; ed anche di un lungo braccio di ferro con il comune (rimangiatosi nel frattempo gli impegni assunti) che vede Fo vincitore di fatto, non solo per la sua caparbia tenacia nel portare avanti il progetto, ma per il vastissimo appoggio dimostratosi in questa occasione, oltre che dalla cultura militante, da vasti strati di abitanti del quartiere coinvolti in un discorso che li vede per la prima volta protagonisti."

⁶² For a summary, cf. Hirst (1989:52-60). For comments on the highly successful London run of this play, cf. Mitchell (1986:96-98) and Hirst (1989:94-106). Hirst takes issue with Mitchell's positive appraisal of the English translation, and claims rather that "no Fo play has been so totally – and wilfully – reworked for the British stage as *Can't Pay? Won't Pay* has".

considerably inferior to earlier productions. His work had, in effect, reached a sort of "impasse" (Pertile, 1984:186), confirming the views of his public, rather than challenging them.

An invitation to present a retrospective of his work on television in 1977 by RAI 2 was therefore an opportunity not to be missed; well aware of the potential of television to reach non-theatre going audiences drawn from the entire political spectrum, Fo accepted. Despite causing a certain amount of (by now, predictable) controversy – notably, the outrage expressed by the Church at the transmission of *Mistero buffo* which it described as "the most blasphemous show in the history of television"⁶³ and a hard-hitting exchange of views between Fo and Zeffirelli – Fo's return to television, after nearly fifteen years, was an enormous popular and critical success.⁶⁴

The second half of the decade saw the production of *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa* (1976), co-written with Franca Rame, which discusses the condition of women⁶⁵ and *Storia della tigre e*

⁶³ Quoted in Mitchell (1986:10). Indeed, the Vatican took out a lawsuit against Fo for "vilipendio alla religione", that is to say, for "religious contempt".

⁶⁴ Two versions of the by now greatly expanded *Mistero buffo* were presented as well as *Settimo*, *Isabella* and *La signora è da buttare*. In addition, a new work was commissioned, *Parliamo di donne* which, together with Franca Rame, he developed into a play, *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*, the following year.

⁶⁵ Valentini (1980:207) has described both the television *Parliamo di donne* and the stage *Tutta casa letto e chiesa* as "una specie di *Mistero buffo* sulla condizione femminile" ("a sort of *Mistero buffo* on the condition of women"). It is certainly the play with which Franca Rame achieved the greatest recognition as an outstanding actress in her own right, both at home and abroad (in 1982, a year before Fo reached London with his *Mistero buffo*, she

altre storie (1979), monologues based on Chinese peasant tales (inspired by a visit to China in 1975), recounted in the style of the *fabulatore*, a sort of "sequel to *Mistero buffo*" (Hirst, 1989:136). Fo returned once again to farce with *Clacson, trombette e pernacchi* (1981) in which he imagines the kidnapping of Giovanni Agnelli, the head of FIAT. In *L'opera dello sghignazzo* (1981), a project begun in collaboration with the Berliner Ensemble, Fo updates Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* (somewhat infelicitously) and in *Fabulazzo osceno* (1982) continues in the narrative vein of paradox so dear to him, supplemented by an excess of scatological humour.

Whilst the 1980s undoubtedly represented a decline in the artistic quality of his plays, they nevertheless saw Fo remaining a prominent figure in the Italian theatre world, involved as he was in numerous workshops and seminars at home and abroad where he received many international prizes for his contribution to drama. In addition, he continued to tour, continually updating what one might regard as his 'longest-running' show, *Mistero buffo*.

Social Satire for the 1990s

To coincide with the bicentenary of the discovery of America in 1992, Fo wrote *Johan Padan a la descoberta de le Americhe*, a didactic monologue where the legendary Columbus is the object of

performed it at the Riverside Studios).

further satirical de-sanctification (cf. *supra*, the 1963 production of *Isabella*). *Angelo Beolco detto il Ruzante* was premiered to great acclaim at the 1993 Spoleto Festival (and later toured Italy). It represents the accomplishment of a long-cherished project to return to the expressivity of dialect theatre, and is a homage to the playwright, Ruzante. Set in sixteenth-century Venice, it recounts a rare episode of popular support for the established order: joining forces with the Venetian army the peasants of the Republic rise up against the invading armies of Spain, France, the Hapsbourg Empire and the Papal States. His last play, *Mamma! I sanculotti* (1994) is a topical tale of bribes and bad administration, performed during the famed *Mani pulite* anti-corruption operation which saw magistrates as protagonists in the campaign to clean up both public and private companies.

Although in Italy he never reached the same heights of popularity as those he had attained during the 1970s, Fo's fame continued to spread internationally: he was already a well-known and much translated dramatist in Scandinavia, Germany, France and Canada, and during the 1980s, he made his belated entry onto the English-speaking stage where several of his plays achieved the kind of *commercial* success they had never known at home.

A Singular Commitment: Fo's Theatre of Counter-Information

What is perhaps most striking when one contemplates the vicissitudes of Dario Fo's career is the coherence of his theatrical project, long before he himself theorised it⁶⁶ and long before it received serious attention from the critics.⁶⁷ The extent and diversity of his work should not conceal the single-mindedness with which Fo set about to produce a theatre of ideas that was neither abstruse nor elitist. The thread that runs through his entire output, and one that can be traced back to *Poer nano*, is his innate awareness of the extraordinary resources that popular culture offers for a 'builder of theatre texts'⁶⁸ with a penchant for social criticism. Fo's initial and

⁶⁶ Cf. Valentini's comment (1977:120) on Fo's tendency in the early 1970s to rationalise *a posteriori* elements in his writing that were the result of intuitive creative decisions. In so doing, he was no doubt encouraged by the habit of explaining events in, often highly complex, theoretical terms which was so typical of Italian left-wing circles at that time; it had become almost obligatory even for artists to offer political or cultural explanations for their work.

⁶⁷ In 1976, Poli could still complain of the lack of critical works devoted to Fo, despite the profusion of newspaper reviews and articles in theatre journals. Within the next year or so this gap was filled in Italy with the appearance – almost simultaneously – of at least five book-length studies.

⁶⁸ The expression was coined by Franca Rame. As she explains in her Preface to the *Commedie* (Fo, 1975:xiii), the description of Fo's theatrical activity as that of a "costruttore di testi per teatro" seems the most appropriate: "Perché costruttore, più che scrittore? Perché, con la scrittura, parte, in Dario, l'esigenza di pensare e fabbricare una scena, meglio, una sequenza di spazi scenici, di piani, dove rappresentare l'azione teatrale. E' ancora costruzione teatrale più che scrittura, perché il suo teatro non è fatto di personaggi, ma di situazioni."

irresistible desire to *épater les bourgeois* whilst making them laugh clearly determined his later choice of satire as being the most effective means of theatrical communication, given the increasingly political content of his work.

According to Valentini (1980:205), Fo's decision to work in the area of popular political theatre ("teatro popolar-politico") stems from his deep-seated dislike for intellectualism and his predilection for paradox and provocation:

C'è da sempre in Fo una vocazione all'irregolarità, uno sforzo a costruirsi un suo percorso autonomo, a ridere e a parlare della società e delle sue ingiustizie che è assente invece in molti altri uomini di teatro italiani.⁶⁹

The visceral nature of Fo's anti-conformist stance (in contrast to the more cerebral manifestations of social rebellion by a figure such as Pier Paolo Pasolini) is responsible in large part for the forcefulness of his ideas. Dacia Maraini is amongst those who praise Fo's contribution to invigorating Italian theatre; even if much of his work, by its very nature (its topicality), is "throw-away", to borrow Cowan's expression,⁷⁰ Maraini (1974:73) asserts that it is far preferable to the existing "teatro di museo". As she notes enthusiastically:

⁶⁹ Cf. Meldolesi (1978:188) and Puppa (1990:201-202) who also comment on Fo's political commitment and civic passion, which they regard as something of an exception in the Italian theatrical landscape.

⁷⁰Cf. "The Throw-away Theatre of Dario Fo" (1975). The term presumably comes from Fo's own description of his theatre as "un teatro da bruciare" (in an interview published in the Italian edition of *Playboy*, December 1974.)

Se esistesse un teatro italiano dovrebbe essere fatto tutto così. Un teatro come presa di posizione, come polemica, culturale e politica, come insulto, come rivolta, come dimostrazione di idee, di sfoghi personali, di malumori, di innamoramenti, di deliri sensati e insensati, come osservazione di sé e degli altri.

It is this "presa di posizione", this firm stand which Fo's theatre adopts, that underlies his rejection of bourgeois values and aesthetics. Instead of espousing the fashion for avant-garde theatre which saw performers such as Carmelo Bene reinterpreting Shakespeare in a mildly outrageous manner – a fashion encouraged in part by Living Theatre's Italian tour, and with which Fo had little sympathy, creating as it did "an elitist ghetto of conceptual theatre" (Mitchell, 1986:50) – he sought rather to produce accessible plays whose innovatory quality and immediateness resided in their fusion of the old with the new.⁷¹

'Experimental theatre', for Fo, meant digging deep into the past to find those spontaneous elements of a genuinely 'popular' culture – created by and for the people – which the dominant culture had buried, thereby denying its very existence:

Ritengo che a teatro, tanto più si va sperimentando verso il nuovo, tanto più si deve affondare nel passato, si intende nel passato che può interessare; e a me interessa soprattutto un passato che sia attaccato alle radici del popolo, cioè che parta dalle manifestazioni di vita e di cultura del popolo come fonte essenziale di solidità e di ampiezza di rappresentazione sia nella vita che

⁷¹ Fo's immense success, according to Bianchi (1978:161), is "un successo che, per dimensioni e continuità, non trova riscontro nemmeno a livello di teatro commerciale o di divismo televisivo e che è sopravvissuto indenne (assumendo semmai misure ancora più clamorose) all'abbandono traumatico dei circuiti ufficiali e alla rottura con la televisione".

nella cultura, per poter esprimere nuove ricerche e saggiare nuove indagini, sulla base del concetto di 'nuovo nella tradizione' a cui sono legato.⁷²

Fo's singular achievement has therefore been this ability to combine political commitment with a vision of popular culture that has little to do with folkloristic revisitations of peasant life or nostalgia for a bucolic past. The originality of his project is at once a reaction against, and a product of, his time. For the cultural historian, Fo's work offers a remarkably acute view of the complexities and contradictions of Italian society in the 1960s and 1970s; as such, it lends itself particularly well to the study of what Marc Angenot has famously termed an "état du discours social". The social discourse that permeates Fo's work can be characterised, broadly speaking, as representative of the Marxist counter-ideology of the Italian Left.

The remainder of this chapter provides the political and sociocultural background to Fo's work, focusing on those influences that are particularly relevant to a careful reading of *Mistero buffo*.

⁷² Fo, in an interview with Giuseppe Bartolucci and Ettore Capriolo, published in *Teatro 2*, autumn-winter 1967-68. Quoted in Valentini (1977:99).

The Political Context of *Mistero buffo*: Protest and Provocation

For Italy, as for many other Western countries, May 1968 was the catalyst for the transformation of society. The following observations by Paul Ginsborg (1990:298) provide an effective overview of the Italian situation:

From 1968 onwards paralysis from above gave way to movement from below. There followed a most extraordinary period of social ferment, the high season of collective action in the history of the Republic. During it the organization of Italian society was challenged at nearly every level. No single moment in Italy equalled in intensity and in revolutionary potential the events of May 1968 in France, but the Italian protest movement was the most profound and long-lasting in Europe. It spread from the schools and universities into the factories, and then out again into society as a whole.

Indeed, the whole decade was characterised by social and political unrest on an unprecedented scale, due in large part to the way in which Italy had developed since the Second World War. In the 1950s, it had had one of the highest economic growth rates in the West, establishing itself as a major industrialised country. The middle classes in particular benefited from this 'economic miracle', and achieved a significant increase in income, thereby fuelling a consumer boom.

However, this development process (not least because of the rapidity with which it took place) left unresolved many problems which stemmed directly from the Fascist era, and created new ones. Amongst these problems it should be mentioned that workers' wages were extremely low, causing increasing discontent

among the workforce; backward conditions persisted in agriculture; industrial growth was concentrated solely in certain regions of the North, whereas the South remained underdeveloped, merely providing the workforce for the North (there was large-scale migration to cities such as Milan and Turin during this period). Furthermore, the transition from a dictatorship to a democracy had not been straightforward; part of the civil service was still attached to the old order and hindered the necessary process of renewal and the dismantling of existing bureaucratic structures; whole areas of civil and penal legislation which had been introduced by the Fascist regime remained unaltered, and the full implementation of the constitutional principles of political liberty and freedom of speech was seriously hampered. There were even several attempts to carry out a *coup d'état* by the extreme Right which, despite the improbability of their succeeding, contributed to aggravating political and social tension. Furthermore, the schools and the universities showed serious signs of backwardness. Until 1968, universities, in particular, were elitist institutions whose structures and courses were inadequate to meet the needs of a modern society.

The chasm which separated the working classes from the middle classes widened in this climate of sudden prosperity and continuing social injustice; such contradictions and divisions could not but lead to a widespread reaction by the Left, culminating in the *contestazione*, the wave of student and worker

protests that swept across Italy in the late 1960s. On the one hand, trade union-led workers, starting with those in the manufacturing industry, organised mass strikes – the so-called ‘hot autumn’ of 1969 – and for the first time succeeded in significantly improving their work conditions and wages.⁷³ And on the other hand, under the impetus of May 1968, students occupied universities and took part in demonstrations, clashing violently with the police.⁷⁴ Indeed, this was a time of extreme political radicalisation; countless revolutionary groups and grouplets were set up, along either Leninist or Maoist lines (the most enduring of which were *Lotta continua* and *Il Manifesto*), forming the largest ‘new Left’ in Europe.⁷⁵ Amid much impenetrable theoretical analysis, militants set about spreading their revolutionary message to the factories. The genuine belief that a revolution in the West was approaching made this a heady

⁷³ The national strike of 1962, which had resulted in modest gains, represented a watershed in Italian labour relations, which worsened considerably. The violent clashes between demonstrators and the police whose repressive measures had unleashed riots in Turin, the city which represented the flashpoint of the crisis, served to fuel what was to become an increasingly bitter class conflict. Cf. Ginsborg (1990:250-253) who also provides an excellent account of the political response to this period of intense social turmoil (Cf. Chapter 8).

⁷⁴ Unrest in the universities had, in fact, begun earlier than in France, that is to say in 1966; the following year, the so-called *Tesi della Sapienza*, a Marxist student Manifesto, was drawn up at the University of Pisa.

⁷⁵ For a more detailed picture of the splintering of the Italian Left during the years of *Nuova Scena* as reflected in the group’s internal schism, cf. Valentini (1977:105-118).

period indeed, and one of utopian aspiration where, as Paul Ginsborg (1990:313) has remarked, "ideology was all".

However, as regards central government, the situation remained virtually unchanged with power remaining concentrated in the hands of the DC (with the support of the Italian Socialist Party, or PSI, from 1959 onwards). Despite gaining considerable popular backing (during the 1960s one Italian out of four voted for the PCI and in the 1976 general elections, the PCI won over 50% of the votes), and despite moving away gradually from the Soviet model of Communism, the PCI continued to be regarded suspiciously by Italy's Western allies and remained constantly in the opposition.

Thus, although it had been excluded from the government opening to the Left, the PCI nevertheless "remained a great force in Italian society" (Ginsborg, 1990:290-291), making its presence felt through its cooperatives, sporting societies and recreational circles. By the mid-1960s, it is fair to say that Marxism had established itself as the dominant counter-ideology in Italy, exerting its influence most strongly in spheres of cultural activity.

Retrieving Popular Culture

In the 1960s, the role of culture in society had become a central issue to be discussed amongst left-wing intellectuals and writers (Gruppo 63 offers a prime example of the prominence given

to this subject). In the area of theatre, the debate revolved around the question of what kind of culture should be produced – bourgeois culture or else 'popular' culture, 'alternative' culture, 'revolutionary' culture or 'working class' culture. *Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano*⁷⁶, with whom Fo worked in 1966 (cf. *supra*), was at the forefront of an attempt to retrieve popular culture.⁷⁷ The theme of class and culture also inspired the proliferation of Marxist reviews (eg. *Quaderni rossi*, *Quaderni piacentini*, *Classe operaia*, *Classe e stato*, *Contropiano*, *Nuovo impegno*, *Giovane critica*) which, as early as 1960, expressed the views of a new, more militant Left;⁷⁸ all these journals, according to Lanfranco Binni (1977:40), "svolgono un ruolo

⁷⁶ The group included researchers such as Gianni Bosio, Cesare Bermani, Michele L. Straniero, and singer-songwriters such as Giovanna Marini and Ivan Della Mea. From 1962-68 they published the first series of a review called *Il Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano*. Also involved in this serious study of popular culture were the group Padano di Piadena, the Sardinian group Galletti di Gallura and Ernesto De Martino (the founder of the eponymous *Istituto De Martino*).

⁷⁷ Cf. Binni (1977:39-45) for an overview of the debate on Italian popular culture whose origins he traces back to the 1950s with the contribution of Ernesto De Martino and Franco Fortini, amongst others. The work of *Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano* in the early 1960s, however, represented the first significant attack on 'bourgeois' culture, translated in concrete terms by two theatrical productions, *L'altra Italia* (1964) and *Bella ciao* (1965), which asserted the values of 'the culture of the subaltern classes'. *Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano* aimed in the late 60s to "recuperare la pelle del teatro popolare [...] riempirlo di contenuti che siano politici, e ridarlo pulito, chiarirlo [...] e lanciarlo come ariete esemplare [...] contro la cultura borghese." (Bosio, 1975:298).

⁷⁸ Cf. Lumley (1990:34-41) for an analysis of these influential reviews.

fondamentale di agitazione culturale, di dibattito teorico che si svilupperà poi nell'esplosione del 1968."

By the end of the decade, class consciousness was the order of the day, and affected all discussion concerning culture;" this was, after all, a period of great social unrest. Those involved in the class struggle inevitably looked to Marxist thinkers for inspiration: according to Ginsborg (1990:306), "Marcuse's *One-dimensional Man*, Marx's own early texts were amongst the books that were most widely read at the time." In that, Italy was of course no different from many other Western countries where Marxist ideas were circulating. It is, however, important to bear in mind some culturally specific aspects of Italian Marxism in order to better understand Fo's project in *Mistero buffo*; in this way, we will be in a position to detect the shifts operated by Tremblay in his translation and to assess their impact on the play's underlying ideology.

⁷⁹ Lumley (1990:133), for example, commenting on cultural production in Italy between 1967-74, observes that "cultural practices had to produce political messages." By way of example, he cites Goffredo Fofi's cinema journal, *Ombre Rosse*, which he says "actually ceased to talk about films and dealt instead with directly political issues." This political hyper-consciousness was, he continues, "symptomatic of the way in which the specificity of the cultural was reduced in this period to a notion of class struggle which allowed little space for fiction. Whether in film or writing, a narrow realist interpretation of 'documentary' held sway."

Gramsci's Legacy

In the 1950s and 1960s, Antonio Gramsci⁸⁰ was the author who had exerted the greatest influence on left-wing Italian intellectuals as a result of his innovative interpretation of Marx's thought which he applied to a wide range of sociocultural and political issues. His writings were widely read in the period immediately following the Second World War: between 1948 and 1951 Einaudi published his prison notebooks in six volumes, referred to collectively as *Quaderni del carcere*.⁸¹ This work

⁸⁰ Several biographies of Gramsci appeared in the 1960s: Salvatore Francesco Romano's *Antonio Gramsci* (Einaudi, 1965) and Giuseppe Fiori's *Vita di Antonio Gramsci* (Bari, 1966). The view of Gramsci as a heroic figure who had paid with his life for his opposition to Fascism contributed to his widespread intellectual influence, for he was, implicitly, held up as a model of political engagement. The brief biographical details that follow should serve to situate his 'popular' appeal among Communists across the class divide: Born into an impoverished middle-class family in Sardinia in 1891, Gramsci won a scholarship to study at the University of Turin where he excelled in literature, linguistics and philosophy. However, he soon devoted himself full-time to political activity (in 1921, he was among the founders of the Italian Communist Party and, in 1924, he was elected to parliament) and to a brilliant career as a journalist. Arrested on the orders of the Fascist government in 1926, he was condemned to twenty years of prison but died in 1937 as a result of the hardships suffered in jail. During his incarceration he wrote several thousand pages of notes (his famous *Quaderni del carcere*) on which rests his reputation as one of the leading twentieth-century Marxist thinkers.

⁸¹ This first edition was incomplete, and organised thematically. The volume titles, chosen by the editors, were as follows: *Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce*; *Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura*; *Il Risorgimento*; *Note sul Machiavelli, sulla politica e sullo Stato moderno*; *Letteratura e vita nazionale*; *Passato e presente*. Since 1975 a complete critical edition (Einaudi), prepared by Valentino Gerratana, has been available.

represents the culmination of his ideas concerning Italian history, politics and literature;⁸² it was republished several times and, together with his prison correspondence (1947) and the various collections of his early articles,⁸³ formed an important point of reference for intellectuals as well as PCI activists and party officials.⁸⁴ Furthermore, extracts from Gramsci's writings and articles commenting on his thought frequently appeared in *L'Unità*⁸⁵ and in reviews affiliated with the PCI, such as *Rinascita* and *Critica marxista*.⁸⁶

It seems useful here to sum up some central concepts introduced by Gramsci which, as we shall see shortly, form the

⁸² It is worth bearing in mind that, even when discussing literary or linguistic problems, Gramsci (1966:57) always sets out to find a "soluzione politico-sociale", that is a solution which takes into account the political and social horizon.

⁸³ All are published by Einaudi: *L'Ordine Nuovo* (1919-20), 1954; *Scritti giovanili* (1914-1918), 1958; *Sotto la Mole* (1916-1920), 1960; *Socialismo e fascismo*. *L'Ordine Nuovo* (1921-22), 1966; *La costruzione del partito comunista* (1923-26), 1971.

⁸⁴ Lumley (1990:232) provides an interesting example of the perceived relevance and topicality of Gramscian ideas to Italian society at the time: "In 1968-9 there was a massive revival of council-communist ideas, which in Italy were historically associated with the Turin movement of 1919-20 and with Gramsci's *Ordine Nuovo* writings." (Some of these writings were published in pamphlet form during this period.)

⁸⁵ The PCI's official newspaper was set up by Gramsci in 1924. The original title was "L'Unità. Quotidiano degli operai e dei contadini."

⁸⁶ As discussed earlier, the 1950s and 1960s saw an ongoing debate in Italy concerning the relationship between culture and society. Gramsci's contribution to the subject was not fully recognised, according to Lucente (1989:172-173), until the mid-60s. In this regard, it seems indicative that the second Gramsci conference (held in Cagliari in 1967) dealt with *Gramsci e la cultura contemporanea* (The proceedings were published in 1969.)

theoretical background to much of Fo's work. Gramsci's reading of Marxian theories was influenced by Georges Sorel and Lenin, and, especially, by the neo-Hegelian idealism of Benedetto Croce, a philosopher whom Gramsci regarded as a political adversary in so far as he was the leading exponent of the bourgeois intellectual class. Gramsci's relationship with Croce is complex; however, his debt to him can best be seen in the Crocean belief in the importance of the intellectual and idealist sphere in political struggle. Moreover, contrary to Marx, Gramsci held that the relation between cultural production (in Marxian terms, the superstructure) and the economic base (the structure), was a reciprocal one.

As is well-known, one of the most original concepts developed by Gramsci is that of hegemony,⁸⁷ and the related distinction between the "classe dirigente" and the "classe dominante", that is to say, the class that attains leadership in civic society through hegemony and the class that dominates the state through political and juridical institutions. Any class that wants to remain in government and introduce lasting changes into society cannot exert power simply by force, but needs to gain consensus among other classes. This would-be ruling class can achieve its objective by representing the economic interests of other classes and, crucially, by exerting a credible and

⁸⁷ Hegemony can be defined as "the set of values and beliefs through which the ruling class exercises its power over the masses, including religion, education and the media" Cavell (1993:345).

socially recognised role of intellectual and moral leadership.

As Richard Cavell (1993:345) sums up, Gramsci's

central insight was that power was exercised not only economically and physically but also through ideas, and that ideas were not purely products of economic forces.

Hence the central role of intellectuals in a Socialist revolution: in close contact with the Communist Party, they have the task of developing a new cultural programme to counter existing bourgeois culture. Gramsci applied this analysis specifically to the Italian situation where the bourgeoisie, although weaker than in other industrialised countries, had been able to maintain power because it had succeeded in gaining the support of most intellectuals (as used by Gramsci, this term should be understood in a broad sense, so as to include members of the clergy). Through the intellectuals, the bourgeoisie had won the consensus of the peasants who, especially in Southern Italy, formed the bulk of the population. Therefore the first step in a Socialist transformation of society is for the proletariat (by the agency of the PCI) to gain the support of the intellectuals and to create a new cultural hegemony.

Dario Fo takes up and adapts various key ideas from Gramsci; indeed, from 1968 onwards, his whole cultural operation can be said to reflect the Gramscian concept that culture (or the "fronte culturale", to employ Gramsci's language) occupies a central role in the political struggle.

Not only is Gramsci's presence felt intellectually in many works dating from this period, but Fo (1975:107) even calls on him to make a brief appearance in the second act of *L'operaio conosce 300 parole, il padrone 1000, per questo lui è il padrone*, a play first performed in 1969, in order to call the other characters to order:

Dobbiamo smetterla di considerare l'operaio come una marionetta che non sa, che non può sapere, perché non ha cultura. L'operaio sa, perché è l'avanguardia del popolo, perché il popolo ha una grande cultura... Il potere borghese, aristocratico, la Chiesa gliel'hanno in gran parte distrutta, sotterrata, ma è nostro dovere fargliela ritrovare.

The ultimate aim is, of course, to empower the worker through education, through the retrieval of his or her culture. As the character Gramsci adds unequivocally:

Il nostro è un partito diretto da intellettuali.
Gli operai devono diventare gli intellettuali del
nostro partito.

Allied to this notion that culture, in particular literature, can defeat existing hegemonies, and institute new ones, is the need to replace mainstream bourgeois culture by a new cultural project. As we shall see in the following chapter, *Mistero buffo*** is one of Dario Fo's most successful attempts to put this idea into practice.

** Fo's debt to Gramsci is acknowledged in the preface to the first edition of *Mistero buffo* (1970) where a passage from Gramsci is quoted at length (cf. *infra*, chapter Two), thereby establishing him as an important ideological point of reference.

There are, however, some significant differences between Gramsci and Fo as regards their views on culture. Gramsci, it should be remembered, believed that proletarian culture had to be a synthesis which dialectically combined popular traditions with the best of bourgeois culture. Fo, who was operating during the intellectually iconoclastic 1960s, rejected bourgeois culture outright, replacing it with a mythical proletarian culture rooted in the peasant world. In this respect, he was clearly responding to a new climate in the universities and beyond, where researchers were beginning to reclaim whole areas of history, once regarded as unfit for serious study.

Recovering Popular History

For the 1960s and 1970s saw a resurgence of interest in historical studies on the proletariat, with scholars now applying Marxist categories (the class struggle, exploitation, etc.) to their analyses of periods as far removed as the Middle Ages. In Italy Marxist historians such as Emilio Sereni, Ernesto Ragionieri, Renato Zangheri, Giorgio Giorgetti and Carlo Ginzburg, drawing their inspiration from Gramsci's *Quaderni dal carcere*, researched neglected areas of social history focusing on the economic conditions of the working classes, and their attempts to emancipate themselves.

Already in 1945, Niccolò Rodolico, a well-known mediaevalist, had published a study concerning an episode of popular revolt which took place in Florence in 1378, the so-called *Rivolta dei Ciompi*. The *Ciompi* were the lowest class of workers in the wool industry who, since they were excluded from membership of a guild, were fighting to gain a *diritto di associazione*, or 'right of association', that is to say, to be allowed to form their own guild. Rodolico re-examines this famous uprising, interpreting it as an early example of proletarian class consciousness; indeed, his account, which bears the significant subtitle *Una pagina di storia del proletariato operaio*, highlights the determination and the sacrifices of the *Ciompi*.¹¹ Sansoni republished it in 1971 in a paperback edition, which enjoyed considerable circulation.

Works such as Rodolico's surely contributed to raising Fo's awareness of popular history (and, in particular, of popular

¹¹ In his preface, Rodolico (1971:xvi) defends his sympathetic treatment of the *Ciompi*, whom earlier historians had often castigated: "Firenze è esaltata per i suoi geni, per la gloria della sua Arte, per i suoi cittadini mercanti-industriali costruttori della potenza economica e politica del Comune. Ed abbagliati da tanta luce noi non vediamo più oltre, e dimentichiamo la folla anonima di popolani minuti, di *Ciompi*, che furono anch'essi costruttori di quella storia. Nella mostra della bottega dei lanaiuoli si ammirava esposto il bel tessuto, e si lodava il lanaiuolo. Dietro la bottega, fuori di vista erano gli operai, che quel tessuto avevano lavorato. E' doveroso, direi, entrare in quelle officine, e conoscere quegli operai nella loro vita di lavoro, di patimenti, di aspirazioni."

uprisings)⁹⁰ and led him, as Pertile (1984:174) has observed, to

disinter authentically revolutionary episodes from the history of popular culture, especially those involving pre-Reformation evangelical religion, which challenges the corrupt and reactionary orthodoxy from an, as it were, left-wing point of view.

⁹⁰ It is perhaps worth noting that Eric Hobsbawn's *Primitive Rebels* (1959), translated as *I ribelli* in 1966, was very influential in Italy.

Chapter Two

Dario Fo's *Mistero buffo*: Historicising the Class Struggle

il giullare nasceva dal popolo e dal popolo prendeva la rabbia per ridarla ancora al popolo mediata dal grottesco, dalla "ragione", perché il popolo prendesse coscienza della propria condizione."¹

Play-in-Progress

Mistero buffo was first performed by the *Associazione Nuova Scena* at Sestri Levante in Liguria on October 1, 1969. The play consists of a series of texts presented essentially in the form of a dramatic monologue recited by Dario Fo who, alone on stage, without the aid of scenery or costumes, evokes a whole gamut of characters.² Initially, the show lasted some three hours, but new pieces were constantly added so that Fo had soon built up at least three times the amount of the original material. Furthermore, since existing texts were continually modified and refined (partly in response to audience reaction), and since the

¹ Fo, 1977:12.

² Mitchell (1986:17) notes: "Fo performs alone on a bare stage, dressed in black sweater and trousers, with no lighting effects and the aid of only a microphone slung round his neck to carry his voice to the outer reaches of the vast halls, sports stadiums, converted cinemas, deconsecrated churches, public squares and open spaces he has performed the play in."

prologues to each piece – his so-called *discorsi* or *interventi* – were subject to digression, the length as well as the content of the spectacle was variable. Thus, Fo would base his performance upon a core version of the 'play', complemented by *lazzi*, or improvised pieces of comic business, sketches where miming predominated, and the *grammelot*⁹³ pieces for which he is reputed. He would then insert topical comments and historical explanations where appropriate, liberally adding off-the-cuff political remarks⁹⁴ – a veritable "spettacolo in divenire", as it is aptly described by Giulio Castelli (1989:440), a sort of 'play in progress'. Indeed, part of the appeal of *Mistero buffo* is this element of unpredictability, and hence

⁹³ *Grammelot* is another dimension of Fo's linguistic inventiveness. Zanichelli (1995) offers the following broad description: "linguaggio teatrale costituito da una mescolanza di espressioni di varie lingue e dialetti o da una serie di suoni privi di significato che imitano una determinata lingua". In the case of Fo, critics have tended to describe his use of *grammelot* solely in terms of the second, more restrictive definition (that is to say, as an onomatopoeic language) whereas the first definition could also be applied to his manipulation of dialect in *Mistero buffo* and *Storia della tigre*, for example. The question of Fo's linguistic innovations, usually passed over in silence by commentators, is an area worth exploring.

⁹⁴ Indeed, from *Mistero buffo* onwards, Fo's extempore political commentary became a regular feature of his shows; the need to respond swiftly to events at a time of great turmoil made this theatrical form particularly appropriate. Thus, as Paolo Puppa (1990:207) has remarked, "l'entertainer diviene uno scalpitante columnist che improvvisa corsivi".

unrepeatability."⁵ For, as Suzanne Cowan (1978:12) has remarked:

The show is never performed exactly the same way twice, nor is the same dramatic material always used. Depending upon the audience, the setting in which the performance is taking place, and other conditioning factors, Fo may leave out certain texts, include others, extend some didactic-descriptive parts and otherwise vary the presentation.

In Italy, it is undoubtedly the play in the Fo repertoire which has achieved the greatest popular success; Tony Mitchell (1986:10) estimates that by 1977 Fo had presented *Mistero buffo* "more than 1,000 times to audiences in Italy of more than a million and a half" and Chiara Valentini (1980:206) points to the central position *Mistero buffo* occupied on the Italian stage for an entire decade, referring to it as "il monologo-fiume più replicato dell'intero teatro italiano degli anni Settanta". Regarded almost unanimously by critics as Fo's best play, together with *Morte accidentale di un anarchico*, it is certainly his most enduring, and one which he still performs to this day."⁶

⁵ Fo has always invoked the storytellers of his childhood from the Lago Maggiore area as a major influence in his work. Their improvisational talents appear to have provided a model for Fo's conception of what is the essence of 'theatricality': "Questi pescatori improvvisavano, era evidente che si preoccupavano di adattare i vari passaggi ad una realtà contingente. Io ho ascoltato la stessa storia raccontata in dieci momenti diversi e l'abilità di chi raccontava consisteva proprio nell'adattarla ogni volta a tutte le situazioni della cronaca, compresi i fatti locali e i pettegolezzi del lavatoio" (Fo, in Allegri, 1990:22).

⁶ As Valentini (1980:207) has remarked: "[...] *Mistero buffo* ha avuto una vita staccata e parallela rispetto al teatro più propriamente d'intervento politico di Dario Fo, mantenendo un'autonomia totale verso le polemiche e le scissioni che intanto

Didactic Entertainment

The title chosen by Fo, *Mistero buffo*, is an allusion to Mayakovsky's dramatic piece *Misteriy a-buff* (1918); it can be seen as a sort of homage to the artist, poet and playwright who was regarded by many as the literary symbol of the Russian Revolution.⁹⁷ However, the significance of this title should not be sought in the content of the play which does not contain any actual references to the work by Mayakovsky,⁹⁸ but rather in the general aim of reinterpreting "the sacred issues of history through farce and parody" in order to "represent the proletarian struggle against the forces of repression and tyranny".⁹⁹ Characteristically, perhaps, for a play with such overtly didactic intentions,¹⁰⁰ the title *Mistero buffo*, or "Comic Mystery", is explained in the opening lines:

il suo autore viveva."

⁹⁷ Mayakovsky is, in fact, one of the protagonists of *L'operaio conosce trecento parole*, a play which, as we saw earlier, belongs to the same period as *Mistero buffo* (it was first performed in November 1969) and is something of a rarity for Fo in that it imparts its lesson in an essentially serious tone.

⁹⁸ "Nessuna reminiscenza maiakovskiana, forse soltanto una civetteria di Fo", according to Arturo Lazzari, reviewing the play at its opening (*L'Unità*, October 4, 1969).

⁹⁹ Hirst, 1989:114.

¹⁰⁰ Initially, Fo used slides to complete his didactic presentation, going into some detail describing and commenting on them.

« Mistero » è il termine usato già nel II, III secolo dopo Cristo per indicare uno spettacolo, una rappresentazione sacra. [...] mistero buffo vuol dire: spettacolo grottesco. Chi ha inventato il mistero buffo è stato il popolo (Fo, 1977:5).

Here, in a nutshell, we have the three fundamental components of the play: namely, a strong emphasis on history, the use of comedy, or the grotesque, to present religious material, and the reappraisal of popular culture.

The Sacred and the Secular

Thus, Fo draws attention to the ancient origins of the Italian *sacra rappresentazione*: akin to the 'Mystery Plays' – dramatised stories based on the Scriptures – which enjoyed enormous popularity throughout Europe from the twelfth until as late as the seventeenth century, these plays gave rise to other, related, dramatic genres such as Miracle plays, Morality plays and Passion plays.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, Fo's use of the term "Mistero" hints at the combination of sacred and profane elements which formed the basis for popular entertainment.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Cf. E. K. Chambers' classic work on the subject, *The Mediaeval Stage* (1903).

¹⁰² The mediaeval Mystery Plays "developed out of the Liturgy of the Church and, in particular out of the *Quem Quaeritis* trope of Easter Day. The earliest dramatizations were presented on the greater festivals of the Church: Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and Corpus Christi. At first they were in Latin and performed by the clergy in the church. There then came an increasing admixture of

For it is this highly idiosyncratic reworking of mediaeval sources,¹⁰³ drawn from all over Europe and presented in fifteenth-century "padano",¹⁰⁴ that lies at the heart of *Mistero buffo*. Described by Fo (1977:12-15), in a long introductory commentary, as a *giullarata*,¹⁰⁵ or *jonglerie*, it purports to be

the vernacular, and lay folk also performed in them. This gradual secularization of religious drama was accompanied by a corresponding physical move. The drama moved out of the church through the west door. Thus, what had been sacred drama became, literally, profane (*pro fano* 'before the temple'). From the church-yard to the market place was the next logical step." (Cuddon, 1986:407-408). Whilst some of these plays were stationary, others were processional; a complete cycle of plays sought to represent Biblical stories starting from the Creation and ending with the Last Judgement.

¹⁰³ This aspect of *Mistero buffo* has not gone unchallenged by academics who contest the authenticity of Fo's texts. In his highly critical book, *Giullari & Fo* (1978), Michele Straniero retitles *Mistero buffo* '*Mistero Bluff*', and takes issue with Fo's 'manipulation' of sources for theatrical purposes. More specifically, he disputes their popular origin, claiming that Fo's 'misappropriation' of sources vitiates his ideological project (Straniero, 1978:37). However, such a literalist approach to Fo seems misguided: one should not be misled into taking at face value assertions made by Fo's stage persona, assertions whose main purpose is to contribute to the construction of a mediaeval fable, hence their *functionality* in the context of Fo's theatre.

¹⁰⁴ Although Fo claims to be using the mediaeval vernacular of the Po valley it is, in reality, a sort of *mistilingua*, "un linguaggio semi-dialettale [...] e semi-fantastico" (Barsotti, 1980:108). Fo's use of dialect has interesting implications in the context of his 'universal' Marxism, and would clearly merit a detailed analysis which the scope of this particular study does not permit.

¹⁰⁵ Indeed, the full title of the play is *Mistero buffo, giullarata popolare*. This description clearly signposts Fo's work as belonging to a tradition of theatre which is antithetical to the bourgeois tradition, and harks back to a collective form of non-institutionalised street entertainment which reflected the cultural autonomy of the peasant population. Not only does it therefore underscore Fo's recent decision to leave the ambit of commercial, middle-class theatre, but it also indicates the sum and substance of his operation *en profondeur* in *Mistero buffo*, namely to create

a re-enactment of the type of pre-Commedia dell'Arte spectacle¹⁰⁶ which the *giullari* – those multi-talented strolling players of Mediaeval Europe who used a mixture of music, mime, acrobatics and improvised narrative to satirise the clergy and the nobility – presented in the public places of Europe.¹⁰⁷

The Church proscribed their theatrical activities, condemning them as anti-Christian occasions inspired by the

conditions that are conducive to the establishment of a genuinely popular culture – one that is capable of challenging the hegemony of the ruling classes. It is, of course, an article of faith for Fo (following Gramsci) that such conditions are the foundations upon which the revolutionary project must be built: "[...] il tempo libero va conquistato dal lavoratore, [...] per conquistare non basta negare i valori, non basta contestare, ma occorre portare avanti delle proposte, ecco che l'intellettuale ritrova una sua possibile funzione positiva, non si logora in frustranti battaglie per minare il sistema, per smascherare la classe dominante, per distruggere, ma inizia fin d'ora una opera di costruzione, a contatto con la classe e al servizio dei reali interessi della classe stessa" (Fo, 1970:8-9).

¹⁰⁶ Echoing Fo's statements of intent concerning *Mistero buffo*, Mitchell (1986:11) comments: "Fo's task in *Mistero buffo* is the retrieval and recovery of this unofficial, 'illegitimate' theatre contained in the original repertoire of the *giullari* before it was appropriated and transformed by court influence".

¹⁰⁷ The term *giullari*, a variant of the Provençal *joglars*, the Spanish *juglares*, from the Latin *ioculares* (attested in the fifth century in the sense of 'buffoons'), is equivalent to the French *jongleurs* (from the Latin *ioculatores*, found in Cicero). (Cf. "giullari" in *La nuova enciclopedia*, 1985.) Since it cannot be rendered accurately by the English 'jester' or 'juggler', the Italian term has been retained in this text (a usage adopted by Mitchell, 1986). According to Cuddon, 1986:346): "They were the literary descendants of the *mimi* and *histriones* of the Roman world. Besides being minstrels who sang and recited, many *jongleurs* were acrobats, jugglers and exhibitors of animals. As versatile professionals, they made a living where and when they could, and their audiences were plebeian as well as patrician. They reached their apogee of popularity in the 13th c., and thereafter they declined. Individual versatility gave way to specialization. Because they were itinerant, they played a considerable part in disseminating literary forms throughout Europe".

devil; indeed, at times it even issued anathemas against the *giullari*, who became the "bersagl[i] di tutte le invettive ecclesiastiche" (Cardona, 1983:57). Such a strong opposition to the *giullari* on the part of the Church allows us (indirectly) to gauge the extent of their popularity, as well as the perceived threat they posed – the threat of subversion from below. For, as Antonelli and Bianchini (1983:171) have pointed out:

L'opposizione della Chiesa verso il mondo giullaresco era anche l'opposizione del *clericus*, l'unica figura intellettuale specifica del medioevo, verso l'unico altro concorrente nella produzione culturale. Alla stabilità e controllabilità assoluta del monaco e del chierico si contrapponeva l'estrema mobilità (il 'vagabondaggio'), l'incontrollabilità e talvolta l'antiistituzionalità (carattere peraltro da non sopravvalutare, dati i complessi rapporti, quasi sempre di ricezione, con la letteratura 'colta') del giullare.¹⁰⁸

Adducing the seventeenth-century scholar Ludovico Antonio Muratori in support of the popular origin of the *giullari*, Fo (1977:12) emphasises what he sees as their function as the social critics of the day, enjoying considerable freedom of expression

¹⁰⁸ The link with aristocratic culture is one which did not escape the more philologically minded critics such as Straniero (1978:18-33) who criticise Fo for overstressing the *giullari*'s popular origin. But, more recently, Fo (1987:121) has nuanced his view of the social role played by the *giullari*. Straniero's polemical position *vis-à-vis* Fo – which ultimately hinges on the evaluation of mediaeval sources – is a fascinating one, not least because of his claim to be replacing Fo's ideologically laden, 'popularising' appropriation of history with ideology-free scholarship.

and often able to voice savage criticism with impunity.¹⁰⁹ However, according to Fo, this freedom was, in fact, exercised within certain limits and the latitude given to the *giullari* was regulated. Thus, they spasmodically incurred the wrath of the ruling classes and were compelled to flee the very oppression their satires exposed; indeed, at times their lampooning even cost them their lives, if we are to believe Fo (1977:12) who tells us that, "nel Medioevo ne ammazzavano con tanta abbondanza di giullari, li scuoiavano, gli tagliavano la lingua [...]".

The peculiarly ambiguous position occupied by the *giullari*, who were much sought after by the public but frequently out of favour with the authorities, who lived precariously yet achieved significant cultural freedom, and who straddled the plebeian and the aristocratic worlds, defying the rigid social hierarchy of the age,¹¹⁰ is almost certainly one area in which Fo recognised his own somewhat anomalous status in Italian theatre, applauded

¹⁰⁹ There is an interesting parallel to be drawn here with mediaeval carnival which, according to Bakhtin (1968:10) was the expression of a strong popular counter-culture: "As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions [emphasis added]. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed."

¹¹⁰ Interestingly, from the twelfth century onwards, the term *giullare* was often used interchangeably with *troubadour*, despite the distinct roles of each. In the cultural hierarchy, the *giullari* were relegated to a far lower status than the *troubadours* "con la loro raffinata consapevolezza artistica"; typically, they were considered to be mere performers, "con le loro più modeste funzioni di esecutori, divulgatori e ripetitori" (Garzanti, 1985:396).

in some quarters, decried in others; at once lionised and ostracised in the course of his career, as we saw in chapter One.¹¹¹

Derision and Demystification

And he took my lovely crutches
 Laughing with a fiend's grimace
 Broke them both across my back and
 Threw them in the fireplace.
 Well, I'm cured now: I can walk.
 Cured by nothing more than laughter.
 Sometimes, though, when I see sticks
 I walk worse for some hours after.¹¹²

The mediaeval *giullari* clearly epitomise for Fo that critical, irreverent spirit whereby the people are able to rise above their condition of subjugation and become 'free', unfettered by the conventional pieties and bourgeois notions of

¹¹¹ Critics have made much of the fact that Fo appears to have cast himself in the role of *giullare* over the years, thereby combining his skills as a comic and virtuoso performer with his vocation as a social critic. Whilst this is a substantially accurate view of the part Fo has played in Italian theatre, succeeding for several decades in his natural penchant to shock the establishment, comments such as the following tend to overstate Fo's missionary zeal: "Fo identifies with the *giullare*, and sees his role as the modern equivalent of the mediaeval *giullare* playing to an industrial working-class audience instead of mediaeval peasants." (Mitchell, 1986:22).

¹¹² From "The Crutches" (Brecht, 1976:329), translated by Edith Roseveare.

respectability which have always conspired to keep them in their place. For, as Fo argues, it is only by demolishing the façade of self-importance that the ruling class has erected in order to protect its interests that its empty rhetoric will be revealed, and the myths of the class structure exposed.¹¹³ And the most effective way to do so, according to Fo, is through the 'weapon' of derision¹¹⁴.

In the *giullari* Fo discerns one of the first serious attempts at subverting the established order.¹¹⁵ Indeed, Fo asserts that the ultimate aim of the *giullari*'s satire was to 'raise the consciousness' of the people, to borrow a key term

¹¹³ It is easy to see how Fo's use of *grammelot* contributes to this *demythification*, and is more than just a comic device: originally it stemmed – or so Fo would have us believe – from the peculiar historical circumstances under which the *giullari* worked. Ponzi (1976:43) offers an explanation that concords with the occasional comments made by Fo on the subject: "I comici del XV, XVI e XVII secolo, espressione delle esigenze e dei disagi popolari, venivano spesso censurati o perseguitati per i loro spettacoli particolarmente irrilevanti nei confronti della gerarchia ecclesiastica o di qualche feudatario, per cui (anche per superare le difficoltà di comprensione di pubblici linguisticamente diversi) inventarono un linguaggio onomatopeico – il *grammelot* (sic) – che riproduceva vagamente i ritmi e le cadenze della lingua ufficiale, della 'lingua dei signori', ma che basava tutte le sue capacità espressive sul coordinamento tra gestualità e tono vocale."

¹¹⁴ Laughter and irreverence are fundamental instruments in the social satire of the *giullari*; these themes are developed *infra*.

¹¹⁵ Fo's claim is lent support by a number of historians of mediaeval culture; Piero Camporesi (1991:124), for example, describes the role of the *giullari* as that of "sconfessare e irridere la cultura ufficiale".

from the language of the Marxist class struggle.¹¹⁶ This challenge to authority is, of course, typical of the general climate that reigned in Italy at the time (cf. Chapter One). As Puppa (1978:101) reminds us:

Siamo nel '68-69, occorre ribadire questo orizzonte politico anti-autoritario, oltre altri aspetti, che circola insistente in questo spettacolo.¹¹⁷

Fo's 'Epic' Theatre

Observe, if you will, one thing: that this imitator
Never loses himself in his imitation. He never entirely
Transforms himself into the man he is imitating. He always
Remains the demonstrator, the one not involved. [...]
Our demonstrator at the street corner
Is no sleepwalker who must not be addressed. He is
No high priest holding divine service. At any moment
You can interrupt him; he will answer you
Quite calmly and when you have spoken with him
Go on with his performance.¹¹⁸

According to Fo (1977:55), the *giullari* performed solo, and this is an important feature of the *giullarata*, since it determines the kind of recital technique that should be adopted:

¹¹⁶ As Fo has repeatedly said in interviews: "Sono intrinsecamente satiriche tutte le forme in cui si esprime il giullare [...] perché il popolo prenda coscienza della propria condizione." (Fo quoted in Artese, 1977:51).

¹¹⁷ Camporesi (1991:77) detects this spirit of rebellion in the narrative structure of mediaeval peasant culture which, according to his distinctly post-1968 view, often portrayed a world of "caos organizzato e trasgressivo della odiata norma padronale".

¹¹⁸ From "On Everyday Theatre" (Brecht, 1976:176-179), translated by Edith Anderson.

[...] quasi tutti questi testi sono stati scritti per essere eseguiti da uno solo. I giullari lavoravano quasi sempre da soli: ce ne rendiamo conto dal fatto che, nel testo, tutto è alluso attraverso sdoppiamenti, indicazioni. Cosicché, attraverso questo gioco dell'immaginazione, tutta la carica di poesia e di comicità viene raddoppiata.

Thus, by having to imagine the characters and action described by the words and gestures of the *giullari*, the audience was required to contribute actively to constructing the *fabula*;¹¹⁹ this clearly established a particular type of actor-spectator relationship where a collective response was elicited. As Fo adds ironically:

Proprio come succede davanti al televisore, dove, per evitare che tu faccia fatica, ti dànno tutti i particolari: e tu te ne stai lí, un po' beota, ti puoi addormentare, digerire, fare i ruttini rotondi... e il giorno dopo sei pronto per andare a lavorare, libero di testa e pronto a farti sfruttare di nuovo.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ The term was coined by the early Russian Formalists (*fabula* versus *sjuzhet*) and is employed by Eco (1979:102) in opposition to *intreccio*: "La *fabula* è lo schema fondamentale della narrazione, la logica delle azioni e la sintassi dei personaggi, il corso di eventi ordinati temporalmente. [...] L'*intreccio* è invece la storia come di fatto viene raccontata, come appare in superficie, con le sue dislocazioni temporali, salti in avanti e indietro (ossia anticipazioni e *flash-back*), descrizioni, digressioni, riflessioni parentetiche".

¹²⁰ It is precisely in the area of culture that the 'mystification of the proletariat' (a recurrent expression in the vocabulary of the Italian Left during the 1960s and 1970s) by the dominant class is best disguised: "Il tempo libero (o tempo al di fuori del lavoro) tende ad essere riempito di contenuti precisi e predeterminati, i modelli di comportamento proposti dalla società dei consumi sono tutti intenti alla logica di questa società: il carattere mistificante della democrazia borghese, le scelte del cittadino appaiono sempre più condizionate dai modelli imposti dalla classe dominante. Con un processo che tende in un primo momento (dialettico non storico) a isolare l'individuo, a farlo sentire solo, libero di agire e di scegliere al di fuori e al di sopra degli interessi della sua classe, pre poi trasformarlo da

Theatre as construction, then, theatre as chorality – such is Fo's alternative to the kind of unthinking entertainment which he sees as perpetuating the class system. In this belief in the educative value of theatre, we find another similarity with Gramsci who, working as theatre critic for *L'Avanti*, wrote that theatre can and should provide "una occupazione cerebrale che completi la vita, che non riduca l'esistenza a un puro esercizio di forze muscolari", offering an opportunity for "ricreazione intellettuale" (quoted in Davico Bonino, 1972:13).¹²¹

This form of theatre, which Fo claims was at the basis of the *giullarata*, is 'epic' in the Brechtian sense, privileging reason (*Verstand*) over empathy (*Einfühlung*): it does not seek to involve the spectator emotionally, but rather intellectually. For, by means of the so-called 'alienation effect', it creates a distance – as opposed to a mirror-like identification – between

individuo sociale e politico in 'uomo massa': tanti individui cioè che 'liberamente' scelgono quello che viene loro imposto, in modo palese e con le tecniche più raffinate, che scelgono tutti le stesse cose e in quel dato momento dalla partita di calcio alla domenica, alle canzonette alla Radio e alla Televisione, ai caroselli, alla cultura a fumetti" (Fo, 1970:8).

¹²¹ Gramsci's early writings privilege theatre rather than literature, for he was drawn to the social aspect of theatre which speaks to the collectivity and not to the individual (Davico Bonino, 1972:14). He was well aware of its enormous potential to influence public opinion and was therefore alarmed at the state of contemporary Italian theatre (his reviews date from 1915-1920) which, in his view, was prevalently *bien pensant* and reactionary. According to Davico Bonino (1972:14), Gramsci devoted himself to theatre criticism "perché si sent[iva] impegnato a 'curvare' e guidare la forza d'attrazione del teatro verso esiti politicamente fattivi." Indeed, Gramsci was the only theatre critic of his time to seek out the sociological motivation for a given play and to question its political use (Davico Bonino, 1972:26).

actor and audience and therefore allows for a more 'objective' response and, in so doing, encourages critical reflection.¹²² However, in the manner in which Fo uses the distancing technique, several critics have discerned an attempt to get away from what they regard as an excessively cerebral approach to performing Brecht in Italy, a view shared by Fo himself who was often critical of the leading Italian Brechtian theatre director, Giorgio Strehler.¹²³

In following Brecht's conception of drama here, Fo clearly intends to place himself firmly within the tradition of 'didactic theatre', in the best sense of the expression (rather than agit-prop)¹²⁴: by drawing attention to the devices he is employing

¹²² One of Brecht's chief innovations in theatre was his use of a distancing technique, a *Verfremdungseffekt*, which he developed as part of his stated aim of ensuring that the audience did not empathise emotionally with the characters on stage. This non-Aristotelian theory of drama – which rejected the very notion of *mimesis* and its corollary, *catharsis* – was formulated in "A Short Organum for the Theatre" (1949).

¹²³ Binini (1975:238) describes *Mistero buffo* as "un esempio concreto di cosa intende per 'teatro epico' Dario Fo, un punto d'arrivo per quanto riguarda la sua concezione del teatro come momento di sintesi dialettica di problemi della collettività e che si fonda sulla partecipazione cosciente, non viscerale, non fondata su un'immedesimazione di chi guarda con le sensazioni artefatte dell'attore, e che raccoglie le indicazioni di Brecht a proposito dell' 'estranamento' ma rifiuta radicalmente ogni sua cristallizzazione in gioco formale, l' 'estranamento' che nella concezione del teatro dei brechtiani italiani [...] significa distruzione programmata del ruolo dei sentimenti (base primaria della partecipazione collettiva nel 'rito epico') in nome di una congelata facoltà critica del pubblico, in una dimensione astratta di raziocinio, di coscienza priva del corpo, di ribellione che la rende necessaria e la motiva."

¹²⁴ "Forme radicalisée du théâtre politique, faisant passer avant toute autre considération les objectifs de la lutte [...]" (Ivernel, 1991:19).

through his constant recourse to digression, *interventi* and direct address, Fo – like Brecht before him – denounces the theatre of the establishment which serves as an ideological buttress for the bourgeois values of individualism and escapism.¹²⁵ Fo reacts with a theatre that presents itself as being at once anti-individualistic and anti-illusionistic.¹²⁶ Thus, the *giullare* embodies the collectivity,¹²⁷ openly putting forward its views and its aspirations and thereby dispensing with mimetic drama. Not only is there no attempt to efface the presence of the actor on stage,¹²⁸ but the very fact that the *giullare* introduces himself into the narrative whilst retaining his 'objective' external position asserts the need for the audience to exert its critical faculties. The *giullare* is at

¹²⁵ Cf. "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction" (Brecht, 1964:69-77).

¹²⁶ The artifice of theatre is shown openly, disclosed in the same way as the ideology of the bourgeoisie is exposed. As Brecht (1964:109) writes: "Realist means: laying bare society's causal network / showing up the dominant viewpoint as the viewpoint of the dominators [...]".

¹²⁷ This use of one actor to present a vast range of characters clearly has a symbolic value, insofar as "Fo becomes a one-man carnival, and amply represents the collectivity" (Schechter, 1984:117).

¹²⁸ The opening lines of *Mistero buffo* (Fo, 1977:5) are spoken by the emblematic figure of the "attore", in a brief prologue which not only serves to inform the audience, but at the same time reminds them that they are 'at the theatre'. Thus, the Brechtian device of 'alienation' – literally, making strange, as suggested in Shklovsky's *ostranenie* from which it is derived – is introduced from the very start.

once *inside and outside* the texts,¹²⁹ in a constant interplay between past and present, *récit* and meta-*récit*; action and reflection, narration and argumentation.¹³⁰

As should be apparent, it is often hard to separate individual scenes from their preliminary presentation by Fo, for *Mistero buffo* is, in effect, a synthesis of commentary, narration, and dialogue, a fusion which at times makes the dividing-line between didactic discourse and dramatic performance indistinct. At any rate, this is unavoidable since Fo the actor presents himself as actor, so to speak, comments on his own comments in a relentless meta-discursive process which is finely woven into the play. Indeed, the critical commentaries themselves contribute to the play's overall texture, its re-creation of the oral tradition of *fabulazione*, or story-telling, as they are interspersed with anecdotes. This technique enables Fo to

¹²⁹ At the risk of simplifying a complex narratological process, the analogy with the technique of *mise en abîme*, found in paintings such as Jan van Eyck's "The Arnolfini Marriage" (1434), might be helpful here.

¹³⁰ In employing these binary categories, there is no intention here to deny that the construction of a narrative presupposes reflection, for as Adam (1984:17) reminds us with exemplary clarity: "L'activité narrative combine un *ordre chronologique* et un *ordre configurationnel*: suivre le déroulement d'une histoire (*ordre chronologique*), c'est déjà réfléchir sur les événements en vue de les embrasser en un tout signifiant (*ordre configurationnel*) par un acte de jugement réflexif." The crucial difference between Fo's narration and argumentation seems to reside mainly in the degree and manner of reflection; for, in the argumentative commentaries, what is paramount is the *making manifest* of a critical response — a sort of object-lesson in Marxist analytical reflexes.

exemplify what he clearly views as the fundamental difference between the modern actor and the mediaeval *giullare*, namely the latter's capacity to intervene at will, to transcend his material which he ultimately controls.¹³¹

The Texts

The spectacle is divided into two sections: *Mistero buffo*, followed by the *Testi della Passione*. The first part draws on such varied sources as "medieval poetry, folk tales, adaptations of choral religious chants, dramatizations of biblical or holy legends" (Cowan, 1978:12); the second part consists of scenes from the Passion of Christ which can be found in mediaeval religious plays and popular legends, based loosely on the Bible stories.¹³²

Establishing anything like a 'definitive text', however, is problematic, given that *Mistero buffo* has evolved over the years: as explained above, Fo constantly supplemented the original

¹³¹ "Tout ce que, commentant le théâtre épique brechtien, Walter Benjamin écrivait du 'jeu interrompu' et du 'gestus que l'on peut citer', s'applique ici à la lettre. Fo pratique une constante interruption. Ses gestes sont abruptement suspendus. Il les regarde, les commente, en rit, les répète ou les prolonge" (Dort, 1979:210).

¹³² In the more dramatic texts evoking scenes from the Passion of Christ, Dario Fo's solo performance is complemented by Franca Rame in the role of the Virgin Mary.

corpus with fresh pieces. A first version of *Mistero buffo*¹³³ was published together with several other plays by Fo from the same season in *Compagni senza censura* (Mazzotta, 1970).¹³⁴ In 1973, a bilingual (French) edition was published by Bertani, in association with the Centre Franco-Italien de Dramaturgie directed by José Guinot; the initiative was timed so as to anticipate Fo's presentation of *Mistero buffo* in Paris in January 1974.

The present analysis is based on the selection of texts edited by Franca Rame for the Bertani edition of 1974 which was subsequently republished in 1977 by Einaudi; all page references

¹³³ It contained the following texts: "Lauda dei battuti"; "l'ubriaco"; "Strage degli innocenti"; "Resurrezione di Lazzaro"; "Passione"; "Il matto e la Morte"; "Moralità del cieco e dello storpio"; "Maria viene a conoscere della condanna imposta al figlio"; "La Crocefissione"; "Bonifacio VIII"; "La nascita del villano".

¹³⁴ This edition included a glossary of over 80 terms translated into standard Italian as well as a bibliography of wide-ranging textual and historical sources. The latter reflects Fo's desire to pass off the texts of *Mistero buffo* as authentic mediaeval sources which he and other researchers had unearthed. The extent of Fo's own artistic input is, in fact, far greater than he himself was initially prepared to admit. Although the need to bolster his work with the academic apparatus of a bibliography might seem to contradict Fo's anti-establishment stance it was typical of the way in which Marxist intellectuals and artists would justify their work by providing historical documentation in the belief that this guaranteed the 'scientificness' of their projects. Perhaps more importantly, the references given by Fo reflect his concern to draw parallels between the mediaeval popular traditions of the *giullarata* in numerous European countries; for, apart from dialect texts from various regions of Italy, Fo cites as his sources Czech, Flemish, French, German, Slovakian, and Spanish mystery plays.

are to the latter edition which is still in print.¹³⁵ For the first time, an Italian translation appeared alongside the texts in "lingua padana". This edition includes the explanatory introductions which accompany each text, and are an integral part of *Mistero buffo*, but does not contain the post-performance debates, the so-called *terzo atto*, which were published in the earlier editions. Nor does it, for the most part, contain those *interventi*, or *ad hoc* commentaries on current affairs, which make the play-in-performance so dynamic. This omission was clearly dictated by the ephemeral nature of such comments whose function it was to act as 'living newspapers' – in other words, they were unscripted, instant responses to political events and thus changed from day to day, and even from place to place.¹³⁶

Since the play is made up of a collection of dramatic pieces covering a wide range of subjects, and does not therefore have a unified plot, it seems appropriate to provide a description of each scene or sketch in *Mistero buffo* proper, before proceeding

¹³⁵ Einaudi have published the vast majority of Fo's plays of which there are nine volumes to date.

¹³⁶ Sally Banes (1983:33), reviewing Fo's London performance of *Mistero buffo*, explains how he "began each evening with a modern example of what a *giullare* might have done with topical material of his own day. He recounted the story of the Pope's assassination attempt [...]. Like a nightclub comedian, Fo interrupted himself and digressed, his easy banter about the Pope as a TV personality in Italy, even a force of nature, suddenly coming into sharp focus on the description of the assassination and a graphic depiction of how the bullet went into the Pope's sphincter ("What an outrage!" he stopped to comment, "the Pope doesn't have a sphincter, he has a sacred conduit"), came out his navel, ricocheted off the columns of the Vatican, and went up to heaven."

to a more detailed analysis of the situations and themes presented, so as to facilitate comparison with Michel Tremblay's *Mistero buffo*.

Synopsis of *Mistero buffo*¹³⁷

"Rosa fresca aulentissima" ("Fresh Fragrant Rose")

Fo takes a famous mediaeval Sicilian poem, "Rosa fresca aulentissima", which is familiar to all Italian schoolchildren, and offers a radically different reading from that presented in the textbooks. It has traditionally been regarded as one of the earliest examples of courtly love poetry (c. 1250), a dialogue between a lover and a lady written by an aristocratic author.¹³⁸ Fo, however, insists that it is in fact

a much less refined, more bawdy piece, a conversation not between two noble figures but between a tax-collector and a servant girl.¹³⁹

In his view, the poem was written as a biting social comment intended to expose the iniquity of the *defensa*, an accepted mediaeval practice which allowed noblemen to pay fines to the

¹³⁷ The order followed is that of the Einaudi edition (1977) which contains thirteen texts.

¹³⁸ Its status in the Italian literary canon can be gauged by the fact that, as David Hirst (1989:120) points out, it is "enshrined as the first poem in Francesco de Sanctis's celebrated two-volume analysis of Italian literature." *Storia della letteratura italiana* was first published in 1870-71 and still represents a standard authority on the subject.

¹³⁹ Hirst, 1989:121.

families of young women they had raped rather than face prosecution.¹⁴⁰ It was, Fo (1977:11) observes, "un privilegio meraviglioso a difesa della persona degli altolocati".

As the opening piece, "Rosa fresca aulentissima" appropriately sets the tone for the rest of Fo's didactic entertainment; it is a demonstration of the Gramscian notion that hegemony is established via intellectual leadership. Here, Fo offers a concrete example of how the bourgeoisie appropriates popular culture, adapting it to suit its own purposes: in this case, a poem which was originally recited by the *giullari* has been emasculated – stripped of its satirical intent, it now serves to prop up the ideology of the dominant class.

"Lauda dei battuti" (The Flagellants' Laude¹⁴¹)

This is the chant of the *battuti*, or flagellants – the rearguard of religious processions during the Middle Ages – who would beat themselves as they walked through the streets of the city. Before demonstrating this type of chant, Fo (1977:22-23) explains how, at the end of the procession, the flagellants

si mettevano intorno al palco dove si svolgeva la
rappresentazione e sottolineavano, indicavano cantando,

¹⁴⁰ "[...] così, un ricco poteva violentare tranquillamente una ragazza" (Fo, 1977:11).

¹⁴¹ The English rendition of titles is taken from Ed Emery's translation (1988).

urlando, lamentandosi e respirando perfino coralmente,
i tempi drammatici e grotteschi della rappresentazione.

"Strage degli innocenti" (The Slaughter of the Innocents)

Fo switches with lightning speed between various characters: A woman has her child killed in cold blood by a soldier taking part in the so-called massacre of the innocents;¹⁴² the soldier then sets on another woman who has been driven to madness by the murder of her baby and is revealed to be carrying a lamb in place of her dead infant. When the first soldier expresses his repulsion for the killing of innocent children and refuses to pursue the Madonna who is carrying the infant Jesus, the other soldier kills him, declaring that pity is incompatible with soldiering. The scene ends with the madwoman unburdening her soul to the Madonna.

In his prologue to the piece, Fo (1977:28) tells us that the figure of the mother carrying a lamb should be read allegorically: "l'agnello è l'Agnus Dei, il figlio di Dio, quindi questa donna è anche la Madonna."¹⁴³

¹⁴² A reference to a well-known episode in the New Testament: in an attempt to thwart the prophecy of Christ's coming, Herod orders all infants under the age of two to be slain (Matthew, 2:16).

¹⁴³ There is a strategic reason, Fo (1977:28) informs us, for this dual role, what he describes as the "doppio gioco del personaggio donna-Madonna". It is a means whereby, historically — Fo insists on the existence of such a device since the time of the Greeks — it had been possible to present views which would otherwise have been regarded as unacceptable; in other words, the

"Moralità del cieco e dello storpio" (The Morality Play of the Blind Man and the Cripple)

Fo alternates here between the part of a blind man who has lost his dog, and a cripple who has lost his cart. Unable to collect alms under such circumstances, they devise a means of overcoming their respective handicaps by compensating for each other's infirmities: thus, the cripple rides on the blind man's back and gives him directions. Meanwhile, they hear the sound of a procession and, in the distance, recognise Christ who is on his way to Calvary. Despite the cripple's insistence that they must do their utmost to avoid him, lest he 'inflict' a miracle upon them (which would make them fit for work, and hence liable for exploitation by a master), they eventually run into him and are cured of their afflictions, the 'blind man' rejoicing in all that he can now see and the 'cripple' cursing his unhappy lot.

In the prologue, Fo stresses the historical roots of this particular sketch which was performed as early as the thirteenth century, thereby lending support to his claim that the working-class struggle has mediaeval origins.¹⁴⁴ Its central theme, as

character of the woman is able to say things which would not have been permissible had they being voiced by the Madonna. Thus, for example, when the mother later recounts her story to the Madonna, she is able to curse violently against God and to denounce his cruelty in allowing so much suffering in the world.

¹⁴⁴ Fo may well have had the *Ciampi* in mind here. According to Ponzi (1976:43), in the peasant battles and popular uprisings of the Middle Ages, Fo identifies "la prima presa di coscienza di classe e di forma di lotta del proletariato".

interpreted by Fo, is that of *dignity* which he describes as one of the best-known themes in European mediaeval theatre: he mentions a French and a Belgian version, but presents a somewhat later fifteenth-century one, attributed to Andrea della Vigna.¹⁴⁵ (Cf. *infra* for section on dignity.)

"Le nozze di Cana" (The Marriage at Cana)

Another of Christ's miracles is evoked here. The scene opens with an altercation over who is to present the story of the marriage at Cana: the archangel as the spokesperson for the official, standard version of the miracle insists on the veracity of his account¹⁴⁶ and the drunkard as a wedding guest wants to

¹⁴⁵ Fo's claim is corroborated by Allardyce Nicoll (1963:172) who mentions "the thirteenth-century French farce of *Le Garçon et l'aveugle*" [...] which belongs to the district of Tournai and cannot be later in date than 1290. [It] introduces a blind old man, who, trading on his infirmity, goes his way invoking alms in the name of God and the saints." Nicoll comments: "The importance of this cynical but vivid playlet rests in the fact that it stands not alone, but is merely the first extant example of the treatment of a theme which carries us through two or three centuries." A number of versions evolved, finally giving rise to an offshoot which, according to Nicoll, "evidently [...] belongs to a cognate tradition". The summary he gives offers interesting parallels with Fo's own version: "The story is told here of the holy St. Martin, whose body is causing miracles manifold. Among his townfolk, however, are a blind man and a paralytic, and these, since they fare quite well on their infirmities, are terrified at the thought of being cured. A procession approaches them bearing St. Martin on a litter, so up goes the paralytic on the blind man's back and off they trot — yet not fast enough to escape the train of ecclesiastics and the involuntary curing."

¹⁴⁶ "[...] tuto quello che andaremo a contarve ol sarà tuto vero, tuto o l'è sortio dei libri o dei vanzeli" (Fo, 1977:59).

give a first-hand, down-to-earth description of his inebriation.¹⁴⁷ The dispute becomes increasingly aggressive, with the angel threatening to remove the drunkard by force.¹⁴⁸ In response, he too threatens violence and the angel flees.

The drunkard then relates how, when he arrived at Cana for the wedding feast, he found everyone in despair since all the wine had turned to vinegar. Finally, the important guests – the Madonna and Jesus – arrive,¹⁴⁹ and the Virgin Mary entreats her son to help "sta povera zent". Jesus therefore asks for twelve pitchers of water to be brought and turns the contents into first-rate wine. Everyone rejoices at this miracle while Jesus climbs onto a table and pours out wine for all, urging them: "Beve' gente, feit alegria, inchiuchive, imbriaghive, no aspetí dopo, alegria!" (Fo, 1977:67).

The scene ends with the drunkard commenting on the fact that wine has always been regarded as an invention of the devil; if humankind was not saved, he reasons, it was because Adam did not know that fruit was not made to be eaten, but to be crushed and made into alcohol. He concludes by recounting a dream in which

¹⁴⁷ "Anco mi voi contar, no de fantasia: me son catat un'imbragadura si dolza, una cioca belisima che non me vogio catar giamai plu cioche al mondo per non desmentegarme de questa cioca belisima che g'ho adoso adesso" (Fo, 1977:59).

¹⁴⁸ "Fora!... Fora!... Te descàssso fora a pesciade" (Fo, 1977:63).

¹⁴⁹ "[...] invitati de riguardo, che rivaven giùsta un pu de ritard" (Fo, 1977:63-65).

he found himself in heaven and saw that all the "beati" there were immersed in huge vats of wine.¹⁵⁰

"Nascita del giullare" (The Birth of the Jongleur)

A giullare recalls his peasant origins and describes the miracle that provided him with a new role in life.¹⁵¹ He relates how, since he had no land, he had to seek out work far afield, like all the serfs in the valley; one day he discovered a mountain which belonged to no one and decided to cultivate it. As a result of the serf's labours the formerly barren land now yielded crops miraculously;¹⁵² it was the envy of all the peasants. When the local seigneur saw the fertile land he claimed it as his own; nevertheless, the serf resisted his offer to buy it off him, imagining already the derisory sum he would receive were he to accept. The following day, first the priest, and then the notary tried to persuade the serf to hand over his

¹⁵⁰ This is the only scene where God (as distinct from Christ) is seen in a positive light. Here he is commended by the drunkard for having devised a place - heaven - where not only is the supply of alcohol unlimited, but drinkers do not even have to make an effort to raise their glasses: "[...] ho capit che meravigiosa invensiun o l'era staita quela del Deo Padre, per i beati, che erano tûti beati là dentro, che per non farghe fa' fadiga ai poveri beati [...]" (Fo, 1977:69).

¹⁵¹ "[...] non son nasûo giular [...] No! Mi a son el frai d'on miracol!" (Fo, 1977:73).

¹⁵² "l'era tera d'ora!"; "u l'era ol paradis, ol paradis terrestre" (Fo, 1977:73).

land to the *padron*, but the serf remained adamant and would not budge. After this, the lord resorted to 'spoiling tactics': initially, petty vandalism (he goes hunting with all his entourage, thereby causing damage to the peasant's land) and, subsequently, arson (he sets fire to his land, his house and his animals). Finally, the lord raped the peasant's wife, in front of him and his children. The family was then subjected to abuse from all the other villagers; the wife ran off, the children died. In desperation the serf decided to hang himself. He was in the process of doing so when he was interrupted by someone asking him for a drink; he obliged, offering the man and his two companions some food as well. Then the man, after revealing that he is in fact Jesus Christ, dissuaded the peasant from committing suicide, telling him that he should leave his land and go spread the (revolutionary) word so that others might free themselves from the tyranny of their overlords. To enable the serf to do this, Jesus performed a miracle, endowing him with the gift of the gab.¹⁵³ Thus was the serf transformed into a *giullare*, who now has his wits about him and is armed with a razor-sharp tongue.

¹⁵³ "Jesus Cristo a soi mi che t'vegna a ti a dat parlar." (Fo, 1977:81).

"La nascita del villano" (The Birth of the Villeyn)

This piece describes how the serf was created by God so that Man would have someone to take care of all the hard work for him. Since Adam refuses to part with another rib, an ass is chosen to bear the villano; after nine months, "l'asen ol trà una slofa tremenda e con quela salta foera ol vilan spüsento." (Fo, 1977:87). An angel then appears and tells the Man that he is now the Master "par ordine del Segnur".

In his long address to the master, listing the many labours befitting a serf and the kind of treatment he should receive, the angel states that the villano is such a lowly creature, he has no soul. (A detailed discussion of this theme appears in Chapter Four.)

"Resurrezione di Lazzaro" (The Resurrection of Lazarus)

Fo describes this text as "un 'cavallo di battaglia' da virtuosi", since the *giullare* has to perform about fifteen roles. Indeed, a whole crowd of people is depicted: first, as they arrive at the cemetery and haggle with the guardian who demands they pay an 'entrance fee'; then, as they look for Lazarus's grave; and, finally, as they watch Christ raising Lazarus from the dead. Single-handed, Fo succeeds in evoking all the pushing

and shoving¹⁵⁴ that characterise fairground spectacles, together with the associated sounds and smells. The earthy, popular atmosphere is conveyed through the cries of vendors – offering everything from chairs to sardines – touting for customers; the allusions to the stench of the rotting corpse full of worms; the wagers which the spectators place on the likelihood of Christ managing to accomplish the feat of the resurrection; and, finally, the pickpocket who takes advantage of the crowd's distraction.

Jesus is portrayed as a mixture of rock-star celebrity-cum-politician: "Jesus! Sempatego! M'ha schiscià l'ögiu!" (Fo, 1977:103). The characteristically popular mixture of the sacred and the profane which is exemplified in this performance combines the people's belief in miracles with an equally typical attitude of irreverence: "No è ora de sto miracolamento?" (Fo, 1977:101).

¹⁵⁴ An element of 'self-satire' is probable here, insofar as Fo pokes fun at a national 'non-custom', in which his Italian audience would certainly recognise themselves, that is to say their notorious lack of respect for queues: "Furbo eh! A l'è piccolo e el vegn davanti! A fem la scaleta? I piccoli davanti, quei lunghi de drio! E peu el piccolo el riva dopo e l'è cuma s'el füss rivà prima! [...] No m'interessa, stiè indrio! Eh?! Ah! Le done, anca lor i spigne adesso!" (Fo, 1977:101). Similarly, when Jesus seems to be taking his time in arriving, one spectator cries out: "O dit un urari, o rivare, no?" The humour here is situated on two levels: firstly, and most obviously, the crowd's expecting a punctual miracle; and, secondly, the failure to comply with timetables which have always bedevilled public services in Italy.

"Bonifacio VIII" (Boniface VIII)

In this *giullarata* Fo shows Boniface preparing himself for an important ceremony, all the while intoning an extra-liturgical chant. Helped by a cleric, he puts on the vestments appropriate to his status, constantly interrupting his recitation in order to make mundane comments, which stand in sharp (and, inevitably, comic) contrast to his role as spiritual leader. The sacred and the trivial are played off against one another here to good effect.

During the procession, Boniface encounters Christ and, feigning humility, addresses him. When Christ fails to recognise him, an indignant Boniface is obliged to introduce himself, and lets slip a few self-incriminating details. In a hilarious crescendo of frustration as Boniface fails to put across the public image he has always so carefully nurtured, he soon turns nasty when Christ accuses him of having killed monks; he responds aggressively by attacking Christ, in turn, charging him with vague accusations: "Anca di te m'han dito de robe ...caro! Ma mi no ghe credo miga!" (Fo, 1977:119).¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Here, Fo pursues the political analogy which is strongly suggested by this scene: Boniface is seen employing a classic politician's strategy which consists of washing one's opponent's dirty linen in public so as to divert attention from one's own less-than-immaculate reputation.

As he unctuously offers to help Christ carry his cross in the procession – pushing Simon of Cyrene aside in irritation¹⁵⁶ – he receives a kick in the shins, at which point his mask drops and he no longer makes any attempt at pretence (such, ultimately, is his sense of the unassailability of his power).¹⁵⁷

Situational Theatre

As can be seen, each text is a self-contained fable and deals with various subjects which are related thematically, rather than by plot. Thus, each scene involves a different set of characters (with the notable exception of Jesus who appears in the majority of them). However, the psychological development of these characters – their personality as *individuals* – is of no interest to us here; what concerns us is their emblematic roles, their position in the social hierarchy. Their interrelationships are simple: they either exploit or are exploited, oppress or are oppressed. On the one hand, we have the feudal lord, the soldiers in Herod's pay, the priest, the pope-politician, and, on

¹⁵⁶ An ironic allusion to the bystander who was obliged to carry Christ's cross part of the way along the road to Calvary. Cf. Mark, 15:21; Matthew, 27:32.

¹⁵⁷ "Cristu!! Una pesciada a mi?! Bonifax!! Lo Prense! ah bon... canaja... malnato... Ah, s'ol save se to padre... disgrasiò! Cap de' aseni!... Sente, no g'ho pagùra da ditel che me fa el piazer de vederte inciudà, ca incoo giùsta am voj ciucare, a voj torme lo plaser de balare... balare! andà de pütane! parché sunt Bonifax a mi... prence son!" (Fo, 1977:119).

the other hand, we have the villey, the beggars, the women who produce children 'by the dozen', and the ordinary folk who make up the crowd at weddings, processions, and resurrections, and are manipulated willy-nilly by the authorities.

Unlike traditional theatre, which is centred on the audience's identification with the play's characters, in *Mistero buffo* we are asked instead to consider the circumstances presented in each text as situations. For Fo is interested in what he calls a *teatro di situazione*,¹⁵⁸ after Sartre,¹⁵⁹ and each scene in *Mistero buffo* examines a different situation, with a different outcome:

Quando scrivevo le farse, per esempio, mi ero reso conto concretamente che non c'è vero teatro che non sia teatro di situazione. Ogni azione teatrale nasce da una situazione scenica pregnante di sviluppi di azione. Il dialogo è solo uno degli strumenti per esprimere questi sviluppi. [...] Il teatro che vuole basarsi su di un dialogo autonomo dallo sviluppo di un'azione, che non è espressivo di un'azione potenziale, non è teatro, è letteratura (Fo, quoted in Artese, 1977:22).

¹⁵⁸ "[...] teatro di situazione uguale teatro popolare", writes Fo in a short article published in *Sipario* (1971).

¹⁵⁹ The reference is to Sartre's notion of "théâtre de situations", first expressed in an article from 1947: "Mais s'il est vrai que l'homme est libre dans une situation donnée et qu'il se choisit lui-même dans et par cette situation, alors il faut montrer au théâtre des situations simples et humaines et des libertés qui se choisissent dans ces situations. Le caractère vient après, quand le rideau est tombé. Il n'est que le durcissement du choix, sa sclérose; il est ce que Kierkegaard nomme la répétition. Ce que le théâtre peut montrer de plus émouvant est un caractère en train de se faire, le moment du choix [...]. Et pour que la décision soit profondément humaine, pour qu'elle mette en jeu la totalité de l'homme, à chaque fois il faut porter sur la scène des situations-limites, c'est-à-dire qui présentent des alternatives dont la mort est l'un des termes" (Sartre, 1973:20).

A Mediaeval Lesson on a Marxist Topos

Is oppression as old as the moss around ponds?
 The moss around ponds is not avoidable. [...]
 I have read songs of the Egyptians, of their men who built
 the pyramids. They complained of their loads and asked when
 oppression would cease. That's four thousand years ago.
 Oppression, it would seem, is like the moss and
 unavoidable.¹⁶⁰

By setting *Mistero buffo* in the Middle Ages, Fo imagines a time when the structure of society was less complicated than it is today, a time when the divide between the rich and the poor was enormous. A whole society is summed up in several broad classes comprising the nobility, the clergy, the legal profession, the soldiery and the peasantry (this familiar microcosm of feudal society can be found in "Nascita del giullare" where all these categories are represented). By constructing his situations around such a highly stratified society, Fo offers a pattern that is immediately recognisable by the audience, a polarisation of roles that endows his texts with a fairy tale-like schematism.¹⁶¹

This narrative approach is in itself an effective argumentative device since Fo draws parallels (usually in his introductions or *interventi*) with the modern period, so that the spectator is in no doubt that he or she is watching an allegory

¹⁶⁰ From "The World's One Hope" (Brecht, 1976:328), translated by Michael Hamburger.

¹⁶¹ The ideological schemes presented by Fo are typical of the Communist-Fascist, good-bad, black-white political polarisation of the period.

of the contemporary class struggle – a topos that, at the time, naturally dominated the discourse of the Italian Left and the trade unions, as did the term "padrone" which was invariably employed to designate an employer, whether it referred to a manager, a factory owner or a captain of industry. This appellation was not neutral (as is, for example, the expression *datore di lavoro*) since it implied a relationship based on oppression, the antonym of "padrone" being "schiavo".

Given its prevalence in the Italian social discourse of the period, it is the term which appears most frequently in *Mistero buffo* with reference to 'masters'. Indeed, the deliberate anachronism of introducing the word *padron* into a mystery play is an important device, a 'clue' which Fo uses to orient the audience's reading of the play; using a mixture of mediaeval and modern terminology Fo demonstrates the perpetuity of a social system built on the dual mechanism of oppression and subjugation. Therefore, today's audience is urged, after it has carefully examined the historical evidence, to oppose itself "ai nobili, ai potenti, ai ricchi, ai padroni in genere [emphasis added]" (Fo,

1977:13).¹⁶² And thus, as Marco de Poli (1976:90) has remarked, out of the medley of mediaeval texts

emerge realmente il senso di un mondo misteriosamente lontano e indefinito nello spazio e nel tempo, ma al tempo stesso presente e attuale nei suoi temi e nei suoi problemi.

The advantage of the mediaeval setting is, of course, that it allows the class struggle to be depicted in a more direct, cruder fashion by using some of the grotesque comic devices which are associated with mediaeval drama (cf. *infra*). In this way, the exposition of the confrontation between proletariat and ruling class is not weakened or blurred by the details and complexities which a contemporary account might have called for. In such an account it would have been more difficult to present the Marxist class struggle in the simple and dramatically appealing terms that a representation of feudal society seems to have afforded Fo the opportunity to do. For, in modern

¹⁶² The intermeshing of past and present (Fo as *giullare* and Fo as commentator) inevitably produces frequent changes in register. As Mauro Ponzi (1976:43) has pointed out: "Fo si muove sempre sul doppio registro della rappresentazione medioevale, satirica, divertente, graffiante, 'buffa', nel senso giullaresco del termine, e del suo aggancio analogico con la realtà odierna. Per cui non perde mai di vista lo scopo ultimo della rappresentazione di Fo-giullare: quello, cioè, di far prendere coscienza agli spettatori delle contraddizioni e delle repressioni del sistema capitalistico avanzato in tutte le forme assunte nella società italiana dei nostri giorni. [...] I due registri non sono sovrapposti, ma strettamente interrelati dalla funzione storica assegnata da Fo ai giullari, e i passaggi di registro non sono meccanici, ma hanno un notevole effetto comico e politico di straniamento, che è forse la chiave interpretativa per valutare appieno l'incisività e la riuscita di *Mistero buffo*."

where everyone is constitutionally equal, differences in class are, arguably, veiled or at the very least less marked, and oppression often remains concealed from view. Here, instead, in Fo's symbolic representation of the Middle Ages, the class struggle is revealed in all its ruthlessness: take, for example, "La nascita del villano" where the miserable condition of the serf stands, allegorically, for the condition of the proletariat. In other words, Fo provides us with a simple 'model' of mediaeval society which, by analogy – and helped along by his repeated *interventi* – we, the audience, are then able to transfer to present-day society.

Challenging the Hegemony

Deafened by commands, examined
 For his fitness to fight by bearded doctors, inspected
 By resplendent creatures with golden insignia, admonished
 By solemn clerics who throw at him a book written by God
 himself
 Instructed
 By impatient schoolmasters, stands the poor man and is told
 That the world is the best of worlds and that the hole
 In the roof of his hovel was planned by God in person.
 Truly he finds it hard
 To doubt this world.¹⁶³

If one of the central themes of *Mistero buffo* is history, it is of course Dario Fo's own unorthodox vision of history that is presented here. For, as Hirst (1989:119-120) has pointed out:

¹⁶³ Brecht, 1976:333-336. Extract from "In Praise of Doubt", translated by Martin Esslin.

It is his aim quite literally to subvert traditional history, to turn it on its head and restore the values of a neglected culture.

Fo's avowedly Marxist *teatro di situazione* illustrates, as outlined in Chapter One, issues which centre on the class struggle; in *Mistero buffo*, popular culture and education are presented as the key to the emancipation of the workers. A corollary of this is Fo's insistence on the need to challenge the official version of history and culture, which he regards as merely an expression of bourgeois culture, and therefore reflecting the ideology of the hegemony. According to Binni (1975:233),

Mistero buffo è un discorso di metodo: contro la storiografia borghese, in cui la borghesia racconta dal proprio punto di vista le imprese dei suoi 'eroi' a cavallo dello sfruttamento e del massacro, contro la storiografia revisionista che attraverso una lettura di Marx riconosce l'esistenza delle classi e nella lotta di classe la molla dello sviluppo storico, ma non sottopone a ribaltamento critico la storia passata, per ribaltare la storia presente (senza cioè affermare la necessità della 'dittatura del proletariato' sulla borghesia).

In seeking to perpetuate itself, the dominant class consolidates its position by setting norms (exemplified in the canonic body of literature) according to which popular culture is viewed as substandard. It is against this state of affairs that Fo is reacting so strongly when he attacks the 'cultural imperialism' of the hegemony, and proposes a counter-culture; indeed, the whole of *Mistero buffo* can be seen as a defence of popular, oral literature, in its form as much as in its content.

Thus, Fo's play presents itself as an attempt both to reappraise popular culture¹⁶⁴ and to situate the class struggle historically. No wonder, then, that in a brief introduction to the published version of *Mistero buffo*, Fo chose to quote a passage from Gramsci (cf. *supra* Chapter One) which links the people's knowledge of history and culture with self-knowledge and self-affirmation, and ultimately with their ability to rise above their condition, to be masters of their destiny.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ [...] quando Marx [...] dice che la cultura dominante è quella della classe dominante, non dice che non esiste l'altra cultura, la cultura della classe soggetta... ma anzi lui per primo ha dimostrato nei suoi studi, nelle sue ricerche... con Engels... quanto enorme, stupefacente sia invece la cultura del proletariato" (Fo, quoted in Binni, 1975:164). The text is taken from a speech which Fo made in June 1974, at a "convegno sulla cultura" organised by La Comune in conjunction with the "Comitato per l'utilizzazione popolare e democratica della Palazzina Liberty".

¹⁶⁵ "Conoscere se stessi vuol dire essere se stessi, vuol dire essere padroni di se stessi, distinguersi, uscire fuori dal caos, essere un elemento di ordine, ma del proprio ordine e della propria disciplina ad un ideale. E non si può ottenere ciò se non si conoscono anche gli altri, la loro storia, il susseguirsi degli sforzi che essi hanno fatto per essere ciò che sono, per creare la civiltà che hanno creato e alla quale noi vogliamo sostituire la nostra... Se è vero che la storia universale è una catena degli sforzi che l'uomo ha fatto per liberarsi e dai privilegi e dai pregiudizi e dalle idolatrie, non si capisce perché il proletariato, che un altro anello vuol aggiungere a quella catena, non debba sapere come e perché e da chi sia stato preceduto, e quale giovamento possa trarre da questo sapere" (Fo, 1970:29).

"La lezione di Gramsci" or History as Self-knowledge

It would seem that Fo has the following quotation in mind when, in statements of intent, he repeatedly refers to "la lezione di Gramsci", a precept which he sums up in a catch-phrase of the period, clearly derived from the same Gramscian passage: "Se non sappiamo da dove veniamo, difficilmente possiamo capire dove vogliamo andare."¹⁶⁶ In other words, it is only by understanding the past that one can understand the present and thus be in a position to shape one's future. In explicating this expression, Fo emphasises the importance of history in the revolutionary struggle:

Cioè, per uno sfruttato, conoscere la propria storia, come è arrivato ad essere sfruttato, quali sono le ragioni, il perché, i metodi che il padrone ha imposto per lo sfruttamento, è determinante. Cultura - dice Gramsci - è il quinto dito per la classe operaia [...]. Ora, la cultura non si può ottenere se non si conosce la propria storia. La più antica storia della classe oppressa si trova nel teatro della tradizione popolare. Che si esprime attraverso la farsa e la satira (Fo, quoted in Artese, 1977:114-15).¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Davico Bonino (1972:30) who, writing in the early 1970s, applies this slogan to Gramsci's theatre criticism where he discerns a sociological approach: "Sempre [...], la duplice domanda ('da dove viene' e 'dove può andare' questa commedia, questo drammaturgo?) sostanzia le sue cronache".

¹⁶⁷ The similarity with a comment by Salvadori in *Gramsci e il problema storico della democrazia* (1970) is instructive here, in that it reveals the extent of Gramsci's influence on literary critics of the period in question: "Si conquista un operaio alla rivoluzione non nel momento in cui viene gettato sul lastrico; ma nel momento in egli si rende capace di comprendere il significato storico generale della lotta fra borghesia e proletariato" (Salvadori, 1970:121).

The influence which this notion exerted on social discourse is attested by another well-known slogan used by the Left during the 1970s, and which represents a further extrapolation of Gramsci's remarks: "Veniamo da lontano e andiamo lontano." And it is this aspect of *Mistero buffo* that was perhaps most pregnant for Italian audiences at the time. The critic Lanfranco Binni (1975:233), for example, reads Fo's play as an extended commentary on Gramsci's notion of history as (self-) knowledge; thus, Fo is simply putting into practice a fundamental tenet of contemporary Marxist thought.¹⁶⁸ Binni analyses the process of "repressione culturale e militare" through which the dominant class has sought to impose its values on the people, thereby denying them their very history. Thus, Binni argues, it is paramount that the proletariat be made aware of the historical mechanism whereby the ruling classes have persistently repressed popular dissent, or any attempt to oppose this control from above.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Fo's approach to history may have scandalised some academics, in its less-than-rigorous use of material, as we saw earlier. Nevertheless, it earned him praise from the Marxist historian Jean Chesnaux who describes him as "uno storico che, invece di rifugiarsi come tanti altri nell'erudizione accademica (sia essa accademica-liberale o accademica-marxista...) vuole mettere il passato al servizio delle lotte popolari di oggi" (emphasis added; Fo, 1977b:6).

¹⁶⁹ The comments made by critic Lanfranco Binni (1975:233-34) who followed closely Fo's work during the 1960s and 1970s, are representative of the kind of Marxist interpretation that circulated at the time; for that reason, they are quoted at some length: "[...] in *Mistero buffo* si pone concretamente, nella pratica dell'operazione svolta, la necessità insostituibile, irrinunciabile, di conoscere 'da dove veniamo' per sapere 'dove

A Short History of Oppression

Part I. In the Hands of the Lawmakers

One of the most effective means of social control, Fo suggests, is the legal system. This means is the most insidious in that it allows the hegemony to impose what are often wholly iniquitous rules and regulations, retaining all the while a veneer of respectability, and placing itself beyond contention.

Throughout *Mistero buffo*, as we have already seen, Fo insists on the historical nature of exploitation. To this end, he cites actual historical instances where the abuse of power by the ruling classes was patent, such as the institution of the *defensa* (cf. *supra*), which not only applied to rape but also to violence against peasants. In his exposition, Fo demonstrates

andare', secondo il concetto gramsciano, che significa conoscere la dinamica dello scontro di classe nel suo sviluppo storico, non in una dimensione statica - di astratta constatazione sociologica - ma dinamica; perché ci serve sapere come si ribellavano i Ciompi, perché sono state sterminate le sette ereticali dei Catari e dei Patari, cosa hanno teso a stroncare sistematicamente con tutte le armi della repressione culturale e militare le classi dominanti. E allora scopriamo che esistevano nel *Medio Evo*, nel passato della storia del nostro popolo, momenti estremamente avanzati di autorganizzazioni sociali gestite secondo i principi di un comunismo primitivo, di ribellione organizzata e liberatoria. Ed erano questi momenti di vita del popolo che esprimevano alti momenti di creatività, di produzione artistica, su cui le classi dominanti intervenivano sistematicamente attraverso i due momenti della violenza militare e dell'aggressione culturale, sia sotto forma di 'acculturazione' (imposizione di propri valori, religiosi, di costume...) sia sotto forma di operazioni 'rapina e distruzione' [...].

that this 'law' is not based on any notion of 'justice',¹⁷⁰ but seeks rather to perpetuate the enormous liberties taken by the 'masters'. Fo's message is unequivocal: everything can be bought with money (including legal immunity). Thus wealth and power go hand in hand.¹⁷¹

In "nascita del villano", Fo (1977:87) offers another example of how injustice is enshrined in the law, for it is written by the ruling classes in order to protect their own interests, and is therefore designed to keep the proletariat in a position of subjugation:

Mo est stabilicto et scripto
che sto vilan debia aver par victo
pan de crusca con la scigola crûda
faxoj, fava alesa e spûda.
C'ol debia dormir sora a un pajon
che d'ol so stato as faga ben rasón.

Here, Fo's intention is to highlight the authority invested in the written word in a predominantly peasant culture. Whilst of course only the clerics and the notaries knew how to read in mediaeval society, as literacy increased over the centuries, still the proletariat remained largely illiterate, particularly in rural areas. In Italy, for example, a similar situation prevailed until the Second World War, with the continued use of

¹⁷⁰ The aim is, of course, to show that, from a common sense point of view, the class system does not rest on any natural order of things, on any logical system, but is simply the result of a myth created by the ruling classes.

¹⁷¹ "Questo vi fa capire quale fosse la chiave della 'legge' del padrone: la brutalità di una tassa che permetteva di uscire indenni da ogni violenza compita da quelli che detenevano il potere" (Fo, 1977:11).

highly localised dialects – and this not only in the more remote regions – exacerbating the divide between the educated rich and the unschooled poor. Under such circumstances, the written word exercised a sort of fascination (in the etymological sense) over the ignorant masses.

Thus, in "Le nozze di Cana", when Fo satirises the archangel's attempts to gain the confidence of the audience by invoking the authority of the Bible and all manner of books – thereby equating the written word with the Truth – he is in effect denouncing the doxological convention whereby the mere fact of publishing a text lends it credibility: "ol sarà tuto vero, tuto o l'è sortio dei libri o dei vanzeli" (Fo, 1977:59). The author is therefore automatically in a position of strength since, from the outset, the reader is prepared to take the printed page at face value. This convention can best be summed up in the "I-read-it-in-the-newspapers-so-it-must-be-true" attitude which is a prime example of how the hegemony succeeds in maintaining its power, namely by exploiting public credulity. As such, *Mistero buffo* – like *Morte accidentale di un anarchico* and many of Fo's other plays – exposes the manipulation of information by the hegemony; indeed, it presents itself as an exercise in counter-information, against the power of the written word which, for Fo, in contemporary terms, translates into the continual brainwashing operated by the mass media, a prime target in Fo's work since the days of *Canzonissima*.

Part II. The Long Arm of the Law

In cases where the prestige of the law is insufficient to convince people to comply, the powerful resort to violence; in other words, where they cannot rule by consensus, they rule by force. Thus, in "La nascita del giullare", for example, when the padron wreaks damage on the peasant and on his land, he uses the classic techniques of intimidation and aggression to coerce the weak. Such, Fo seems to be saying, are the methods that the ruling classes have always used to enforce their will: it is only by employing less-than-scrupulous means that they continue to maintain the upper hand.

Part III. The Worker's Lot

The satire of *Mistero buffo* is directed, amongst other things, at denouncing a society where the populace is at the mercy of its leaders' every whim. The lives of ordinary people are considered insignificant and therefore expendable, whether they be used as cannon-fodder in times of war, or exploited as workers until their reserves run dry and they drop dead. For, as Fo (1977:39) illustrates ironically in "La strage degli innocenti", people are afforded little more dignity than animals, and at times even less; driven to distraction by the loss of her child and by the carnage of infants which she has witnessed, the

mother exclaims: "ol vegnirà plu facile, a sto me fiol, campar de pegura, che non d'omo, in sto mundo infamat!".

Elsewhere, the lot of the proletariat is described metaphorically ("La nascita del villano"); no sooner is the serf born than the hardship of his condition is made clear to him:

vegn oltra un tempural diluvi e giò acqua reversa a el fiol de l'asino e poe grandina e tormenta e fülmeni e tûti sul curpason del vilan, parché ol se faga de sùbit coscienza de la vita che ghe se presenta." (Fo, 1977:87).

Deprived of Dignity

In addition to physical hardship, the worker has to endure the daily humiliations associated with his or her class. The utter lack of dignity afforded to the poor – who are reduced to 'beasts of burden' and therefore deprived of their humanity – is a recurrent theme in Fo's work. And *Mistero buffo* is no exception here. In "Nascita del giullare", for example, this aspect of the serf's condition is highlighted just as much as his wretched condition and his dispossession; as his wife reminds him:

[...] ti no t'hait onore, ti set povero, set contadin, vilan, non puoi pensar dignitat, onore, quella è roba par quei che inn sciuri! ai nobli [...] Valse pi tera che l'onor de ti, de mi, che tûti (Fo, 1977:77).

And, after his wife has been raped, the serf is rejected by the other villagers who accuse him of lacking in honour since he has been unable to defend his wife. This detail echoes other

references to dignity throughout *Mistero buffo* and contributes to Fo's portrait of the proletariat; here he makes an important ideological point by showing that the poor set great store on honour which is the central value in their lives – unlike, it is implied, the rich whose conduct is amoral, driven only by rapacity and cruelty:

No g'hai la forza de far feura onor che nu te g'hai,
bestia che te set (Fo, 1977:77).

The significance of this theme is explicitated by Fo (1977:87-88) who interrupts the text of "La nascita del villano" to draw parallels with present-day working conditions. He cites actual instances in various factories where management has laid down Draconian laws concerning the time allocated to workers to go to the toilet during the day. Fo parodies this grotesque, somewhat Orwellian, means of control over the workers, showing the unfeasibility of such regulations which merely serve to further humiliate the proletariat.¹⁷²

One cannot but conclude, along with Fo – who, once again, preempts the message in the prologue to the "Moralità del cieco e dello storpio" and offers the correct reading of the scene that is to follow – that the real meaning of 'dignity' is not having to work for a master, and hence not being subjugated: "dignità è

¹⁷² In *Legami pure che tanto io spacco tutto lo stesso*, which dates from the same season as *Mistero buffo* (1969), Fo (1975:142-143) includes a passage where he caricatures the situation of a piecemeal worker who cannot find the time to leave her loom in order to go to the lavatory during her working day, and has now developed a physiological 'block' in reaction to this pressure.

non avere un padrone che ti sottomette" (Fo, 1977:40).¹⁷³ We are thus presented with the paradox whereby the worst thing that could befall the blind man and the cripple would be for them to be cured of their handicap; in this case they would have to work for a living.¹⁷⁴ In other words, the real *handicap*, the greatest hardship in life, is to be a proletarian. The 'dignity' of this pair of marginalised characters – representatives of the *lumpenproletariat* – resides in their not having to work; here, then, they illude themselves that they enjoy the same dignity as the *padron*. Thus, their dubious privilege ('*previlez*') is shown up as a mockery, a ghastly distortion of real privilege and power.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Cf. Fo's definition of freedom in a slogan-like statement: "La libertà vera è quella di non aver padroni, non soltanto io, ma vivere in un mondo dove anche gli altri non abbiano padroni" (Fo, 1977:40).

¹⁷⁴ "Pensaghe un poc, se davvero ghe cata a tuti e doj la desgrazia de ves liberadi di nostri desgrazi! D'un boto ag s'trovariam in la cundision d'es obligat a tor via un mestier per impoder campare" (Fo, 1977:47-49). The grotesqueness of their condition is made apparent when, shortly after the miracle has occurred, the cripple laments his new plight: "Ohj me mi...che 'm tocarà andar de sota a un padron a sùdar sangu per magnar... dovarò 'ndarme intorna a cerciarne un altro santo che ol me faga la grazia de storpiarme de novo i garetì..." (Fo, 1977:53).

¹⁷⁵ "E a perderesmio ol gran previlez che g'avemo in pari ai siori, ai paroni [sic], de tor gabela: lori col slongar i truchi de la lege, nojaltri con la pità. Li doi a gabar cojoni!" (Fo, 1977:49).

The Temporal and the Spiritual

Alongside improving the material conditions of the proletariat, there is, Fo insists, the need to restore its dignity. Whilst the ruling classes, in cahoots with the Church, have constantly sought to deprive the people of even their most basic dignity, Jesus, according to Fo (1977:54)

è quel Dio che viene sulla terra per cerca di ridare la primavera agli uomini. La primavera, come ho detto prima, è la dignità.

Here, Fo is picking up on what was a burning question in Italy during the 1960s and the 1970s: how to reconcile the immense wealth and power of the Church with its original message of poverty and humility. It was a question that was addressed especially by Communist Catholics, and groups such as the so-called "Cattolici di Base" who sought to confront issues in society at large and to return to a more 'authentic' vision of Christianity;¹⁷⁶ the phenomenon of the *preti-operai*, inspired by the French example, was an attempt to break down barriers between the clergy and the lay populace, as these priests entered the factories and saw at first hand the kind of social problems that daily faced workers.

¹⁷⁶ Pasolini's *Il vangelo secondo san Matteo* (1964), with its proletarian cast, and anti-bourgeois re-evocation of the life of Christ, is an early example of what was to become an increasingly critical attitude towards the Church by the Left and, more especially, by the *Cattocomunisti*.

Militant Monks and Mystics

Those who have been set on golden chairs to write
Will be questioned about those who
Wove their coats. [...]

Whole literatures
Couched in the choicest expressions
Will be examined for signs
That revolutionaries too lived where there was
oppression.¹⁷⁷

In order to show that the discrepancy between the wealth and temporal power of the Church and its spiritual message is not a recent one, and that the roots of the problem can be traced far back, Fo (1977:106) quotes the twelfth-century Italian mystic Gioacchino da Fiore¹⁷⁸ as saying:

Se vogliamo dare dignità alla chiesa di Cristo,
dobbiamo distruggere la chiesa. La grande bestia di
Roma [...].

Fo's intent is clear: once again, he is keen to demonstrate how, throughout history, there have been attempts to oppose the power of the ruling classes, epitomised here by the most pervasive

¹⁷⁷ From "Literature will be Scrutinised" (Brecht, 1976:344-45). Translated by Patrick Bridgwater.

¹⁷⁸ Gioacchino da Fiore's doctrine embraced ideas concerning a future "Age of the Spirit" where an exclusively monastic Church would reign over humanity which would be converted to evangelical poverty. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries these ideas were taken up by non-conformist Franciscan movements which were fighting to dislodge the established Church (Petit Robert, 1977:956).

force that existed during the Middle Ages, that is to say, the Church.

In the same way as class consciousness has always existed, according to Fo (cf. the exemplum of the "Moralità del cieco e dello storpio" which is discussed supra), if one examines ecclesiastical history one can also find traces of an early awareness of the corruption of the Church, usually by its dissenting members. In "Bonifacio VIII", for example, Fo rehearses various mediaeval debates on poverty and Christianity, a theme he had already introduced in the guise of the *comunitardi* who feature in *La colpa è sempre del diavolo* (1965). Referring to Jacopone da Todi he describes him as a "pauperista evangelico", and then adds ironically: "un estremista, diremmo oggi" (Fo, 1977:105-106).¹⁷⁹

He also alludes to the mendicant orders, to figures such as Fra Dolcino; according to Fo (1977:107-108), they formed part of a group of proto-Marxists, so to speak, who, already in the Middle Ages, were actively combatting oppression and inciting the peasants to revolt:

¹⁷⁹ Later, in the same passage, Fo (1977:106-107) comments on his use of the term "estremista" to describe another monk in an order devoted to poverty: "[...] un altro estremista, tanto per rimanere all'interno del linguaggio di questi giorni, che sentiamo così spesso parlare di estremismi di ambo le parti, di opposti estremismi... L'estremista [...] era di quelli che pretendevano che il papa e la chiesa fossero poveri, estremamente poveri, che tutto venisse consegnato nelle mani della gente più umile: che la dignità della chiesa [...] si fondasse sulla dignità dei poveri." This is, of course, one of the many examples of how Fo uses his often lengthy prologues to convey Marxist ideology.

Vangate la terra? Lavorate! E di chi è la terra? Vostra, immagino! No? Non è vostra? Ma come! Voi lavorate la terra e... Ma ne avete un profitto?! Che profitto? Ah... una percentuale così bassa? E come, tutto il resto se lo tiene il padrone? Il padrone di che cosa! Della terra? Ah ah ah! C'è un padrone della terra? Voi credete davvero che sulla Bibbia il tal appezzamento di terra sia assegnato al tal dei tali... Cretini! Deficienti! La terra è vostra: loro se la sono fregata, e poi l'han data da lavorare a voi. La terra è di chi la lavora [emphasis added]: chiaro?!¹⁸⁰

Christ, a Revolutionary Bacchus

As part of Fo's project of restoring history to the people, in *Mistero buffo* he presents religion from the point of view of the people. According to Fo (1977:28-29), in popular Christian 'mythology', God is regarded as an ally of the ruling classes and, as such, is hated by the people, whereas Christ is considered to be on their side and is therefore loved and held up as the redeemer:

[...] il padreterno è rappresentativo di quello che i padroni hanno insegnato al popolo, è quello che ha fatto le divisioni, che ha dato terre, poteri, privilegi a un certo gruppo di persone, e invece fastidi, disperazione, sottomissione, umiliazione, mortificazione all'altra parte del popolo. Ecco perché Dio è odiato, perché rappresenta i padroni, è quello

¹⁸⁰ It is worth pointing out that the episodes chosen by Fo to illustrate this early form of Communism are all true; the significance which he assigns them results, naturally, from his Marxist interpretation of history. However, when Fo (1977:108-109) talks about the "comunitardi" who formed communities and associations of skilled workers as early as the sixth century, and sees in them the precursors of the trade unions, there is clearly an attempt to force that interpretation somewhat.

che dà le corone, i privilegi; mentre è amato Gesù Cristo, che è quello che viene sulla terra a cercare di ridare la primavera.

In this scheme of things, religion is no longer an instrument of oppression and the figure of Christ is no longer a solemn figure raised on a pedestal; instead, Jesus is shown as "a catalyst for festivity and enjoyment and even Bacchanalian excess" (Mitchell, 1986:20) in "Le nozze di Cana" where Fo's projection of a "joyous, Dionysian, pagan view of the gospels" is at its height. Christ saves the day at the wedding feast by turning water into first-rate wine, a fact that the drunkard comments on at length, concluding that it was a veritable "anata d'ora!" (Fo, 1977:65).¹⁸¹

Thus, Fo suggests, in an alternative (popular) version, or reading, of the Bible, people are actually encouraged to embrace the good things in life rather than to shun them for fear of committing a sin; the greatest sin, the drunkard tells us, is that Adam did not realise fruit could be transformed into wine, which stands metaphorically here for that *joie de vivre* that is so often repressed by the official Church, excised as it were from the authoritative version of the Bible, and that Dario Fo regards as the quintessence of popular culture.

¹⁸¹ The fool in "Il matto e la morte" (one of the texts from the *Passione* that follow *Mistero buffo* proper) also remarks on Jesus's fondness for good wine: "ol Nazareno [...] e quel as n'intende e come ad vin... gran cognosidur l'è, quel!" (Fo, 1977:131).

'Raising Consciousnesses'

But a political message lurks beneath the apparent appeal to hedonism expressed in Jesus's words at the end of "Le nozze di Cana"; it is a message which Fo has already explained in his introductory commentary on the piece. The meaning of this parable, he tells us, is that people should no longer accept their lot in life with fatalistic resignation as the Church has always taught. Fo (1977:55) parodies the way the conventional argument goes: "bisogna pur sopportare... siamo in una valle di lacrime... non tutti possono essere ricchi, c'è chi va bene e chi va male, ma poi tutto viene compensato dall'altra parte, quando saremo in cielo." In other words, don't rock the boat: "state tranquilli, state buoni e non rompete le scatole." Here it is Christ who tells the people: "Rompete pure le scatole e state in allegria."

This Marxist reading of the New Testament, where we rediscover a truly 'revolutionary' Christ, is a further demonstration by Fo that the educated ruling classes have, through the ages, deliberately mystified the people by manipulating or concealing information; in this way, they have managed to perpetuate the ignorance of the masses, thereby keeping them in a position of subservience. In denouncing this obfuscation, Fo offers us a further example of how those who hold power are those who have access to information; his analysis is

simple: it is by controlling the supply of information that the dominant class have always controlled the people.

Together with Fo's 'historical overview' of popular resistance to the powers-that-be, this conclusion reinforces his central thesis, namely that any movements by the poor to defy their oppressors, whether they be lay or clerical, have been systematically covered up by the hegemony. As Fo (1977:110) comments:

Di questa storia [...] sui libri di testo in uso nelle scuole non si fa cenno. Ed è giusto, d'altra parte: chi organizza la cultura? Chi decide cosa insegnare? Chi ha l'interesse a non dare certe informazioni? Il padrone, la borghesia. *Fin che glielo permetteremo*, è naturale che continuino a fare quello che ritengono giusto (emphasis added).

Hence the importance of talking about the exploitation of the proletariat: the very fact of making public their condition marks the end of what has always been represented as the resignation and passivity of the poor:

Naturalmente, queste sono cose che a scuola non ci insegnano, perché far sapere ai ragazzini che già nel Medioevo i poveracci avevano capito certe dimensioni, il significato dell'essere sfruttato, è molto pericoloso! (Fo, 1977:40)

Therefore, if Fo's cultural project is one of counter-information, it is counter-information with a precise political goal since it is intended as an incitement to the proletariat to take action. It is also a demonstration that justice has to be fought for so that a new society can be created; each class

inevitably looks out for its own interests and it is up to the working-classes to speak up and defend themselves.

Fighting Back: Class Solidarity

Honour (cf. *supra*) is portrayed as a fundamental value, one of the major attributes ascribed to the proletariat both in the mythology of the Left and in Italian social discourse, a view that persists even today. In addition to honour, solidarity is seen as another trait peculiar to the people, as opposed to the individualism of the bourgeoisie. Thus, as the impending 'danger' of the procession approaches, the *storpio* reassures the fearful *cieco*: "ag salveremo tot doj in compagnia [...]" (Fo, 1977:49). It is therefore regarded as a natural, almost a defining, attribute of the proletariat and is exalted as the strong foundation on which the revolution is to be built.

In another episode, in "Nascita del giullare", Jesus urges the serf to rebel against the order of things and to spread the revolutionary word, not for his own sake, but for the sake of others who are worse off than him. The message that Christ brings is that the serf should acquire a class consciousness based on class solidarity, rather than simply contenting himself with his economic independence (not having to work for a *padron*), and cultivating and defending his plot of land (the concept of private ownership is, needless to say, implicitly rejected by this

Marxist Jesus).¹⁸² His words carry with them the aspiration to higher ideals than those of materialism and self-advancement; they are an invitation to solidarity and altruism.¹⁸³

Pietà l'è morta

Pity and compassion, however, are to be rejected as useless sentiments, for they are luxuries that can ill be afforded in the proletarian struggle. Already in *Grande pantomima con bandiere e pupazzi piccoli e medi* (1968), Fo had touched on this theme: he caricatures the ruling class's attempt to pacify the people who are clamouring for a revolution; the rebel's response indicates that there is no longer room for 'pity'.¹⁸⁴ For, as is suggested in "Moralità del cieco e dello storpio", the poor

¹⁸² "[...] giùsta che t'hai tegnit la tera, giùsta che non te vòì de padron, giùsta che t'hai ùt la forza de no molar, giùsta..." (Fo, 1977:79-81). Jesus therefore urges him: "No star lí atchí in sù la tera" (Fo, 1977:81).

¹⁸³ "No par ben de ti, par la tua tera, ma par quei che è come ti, ca non han tera e che non han gnente e che han de soffregare sojamente, e che non han dignità da vantare" (Fo, 1977:81).

¹⁸⁴ REGINA. Pace, pace... e buona volontà.
CAPITALE. Bisogna ricostruire... abbiamo sofferto già fin troppo... Chi più chi meno.. siamo tutti nella stessa barca...
GESÙ GESÙ. Vogliamoci bene, andiamo d'accordo, tiriamo a campà!
PRINCIPE. Bisogna darci una mano da buoni fratelli!...
RIVOLTOSO. Macché buoni fratelli del porco giuda! Pietà l'è morta! (Fo, 1975:20).

cannot allow themselves to feel pity.¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, humanitarian ideals do not serve the Marxist cause, a point which Fo (1977:34) makes clear in "La strage degli innocenti". In an allusion to Brecht's *Die Ausnahme und die Regel* (*The Exception and the Rule*), he presents this notion as if it were a proverb: "'Suldat ch'ol sent pità a l'è già bela mort cupà'". When one of the soldiers expresses his disgust at the job in hand – viz. killing innocent babies – and tries to prevent the other soldier from continuing the massacre; the second soldier kills him, declaring: "No l'ho cupat mi, quest a l'era già cadaver in d'ol mument che l'ha scomenzà a 'vegh pità". An important ideological point is made here, namely that in the class war you are defined by your social class, therefore a soldier cannot feel pity.

¹⁸⁵ Thus, for example: "Ma ti varda ben de no lasarte miga catar de cumpassion par lû, che o l'è ol pû-gran pericol de ves miraculat" (Fo, 1977:49); "No stat a perderte in compasione..." (Fo, 1977:51).

Mistero buffo, "Il Vangelo dei poveri":¹⁸⁶ The Reappropriation of Popular Culture

The counter-culture that Fo offers us in *Mistero buffo* is, as we have seen, an invitation to reappropriate the culture of the 'people':

Quando ripeto il modo in cui il giullare faceva leggere la Bibbia e il Vangelo, io indico al popolo di oggi qual'era il suo modo di scoprire nella cultura – la Bibbia, il Vangelo – la sorte che gli spettava, qual'era il suo modo di esprimersi con illustrazioni e per bocca dei giullari e lo invito a riappropriarsi della sua cultura per saper affrontare oggi di nuovo la cultura dotta e libresca (Fo in Artese, 1977:139).

Given this project, it is only natural that Fo should have sought to recover those theatrical forms such as the buffoonery inherent in the *giullarata* whose comic style *Mistero buffo* claims to emulate that belong to a popular tradition – and that he traces back to before the Italian Renaissance – and to present them in their 'genuine' form, freed from aristocratic encrustations (Binni, 1977:51), as he has so often stated. He is therefore concerned to show what has traditionally been regarded as 'low

¹⁸⁶ "[...] il *Mistero buffo* di Fo, divenuto il Vangelo dei poveri, [è] contrapposto al Vangelo dei ricchi, quello oleografico-cinemascope di alta raffinatezza illustrativa, con firma Zeffirelli". Puppa (1978:28, note 6.) is, of course, referring here to Zeffirelli's film, *Jesus of Nazareth*. It, too, was televised in 1977, and so comparison was inevitable, and led to an ideological confrontation between Fo and Zeffirelli. Hirst (1989:132-135) gives an account of their polemic. Puppa's expression "Vangelo dei poveri" echoes Longo's self-description as the "Rigoletto dei poveri" in Fo's 1959 play, *Gli arcangeli giocano sempre a flipper*. Cf. Chapter One.

culture'. In stressing this visible dichotomy between high culture and low culture that became firmly entrenched after the sixteenth century, Fo appears, yet again, to be echoing Gramsci.¹⁸⁷

The Comic and the Grotesque in Mediaeval Theatre

Derision, as we saw earlier, is the motivating force behind the satirical verve of the *giullari*, in whose comic style Fo identifies "il gioco del paradosso, il gioco dell'abnorme e dell'assurdo come deformazione fantastica della realtà" (Allegri, 1990:126), a description that readily characterises his own style in *Mistero buffo*.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ "[...] dopo il '500, [...] la poesia popolare decade fino alle forme attuali, in cui l'interesse popolare è soddisfatto dal *Guerin Meschino* e da simile letteratura. Dopo il '500 cioè si rende radicale quel distacco tra intellettuali e popolo che [...] tanto significato ha avuto per la storia italiana moderna politica e culturale" (Gramsci, 1966:60).

¹⁸⁸ The connection with carnival laughter and counter-culture would be worth exploring here. In his famous study on Rabelais (1965), Bakhtin describes how in many civil ceremonies and rituals organised by the authorities during the Middle Ages, the participation of fools and clowns who parodied the official event allowed the penetration of folk humour into an otherwise serious occasion. As Bakhtin (1968:4) notes: "A boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture. In spite of their variety, folk festivities of the carnival type, the comic rites and cults, the clowns and fools, giants, dwarfs, and jugglers, the vast and manifold literature of parody – all these forms have one style in common: they belong to one culture of folk carnival humor."

Allied to the use of satire is the grotesque key in which many scenes are played: rather than diminishing the play's tragic elements, it serves instead to highlight them.¹⁸⁹ Take, for example, the "Moralità del cieco e dello storpio". Here, the comedy lies in the paradoxical situation which Fo depicts through a fantastical inversion, or deformation, of conventional reality: the grotesque message is that it is better to be handicapped than to have a master. The allusion to Peachum's false cripples in Brecht's *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Threepenny Opera*) which Mitchell (1986:19) rightly detects adds to the comic dimension of the pair's desperate attempt to avoid being in a position where they would have to work, but this should not obscure the text's underlying significance in presenting the degradation and misery suffered by the poor. Fo's use of comic devices in this scene (in particular, the insistence on scatological details) simply underline the grotesque nature of the peasant/proletariat's predicament and evokes the pauper's daily struggle to survive, for the need to feed oneself – the "tema ossessivo della fame" (Puppa, 1978:105) – is a fundamental one, and this is made clear in their language. The message therefore avoids the risk of being over-laboured since it is offset by its comic presentation, focusing on the verbal fun to be had, as well as the visual

¹⁸⁹ As Fo (1977:16) remarks in the long historical introduction to *Mistero buffo*: "Se io mi limitassi a raccontare le angherie usando della chiave 'tragica' con una posizione di retorica o di malinconia o di dramma [...], muoverei solo all'indignazione e tutto, immancabilmente, scivolerebbe come acqua sulla schiena delle oche, e non rimarrebbe niente..."

capital to be made, out of the grotesque physical situation which is presented. In addition, it clearly affords Fo the actor with a great opportunity to display his gesticulatory virtuosity.¹⁹⁰

Thus, wordplay on eating and excrement¹⁹¹ serves to evoke a time and a place where hunger dominated the lives of the poor which were centred on their desperate attempt to provide for themselves and their families. In popular mediaeval theatre, the comic mingles with the grotesque in an attempt to transcend the misery of this lifestyle, laughter providing the key to liberation. As Camporesi (1991:99) observes:

La cultura inferiore, nata nella fame, proprio per questo è vitalistica, vorace, a suo modo ottimistica, legata al ventre e al corporale, fedele al ritmo fisiologico. E' cultura essenzialmente comica, sfaccettata nelle varianti del grottesco, del caricaturale, del contraffatto, del deformato, attivo sia nell'area narrativa che in quella delle numerose forme teatrali: testimonianza delle remote origini agrarie del dramma, connesso con il rituale

¹⁹⁰ "il corpo di Fo, per il registro comico scelto, per il basso materiale come struttura stilistica e ideologica, ha maggior agio di moltiplicarsi gestualmente, perché dovrà sdoppiarsi negli idioletti fisici opposti del cieco che ha perduto il suo cane e dello storpio rimasto senza carrettino, i quali dopo reciproche lamentazioni daranno vita a un orripilante innesto bruegheliano, per aiutarsi a vicenda" (Puppa, 1978:105).

¹⁹¹ CIECO. [...] Ohj! Boia, bestia, at set trop pesantu!
 [...] T'hait magnà un incuden de fero a colasion?
 STORPIO. A ti se mato, a son doj giorni che no magno.
 CIECO. Bon, ma i saran puranco doj mesi che no ti caghi.
 STORPIO. Ohj che sberlùsciadi: Deo me vegna a testimoni... a i sont sie die a pena che no i vag de corpo.
 CIECO. Sie die? Doi pasti almanco al giorno ai fano dodese coverti. San Gerolamo protetor de i fachini, e sono drio a portarme intorna un magasin de scorta par un ano de carestia. Am despiase ma mi at scarego chi loga e ti am fet ol sacrosanto piaser d'andarte a scarigar ol magasinamento illegale! (Fo, 1977:47).

delle fertilità e perciò del riso, da cui discende anche la vetusta funzione della censura collettiva e della satira sociale svolta dal teatro popolare.¹⁹²

Scatological humour – notably, the references to bodily functions in the "Strage degli innocenti" (Fo, 1977:34) and in "Moralità del cieco e dello storpio" (Fo, 1977:46) – is associated, typically, with 'low humour', which is deemed to be in 'bad taste'; it tends therefore to be viewed pejoratively as an indicator of the crudeness of popular culture, rather than celebrated as a sign of its vivacity and its refusal to conform. Indeed, "lo stile comico escrementale, attivando il meccanismo del riso demolitore della paura e del rispetto delle distanze gerarchiche" (Camporesi, 1991:126), is a form of humour that, in its indifference to social conventions of propriety and decorousness, is essentially irreverent.

In addition, grotesque elements such as the second soldier's scatological remarks and the dying soldier's graphic description of his physiological response; the woman's singing a lullaby to the lamb, etc. mean that the audience is kept at a distance, an

¹⁹² It is worth mentioning in this connection the famous "Grammelot dello Zanni" which, like all the other *grammelot* pieces, is omitted from the published version of *Mistero buffo*. In this extraordinary *lazzo* Fo mimics a famished peasant from the Po valley, the eponymous Zanni, who is so ravenous he dreams he is eating himself. He then imagines that he is preparing a lavish feast for himself which is described at great length. On awakening, he "captures a fly, dismembers it and eats it with all the relish of someone devouring the feast he has dreamed up previously, distending his stomach grotesquely" (Mitchell, 1986:18) – a telling comment indeed on the condition of the mediaeval peasantry.

example of Fo's use of the Brechtian 'alienation' technique, which, as we saw earlier, is intended to ensure that no identification takes place, something that would otherwise blur the message and prevent a critical response.

If the role of the *giullare* was to "aprire gli occhi al popolo, insegnargli a capire i soprusi del padrone" (Fo in Artese, 1977:53; emphasis added), it is the role *par excellence* that Fo has chosen for himself in his desire to 'raise the consciousness' of the audience, using all the rhetorical devices and comic means at his disposal to persuade and to entertain, all the while theorising both his politics and his theatrical practice. As should have emerged from this analysis of some of the major themes of *Mistero buffo*, the play is a veritable compendium of Marxist ideas and views that were current in the 1960s-1970s, simplified or popularised, if you will, for the theatre and viewed through the prism of Italian social discourse. It is, as Marco de Poli (1976:90) has remarked:

Il piú tipico e completo spettacolo di Dario Fo, la sintesi di tutti i suoi punti di vista culturali, politici e teatrali, continuamente ripreso, rinnovato e aggiornato, è quindi *Mistero buffo*, spettacolo veramente unico nel suo genere [...]

Chapter Three

Michel Tremblay's *Mistero buffo* and the Québécois "Horizon of Expectations"

The new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts, which are then varied, corrected, altered, or even just reproduced (Jauss, 1982:23).

Monde cheap des quartiers populaires et des cabarets de sixième ou de septième zone, l'univers de Michel Tremblay révèle toujours une importante coloration grisâtre. [...] personne ne s'en sort; personne ne rit, sinon des autres. (Bélair, 1973:118).

Pour une critique des traductions: Antoine Berman

The concept of "horizon of expectations" – broadly speaking, the conventions which a particular time-and-place-specific audience brings to bear on its interpretation of a given text –

developed in the field of literary hermeneutics by Hans Robert Jauss¹⁹³ is a valuable one for translation criticism. In developing his proposal for a positive "critique des traductions", what he describes as a 'hermeneutics' of translation, Antoine Berman (1995) has suggested that it could fruitfully be incorporated into a comprehensive analysis of translated texts. Thus, under the heading "l'horizon traductif", he includes (79)

l'ensemble des paramètres langagiers, littéraires, culturels et historiques qui 'déterminent' le sentir, l'agir et le penser d'un traducteur.

An apparently all-embracing horizon, it is in fact intended to define the boundaries within which the translator operates, thereby setting the "limits of interpretation" (to borrow Umberto Eco's expression), within which a translated text can be appraised:

¹⁹³ The term *Erwartungshorizont* (literally, horizon of expectation), borrowed from the phenomenological and hermeneutical writings of Husserl, Heidegger and Gadamer, is used by Jauss to indicate "an intersubjective system or structure of expectations that a hypothetical reader might bring to a given text" and is regarded by him as "essential for both the interpretation and the evaluation of a literary work. The critic must establish the horizon of expectations for a particular historical moment" (Holub, 1993:552). For, as Jauss (1982:23) writes: "A literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions. It awakens memories of that which was already read, brings the reader to a specific emotional attitude, and with its beginning arouses expectations for the 'middle and end', which can then be maintained intact or altered, reoriented, or even fulfilled ironically in the course of the reading according to specific rules of the genre or type of text."

La notion d'horizon a une double nature. D'une part, désignant ce à-partir-de-quoi l'agir du traducteur a sens et peut se déployer, elle pointe l'espace ouvert de cet agir. Mais, d'autre part, elle désigne ce qui clôt, ce qui enferme le traducteur dans un cercle de possibilités limitées. (80-81)

Berman's desire to eschew the formulation of translation 'laws' and 'systems' stems from a firm belief in the decisive creative role of the translator (1995:54). Whilst the present study shares Berman's concern to avoid over-schematisation – the "mécanicisme" (55) which he detects in Toury's work – and acknowledges the element of unpredictability involved in translating, as in all writing,¹³⁴ it is premised on the conviction that all texts yield a significant amount of sociocultural information about a given period, certain texts at certain times clearly yielding more than others. The highly intertextual activity that is translation cannot but be influenced by prevailing discursive practices, and in the theatre, that most social of arts, this is particularly evident. Such a consideration does not, naturally, exclude other factors (intersubjectivity, for example) from entering into the equation: translation is undeniably a complex, multilayered process.

This analysis of Tremblay's translation of *Mistero buffo* cannot claim the exhaustiveness which Berman's proposed hermeneutic criticism aspires to; its scope, as described in the

¹³⁴ Cf. Folkart (1989:46): "The fundamentally non-deterministic nature of processes such as trans-figuration and trans-creation is linked to the fact that these are essentially *heuristic* processes, ones whose outcome, being something that is invented *au fur et à mesure*, is almost by definition unpredictable".

Introduction, is circumscribed by the decision to focus on the ideological (rather than, say, the aesthetic) parameters of both source and target text in order to better understand the way translation selects those elements that are pertinent to a given society's horizon of expectations at a given time. The high degree of acceptability that is needed for a translated play to function as a play makes translation in the field of theatre particularly prone to the recycling of social discourse – the *déjà dit*, the doxa of an age – and sociocriticism is an effective tool for uncovering the discursive pattern underlying texts, as Brisset's work in the area has shown so convincingly.¹⁹⁵

Nevertheless, in isolating a 'moment' in the continually shifting 'pattern' underlying translation behaviour, the present synchronic study privileges the historical context in which a translation is produced – the "historicité du traduire", according to Meschonnic (1972:358), the "horizon traductif", according to Berman (1995:83). This chapter follows the spirit,

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Brisset (1990:26-27): "La traduction soumet l'oeuvre à de multiples changements pour qu'une fois transférée, cette oeuvre soit acceptable, c'est-à-dire conforme à l'ensemble des codes qui régissent à des degrés divers le discours de la société-cible. [...] La traduction réussie, autrement dit celle qui a pu franchir les portes de l'institution réceptrice, ne peut pas échapper à l'emploi de ces codes. Comme l'écriture, elle est fondée sur des stratégies sélectives. Mais à la différence de l'écriture, la sélection y est doublement contrainte. La traduction effectue des choix qu'embrayent (et limitent) aussi bien la lecture ou décodage du texte original que les disponibilités discursives du milieu d'accueil, ce que la société réceptrice autorise le traducteur à écrire. Entre le donné du texte-source et la pragmatique du milieu-cible qui la prennent en tenailles, la traduction établit des priorités. Dans une société donnée, ces priorités font système." (Emphasis added.)

if not the substance, of Berman's "trajet analytique", borrowing several of his categories and adapting them to suit Tremblay's particular "projet de traduction".

Michel Tremblay,¹⁹⁶ Quebec's Foremost Theatre Translator

The translator's attitude towards the translation activity, what Berman (1995:74) refers to as "la position traductive", is one of the factors that he proposes taking into account in his theorising of translation criticism:

Tout traducteur entretient un rapport spécifique avec sa propre activité, c'est-à-dire à une certaine 'conception' ou 'perception' du traduire, de son sens, de ses finalités, de ses formes et modes. [...] La position traductive est, pour ainsi dire, le 'compromis' entre la manière dont le traducteur perçoit en tant que sujet pris par la pulsion de traduire, la tâche de la traduction, et la manière dont il a

¹⁹⁶ The details of Michel Tremblay's biography are well-known and are merely recalled in brief here. Tremblay was born in 1942 in the Francophone working-class district of Montreal, the Plateau Mont Royal. His early plays depicted, often in crude terms, the harsh social realities of the environment he grew up in: *Les Belles-Soeurs* (1968); *La Duchesse de Langeais* (1969); *À toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou* (1971); *Hosanna* (1973); *Sainte-Carmen de la Main* (1976); and *Damnée Manon, sacrée Sandra* (1977). In his later plays, Tremblay turned his attention towards middle-class concerns, for example in *L'Impromptu d'Outremont* (1980) and *Les grandes vacances* (1981). The increasingly individualistic slant of this second phase of Tremblay's work is best exemplified, perhaps, in *Albertine, en cinq temps* (1984), regarded by many critics as one of his finest plays. Cf. Renate Usmiani (1982) for an appraisal of Tremblay's drama and early fiction.

'internalisé' le discours ambiant sur le traduire (les 'normes').¹⁹⁷

A theory of the 'sujet traduisant' would, according to Berman (1995:75), have to include not only the translator's "position traductive", but also his or her "position langagière" and "position scripturaire".¹⁹⁸

In the case of Tremblay's *Mistero buffo*, since it is unpublished we do not have the benefit of a Translator's Preface, or even the occasional footnote explaining a translation decision; furthermore, there do not appear to be any interviews where Tremblay discusses his translation. The sole information available in this instance is contained in a letter received by the present author from Tremblay (in response to a list of queries sent him) where he comments on the circumstances in which he undertook to translate *Mistero buffo*:

La commande avait été faite par le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, en 1973, dans le cadre d'une entente avec le consulat d'Italie. Je n'ai donc pas moi-même choisi de traduire cette pièce.

¹⁹⁷ Here, there appears to be a confusion over the sociological notion of 'norms' employed by Toury. For norms are rarely put forward, a priori, in the form of explicit recommendations. Instead, they are the result of a *posteriori* observations which reveal those "impensés" of translation that Ladmiral (1990) speaks of.

¹⁹⁸ Tremblay's "position scripturaire", although of indubitable interest, cannot be touched upon here, given the scope of this thesis. In the case of writer-translators, an examination of their singular relationship to the act of writing – which would involve a detailed textual comparison of their literary production and their translations – is an area where much work remains to be done. Fitch's study (1988) of Beckett as a self-translator is a fine example of the fruitfulness of this area of research.

Je n'ai jamais été en contact avec l'auteur pour la simple raison qu'on m'avait donné trois grosses semaines pour faire mon travail.[...] J'ai travaillé sur une traduction littérale faite par un professeur de l'Université de Montréal, qui, elle-même ne comprenant pas tous les mots en lombard, m'avait livré un texte.... plein de trous. Aucune autre traduction de cette pièce n'existait à cette époque, je crois. [...] (Tremblay:1996).¹⁹⁹

Thus, in 1973, when Michel Tremblay was commissioned by Montreal's prestigious Théâtre du Nouveau Monde to translate *Mistero buffo*, it was neither for his knowledge of Italian nor for his acquaintance with Dario Fo's work that he was chosen. He had, it is true, already produced several translations for the stage (variously referred to as "traductions" and "adaptations"),²⁰⁰ but this experience clearly did not 'qualify' him in any conventional sense to translate an Italian author. It merely reflects a recognised – and self-perpetuating – practice whereby theatre directors typically ask a dramatist, rather than a professional translator, to translate a play (irrespective of whether or not he or she knows the language in question). And Quebec is no exception insofar as this generalised tendency is concerned. Paul Lefebvre and Pierre Ostiguy (1978:34) note:

¹⁹⁹ The full text of this letter appears in the Appendix.

²⁰⁰ By 1973, Tremblay had translated works for the stage by the following authors: Aristophanes (*Lysistrata*, 1969; jointly with André Brassard); Paul Zindel (*L'Effet des rayons gamma sur les vieux garçons*, 1970; *Et mademoiselle Roberge boit un peu*, 1971), Tennessee Williams (*Au pays du dragon*, 1972). Regarding the prestige conferred upon Tremblay as "traducteur lauréat" (the expression is Brisset's) by the Québécois institutions of theatre and publishing alike, cf. Brisset, 1990:49-51.

Les adaptateurs Québécois sont habituellement auteurs, metteurs en scène ou comédiens. Parmi les auteurs, citons Michel Tremblay [...], Michel Garneau [...], Jean-Claude Germain [...] et Sauvageau.

Indeed, the prevalence of "auteurs, metteurs en scène ou comédiens" among Québécois theatre translators bears out the commonly held belief that only someone who knows the theatre at first hand, from the inside, is capable of 'translating' a play.

Yet, behind the façade of creative dialogue between two playwrights implicit in the dramatists-translated-by-dramatists format, there lies the hidden work of an anonymous translator. The word 'translate' and its cognates, are placed in inverted commas here to indicate that their use is problematic, since the ultimate product, the 'translated play', is, more often than not, the result of a mediated process: it is standard practice for a theatre to get a 'translator' (which can simply mean a person who 'knows' the source-text language) to produce a first draft – either an interlinear or a 'literal translation' – of the source text and then to commission a well-known dramatist to turn it into a 'performable play', by some process of alchemy. Inevitably, this implicit transmutation establishes a hierarchy between the 'base' translator-replicator and the 'precious' writer-creator. Yet, often the first 'translator' receives no mention; however, even when he or she is credited, one usually has to scour the theatre programme to find evidence of this 'linguistic assistance' offered the 'real translator' who is not versed in the language of the source text.

The situation is no different in the case of the Québécois *Mistero buffo*. On the programme produced by the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, the name of the language expert (Fulvia Bessette) appears last on the list of technicians grouped under the heading "Équipe de Production". Such relegation is, of course, highly symbolic, as the name of the 'creative writer' responsible for the "adaptation" of *Mistero buffo* (Michel Tremblay) appears at the top of the cast list, in close proximity to the title "*Mistero buffo* de Dario Fo" printed in large type.²⁰¹ The hazy distinction between the terms 'translation' and 'adaptation' is borne out by the 'explanatory' subtitle that follows *Mistero buffo*: "traduit et adapté par Michel Tremblay". However, on the poster advertising *Mistero buffo*, the word "traduction" does not appear; instead, in the place usually reserved for the 'dramatist', we find the caption "Adaptation", followed by MICHEL TREMBLAY (printed in capital letters), thereby seeming to attribute him with *authorship* of the play.²⁰²

²⁰¹ What we have here is not simply the archetypal 'invisible' translator – denounced by Lawrence Venuti (1986) and many others besides – who, under a regime of 'fluency', is constrained to cover his or her tracks, and lie low, but rather a non-presence which is immediately substituted by a playwright. Thus, a well-known figure in the world of theatre steps into the role of translator-adaptor, a role which, quite exceptionally, now acquires 'added value': instead of being concealed, it is to be advertised.

²⁰² That Tremblay's name made better copy than Dario Fo's – the Québécois playwright was at the height of his popularity – clearly determined the latter's position at the bottom of the playbill, where his name appears in small print after the cast-list which highlights, not surprisingly, the presence of the province's star singer-songwriter, Gilles Vigneault.

Tremblay's "horizon traductif"

If, then, the decision to ask a playwright to 'translate' a foreign play is anything but unusual, and already orients to a certain extent the kind of translation that will be produced,²⁰³ it is nonetheless worth probing the significance of a 'translation' signed by Michel Tremblay, within the context of 1970s Quebec. Tremblay was certainly the most prominent exponent of the new Québécois theatre that he himself had been instrumental in creating; indeed, it is customary to date the inception of Québécois theatre from the first performance of *Les Belles-Soeurs* in 1968. Historians of theatre have conventionally defined all works prior to this as products of French-Canadian theatre. According to Leonard E. Doucette (1994:977):

Few works have ever represented such a universally recognized turning point in the evolution of a national stage.²⁰⁴

Hitherto, theatre in the province had been subjugated to the aesthetic norms of French drama against which it had constantly

²⁰³ At the very least, it seems more than likely that the translation will be target-oriented, the play's acceptability in the receptor society being the prime concern. The widely used, and rarely defined, notion of 'performability' is often invoked to justify varying degrees of textual transformation. Cf. in particular, Bassnett-McGuire (1985).

²⁰⁴ However, as various critics have pointed out (eg. Godin and Mailhot, 1988:29-30; Brisset 1990:77), there has been at least one attempt to trace the birth of Québécois theatre a good deal further back: Jean Béraud (1958) makes claims for its existence since the early seventeenth century, based on the performance of Marc Lescarbot's *Le théâtre de Neptune en la Nouvelle-France* in 1606.

to measure itself, yet of which it only succeeded in producing pale imitations:

Au théâtre, nous en étions encore au stade de la copie, très souvent de la mauvaise copie. En prose ou en vers, nous imitions la France en ce qu'elle nous enseignait de plus médiocre: mélodrames, vaudevilles, épopées glorifiantes et gonflées, pièces à thèses, spectacles de paroisses nourris de bonnes et de mièvres intentions, dans lesquels tous les méchants se retrouvaient du même côté et tous les bons de l'autre. (Dubé, 1987:8)

The burden of French influence, it was argued, had seriously stifled theatrical inventiveness, with only the occasional play distinguishing itself. Once such play was, of course, Gratien Gélinas's *Tit-Coq* (1948). Its huge popular success was largely attributed to the fact that it had touched a highly sensitive chord among the Québécois:

In this play's theme of a foundling's frustrated search for identity, French Canadian audiences perceived something of their own quest, formulated in familiar language (Doucette, 1988:154).

Although Gélinas's influence on theatre remained limited,²⁰⁵ most critics today see in *Tit-Coq* the beginning of a new 'national' dramaturgy, containing as it did the seeds of a subject which was subsequently to exercise the minds of a whole generation of playwrights: namely, the desire to assert a truly Québécois identity which would help distinguish French-Canadians from "les Autres", a theme we shall return to shortly.

²⁰⁵ Over the next decade, Gélinas devoted his time to directing as well as to working in television, and it was not until 1960 that he staged another play, *Bousille et les justes*, which was also a resounding success.

Nevertheless, whilst a dramatist such as Marcel Dubé (1987:9) could join the majority of critics in declaring *Tit-Cog* an

événement [...] consigné dans l'histoire de notre littérature comme étant le point de départ de notre dramaturgie nationale (The italics are mine)

and could look back on Gélinas as the 'spiritual father' of Québécois theatre, another twenty years were to pass before *that other événement* – *Les Belles-Soeurs* – would be possible. In the intervening period Quebec underwent major transformations: from being a backward-looking, highly conservative, clerical society whose every institution – or virtually – was dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, Quebec eventually emerged as a modern, secular society, espousing the values of neo-liberalism and making manifest increasingly its desire to constitute an *État québécois*.²⁰⁶

Quebec's Not-so Quiet Revolution

What follows is an overview of the major events in Quebec's recent history, based on Marcel Rioux's account (1974:142-147, *passim*). These are merely touched upon briefly here in order to anticipate the more detailed historical and political

²⁰⁶ For a full discussion of the sociocultural implications of the Church's century-old hegemony in Quebec, as evidenced in the social discourse of the 1960s-1970s, cf. *infra*, Chapter Four.

contextualisation which will accompany the textual analysis of Tremblay's *Mistero buffo*.

The death, in 1959, of Maurice Duplessis, the leader of the ultra-conservative *Union Nationale*, has conventionally been regarded as a watershed in the history of Quebec by historians and sociologists alike. The period under Duplessis's authoritarian rule²⁰⁷ was referred to thereafter as *la Grande noirceur*: it was a period which, in many ways, had been repressive²⁰⁸ and reactionary, with the influence of traditional Catholic values holding sway throughout society, as the clergy propped up the ideology of the dominant political class, through its religious teachings and complete control over the education of Francophones. This lack of genuine democracy had discouraged political awareness or any sense of participation in government matters, leaving a disaffected, and largely ignorant population

²⁰⁷ He intermittently served several terms as Prime Minister which extended from the pre-war years well beyond the post-war period (1936-1939 and 1944-59).

²⁰⁸ The way in which the striking miners at Asbestos and Thetford Mines were brutally restrained in 1949 by Duplessis's police was symptomatic of the worst excesses of his near-tyrannical regime. It is also one of the rare occasions when a high-ranking member of the clergy sided with the workers against the ruling classes: Archbishop Joseph Charbonneau's confrontation with the Québécois prime minister - which led to his being dismissed from his position and 'banished' from Montreal - forms the subject of John Thomas McDonough's drama, *Charbonneau and le chef*. The play enjoyed considerable success when it was performed in translation in Quebec City and Montreal in 1970; Nardocchio (1986:78) notes: "More than 11,000 Québécois turned out to see Jean Duceppe and Jean-Marie Lemieux confront each other as Maurice Duplessis and Archbishop Charbonneau during the 1949 Asbestos strike."

(the province counted the highest rate of illiteracy in Canada),²⁰⁹ entrenched in the feudal values of its clerical and rural past.²¹⁰

The end of the Duplessis regime heralded an era of transition, a new start for Quebec, as Jean Lesage's Liberal Party took power in 1960 with the rallying cry, "C'est le temps que ça change!" The so-called *Révolution tranquille* was optimistically proclaimed – its prime goals, the secularisation and liberalisation of society.²¹¹ As Elaine Nardocchio (1986:49) has pointed out:

The reforms [Lesage's] government introduced shaped Québec as we know it today. Electricity was

²⁰⁹ "Les 'non-instruits', que méprise Lesage, veulent recevoir leur part du festin, leur large part. Ne forment-ils pas 90% de cette nation à qui l'on vient de promettre une vie nouvelle, libérée de la peur, de l'ignorance et de la servitude?" (Vallières, 1969:58).

²¹⁰ For, as Rioux (1974:140-141) observes: "La politique a acquis une bien mauvaise réputation dans plusieurs couches de la population au Québec. Pour bien des gens, la politique est associée à l'idée de promesses non tenues, de manoeuvres frauduleuses, d'enrichissement rapide et d'activités plus ou moins louches. Pour des raisons historiques, l'État est souvent apparu comme quelque chose d'extérieur à la société, comme un pouvoir que l'on ne contrôle pas et avec lequel on peut tricher sans scrupules. La vie sociale ayant eu tendance à se centrer sur la paroisse, le village et le quartier, l'État canadien et même l'administration québécoise apparaissaient lointaines et étrangères." The extraneousness of the population to the democratic process and its wariness of the political ruling class is not without parallels with the deep-rooted distrust of the State by Italians – a feeling which is particularly acute in the South – that persists to this day. The reasons for this attitude are, of course, determined by altogether different historical circumstances, as we saw in Chapter Two.

²¹¹ In terms of periodisation, the expression *Révolution tranquille* is used to refer to the years when Lesage's government was in power (1960-1966).

nationalised and economic planning boards set up. Education, thanks to the Parent Report, was offered free to those attending secondary schools and the new Junior Colleges or CEGEPs (*Collège d'Enseignement Général et Professionnel*) and curricula were revised to meet the needs of the technological age.

Thus, the schools were amongst those institutions that benefitted the most from the reforms, as a result of the establishment of a Ministry of Education in 1964; and, indeed, some of the most immediate and visible fruits borne by the *Révolution tranquille* were to be found on the cultural front. It is, of course, highly symbolic that Quebec, which had remained isolated for so long, should celebrate its coming of age by sending delegations first to Paris and New York (1961), and then to London (1962); by signing an agreement with France to promote Francophony (1965); and by hosting a World Exhibition - "Expo' 67" as it was always referred to. This was an event which remained vivid in the memories of Montrealers long afterwards, and signalled Quebec's willingness to open itself to outside influences.

In the new self-image that Quebec sought to project at home and abroad there was, above all, the desire to affirm its identity by developing an autonomous, self-respecting culture that reflected the *distinctiveness* of the Québécois people. This reflected a concerted attempt to lay the foundations for a future state, since the ultimate objective was, of course, that of achieving the political and economic sovereignty of Quebec.

The decade was marked by the rise of a nationalist ideology which, if not shared by all Québécois, came increasingly to fill

the neo-liberal vacuum left by the Lesage government, as not all the promises of reform had been honoured,²¹² and it was felt that only the Separatist movement could introduce the sweeping changes that many hoped for.

Society was divided over how best to achieve these aims. The very term *Révolution tranquille* is, of course, highly ambivalent as, even in its early years (from 1963 onwards) it spawned a number of pro-Independence terrorist organisations, chief amongst which was the *Front de libération du Québec* or FLQ, as it was commonly known. In the FLQ's attempt to draw attention to the nationalist cause, it periodically exploded bombs in public places; such violent tactics culminated, in 1970, in the group's kidnapping and killing a liberal minister, Pierre Laporte (the British High Commissioner, James Cross, had also been kidnapped but was later released). The incident sparked off the so-called October Crisis: the Canadian army was despatched to Quebec and martial law proclaimed; hundreds of suspected activists were rounded up and arrested.²¹³ The FLQ – whose

²¹² Vallières (1969:58) echoed this widespread frustration when he asserted: "Les promesses de 1960 sont encore les promesses de 1966, sauf, en partie, dans le domaine de l'enseignement."

²¹³ For a docu-drama reconstruction of events, cf. Michel Brault's *Les Ordres* (1974). The film, based on the testimonies of 50 of the 450 people who were imprisoned in October 1970, is highly critical of the methods adopted by the police under the War Measures Act. This dramatic event would still have been fresh in the minds of the Québécois, particularly as they could have read a short piece pre-announcing the film on the same page as a review of *Mistero buffo* in *Le Devoir* (1973:12): "[...] ce film raconte les humiliations subies par un groupe de personnes incarcérées lors d'une crise politique que subit leur pays."

militants had never numbered more than about a hundred, according to Rioux (1974:146) — lost much popular consensus through this episode. One of its most famous exponents, Pierre Vallières, "considéré comme le théoricien du terrorisme" (Rioux, 1974:146), renounced violence, and devoted his efforts to supporting the *Parti québécois*, as did many other former FLQ followers.

For, in the meantime, the peaceful pro-Independence movement had been gaining momentum:

Dans la foulée de la Révolution tranquille, un autre espoir est né. Par-delà le conservatisme, rêve du XIX^e siècle, et le 'rattrapage' des libéraux, est née l'idée de dépassement, l'idée d'un Québec souverain, d'un Québec socialiste, d'un Québec qui serait lui-même libre enfin des tutelles étrangères et qui prendrait tardivement sa place parmi les nations du monde. L'enjeu idéologique se situe entre le rattrapage et le dépassement (Rioux, 1974:135).

Général de Gaulle's "Vive le Québec libre!" which was famously pronounced from the balcony of the Montreal Town Hall in July 1967 had opportunely boosted the nationalist cause.²¹⁴ Several months later, in October, René Levesque left the Liberal Party to found the *Mouvement Souveraineté-Association* whose aim it was to achieve independence for Quebec whilst retaining economic ties with Canada. The following year, Levesque founded

²¹⁴ The pro-Independence movement did not fail to seize on the significance of this event. The September editorial of *Parti pris* (1967:5-6), for example, predicted that its repercussions would be far-reaching: "La visite du Général De Gaulle a accéléré la marche vers l'indépendance. Le séjour du Président de la France dans notre pays fut un catalyseur, un de ces événements circonstanciels qui se traduisent par un bond du déroulement de l'histoire; on doit en comparer l'importance avec la naissance du F.L.Q., la mort de Duplessis ou la grève de l'amiante. Il n'est pas exclus que l'Union national [the party in government in Quebec at the time] fasse l'indépendance."

the *Parti québécois* which was joined by the other two pro-Independence parties, the *Rassemblement pour l'indépendance nationale* (RIN) and the *Ralliement national* (RN). In the 1970 general elections the *Parti québécois* won 24% of the vote,²¹⁵ a figure which had risen to 30% by 1973, thereby representing a serious challenge to the federalist Liberal Party which had governed Quebec since 1970. The other two political contenders of the day were *l'Unité-Québec* and the *Crédit social* whose traditional electorate was to be found in the provinces and in the rural areas, for "seuls le *Parti québécois* et le parti libéral représentent la région de Montréal" (Rioux, 1974:146), a factor which is not without pertinence to the present study since it gives us a fairly good idea of the probable political orientation of a significant proportion of theatre-goers attending Tremblay's *Mistero buffo*.

Thus, the October Crisis had found a peaceful resolution,²¹⁶ thereby averting an escalation of what might have

²¹⁵ This represented a significant victory for the pro-Independence movement. As Rioux (1974:145) points out: "Si l'on tient compte du fait que les anglophones du Québec ont voté en bloc contre lui et qu'ils représentent à peu près 20% de l'électorat québécois, on peut dire qu'en l'espace de deux ans d'existence, ce parti a réussi à convertir à peu près un Québécois francophone sur trois aux idées indépendantistes".

²¹⁶ Indeed, as Nardocchio (1986:77) points out, social unrest was rapidly defused in the 1970s as the *Parti Québécois* provided an outlet for nationalist aspirations, creating in the process a significant degree of social cohesion: "Soon after the October Crisis, student and union protest marches, radical nationalism and the like became far less prevalent in Québec. Instead, union organizers, student leaders and even former radical intellectuals like Pierre Vallières rechannelled their patriotic fervour and

turned into a full-scale terrorist onslaught against the state, as was the case in Italy during the 1970s. Whereas in several Western countries, various 'revolutionary' factions (besides the Brigade Rosse in Italy, one need only think of the Baader-Meinhof group in Germany and the IRA in Northern Ireland), had espoused the 'armed struggle', and the decade had seen a steep rise in anti-institutional violence in Europe, in Quebec a reverse process took place during the same period:

Although the political agitation which began in the early sixties spilled over into the seventies, it did not dominate this particular decade as it had the previous one. In fact, the nationalist fervour which on occasion bordered on rebellion was diffused in the early seventies in many ways by the emotional backlash created by the October Crisis of 1970 (Nardocchio, 1986:77).

To all intents and purposes the use of violent means to apply pressure were abandoned and, instead, energies were directed towards achieving statehood democratically, by gaining popular support. This approach clearly paid off:

En dépit d'un large consensus autour du néo-libéralisme, les débats sont encore vifs. Tout va trop vite ou tout va trop lentement. Néanmoins, de réforme en réforme, la société est entraînée petit à petit vers une démocratie relativement plus égalitaire. La majorité des Québécois rejettent toutefois les suggestions révolutionnaires de la minorité socialiste. Une question envahit pourtant les débats de société jusqu'à la polarisation: le nouvel État des Québécois – comme ils se désignent désormais – sera-t-il un État national? (Roy, 1993:108-109).

threw their support behind the Parti Québécois (PQ) which promised to fight for political independence through peaceful and democratic means".

As we saw above, the polls clearly reflect the fact that, by 1973, nationalism had firmly established itself as the most important counter-hegemony in Québécois society. The victory of the *Parti québécois* in the 1976 elections consolidated its position and brought to centre-stage views that, only a decade earlier, had been regarded as marginal.²¹⁷ The work of the seminal journal *Parti pris* was, to a considerable extent, responsible for this radical shift in public opinion.

Politics and Poetics: In the Wake of the *Partipristes*

Founded in 1963, *Parti pris* appeared monthly for a mere five years but the literary and political influence it exerted on Québécois society was far-reaching.²¹⁸ Describing itself as a "revue politique et culturelle", it advocated, as Jacques Pelletier (1990/91:47-48) explains succinctly

rien de moins qu'une transformation radicale, révolutionnaire de la société québécoise inspirée par la 'théorie' du socialisme décolonisateur alors très valorisée par les jeunes intellectuels. Le programme de la revue était synthétisé dans le célèbre mot

²¹⁷ In his survey of Québécois society, Rioux (1974:183) adds a triumphant postscript for 1976: "15 novembre: éclatante victoire du Parti québécois. C'est déjà le Québec presque libre; cette élection a sanctionné le principe d'autodétermination pour le Québec. Dans quelque temps, il restera au peuple québécois à décider par référendum s'il veut assurer pleinement son indépendance." (Rioux is, of course, referring to the 1980 referendum where the 'yes' partisans were to gain close to 40% of the vote.)

²¹⁸ For an in-depth study of *Parti pris*, cf. Major (1979).

d'ordre: indépendance, socialisme, laïcisme. Dans cette perspective, la lutte pour la libération politique et sociale du Québec constituait la tâche prioritaire à laquelle devaient se consacrer les militants révolutionnaires.

Ideologically, it had much in common with the revolutionary theories which underpinned the terrorist activities of the F.L.Q. By its own admission, the journal sympathised with the group's ideals, if not with its methods; indeed, it counted amongst its collaborators F.L.Q. activists such as Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon. In an editorial entitled, "Le F.L.Q. et nous" (*Parti pris*, 1966:2-3), it sought to clarify its relationship with the F.L.Q. and to distance itself from the movement's adhesion to violence:

La naissance de la Revue *parti pris*, à l'automne 1963, suivait de peu le démantèlement de la première cellule du Front de Libération du Québec; d'ailleurs, l'équipe d'alors se solidarisait tout naturellement avec les amis emprisonnés. On comprenait alors, et on comprend encore aujourd'hui, que des Québécois en viennent à la violence pour dégourdir les idées et les gens par ici. [...] *parti pris* n'a jamais fait d'appel à la violence, parce que nous n'avons jamais cru que ce serait le peuple en armes qui pouvait faire la révolution au Québec. Nous devons cependant admettre, sans aucune espèce de retenue, que tous les jeunes révolutionnaires de notre groupe ont dû, à plusieurs occasions, lutter contre l'envie de foutre des choses en l'air.

Nevertheless, the editorial closes with some remarks (7) whose reasoning reveals not a little ambiguity, in that it claims to reject violence whilst at the same time implicitly offering an apology for self-made justice:

[...] c'est le contraire de la violence que nous prônons: qu'on fasse disparaître la violence de l'ordre établi, la violence des exploiters capitalistes protégés par l'Etat colonisé et sa police, et il n'y aura plus aucune raison pour que des citoyens

épris de justice soient acculés à la violence pour rendre aux travailleurs la justice que LA Justice ne leur rend pas.

"Québec occupé"²¹⁹: The Colonised Canuck²²⁰

As will have emerged from the preceding extracts, the *Partipristes* saw themselves as representatives of Quebec's "nouvelle gauche", and based their analyses on the dual doctrines of socialism and decolonisation – what they called a "socialisme décolonisateur". Already, in the late 1950s, some of the writers involved with the pro-independence journal, *Liberté* (1959-), a less radical precursor of *Parti pris*, had seized on the concept of decolonisation, borrowed from the freedom movements of many colonised countries, chief among which was Algeria. In the condition of these colonised peoples they drew a parallel with their own condition as a 'subjugated people', crushed by what they viewed as the 'colonial' domination of English Canada. It

²¹⁹ Such is the title of a book published by *Parti pris* in 1971. This collection of articles addresses the issue of the recent October Crisis, which is described as the "occupation armée du Québec" (Piotte, 1971:8), and posits that "L'un des objectifs de la répression gouvernementale est d'arrêter [la] politisation des Québécois et d'obliger les media à revenir à leur fonction idéologique première, qui est de diffuser l'idéologie des classes dominantes." It is not difficult to see how Tremblay's *Mistero buffo* would have been seized on by many spectators with nationalist sympathies as an attempt to counter that hegemony.

²²⁰ "Le sous-homme" writes Miron (1993:75), in a well-known verse, "l'homme du cheap way, l'homme du cheap work / le damned Canuck." (From "Le damned Canuck".)

is not, therefore, surprising to find that two theoretical works on the subject – Albert Memmi's *Portrait du colonisé* (1957)²²¹ and Frantz Fanon's *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961) – circulated in Québécois intellectual circles from the early 1960s, and contributed significantly to the orientation of the nationalist debate.

During this period, the author Hubert Aquin, for example, became particularly interested in the psychology of the colonised, a theme which he later developed in a number of essays such as "L'art de la défaite" (1965) and "Littérature et aliénation" (1967).²²² In what is perhaps his best-known article, "Profession: écrivain" (1964), Aquin examined specifically what position a writer should adopt in a colonised society, declaring "Écrire me tue", and arguing that the only

²²¹ The relevance of Memmi's work to the Québécois situation lies in the fact that he establishes a link between national liberation movements and decolonisation movements. *Portrait du colonisé* was published in Paris in 1957, and became more widely known in Quebec after l'Action Socialiste brought out an abridged version (published by Editions du Bas Canada) in 1963 in pamphlet form. The fact that it was republished in Montreal in 1972 – this time in an unabridged edition containing both the *Portrait du Colonisateur* and *Portrait du colonisé*, as well as the original preface by Jean-Paul Sartre – bears witness to the increasing feeling on the part of the Québécois that theirs was a colonised people. The Montreal edition carries a postface entitled "Les Canadiens français sont-ils des colonisés?" where Memmi defends the Québécois's definition of themselves as colonised.

²²² This interest was initially stimulated by a commission which Aquin had received in 1962 to research and write a film for the National Film Board on the subject of decolonisation in Africa. As part of this project, he went to Paris where he interviewed Albert Memmi and, later that year, he read Memmi's *Portrait du colonisé* and *Portrait du colonisateur*.

possible position was to refuse to write.²²³ (This view was shared, with certain qualifications, by the poet Gaston Miron.)²²⁴ Nevertheless, Aquin went on to write, and publish, *Prochain épisode* (1965) and *Trou de mémoire* (1968). According to Pelletier (1990/91:49):

Pour être pleinement compris, ces deux romans doivent donc être lus d'une part à la lumière du phénomène général de la décolonisation à l'époque contemporaine et d'autre part à celle de la révolution québécoise en cours au moment de leur rédaction.

Pierre Vallières's 1968 analysis of the historical exploitation of the Québécois in *Nègres blancs d'Amérique* (1979:9) draws heavily on theories of decolonisation; he was patently influenced by Fanon's writings when he asserted:

Heureusement pour nous, des damnés prirent les armes en Afrique, en Asie, en Amérique latine et réveillèrent dans nos corps fatigués dès l'enfance l'instinct de lutte et de dignité. Nous nous sommes accrochés à ces guerres de libération avec le désespoir du dernier recours.

²²³ "Au fond je refuse d'écrire des oeuvres d'art, après des années de conditionnement dans ce sens, parce que je refuse la signification que prend l'art dans un monde équivoque. Artiste, je jouerais le rôle qu'on m'a attribué: celui du dominé qui a du talent. Or je refuse ce talent, confusément peut-être, parce que je refuse globalement ma domination" (quoted in Pelletier, 1990/91:49).

²²⁴ "Une fois que j'eus assumé ma condition de colonisé, du moins la part en moi qui est colonisée, que je l'eus revendiquée et retournée en une affirmation, j'estimai, face à l'écriture, que la seule attitude convenable résidait dans le silence, forme de protestation absolue, refus de pactiser avec le système par le biais de quoi que ce soit, fût-ce la littérature" (Miron, 1993:197). For an elaboration on this position, cf. the article from which the above extract is taken, "Un Long chemin" (first published in 1965 and reproduced in Miron, 1993:193-204).

Increasingly, many Québécois equated their struggle for 'national liberation' with the struggles of colonised peoples to emancipate themselves from imperialist powers and, in the speech of the Separatists, being Québécois became synonymous with being colonised.

Indeed, the word 'colonisé' was a key term in the doxa of the period. As Vallières (1968:334) himself remarked:

C'est devenu un ensemble de lieux communs de dire que le Québec est une colonie, une sous-colonie, une sous-sous-colonie, une triple colonie, etc. La 'dépendance' du Québec à l'égard de l'étranger est une constante de son histoire. Son développement 'économique', social et politique, constamment subordonné à des intérêts financiers étrangers, n'a jamais connu d'évolution 'indépendante'. Car le Québec, depuis l'établissement d'un comptoir commercial à Québec par Champlain en 1608, a toujours été soumis aux intérêts des classes dominantes des pays impérialistes: d'abord, la France; puis l'Angleterre; et aujourd'hui, les Etats-Unis (emphasis added).²²⁵

Here we find a clumsy but characteristic mixture of Marxist terminology (eg. "classes dominantes"), and anti-imperialist discourse, together with an appeal to nationalist sentiments, which are manipulated by initially presenting an *anonymous* 'foreign enemy' ("des intérêts financiers étrangers") who is responsible for all of Quebec's woes. When the foreign

²²⁵ This corresponds perfectly, of course, with the position put forward by *Parti pris* (1963b:3) in its first issue: "L'aliénation dont nous souffrons, et qui existe à tous les niveaux, vient de ce que nous sommes colonisés et exploités [...] - au niveau économique, la presque totalité de nos richesses naturelles et de notre industrie est dans les mains d'étrangers -- canadiens ou américains".

oppressors are named, the first example given is France, a rhetorical tactic which conceals what would clearly be an uncomfortable thought for the proponents of the 'Québécois colonisation theory', namely that if the French were the first colonial exploiters in Canada, the victims of their colonisation were first and foremost the indigenous peoples and that if indeed the first French *habitants*, the first settlers in Canada were exploited, they were exploited by other *French* settlers. A similar contradiction, which permeated Québécois social discourse during the 1960s and 1970s, has already been pointed out by Annie Brisset (1990:130, note 28):

Curieusement, la mémoire de l'altérité ne remonte pas au-delà de la conquête britannique. [...] le 'colonisé' francophone oublie qu'il a d'abord été un colonisateur, qu'il a lui-même été l'agent d'un semblable traumatisme infligé aux nations autochtones, dépossédées de leurs terres ancestrales, de leurs cultures, de leurs langues. Cette violence est niée. [...]

Apart from political analysis, *Parti pris* offered a forum for cultural debate; contributors included the future film-maker, Denis Arcand, the poets Jacques Brault, Paul Chamberland, Gérard Godin and Gaston Miron, the writers Jacques Ferron, Pierre Vadeboncoeur and André Major. All were convinced of the inseparability of politics from culture, and of the need to resist acculturation by the hegemony. In 1965, Miron (1993:200) insisted:

Ce n'est pas le nationalisme qui importe, c'est la conscience nationale; celle-ci ne peut être vivifiée qu'aux sources d'une culture nationale.

The work of these politically committed writers can be seen as one such attempt to assert the specific ethnicity of French Canadians – by now, strictly referred to as Québécois in nationalist quarters – and, in so doing, to construct an identity for themselves.

Québécoisité and the Creation of a New Literary Canon

- Bon, disons médinnequébec... Dans un roman écrit par un Ca... un Québécois, on devrait se voir, se sentir dedans. Tu comprends? Comme c'est là, tu lis des romans français écrits par des Québécois. Ils ont peur de se servir de notre vie, d'inventer quelque chose de québécois (Major, 1965:17).

According to Jacques Pelletier (1990/91:46), at the outset of the *Révolution tranquille* the literary landscape in Quebec could be summed up as follows:

[...] un discours traditionnel, valorisant le roman régionaliste et la poésie bucolique – célébrations d'une société encore perçue comme rurale et catholique – domine l'institution littéraire.

Even though, prior to this period, nationalist views had already begun to colour poetic discourse, particularly that of the *automatistes*, these views had remained marginal, affecting only the avant-garde fringes of the arts.²²⁶ It was not until the

²²⁶ Paul Borduas's 1948 manifesto, *Refus global*, was an early and, more or less, isolated attempt to challenge the old order which had emanated from the arts.

resurgence of nationalism – or 'neo-nationalism' as it was termed – in the political sphere during the early 1960s that literary production received the necessary impetus to fully embrace this doctrine.

Thus, by the end of the decade, it is fair to say that the dominant trend in the arts was underpinned by the phenomenon of *québécoisité* (Pelletier, 1990/91:47) – a term modelled on *négritude*, the recent affirmation of the neglected or disparaged culture of the Blacks – which involved the appraisal of the specificity, of the ethnicity of the Québécois who become, increasingly, the sole subjects of literary representation.

Take, for example, Jacques Godbout's best-known novel, *Salut Galarneau!*, first published in 1967; the protagonist's new-found self-understanding can be read, according to Pelletier (1990/91:51), as

une allégorie de l'éveil du peuple québécois, le récit de la prise de conscience individuelle et de la libération de Galarneau étant une parabole de la prise de conscience collective et l'éventuelle libération du Québec.

Indeed, we find a character in constant rebellion against the status quo, against the twin hegemony of Church and State, represented as foreign forces (the imperialism of Rome and the imperialism of England) whose domination has infiltrated even the most intimate spheres of the lives of the Québécois. The fact that the latter are often not even aware of being colonised simply reflects their alienation and conditioning, as the following remarks by the narrator, Galarneau, make clear:

[...] chez Henault's Drugstore (il aurait pu appeler ça la *Pharmacie Hénault*, le sacrement, mais il est tellement content, Hénault, de savoir parler anglais que si sa femme lui dit: je t'aime plutôt que *I love you*, il ne peut plus bander. Colonisé Hénault: une couille peinte en Union Jack, l'autre aux armoiries du pape!) (Godbout, 1967:59).

In the work of Gaston Miron and Paul Chamberland²²⁷, to name but two of the leading poets who were politically engaged, we find summed up the major themes which were to dominate Québécois literature and social discourse over the next decade or so, notably the existential and linguistic alienation suffered by an oppressed people, and the search for an authentic self.

Indeed, it is perhaps the young poets of the *Révolution tranquille* who best characterise the renewed patriotic fervour of their age; they launched themselves headlong into the 'struggle for liberation' which was taking place violently in other quarters, harnessing their creative energies to the construction of a would-be-nation.

²²⁷ Miron's series of poems, *La vie agonique* first appeared in 1963, and his celebrated collection, *L'homme rapaillé*, in 1970, shortly before the Events of October, whereas Chamberland's nationalist *Terre Québec* was published in 1964 and *L'afficheur hurle* in 1969.

History and the Amnesia of a Nation

nous te ferons, Terre de Québec
 lit des résurrections
 et des mille fulgurances de nos métamorphoses
 de nos levains où lève le futur
 de nos volontés sans concessions
 les hommes entendront battre ton pouls dans l'histoire
 c'est nous ondulant dans l'automne d'octobre
 c'est le bruit roux de chevreuils dans la lumière
 l'avenir dégagé
 l'avenir engagé

With this 'prophecy', first published by *Liberté* in 1963, Gaston Miron (1993:103-104) expressed the hopes of a whole generation of young Québécois. The need to find their place in history, to carve out a history for themselves in order to imagine a future that is different from their past – in short, to get away from that "amnésie de naissance" which Miron (1993:129) laments²² – suggests the value of *history* and remembrance for a people struggling to break free from other people's history, from the history of the Anglophone Oppressor:

Je dis que personne n'a le droit d'entraver la
 libération d'un peuple qui a pris conscience de lui-
 même et de son historicité (emphasis added; Miron,
 1993:128).

²² Cf. the following couplet taken from "Séquences" (Miron, 1993:77):

je me dresse dans l'appel d'une mémoire osseuse
 j'ai mal à la mémoire car je n'ai pas de mémoire.

The whole of the new wave of Québécois literature can perhaps be seen as an attempt to activate the collective memory,²²⁹ to shake off the "léthargie coloniale" (Lefebvre, 1965:11) of centuries of subjugation. To achieve this end, writers and poets stress that assimilation – or "disparition en l'Autre", as Miron (1993:128) puts it – is tantamount to obliteration. That the Québécois are doomed to extinction is, of course, the apocalyptic message underlying Gaston Miron's ironic 'requiem' for the "Québécanthrope" (1993:156):

Telle fut sa vie que tous pouvaient voir.

Terminus.

Dans l'autre vie il fut pauvre comme un pauvre
vrai de vrai dépossédé.

Oubliez le Québécanthrope
ce garçon qui ne ressemble à personne.

Hence the imperative need for the Québécois to find, or to create, an historically rooted national identity: to do so they must acquire an awareness of the history of their oppression as a people – an *ethnic consciousness* as opposed to a class consciousness.²³⁰ The alternative, it is suggested, is for the Québécois to continue to live a shadowy existence, as a 'non-

²²⁹ A recent film by the theatre director Robert Lepage, *Le confessionnal* (1995), harks back to this theme of forgetfulness in the Québécois context, implicitly taking up Gramsci's notion of *history as self-understanding*.

²³⁰ Vallières's 'revolutionary' tract, *Nègres blancs d'Amérique* (1968), which earned him a considerable following, consists in large part in rehearsing the history of the Québécois people in terms of its exploitation by colonial forces, as we saw earlier.

people', relegated to the fringes of society, dispossessed spiritually as well as materially, in perpetual exile,²³¹ strangers unto themselves.²³²

Thus, in 1968, Pierre Vallières (265) could still wonder:

Ce pays avait-il seulement un avenir? Vu de Paris, le Québec avait l'air d'une ridicule ville de province dont les habitants, tournés vers un passé mythifié, s'inventaient de peine et de misère une histoire héroïque. Dollard des Ormeaux, Madeleine de Verchères, Radisson... (emphasis added).

The recourse to history implicit in the ideological project of novelists such as Hubert Aquin and poets such as Paul Chamberland is not based on any Marxist claim to be 'scientifically' rewriting the history of the proletariat (substantiated, in the case of Dario Fo's *Mistero buffo*, by his use of mediaeval sources) such as we saw in Chapters One and Two, but is, instead, motivated by the Nationalists' yearning to write the 'demystified' history of a neglected ethnic group, the 'damned Canuck' of French Canada, a history based on the theories of "socialisme décolonisateur" propagated by *Parti pris*.

²³¹ Cf. Vallières (1969:41): "[...] le peuple accepte difficilement de crever de faim... même par patriotisme! [...] même à l'heure de la 'révolution tranquille' et de l'Expo 67, des travailleurs québécois abandonnent 'la patrie' pour aller bûcher les pins de la Colombie-Britannique ou s'enterrer vivants dans les mines du nord de l'Ontario et du Manitoba."

²³² "Longtemps je n'ai su mon nom, et qui j'étais, que de l'extérieur. Mon nom est 'Pea Soup'. Mon nom est 'Pepsi'. Mon nom est 'Marmelade'. Mon nom est 'Frog'. Mon nom est 'Damned Canuck'. Mon nom est 'speak white' [...]" (Miron, 1993:132).

Staging the Self, or How to Forge a National Identity

Theatre, perhaps more than any other area of the arts, reflected this will-to-be of the Québécois. The explosion of theatrical activity that followed the Révolution tranquille coincided with the proliferation of "médiinnequébec" novels and was intent on raising awareness of the nationalist cause. The playwright, too, must be engaged in the fight for 'national liberation'. As Verchères reminds Pierre in Jean Barbeau's *Le chant du sink* (1973:49):

Ton théâtre doit être un champ de bataille... un combat contre les entraves [...] à notre liberté collective.

Therefore, the new Québécois theatre functioned as a form of social protest against the 'federalist hegemony'; Jacques Cotnam (1976:363) describes it as "un théâtre de dénonciation", which recalls the *teatro di contestazione* that we saw emerging in Italy from the 1960s onwards (cf. *supra*, Chapter Two). Indeed, Bélair (1973:33) regards Québécois theatre from this period as being very much in line with the themes of modern theatre; he characterises it as

un théâtre de revendication-sociale, un théâtre global ou théâtre d'environnement de même qu'un théâtre de provocation quasi-révolutionnaire.

And he stresses its inherently political character:

[...] en plus de s'opposer au théâtre officiel elle véhicule des valeurs de contestation qui remettent en cause le Pouvoir Politique, autant dans ses prises de position globales face à la culture que dans les implications politiques qui découlent de cette orientation générale. (Bélair, 1973:33)

Not surprisingly, then, given the political context outlined above, we find the subject of identity strongly thematised in the work of a number of engaged playwrights. The topos of the 'Québécois nation' is one which begins to feature prominently in many plays from the late 1960s onwards. Two examples should suffice to illustrate the increasingly overt use of political statement in Québécois theatre. In Robert Gurik's *Hamlet, prince du Québec* (1968), we are presented with a protagonist who is "à la fois 'calme et agité', comme cette soi-disante Révolution tranquille" (Godin and Mailhot, 1988:100), dividing his time between reading *100 ans d'injustice* and agonising over the treachery and oppression that bedevil his 'country'²³³; and in Marcel Dubé's *Pauvre amour* (1969), one of the characters recounts how he has discarded his previous, illusory existence as a Canadian in order to find his 'true' identity as a Québécois.²³⁴

The near-obsessive recurrence of this theme indicates the extent to which it was omnipresent in social discourse of the

²³³ According to Jean-Cléo Godin and Laurent Mailhot (1988:103): "Le héros de Gurik est moins un personnage [...] que le symbole d'un peuple, d'une nation. Son *to be or not to be* est historique, politique, et non métaphysique. *Hamlet, prince du Québec*, c'est aussi bien le Québec, prince du Québec, c'est-à-dire autonome, libre, indépendant, maître de lui, ayant dépassé ses velléités et surmonté sa peur."

²³⁴ This is explicated in the following excerpt:
 GEORGES. Je suis québécois. [...]
 JANE. Avant hier, vous vous êtes présenté comme étant Canadien.
 GEORGES. Une vieille habitude dont je me corrige de plus en plus. [...] En vieillissant, j'ai ouvert les yeux sur ma réalité, je me suis découvert et accepté Québécois. [...] (Dubé, quoted in Cotnam, 1976:364).

period, for the new realist theatre (inspired, to a fairly considerable extent, by American drama)²³⁵ claimed to 'hold up a mirror' in which contemporary society could see itself. As Cotnam (1976:363) was to note:

De plus en plus, le théâtre québécois aborde la donnée politique, culturelle et sociale du milieu où il s'enracine, tendant ainsi à devenir l'instrument d'une libération collective et nationale.

This explains why a play such as Tremblay's *Les Belles-Soeurs*, with its themes of destitution and despair, portraying the (Québécois) have-nots of a society where they are doomed to be the perpetual losers,²³⁶ resounded so strongly at the time. It was perceived as a provocation, an indictment of the condition of the Québécois, epitomised by the "maudite vie plate" of fifteen working-class women, directed (supposedly) at the very people it portrayed in an attempt to expose the frustrations that motivated the nationalists in their struggle for self-determination, and thereby 'raising consciousness', an expression frequently used in the social discourse of Quebec in the early 1970s, just as it

²³⁵ For a general overview of the subject, cf. Kattan (1976).

²³⁶ The leitmotiv of the play seems to be summed up in the excruciating refrain echoed by virtually all the characters: "J'ai-tu l'air de quelqu'un qui a déjà gagné quelque chose?" (Tremblay, 1972:41). Lisette de Courval's self-deception that she can rise above her milieu is cruelly exposed in the double-voiced: "J'ai-tu l'air de quelqu'un qui a besoin de ces affaires-là, moé.... euh, moi?" (Tremblay, 1972:44).

was — albeit in somewhat different circumstances — in Italy during the same period.²²⁷

This process of self-awareness was, as we saw earlier, a necessary part of the collective quest for identity which involved first shrugging off the ill-fitting garment of otherness, that "quotidienne alterité" (Miron, 1993:126) which the Québécois had long been forced to don. As Tremblay (1971) was later to put it:

On est un peuple qui s'est déguisé pendant des années pour ressembler à un autre peuple. C'est pas des farces! On a été travestis pendant 300 ans (Quoted in Usmiani, 1982:22).²²⁸

A New Language for a New Theatre

Tremblay's concern with depicting the social realities of Francophone Quebec was shared by a number of other contemporary playwrights such as Jean Barbeau, Jean-Claude Germain, Michel Garneau and Victor-Lévy Beaulieu. Writing in various forms of

²²⁷ "Les Belles-Soeurs [...] est une pièce politique: c'est évident que quand on montre aux gens comment ils sont, c'est pour les changer [...] Oui, les gens prennent conscience mais jusqu'à quel point? Ça, on peut pas l'dire. Ce qui me décourage, c'est que les Belles-Soeurs ont été écrites en '65. Ça fait 5 ans, pis y a rien de changé. Mais on est en perpétuelle évolution. Ça va peut-être prendre quelque temps" (Tremblay, quoted in an interview by Handfield, 1970).

²²⁸ According to Usmiani (1982:22), commenting on the "prevalence of transvestite characters" in Tremblay's work, such characters "carry heavy overtones of political symbolism: the transvestite par excellence represents loss of identity, as well as impotence."

joual,²³⁹ these authors, like Tremblay, sought to forge an entirely different kind of theatre, a theatre that was authentically Québécois, one that no longer looked to France for its literary models and, above all, one that was not written in what, in Quebec, is generally termed 'international French'.²⁴⁰

A good part of that authenticity resided in the use of joual which had been theorised by the *Partipristes* as an essential instrument in the liberation of the Québécois. Indeed, the language issue had featured prominently throughout the 1960s (eg.

²³⁹ A corruption of the word *cheval*, this term – initially intended to be derogatory – denotes the popular sociolect spoken in Quebec, in both its rural and urban variants. "Attesté déjà dans les années 1930 (chez Claude-Henri Grignon par ex.) dans l'expression parler joual, reprise en 1959 par André Laurendeau dans un billet paru dans *Le Devoir*, le mot joual s'est répandu comme une traînée de poudre à partir de 1960, grâce notamment à Jean-Paul Desbiens et à ses célèbres *Insolences du Frère Untel*. [...] Dès lors associé à des prononciations dites déformées ainsi qu'à l'anglicisme, le joual allait du coup être identifié au parler des classes populaires, parler qu'il fallait à tout prix réformer. S'ensuivit une vaste entreprise de rectification langagière qu'est venue soutenir toute une batterie d'ouvrages correctifs, tel le *Petit dictionnaire du "joual au français"* d'Augustin Turenne (1962)" (Français Plus:1988).

²⁴⁰ Michel Bélair (1972:14), for example, sees 'authenticity' in Québécois culture as the *sine qua non* for its survival: "A la fois nord-américaine et de souche française, la culture québécoise aura sans cesse à s'affirmer dans un sens bien précis; ni américaine ni française, elle doit constamment faire la preuve de son autonomie si elle a des prétentions à la survivance. Cela signifie concrètement qu'elle a à se particulariser face à ses [sic] deux univers culturels que sont la France et l'Amérique. On voit tout de suite, dans cette optique, l'importance d'un théâtre authentiquement québécois, qui ne soit pas 'importé' de l'une ou l'autre de ces entités culturelles: elle est capitale. Société marginale parce que se définissant résolument comme autonome dans un contexte où le nivellement s'impose comme principe premier, la *société québécoise se doit de capitaliser sur ses particularités; le théâtre en est une des plus manifestes.*" (The italics are mine.)

in the writings of Miron and Aquin), rapidly spreading to the pages of the wider circulation daily newspapers. The debate,²⁴¹ as is well known, sharply pitted the linguistic purists, partisans of a 'correct French' identical to that spoken and written in France, against the *joualisants*, advocates of a 'national language' for Quebec.²⁴² The use of this idiom was frowned upon by the educated classes who "referred to it to denote not only a corrupt speech but the deprived culture that went with it" (Warwick:1983); Paul Desbiens's famous description in *Les Insolences du Frère Untel* (1960) of *joual* as a disease like malnutrition to be extirpated by educational reforms only served to reinforce its status as the language of an underclass. Yet, there were also those who in their desire to see Quebec rid of its English oppressors, argued fervently that to deny the people the right to speak *joual* was simply to deny the reality of the current socio-cultural situation, namely that this idiom represented "un décalque parfait de la décadence de notre culture nationale" (Godin, 1965:18).²⁴³

²⁴¹ For a useful overview of the main issues, cf. Gauvin (1974).

²⁴² "Nous parlons *joual* comme les Africains diplômés de la Sorbonne ont rompu un jour avec le français pour parler la langue de leur tribu ou de leur pays" (emphasis added; Godin, 1965b:59).

²⁴³ This notion had already been expressed in the inaugural issue of the Socialist, pro-Independence journal *Parti pris* in an editorial entitled "Notre Perspective" (1963); for its authors *joual* was a reflection of the state of alienation in which the Quebecois people found themselves: "[...] au niveau culturel, la dégénérescence de notre langue et l'abâtardissement de notre peuple témoignent de notre aliénation."

The decision to write in *joual* is therefore an ideological one in that its presence highlights the colonised condition of the Québécois, whilst asserting a defiant reaction to that condition. As the poet and critic Gérard Godin (1965b:58) wrote in *Parti pris*:

Il y a une attitude de défi dans l'utilisation
raisonnée du *joual*: [...] défi [aux]
institutions anglo-saxonnes [...].

By 1964, *joual* had entered the literary arena with the publication of Jacques Renaud's classic *Le cassé* written entirely in *joual*.²⁴⁴ Although its use was short-lived in fiction, its natural habitat appeared to be the oral medium of theatre where it was to find a most receptive audience. With the immense success of *Les Belles-Soeurs*, Tremblay had, in effect, catapulted *joual* irreversibly and irrevocably onto the Québécois stage.²⁴⁵ For, despite the endless debates surrounding the 'language question' which persisted – albeit with less vehemence – once the initial shock value of *joual* had worn off, it soon became accepted as the appropriate language for theatre. Writing in 1973, Michel Bélair (112) states:

²⁴⁴ This was followed, in 1965, by Claude Jasmin's *Pleure pas, Germaine*. Literary *joual* was intended to convey the misery and alienation of the Francophone proletariat of Quebec.

²⁴⁵ Whilst *Les Belles Soeurs* is the first sustained attempt to write a play entirely in *joual* – written in 1965, it was not until 28 August 1968 that it was performed at Montreal's Théâtre du Rideau-Vert – *joual* had, in fact, already been heard on the Québécois stage several months earlier in a translation of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* by Éloi De Grandmont. But its use had been limited to rendering the cockney speech used by several characters, a sociolectical marker to contrast with the 'standard' language used by the other characters.

"[...] le joual est 'd'office' la langue officielle du théâtre québécois [...]. Il ne semble plus possible maintenant de faire un théâtre qui ne soit pas 'joual' par définition.

Indeed, its status as a quasi-literary language can be gauged by the way it was taken up so quickly: from being a marginalised, disparaged oral language, *joual* had come to be the *standard* language of Québécois theatre, a situation which prevailed well into the 1980s, as Annie Brisset (1990) has documented in her extensive work on theatre in Quebec between 1968-88.

It was through *joual*, then, that theatre placed itself in the vanguard of the "bataille culturelle" (Bélair, 1972:14) – the expression is reminiscent of André Belleau's declaration, "La littérature est un combat"²⁴⁶ – the struggle to resist linguistic and ethnic assimilation into the mainstream of North American life.

The political significance of writing in *joual* would therefore not have been lost on contemporary audiences. Nevertheless, Jean Barbeau, for example, often felt the need to comment on its use in his plays, by inserting self-referential 'statements of intent', as it were, where he explicitates the ideological impetus behind his writing in *joual*. Verchères tells Pierre, the aspiring playwright in *Le chant du sink* (Barbeau, 1973:31): "T'es là pour te battre pour le Québec libre...", and "Il faut que tu sois engagé dans ce combat-là..." As Pierre

²⁴⁶ Such is the title of a short comment by Belleau in *Liberté* (1963) concerning the political engagement of some of the journal's younger writers.

himself admits, the very fact that he continues to resist linguistic assimilation is a political statement:

Que je le veuille ou non, j'y suis engagé... Chaque mot que j'couche sur le papier, c'est un crachat dans la face de la logique qui voudrait qu'on se confonde avec les deux cent cinquante millions de blokes qui nous entourent...

The high ideological value assigned to *joual* – increasingly referred to as *québécois*, partly to get away from the pejorative associations of the term *joual*, but above all because of the nationalist overtones assumed by this appellation – is also evinced in the concerted attempt to endow this sociolect with the dignity of a fully fledged language, the mythical language of all Québécois.²⁴⁷

Michel Tremblay: Quebec's Favourite Playwright

tout le monde au Québec sait aujourd'hui que Tremblay, c'est nous, le joual, c'est nous, *Les Belles Soeurs*, c'est nous, que Tremblay reproduit fidèlement notre réalité et que son théâtre n'est ainsi que l'accident d'une prise de conscience collective (Saint-Jacques, 1974:155)

The institutional role which Tremblay played in the early days of the recently constituted Québécois theatre was certainly a critical one: by 1972, he was already being classed by Alain

²⁴⁷ Thus, Léandre Bergeron's desire to codify *joual* into a language by compiling a dictionary (1980), followed by a *Charte de la langue québécoise* (1981), can be seen as the culmination of two decades of linguistic propaganda on the part of the nationalists.

Pontaut in his *Dictionnaire critique du théâtre québécois* (142) "parmi les meilleurs dramaturges du Québec et sans doute le plus important de sa génération". As we saw earlier, Tremblay's influence in shaping a new, socially aware, dramaturgy is generally regarded as having been far-reaching:

Avec des pièces comme *Trois petits tours*, *En pièces détachées* et *A toi, pour toujours*, ta Marie-Lou, Tremblay a presque donné ses premiers 'classiques' au théâtre québécois; plus, ces textes allaient permettre une orientation sociale, politique et culturelle qui marque la profonde originalité du théâtre québécois. (Bélair, 1973:57)

This appraisal of the canonical position of Tremblay's oeuvre within Québécois theatre is echoed by Jean-Cléo Godin and Laurent Mailhot (1988:243) who remark that Tremblay rapidly became "le plus 'classique' de nos auteurs dramatiques", having gained "la consécration par la critique et les facultés universitaires".²⁴

A constant presence on the Quebec stage in the seventies, Tremblay was the province's most successful playwright during that decade. His early succès de scandale as a joualisant has

²⁴ Within a year or so of the first performance of *Les belles Soeurs*, several of Tremblay's plays were already on the curricula of schools and universities, reflecting the urgent need expressed by Québécois society to quickly build up a literary canon no longer based on foreign (read French) writers of the past, but rather on indigenous writers of the present. Indeed, the academic year 1971-1972 constitutes the apogee of this movement to radically alter the traditional emphasis of literary studies which had hitherto dominated Québécois schools. As Pierre Cayouette writes in *Le Devoir* (1996): "Cette année-là, la proportion d'œuvres québécoises enseignées au cégep a atteint, pour diverses raisons sociologiques faciles à comprendre, 61,2%". Ultimately, it was the perception of Tremblay's relevance to contemporary Quebec which had determined his status of 'classic writer'; Micheline Handfield (28), writing in 1970, sums up the mood of the period when she concludes: "Jamais un 'classique' n'a été autant d'actualité!"

become legendary in Quebec where today he is regarded as something of an 'icon'; indeed, excessive adulation has tended to blur judgements somewhat, and generated for a long time a fairly uncritical approach to his work amongst the Québécois, motivated perhaps by the feeling that to attack Tremblay would be to attack their very identity as an emerging nation, and would, at the very least, be an act of extreme disloyalty.

Initially, of course, he had outraged critics and members of the audience alike with his 'coarse' portraits of the squalor of "life on the wrong side of the tracks in Montreal" (Nardocchio, 1986:66) and, above all, with his use of *joual* on stage: for his characters spoke in the idiom of the urban proletariat of Montreal, that "langue populaire, drue et dure, souvent vulgaire" (Godin and Mailhot, 1988:243) which was to become the hallmark of Tremblay's writing. Yet, people did not fail to respond to the direct quality of Tremblay's writing, and rapidly co-opted him as their representative, the "chantre de la rue Fabre". Critics repeatedly referred to Tremblay's extraordinary capacity to offer his audiences a reflection of themselves:

Cruel et sans complaisance, Michel Tremblay nous tend encore une fois un miroir: NOUS SOMMES TOUS DES DUCHESSES DE LANGEAIS (Germain, 1970:9).²⁴⁹

It is worth remembering that his flagship play, *Les Belles-Soeurs*, was revived several times within the space of a few

²⁴⁹ Denis Saint-Jacques (1974:155) offers an apparently dissenting voice, rare amongst the generalised praise for Tremblay's 'mirror-image' universe: "Le théâtre de Tremblay se manifeste faux [...], trompeur, truqué, tout en fausses apparences, d'où au reste sa valeur de théâtre véritable, qui sait tricher."

years, a clear indication of its popularity and pertinence within Québécois society.²⁵⁰ With its production in Paris in November 1973, Tremblay's international renown grew, and his status at home was reinforced. In a review of the Parisian production which appeared in *Le Devoir* only several days before the opening of *Mistero buffo* in Montreal, Michel Vaïs (1973:12) described Tremblay as "un écrivain, enfant de *Parti pris*" which is a reminder that the legacy of that review was still capable of influencing audience expectations. And this, despite the fact that, as Nardocchio (1986:73) suggests, the universe presented by Tremblay – and with which the theatre-going public was by now very familiar – clearly did not aspire towards the socialist vision of society conceived of by the *Partipristes*:

In all his plays of the sixties and seventies, Tremblay sought to point out and denounce the social and cultural failings of a repressed and frustrated minority. His work also defended the right of the Québécois to seek a better material and cultural role in the modern world. This attitude was quite a change from Marcel Dubé's, for instance, who considered money and materialism to be an alienating consequence of the industrial age and the modernization of Québec.

Thus, whilst Tremblay's work exposes the socioeconomic impoverishment and enslavement of the Francophone population, its ultimate objective appears to be less the overturn of capitalism that Fo's work targets, but the opportunity for the colonised Québécois to have access to the privileges enjoyed by the

²⁵⁰ Revivals in the early seventies included productions by the Théâtre du Rideau Vert in Montreal in August 1969 and in Quebec City in May 1971; by the Compagnie des Deux-Chaises in November 1973, and by the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde in 1974. (Nardocchio, 1986:128).

Anglophone colonisers. In Germaine Lauzon, for example, Tremblay presents us with a character whose attitude is typically *petit-bourgeois* in that the only values that count are improving one's material condition. According to this scheme of things, she scorns her daughter's boyfriend whom she criticises on the grounds that he is poorly paid and has no 'future', economically speaking:

Tu t'es pas encore aperçu que ton Robert c't'un bon-rien? Y gagne même pas soixante piasses par semaines! Pis tout c'qu'y peut te payer, c'est le théâtre Amherst, le jeudi soir! [...] si tu continues à le fréquenter, tu vas devenir une bon-rienne comme lui! T'as quand même pas envie de marier un colleur de semelles pis de rester strapeuse toute ta vie! (Tremblay, 1972:17-18).

Linda Lauzon's response simply serves to confirm this ideology which posits material improvement as the sole end, the sole salvation that the working-class are offered by society:

[...] Robert, là, y va avoir une augmentation ben vite, pis y va gagner pas mal plus cher. Y'est pas si nono que ça, vous savez! Le boss m'a même dit qu'y pourrait embarquer dans les grosses payes, ben vite, pis devenir p'tit boss! (Tremblay, 1972:18).

One might object that since Tremblay's aim (here and elsewhere in his work) is clearly to expose the misery and frustration caused by deprivation, he is implicitly attacking the society that is responsible for it. Yet, there are no visible signs that he wishes to challenge the value-system that underlies such a ruthless, mercenary society. Tremblay does not introduce, for example, any characters who contest this world-view and who offer a counter-view in its stead. We could not be further from the universe evoked in Fo's *Mistero buffo* where, it is worth

recalling, freedom is defined not only as not having to work for a *padrone* but in being able to live in a world where others also do not have to submit to a *padrone*.²⁵¹

Tremblay's plays may well depict and address the Québécois as a community, but the 'solution' they suggest is an individual, not a collective one. At the root of this contrast between Fo and Tremblay there lies, of the course, the fundamental difference between Marxism and neo-Nationalism, which are propelled, respectively, by the myths of solidarity and individualism, myths on which the European and the American identity are ideally founded.

Theatre Translation in Quebec

In an article on theatre adapters in Quebec, Adrien Gruslin (1974) comments on Tremblay's approach to translation:

[...] Michel Tremblay, avec René Dionne, est sûrement celui qui affirme se permettre le plus de libertés dans ses adaptations, tout en énonçant au préalable le principe du 'respect intégral'. Il est bien différent d'adapter *Mistero buffo* une pièce italienne du quinzième siècle [sic], à partir d'une traduction française, et de traduire Tennessee Williams de l'anglais au français. On pourrait laisser tout tel quel, dans ce dernier cas, alors qu'il suffit amplement de respecter l'esprit sans la lettre chez Dario Fo. C'est d'autant plus vrai que Fo véhicule des éléments anciens inconnus ou même inutiles aujourd'hui, quand ils ne sont pas incompréhensibles.

²⁵¹"dignità è non avere un padrone che ti sottomette" (Fo, 1977:40). Cf. section on dignity, *supra* Chapter Two.

De tels éléments doivent être complètement modifiés, transposés. Ce faisant, l'adaptateur n'aura pas trahi l'auteur, il aura simplement trouvé l'équivalent d'ici, indispensable à la bonne compréhension de la pièce. Plus un auteur est loin de nous (dans le temps ou autrement), plus les libertés possibles seront nombreuses à l'égard de ses textes.

This passage, published in *Le devoir* is reproduced here, since it reveals the kind of commonplaces regarding theatre translation that circulated in Quebec at the time of Tremblay's *Mistero buffo* (many of which have not yet been dislodged). Leaving aside the topos of "respecter l'esprit sans la lettre", several stunning prejudices and presuppositions emerge: where the source-text author (in this case, Fo) presents ideas that are alien to the target audience, ideas deemed to be "éléments anciens inconnus", these are to be rejected as variously "inutiles" or "incompréhensibles", and "doivent être complètement modifiés, transposés" (the italics are mine).

The consequences for translation are staggering: it is no longer the inter-cultural transaction which the most optimistic commentators have always held it to be, but a uni-directional operation which involves raising the ramparts against the unknown, hence *incomprehensible*, foreigner. The likelihood of new ideas being imported into the target society is thereby severely restricted.

Since Tremblay's name remained (and still today remains) inextricably linked with the use of *joual* on stage,²⁵² and with

²⁵² Much ink has been spilt discussing the virtues or otherwise of literary *joual*. Countless newspaper articles discussed Tremblay's 'historic' decision to write *joual* plays. For an

the emergence of a new dramaturgy which, as we saw, quickly established itself as a vehicle for Quebec's political independence, this cannot but have had a significant bearing on his work as a translator - and on the reception of his translations.

His attitude towards translating plays appears to reflect a practice which, as Annie Brisset (1990) has shown, was typical in Quebec throughout the 1970s and 1980s, namely the desire to 'convert' the foreign elements of a play into the currency of one's own country's discourse:

[La traduction] n'a plus pour objet de transmettre le discours de l'Étranger mais d'utiliser l'Étranger pour cautionner son propre discours, celui de l'émancipation nationale (Brisset, 1990:312).

analysis covering both his plays and his novels, see in particular Lise Gauvin, "Le théâtre de la langue" (1993). *Présence Francophone* (no. 32, 1988) contains a section devoted to "La langue dans l'oeuvre de Michel Tremblay" with articles by Paul Laurendeau, Stéphane Sarkany, Bruno Vercier, Chantal Hébert and Pascal Normand.

Contextualising Transformation

As we have seen, the sociocultural background against which Michel Tremblay's *Mistero buffo* was received as a dramatic work is, as well may be expected, substantially different from that of Dario Fo's play. There are, of course, some important similarities (notably, the existence of a strong Catholic Church in both societies, and the aftermath of 1968 which, in its broad aims, affected both societies). The temporal distance between Fo's *Mistero buffo* and Tremblay's translation of it is not all that great, especially if one takes into account the fact that, during the early years of the decade, Fo was still in the process of developing some of the pieces which were to appear in the 1973 edition on which Tremblay's translation appears to be based.²⁵³ The geographical distance is, self-evidently, far greater and this has important implications for the play's re-contextualisation in Quebec. Whilst European audiences of

²⁵³The French translation was published in 1973 in anticipation of Fo's performance of *Mistero buffo* in Paris in January-February 1974. British audiences had to wait until 1983 to see Fo perform his show at the Riverside Theatre and an English translation of *Mistero buffo* by Ed Emery was not published until 1988. There have been "at least two attempts to stage *Mistero buffo* in English", according to Tony Mitchell (1986:93). The first was in Scotland in 1983 and was presented by Malcolm Knight, using "rod and glove puppets to illustrate the gestural range of Fo's monologues in Knight's own translation"; and the second was by an English and American collective theatre group (the 1982 Theatre Company) and was performed at the Half Moon Theatre in 1984, using a "very accurate, literal translation" by Ed Emery.

Mistero buffo can draw on their shared mediaeval heritage (which, to a greater or lesser extent, is still visible in the architecture and artefacts of the period) in order to make sense of the historical dimension of *Mistero buffo*. North American audiences clearly do not have the same points of reference; for such audiences, the Middle Ages are most likely to be associated with the history of Europe as learnt from their school books, disconnected from their own history and landscape.

This may well explain why, in a translation which has clearly sought by all means possible to "bring the text to the audience" – as opposed to bringing the audience to the text – the numerous historical explanations offered by Fo have been removed. Indeed, all the introductions and *interventi* so characteristic of the structure of Fo's *Mistero buffo* have been excised, without exception. A drastic solution perhaps, but one wholly in keeping with the *québécoisation* which seems to be the motivating force behind Tremblay's implicit "projet de traduction".

Mistero buffo in Translation: Macrostructural Changes

For anyone familiar with Fo's *Mistero buffo*, the loss of such an integral part of the play as the prologues and digressions would have made the performance unrecognisable; as we saw in Chapter Two, they form the meta-discursive complement to the narrative material that is presented. Their removal results

in the loss of the monologue which Fo privileges as the instrument for conveying a large part of the play's ideological content and whose dramatic intensity he exploits to the utmost: the texts are, of course, introduced by a *giullare* who addresses the audience directly – with all the potential for improvisation that that implies – pointing out the relevance of various details and anticipating key themes.

The excision of the prologues, and of any interpolations by Fo (for example, on the theme of dignity which he links with present-day factory conditions) signifies, therefore, the loss of all the historical, cultural and political information that Fo brings to bear on the audience's interpretation of the texts. As we know, virtually all the overt Marxist references are to be found in these contextualising passages; clearly, this particular 'directed reading' was no longer regarded as pertinent to the target audience. A corollary of this is the loss of what appears to be an element of redundancy in *Mistero buffo*, namely the fact that Fo first *describes* a scene and then *performs* it. But, in reality, the two 'moments' represent two separate rhetorical functions, and two registers, a didactic, expository function and a narrative function, the first circumscribing the present, so to speak, and the second the past, although the two temporal spheres are in constant communication. This flexible device allows Fo to surprise his audience by leaping back and forth across what is, he suggests, the fluid boundary of history; the

differentiating double register is therefore dispensed with in Tremblay's version.

The symbolic value of the *giullare* whom Fo constructs as an idealised disseminator of popular culture is erased,²⁵⁴ although this figure still exists in one scene, "La naissance du jongleur". Yet, without the benefit of the various comments that Fo intermittently makes on the *giullare*'s role as social critic, it seems likely that he would automatically have been assimilated into the audience's mental picture of a mediaeval clown or buffoon whose sole aim was to divert. Thus, the overtly didactic vocation of *Mistero buffo* is largely sacrificed.

Consequently, there is no longer the story-within-a-story format, as there was in Fo's *Mistero buffo* where we were asked to imagine that a mediaeval *fabulatore* was standing before us; instead, we are presented with a series of *uncommented scenes*, as one would find in any conventional play. In other words, Tremblay has transformed the structure of Fo's *Mistero buffo* to such an extent that the scene has shifted: we are no longer watching a *giullarata*. And this radically changes the genre of the play, with the first-person narrator – an archetypal, age-

²⁵⁴ By presenting these pieces through the *giullari* Fo is clearly attempting to recover and reinstate a strong popular tradition that had flourished in Europe until the Renaissance (when the *giullare* were drafted into the service of the nobility and had become court jesters, abandoning what Fo claims was their traditional role as popular entertainers and satirists). Thus, in *Mistero buffo*, it is that blend of social satire and entertainment which was made for, and by, the people which Fo is trying to retrieve and re-evoke, that ability to create their own culture and to rebel, at least morally, against their tyrannical masters through ingenuity and trenchant wit.

old figure in the life of the people, present in all the public places of Europe – disappearing and the *mimesis* of traditional theatre which Fo had deliberately avoided being reinstated. The desire to introduce a critical distance between actor and audience through a form of 'alienation effect' loosely based on Brecht's techniques which lies at the heart of Fo's *Mistero buffo* is of no interest, apparently, to the nascent Québécois theatre intent on audience *identification*, on self-reflection – the very *immedesimazione* Fo laboured to avoid.

Not only is Fo's attempt to break down the *quarta parete* thereby eradicated, so is his construction of two stages *personae*: Fo the *giullare*, and Fo the "costruttore di testi per teatro" (Fo, 1975:xiii), who describes this activity of constructing (he would say 're-constructing') texts as if he were a theatrical philologist, all the while weaving a tale out of this fiction of *fabulazione*.

Furthermore, the order of the scenes has been changed,²⁵⁵ a detail which does not seem particularly significant, given that Fo himself included or excluded different texts according to the

²⁵⁵ The first two sections "Rosa fresca aulentissima" and "Lauda dei battuti" are omitted, thereby reducing the number of texts to eleven. Since the former consists of a long historical and cultural introduction it was obviously deemed irrelevant to the action of the play, whereas one can only speculate as to the non-inclusion of the latter – perhaps a mediaeval procession, and a religious one to boot, was regarded remote and devoid of significance for the contemporary audiences.

particular audience before whom he was performing²⁵⁶; however, the clear division in Dario Fo's work between the texts of the *giullarata* and the texts of the *Passion* marks a shift in register, from a comic, more overtly satirical, register to a mixture of dramatic and grotesque registers.

Some Preliminary Conclusions

Thus, before examining Michel Tremblay's *Mistero buffo* in further detail, we can already see how its macrostructure is drastically different from that of the play which we analysed in chapter Two: its narrative framework transformed, its contextualising prologues excised, its Brechtian alienation effect obliterated, its Marxist didacticism diminished, and its medieval setting limited to its description as a miracle play and some token archaising by means of decor and costume that lacks the serious historicising intent which propels Fo's *Mistero buffo*.

Yet, the dramatic pieces – performed as a sequence of uninterrupted scenes with no presentation, either to situate them (in their 'original' Italian context) or to re-situate them in their new Québécois context – retain the internal structure of

²⁵⁶The first version of *Mistero buffo* shows a different ordering of the texts, and without carrying out a detailed examination of this aspect on the basis of the texts-in-performance, it is clearly impossible to speculate as to the significance of the order, which surely had its *raison d'être* in Fo's experience of the impact of each dialogue individually, and as part of a carefully constructed series.

Dario Fo's monologues and dialogues (the 'story-line'), tending, on the whole, to follow Fo's texts fairly closely. This, of course, makes any deviations all the more significant.

The translation process has, inevitably, produced actual changes in the microstructure of these pieces, effecting shifts in emphasis, displacements and transformations which, taken together, alter the configuration of the source text, and have a bearing not only on the way the 'message' of the target text is encoded, but also on what information it contains. It is worth recalling – at the risk of stating the obvious – that the decoding of Tremblay's *Mistero buffo* took place under fundamentally different circumstances from those that attended reception in the source culture.

Nevertheless, as we shall shortly see, a large part of the remaining text is, superficially at any rate, unchanged – what a line-by-line, word-for-word²⁵⁷, linguistic comparison would simply reveal as 'non-changes', the target language 'equivalent', to use a convenient, if problematic term²⁵⁸, of source language

²⁵⁷Cf. Meschonnic (1973:162): "le langage n'est pas mots, il est phrases, contextes contraignants où se trament les connotations. Dans tout ce qui est texte, tel mot n'a pas un sens, c'est le texte qui est le sens du mot, tout le texte dans tous les sens. Dès qu'on raisonne sur un mot isolé, il y a idéalisme, implication d'un sens propre des mots [...], un universel abstrait qui préexiste au découpage des langues, pour une conscience transcendantale."

²⁵⁸The word, a standard term in the translation theory terminology, is perhaps best known in the expressions "semantic equivalence" and "dynamic equivalence" coined by Eugene Nida (1964). Given the recent emphasis on the eminently cultural aspect of translation, on the countless sociological, historical, ideological, and thus intersubjective factors that come to bear on

items. These 'non-changes', then, only become changes at the decoding stage when their pregnant sense is realised. That the reception of a text can in some way modify or assign meaning, what Jauss (1982:23) refers to as the audience's "specific emotional attitude" is amongst the assumptions on which is based the microtextual analysis that follows.

For we have now reached what Antoine Berman (1995:83) calls

l'étape concrète et décisive de la critique de traductions: la confrontation *fondée* (fondée en ce sens que nous nous sommes assuré une série de bases pour la faire) de l'original et de sa traduction.

the production of a text-in-translation, it seems of questionable value to continue to think in terms of Nida's dualist categories. The shift in translation studies over the last decade or so towards developing Jakobson's notion of 'difference in translation' has generated an entirely new, non-linguistically focused, perspective.

Chapter Four

Ite missa est: Anti-clericalism in Italy and Quebec

Ed el gridò: "Se' tu già costí ritto
se' tu già costí ritto, Bonifazio?
Di parecchi anni mi mentí lo scritto.
Se' tu sí tosto di quell'aver sazio
per lo qual non temesti tòrre a 'nganno
la bella donna, e poi di farne
strazio?"²⁵⁹

la gloire sonnait haut dans les mats du mystère et
l'archange en toi supplantait le corps transverbéré

des saisons du divin n'est resté sous ta langue qu'une
amère mémoire d'herbes séchées dans ton regard après
les pluies que les os blanchis des danses
foudroyées.²⁶⁰

At first sight the decision in 1973 to translate and perform
a play whose subject-matter is predominantly religious may seem a

²⁵⁹ "Inferno", Canto XIX, 52-57 (Dante:1987). The whole canto is devoted to an attack on the Church's deviation from its spiritual mission and its transformation into a temporal power whose institutions were highly politicised. Boniface VIII is one of the popes whom Dante singles out as being responsible for the decadence of the Church.

²⁶⁰ "Ite missa est" (Chamberland:1964).

surprising one in a post-*Révolution tranquille* Quebec which had only recently freed itself from the pervasive influence of the Church in virtually every sphere. Overnight, or so it seemed, the Québécois had risen up against the domination of the Church and had declared itself liberated, a newly secular society which had emerged from the *Grande noirceur* and now wished to take its place in the modern world; a whole generation brought up on television wanted to catch up with the rest of North America and to be a beneficiary of social and economic change. During the sixties "une aspiration globale vers la liberté"²⁶¹ was manifest in Quebec, a desire for freedom which embraced all areas of life and took on many forms. At the time, it was frequently observed that

Dans cette Amérique du Nord prospère et même pléthorique, nous formons, pris en groupe, une des communautés humaines les plus pauvres.²⁶²

²⁶¹ Lefebvre (1965:11).

²⁶² Lefebvre (1965:11).

And one of the main causes of this disparity in the living standards of the Francophones compared to their Anglophone neighbours was attributed to the domination of the Church which, it was argued, had long held back the Québécois, both economically²⁶³ and culturally.²⁶⁴

Now that they had a forum – *Parti pris* – in which to voice their opposition to the Church, writers and critics were not slow in blaming it for its "idéologie retardataire" (Maheu, 1967:175) which was responsible for Quebec's "immobilisme" (Lefebvre,

²⁶³ "Au moment où le pouvoir clérical se consolide, le Québec forme encore une société de type traditionnel, à majorité paysanne. Chaque communauté, chaque village y vit replié sur lui-même; le système seigneurial aboli, c'est la paroisse qui est le principal système d'encadrement de ce monde traditionnaliste et remarquablement stable. La religion y pénètre toute la vie [...]. La paroisse devient donc la structure sociale la plus importante, les divers organismes sociaux s'organisent en fonction d'elle. Cela est grave, parce que ce système prend toute sa force au moment même où commence l'urbanisation et l'industrialisation du Québec. A cause de la force d'inertie des institutions, et du conservatisme de l'Eglise, les clercs tenteront alors de s'opposer à ce mouvement de progrès; ils présenteront la grande ville comme un lieu de perdition, et nous inventeront une illusoire vocation agricole [...]" (emphasis added; Maheu, 1967:175).

²⁶⁴ Gérard Bessette's *Le Libraire* (1960) bears eloquent witness to the insularity and cultural obscurantism of pre-Révolution tranquille Quebec. Set in a small town which is still wholly subjugated to the dictates of the local clergy, the novel satirises the strict observance of the Vatican's Index. Against a backdrop of social stagnation and claustrophobia, Bessette describes the furore that ensues when the titular protagonist sells a copy of Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs* to a collégien, an ill-advised initiative which costs him his job.

1965:11).²⁶⁵ Indeed, a wave of resentment towards the Catholic religion and its imposition was in the process of being unleashed, and the strength of feeling revealed therein indicates that such views had, quite evidently, lain dormant for a long time. By the end of the decade, anti-clerical criticism was beginning to spread beyond the pages of *Parti pris* to reach the major daily newspapers with their considerably wider circulation; there it was finally expressed openly. The time was clearly ripe for an uncompromising rejection of institutionalised Catholicism by those who had never fully espoused its values²⁶⁶.

It is easy therefore to see why Michel Tremblay's *Mistero buffo* was greeted in some quarters as "un sain exercice de ventilation psychologique et intellectuelle",²⁶⁷ despite the outrage of those members of the audience who did not find the

²⁶⁵ The previous generation had, of course, set up the pro-federalist publication, *Cité libre*, to comment on and criticise the social ills they perceived in Quebec, but their attack on the Church remained relatively mild when compared with the vehemence of the so-called *Partipristes*.

²⁶⁶ Rioux (1974:36) observes that there had long been "une espèce de naturalisation de la religion catholique [...] chez les Québécois". He suggests that this inevitably led to a certain indifference towards Catholicism which, although it had always been strictly observed, was never strongly felt by the majority of the Québécois: "Nullement source de conflits entre les individus et les groupes, elle n'a pas eu non plus la fonction de ferment de la vie intérieure parce qu'elle ne fut ni contestée, ni confessée ostensiblement. La religion marquait les rythmes naturels de la vie, du jour et de la nuit, des semaines, des saisons, des années, de la vie et de la mort, et s'incorporait si bien à la vie qu'elle s'en différenciait à peine."

²⁶⁷ Dassylva:1973.

treatment of biblical figures to their taste.²⁶⁶ Others, on the contrary, might even have demurred initially at the prospect of sitting through a re-enactment of some mystery plays:

En plein temps des fêtes de Noël, j'assiste à une pièce où l'on me présente la vie du Christ. "Chriss, que j'me suis dit, j'viens de m'faire avoir..." Mais non, c'est pas pareil... C'est une vie du Christ qui n'est pas semblable à celle qu'on nous raconte à l'Eglise. C'est une pièce pour nous autres.²⁶⁷

What this particular spectator apparently found, to his relief, was "une pièce adaptée à ma culture québécoise." For, whilst religious values no longer provided an obvious theme²⁷⁰ for Québécois dramatists, an evening of satirical comedy at the expense of the Church was certainly in keeping with the increasingly confrontational attitudes towards the old establishment which, throughout the previous decade, had spread

²⁶⁶ The potentially 'provocative' nature of the subject-matter did indeed shock some spectators; one in particular wrote indignantly to the *La Presse*: "[...] je ne puis admettre que l'on attribue à la Vierge Marie des propos blasphématoires et des paroles vulgaires" (January 10, 1974).

²⁶⁷ Unsigned review in *Journal des Hautes Etudes Commerciales*, 17 January 1974 (emphasis added).

²⁷⁰ Despite the theme of social denunciation in Gratien Gélinas's highly successful *Tit-Coq* (1948), the Church is somehow 'defended' in the guise of the Padre, a figure who offers moral counsel to Tit-Coq throughout the play, and finally has the last word. This is not at all remarkable when one recalls that Gélinas was writing under Duplessis's "ultra-conservative political regime" (Nardocchio, 1976:35); whatever the case may be, *Tit-Coq* certainly demonstrates "the important role that religion and the Church played at the time in the daily lives of French Canadians for whom close family ties formed an integral part of their value system" (Nardocchio, 1976:34).

beyond the pages of *Parti pris* to include a wider constituency.²⁷¹

Countless reviewers commend *Mistero buffo* for being "actuelle et troublante".²⁷² High praise, indeed, for the Tremblay-Brassard team which had brought *Mistero buffo* to the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde; the objective that it had patently set itself – namely, the *québécoisation* of Dario Fo's play – appeared to have hit the mark. How far this success was the result of Tremblay's adaptation and how far it was determined by the intrinsic features of the source text is not easy to ascertain. However, a close comparison of the social discourse most prevalent in Italy and in Quebec, respectively, between 1960-70 will certainly shed light on the points of contact between the two cultures. One can then identify those elements of Fo's play that are most germane to the Québécois context and hence needed little or no adaptation, and those elements that were deemed unsuitable for the project of *québécoisation* and required "manipulation", to borrow Theo Hermans' expression.²⁷³

²⁷¹ Indeed, it seems to converge remarkably well with the Révolution tranquille's more socially and politically engaged theatre of writers such as Jacques Duchesne, André Laurendeau, Gilles Derome and Jacques Ferron; many plays of the period effectively chart "Québec's struggle during the sixties to free itself from traditional attitudes and lifestyles" (Nardocchio, 1976:58).

²⁷² *Le Devoir*, December 17, 1972.

²⁷³ "From the point of view of the target literature, all translation implies a degree of *manipulation of the source text for a certain purpose*" (added emphasis; Hermans, 1985:11).

The Role of the Catholic Church in Italy and Quebec

In transposing *Mistero buffo*, Michel Tremblay was able to exploit one fundamental, common feature which links Italy and Quebec – namely, their shared Catholic background. One hardly need recall that the history of both societies is indissoluble from that of the Church which, in each case, wielded great power. Until very recently (1993), in Italy the moral and political influence of religion ensured the uninterrupted presence of the Christian Democrats (DC) in Central Government for over forty-five years, whereas in Quebec the sway of the Church on public opinion and Provincial politics went virtually unchallenged until the death of Duplessis in 1959.

It is precisely this preponderance of the Church – the guarantor of political and social conservatism, as epitomised in the pejorative expression *tutta casa e chiesa* – that not only made it the target for Fo's anti-clerical satire, but also the perfect vehicle for his political diatribes:

[...] parlando della religione, come facevano i giullari, io intendevo parlare della politica, facendone spettacolo." (Allegri, 1990:140).

Religion and politics are clearly equated in Fo's conception of *Mistero buffo* where the two are often inseparable. The savage criticism of Boniface VIII, for instance, is undoubtedly meant to be taken at face value, and can be extended to the Papal system as a whole; but the analogy with a political *nomenklatura* is

equally patent. It would be futile to try to establish which hegemonic order represents the primary object of Fo's invective: his target, as always, is the "potenti", the high and mighty who, having assumed a position of authority, typically abuse this position.

If, then, politicians and popes become, in Fo's work, the symbols par excellence of *prepotenza* (the arrogance and ruthlessness characteristic of overbearing overlords who act with impunity)²⁷⁴, it is worth recalling that Authority in general is being challenged – the authority of those who write the textbooks, those who make the laws, those who censor information and choose what should and what should not be taught in the schools and in the universities. In other words, Fo is opposing those who, throughout history, have arrogated for themselves the right to decide for others, and who have imposed their ideology on the proletariat.

²⁷⁴Fo's moral outrage at the way in which those in power get away with their misdeeds scot-free is already summed up – albeit in a lighter vein – in *La colpa è sempre del diavolo* (Fo, 1966:319). The devil Brancalone (hidden inside the *Manichino*) asks ironically: "Po' a la fin, de chi xe la colpa? De quei che i fa i giochi de prestigio con la religion, la morale, la politica, che i mete in sema, come drento una bela torta coi lupini e le ughete, tanto il comercio che la guera, le benedision e le spade, le bandere, el milite ignoto e la sacocia de i baiocchi? No, tranquili, i sior de la torta coi lupini no i ghe c'entra: la colpa, xe sempre del diavolo: l'è lu che 'l fa tuto!" In other words, invoking the responsibility of diabolic, extraneous forces in order to justify evil actions is a handy pretext devised by the sior to 'exonerate' themselves.

I servi del padrone: Religion as a Form of Moral Suasion

The Church in Italy has frequently been accused of using its authority (and prestige) to prop up the ruling class. And conversely, the *padroni* have often exploited the hold of the Church over the poor in order to impose their will without having to resort to force. In "Nascita del giullare", Fo shows how the *potenti* can automatically count on the support of the clergy, their natural ally in oppressing the people. In this scene the priest is portrayed as the *padrone's* lackey who immediately takes his side in the land dispute; the very first thing he says to the peasant is: "L'è del padrun" (Fo, 1977:75). A supporter of the status quo, he is concerned to avoid 'trouble' and seeks to mollify the serf, initially by appealing to the established order of things (it is the masters who own land, not the peasants); then by urging him patronisingly to 'behave well' and not to be unruly (the church's paternalism is evident in the expression, usually reserved for fractious children, "fa' el bravo, mola, nun te stai a far de caprissi" (Fo, 1977:75). In the same condescending vein, he warns the serf to do as he is told and hand over his land to the local seigneur before the latter 'gets nasty', thereby allowing that his wrath is a sufficient justification to submit to him (the blunt law of brute force, rather than the rule of reason, determines what is to be the most sensible course of action here): "varda che quello l'è tremendo, l'è cativu" (Fo, 1977:75). And, finally, as the serf fails to

respond to the threat of violence, the priest invokes God in a typical gesture of moral blackmail: "In Deo Domini fa' el bun..." (Fo, 1977:75).

Fo thus depicts the clergy as being against the people, in collusion with the padrone. As he tells us in "Rosa fresca aulentissima":

Il fatto è che sempre, in tutti i tempi e in tutte le epoche, i vescovi stanno dalla parte dei padroni per mettere in croce i poveri cristi!" (Fo, 1977:19).

The pun on "Cristo" – alluded to in the expression "mettere in croce i poveri cristi" – serves to highlight what Fo clearly views as a highly paradoxical situation: namely, that the Church of Christ should oppress the very people whom Jesus wanted to protect and to provide for.

We find a similar criticism levelled against the Church in Quebec, which has often been accused of siding with the English conquerors:

[...] si elle n'en est pas directement l'auteur, l'Eglise, par ses déclarations de loyalisme et les condamnations publiques et officielles qu'elle prononça dans chaque cas des révoltés et insoumis, s'est ouvertement solidarisée avec la répression, même sanglante. (Maheu, 1967:174)

In Tremblay's version of "Nascita del giullare", the same incident with the priest is reproduced with some minor, though telling, modifications:

Le lendemain, le curé est monté me parler: "Sois raisonnable, avec le patron, mon garçon, fais pas d'histoires! Y'est méchant rare quand y se fâche, t'sais... Lâche ta terre... Donne s'y... Sois raisonnable, mon fils..." "J'reste chez nous!" que j'y ai répond [...] (Tremblay, 1973:15)

Compare Fo's text (the omissions are indicated in italics):

El dí appresso a l'è vegnù el prevete a dumandar.
 - *L'è del padrun... fa' el bravo, mola, nun te stai a far de capriSSI, varda che quello l'è tremendo, l'è cativu, mola sta tera! In Deo Domini fa' el bun...*
 - No! no! - g'ho di', - no voi [...] (Fo, 1977:75)

The most striking difference between these two passages is the omission in Tremblay's translation of the priest's assertion that the land belongs to the *padrone*; instead, the *curé* takes it for granted that the land belongs to the serf. Whereas in Fo's text, the priest is shown to support a 'pre-ordained', rigid social hierarchy based on class, the *curé* in Tremblay's text is less concerned with defending a particular caste against the clamour of the masses to change the structure of society than with ensuring that the serf does not rebel against the foreign invader;²⁷⁵ indeed, he tacitly acknowledges that the colonised Québécois is in the right but submits to the authority of the coloniser whose supremacy he unquestioningly accepts, turning a blind eye to its wrongdoings. Paul Chamberland (1964:14), amongst others, comments on this conspiracy of silence:

ce peuple meurt aux lampadaires du silence
 cierge aux doigts fins de l'officiant castrat.

²⁷⁵ This reflects the way the Church in Quebec not only discouraged rebellion, but took vigorous measures to repress it. Lefebvre (1965:14) stresses the historicity of the clergy's pro-colonial position: "Le Trône colonial et protestant, et l'Autel catholique se soutinrent mutuellement; mariage de raison qui s'avéra durable. Les évêques excommunièrent les partisans de l'envahisseur américain; ils excommunièrent de nouveau les Patriotes rebelles de 1837. Ils pesèrent de toute leur puissance pour faire approuver la Confédération."

The matrix underlying the fable of class oppression which Fo's *Mistero buffo* narrates has thus been displaced²⁷⁶ and converted into a matrix which shapes a tale of ethnic oppression. This significant semantic shift is effected by changing the neutral, seemingly impartial, demonstrative article of the source text, "sta", to the more partisan, possessive article "ta". In the Québécois context, "ta terre" could not fail to produce a strong resonance with nationalist aspirations as expressed in the social discourse; because of their "pertinence doxologique" (Brisset, 1990: 222) terms such as *terre*²⁷⁷ are clearly particularly

²⁷⁶ Superficially, the change may seem negligible, yet structurally it represents a major modification: put in Chomskyian terms, both "sta tera" and "ta terre" share the same "surface structure", but each expression has a different "deep structure". This explains why, as part of a pattern that is built up throughout the play, its textual repercussions will be far-reaching, as we shall later see.

²⁷⁷ Cf. the title *Terre Québec* that Paul Chamberland gave to his collection of poems (published in 1964) which carries the dedication, "au pays". Throughout, his use of the word *terre*, together with *pays*, *espace*, *peuple*, appears in conjunction with many topographical details, which together form an obvious *isotopie*. In Chamberland's poems the Québécois are so intimately associated with their land that the two often become interchangeable, an effect that is sometimes achieved through personification. Thus, he refers to "notre terre Québec" with "ses mille blessures" (39), to the "coeur noir de ma terre" (40) which he suggests is in need of a transfusion of vigour – "j'ai tout mon sang pour / mon pays" – (41), for he told us earlier that "la terre énorme halète et taille dans sa chair / l'enclume et le marteau" (33). Similarly, the land itself appears to be 'dispossessed', a land without a homeland: "l'espace apatrié" (12). In order to repossess it, "enfin radiant l'espace de chemins guerriers", the poet promises: "NOUS rançonnerons aux cents nuits / la TERRE QUÉBEC" (19). The last stanza of "Raison de vivre ou de mourir" (36-37) synthesises the key terms which, as shown above, serve to reinforce the notion of 'territory':

en nos corps criblés de sève
 en notre sang terre assaillie d'aurore
 nous fondrons l'espace au feu d'un pays.

sensitive ones and hence particularly prone to manipulation (conscious or otherwise) by a Québécois writer.²⁷⁸

Here, the *curé* does not seek to persuade the serf that the land belongs to the invader; it would, presumably, have been pointless to even attempt to do so, since the (English) conqueror appropriates by *expropriating* – this is something so self-evident it does not bear talking about. It is simply a given in Québécois discourse. And thus, the *curé* is seen to side with the seigneur, not because he believes he has a legitimate claim to the serf's land, but because he is pusillanimous and prefers to side with the powerful.²⁷⁹ He twice appeals to the serf to be "raisonnable", intimating thereby that he cannot hope to come out winning against such unequal forces. The term "raisonnable", with its implications of self-control and endurance, calls to mind Hubert Aquin's rejection of rationality, a notion he regards as negative, even dangerous, as it creates an impediment to the 'real' revolution.²⁸⁰ It is the very antithesis of the

²⁷⁸ As Annie Brisset (1990:222) has pointed out: "Par définition, la 'territorialité' constitue un point nodal du discours nationaliste, un *noeud doxologique*. Toute référence au territoire, présente dans le texte-source, est donc susceptible de mobiliser l'attention du traducteur québécois".

²⁷⁹ Declaring that the Church "dut faire preuve d'une insistance et d'une absence de pudeur surprenantes dans ses déclarations de loyalisme pour que le conquérant en vienne à la considérer comme un intermédiaire privilégié entre lui et le peuple", Maheu (173) asks accusingly: "[...] des recherches sérieuses ne dévoileraient-elles pas que son rôle de *collaborateur*, l'Eglise n'a pas été forcée malgré elle de l'assumer, mais qu'elle l'a au contraire consciemment voulu et recherché?"

²⁸⁰ This is a recurrent theme in *Trou de mémoire* (1968).

state of mind required to break out of the long slumber of submission in which the Québécois - "[leurs] corps ensommeillés de taupes", to borrow Chamberland's image (1964:39) - have cowered for so long. For it is impetuosity and irrationality alone that will succeed in bringing about the necessary renewal:

naître naître à nos corps folle flambée d'aurore sur les
montagnes bousculées (Chamberland, 1964:13,

Thus, the curé implicitly warns against rebellion, counselling 'reason' and, consequently, acquiescence as the most sensible response to the seigneur's violation of the serf's rights. Given the context, Tremblay's choice of the term "raisonable" can be seen as a polyphonic, Bakhtinian rendering of pro-Federalist (establishment) discourse and an ironic comment on the reasonableness of the (marginalised) partisans of Separation.

The theme of the Church's paternalism, already hinted at in Fo, becomes particularly pertinent in the Québécois context where the curé would take it upon himself to 'meddle' in the affairs of his parishioners.²⁸¹ It therefore seems natural that this familiar feature should be emphasised somewhat in the target text. The priest's invocation of God is omitted and, instead, is replaced by the clerical "mon fils" which, taken together with Tremblay's translation of "nun te stai a far de caprissi" by "mon garçon", only a couple of lines earlier, represents an

²⁸¹ Maheu (1967:175-76) comments on this form of 'social control' carried out by the clergy.

explicitation of the traditional relationship between the clergy and the faithful.

Where Fo's serf ends the conversation with the priest by reiterating his refusal to be browbeaten ("No! no! [...] no voi"), Tremblay's peasant tells the curé, "j'reste chez nous", thereby resolutely including himself in the Québécois collectivity and reasserting his birthright, so to speak. Apart from the symbolism of the expression "chez nous", given its inevitable association with the pro-Independence rallying cry "Maîtres chez nous", it also serves as an "actualisateur" (Brisset, 1990:228), anchoring the target text in a world that is familiar to the target audience, and hence in its own 'reassuring' universe of discourse.

Clerical Interference in Politics

In addition to what is generally acknowledged as the Church's tacit support for the ruling classes in Italy and Quebec, there were occasions when it championed them more openly. Two examples taken from the recent past offer interesting parallels between the Italian and the Québécois situation and should suffice to illustrate the extent of the Church's interference in politics. Pius XII's proclamation, in 1949, that all members of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) would be excommunicated²² was followed up for several decades by a highly effective policy of grass roots activism on the part of the clergy: Catholics in Italy were entreated by the priests to respect the so-called "unità del voto cattolico" by voting for

²² Italian literature offers many illustrations of the Church's traditionally anti-Communist stance which was first sanctioned by the 1929 Lateran Treaty, and rose to a fierce pitch in the aftermath of the Second World War. In Carlo Cassola's classic novel, *La ragazza di Bube* (1960), for example, the tragic incident around which the entire story revolves is triggered off by the priest's refusal to allow some ex-Partisans into church: "[...] Però quella del prete era una scusa, non ci voleva far entrare perché eravamo partigiani. E difatti Umberto gliel'ha detto, quando venivano i fascisti col gagliardetto li facevate entrare, allora fate entrare anche noi col fazzoletto rosso. Ma lui, niente, non ne ha voluto sapere. E il maresciallo, che aveva visto dalla finestra, perché la caserma è proprio di fronte alla chiesa, è sceso giù a dargli manforte." (Cassola, 1969:47). The episode reflects the unresolved enmity between the clergy (accused of siding with the Fascists during the war) and the Communists; this distrust resulted in sharp divisions within Italian society which were to persist well into the 1960s (cf. Chapter One). Thus, although the threat of excommunication was officially lifted by Pope John XXIII, the social stigma of Communism remained long afterwards.

the Christian Democrats.²³³ This corresponds closely to the way in which, during the Duplessis years, Québécois priests used their position to influence their congregations politically, proclaiming from the pulpit: "Le ciel est bleu, l'enfer est rouge". The crusade against Communism which many Western governments launched in the wake of the Second World War had thus found a zealous ally in the Roman Catholic Church.²³⁴

From the campaign to discredit Communism (together with its watered down, but nonetheless suspect, Socialist variant) it was presumably a short step in Quebec, at least, to persuade the electorate that "les libéraux sont des anticléricaux". Jean-Marie Nadeau (1966:94) reports that, under Duplessis, people were told that if they voted for the Liberals as opposed the *Union nationale*, "vous votez contre la religion catholique". Here, as in Italy, the Church lent its moral prestige to the most conservative political forces who, in turn, maintained their

²³³ "In July 1949, after the Holy Office had excommunicated all those who espoused Communist, materialist or anti-Christian doctrines, the civic committees launched their 'Religious Crusade for the Great Return of Communists to the Fold'. This coincided with the Holy Year of 1950, which witnessed unparalleled Catholic celebrations throughout Italy" (Ginsborg, 1990:169).

²³⁴ In summing up the views of a section of the clergy in 1966 as reflected in journals such as *L'Action Nationale*, *Relations* and *Aujourd'hui Québec*, Racine (1966:22-23) includes: "opposition à l'intervention de l'Etat dans le domaine de l'éducation, anti-communisme délirant, attachement à la Confédération sous sa forme actuelle ou selon la formule des Etats-associés, etc" (emphasis added).

power, "circondandolo di un alone di dignità divina" (Ponzi, 1976:44).²⁸⁵

In Italy, the Church was also able to influence politics by intervening in a number of crucial areas of people's lives which were wholly neglected by the majority-Christian Democrat government:

Over many decades the church had built up an impressive network of hospitals, nursing homes and old people's homes, staffed by various religious orders. In the absence of any state provision for old people, families turned with gratitude to Catholic welfare institutions. Sometimes these institutions extracted a political price for their charity [i.e. persuading people to vote for the DC in return] (Ginsborg, 1990:170).

This kind of intervention is analogous with the social role played by the Church in Quebec, although its sphere of influence extended even more widely, including as it did education, health and administration:

Au moment où le pouvoir clérical se consolide, le Québec forme une société encore traditionnelle, à majorité paysanne. Chaque communauté, chaque village y vit replié sur lui-même; le système seigneurial aboli, c'est la paroisse qui est le principal système d'encadrement de ce monde traditionaliste et remarquablement stable. La religion y pénètre toute la vie, elle n'est pas une théorie, mais une tradition; la distinction entre monde profane et monde sacré ne s'y fait pas; c'est un monde unitaire, globaliste. Le pouvoir du prêtre y est donc comme naturellement autant matériel que spirituel [...]. La paroisse devient donc la structure sociale la plus importante, les divers organismes sociaux s'organisent en fonction d'elle (Maheu, 1967:175).

²⁸⁵ Nadeau (1966:140) notes in his journal: "Séance hebdomadaire de propagande et de dénigrement par Duplessis, tous les vendredis (jour de jeûne). Il faut voter pour Duplessis parce qu'il va à la messe tous les matins (tartuferie politique)".

And once the process of urbanisation began at the turn of the century the Church was able to redeploy its forces, exploiting the close ties it had forged with the population whose needs it had an intimate understanding of. As Pierre Maheu (1967:176) points out:

[L'Eglise] était à peu près seule, une fois l'opposition laïque éliminée, à pouvoir définir les problèmes sociaux que devait poser l'urbanisation, et [...] elle leur inventa des solutions à sa convenance. Le clergé contrôlait déjà l'éducation et l'hospitalisation; au moment où la classe ouvrière allait se donner une organisation propre, il créa les "Syndicats Catholiques", et y imposa un paternalisme dont notre syndicalisme ne s'est pas encore tout à fait remis.

This brief aperçu on the social role of the Church in Quebec and in Italy respectively shows the way each has been able to exploit the "vide politique" (Maheu, 1963:5) left by governmental institutions, but at the same time has itself been used by politicians to further their power. Despite many similarities, one fundamental difference stands out: the Québécois clergy exerted a considerably more *homogeneous* influence over the population than did the Italian clergy since its power had gone virtually unopposed for over a century, leaving little in the way of an alternative society.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁶ Maheu (1967:176) enumerates many other areas which lay within the Church's control: "L'Eglise arriva, au début au moins, à établir son pouvoir sur les coopératives agricoles. Elle a pris en mains l'administration de presque tout le bien-être social. A mesure que des besoins naturels nouveaux se sont faits sentir, elle a créé des maisons d'éditions, revues, fondé ses propres imprimeries, s'est assuré le monopole de la production des manuels

*L'essentiel, c'est le ciel*²⁸⁷

As we have seen, in Italy and in Quebec, the Church sometimes interfered directly in politics, but more often than not, its power was mediated by its social organisations. However, yet another – more insidious and hence more effective – form of control existed: the Church, as Paolo Camporesi (1991:74) reminds us, "inculcava nei subalterni la morale della rassegnazione e della pazienza", using its moral authority to preach submission. To this end it brought to bear the well-worn but convenient concept of spiritual salvation so as to exert pressure. In the *intervento* which follows "La nascita del villano", Fo (1977:95) denounces the way in which the idea of the soul has, throughout history, been exploited by clergy and ruling class alike who use it as a form of moral blackmail – "l'anima costituisce il pretesto per il più grosso ricatto che si possa fare" – to compel the poor to endure their lowly condition without rebelling. For they are enjoined to resign themselves to a life of material hardship; indeed, as good Christians they

scolaires, etc."

²⁸⁷The expression, commonly found in Québécois social discourse, crops up with ironic insistence in a 1966 article by Pierre Maheu to denounce an attitude of resignation inculcated by the Church. And Paul Desbiens (1960:27) before him had used the phrase to mock the inadequacies of an educational system which Duplessis had always brandished as "le meilleur au monde" but which, according to Desbiens, had done little to help the Québécois to rise above their condition of "race servile".

should gladly embrace the doctrine of poverty.²⁸⁸ Fo (1977:95) satirises the hypocritical use to which this doctrine has traditionally been put, either by "il padrone, o il padrone attraverso il prete" in order to manipulate the people into believing it is preferable to be poor rather than to be rich: "tu sei l'ultimo degli uomini e avrai il regno dei cieli".²⁸⁹ This subject appears frequently in the anti-clerical polemics of Marxist thinkers who denounce what they see as one of the greatest shams to which the proletariat has been subjected. And it was equally common in post-Révolution tranquille diatribes against the Church:

[...] la misère fut arrosée d'eau bénite. [...] "Bienheureux les pauvres, car le Royaume de Dieu leur appartient." La religion de l'abrutissement, du cercle vicieux, du sacrifice permanent et de la résignation au malheur [...] (Vallières, 1968:43).

In "La nascita del villano" proper, however, Fo (1977:95) traces this duplicity back to its origin, as it were: the angel

²⁸⁸ Cf. for example, the oft-cited "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mark, 10:25) and "But many that are first shall be last; and the last first" (Mark, 10:31).

²⁸⁹ This, Fo tells us, is the ultimate "fregatura" or deception, since it allows the evangelical message to be ruthlessly exploited by the padroni who, conveniently pursuing it to its 'logical' conclusion, invert it entirely. Fo (1977:96) parodies the padrone by means of heavy irony: "Per forza devo farmelo qui, un piccolo paradiso. Ed è per questo che mi do da fare a tenerti sotto, a schiacciarti, a derubarti: ti porto via anche l'anima, certo! Io voglio il mio piccolo paradiso, piccolo ma tutto per me, subito, per il tempo che sto al mondo. Beato te che ce l'avrai tutto quanto, il paradiso! Dopo, è vero, ma per l'eternità!..." (added emphasis). And now, to boot, the padroni have a moral (religious) justification for their unscrupulous behaviour.

sent by God to instruct the master as to how to treat the "villano", says he should allow him to go to mass where he will be able to pray "per pasatemp", thereby encouraging the serf to nurture the belief that his soul will be saved. However, the angel reassures the master:

tant no gh'n'avrà salvamént
che l'anema no ghe l'ha
e ol Deo nol pò scultà.

Fo's (1977:95) angel simply instructs the master: "digh' che vaga a mesa", but Tremblay (1973:67) has his angel say: "Dites-y d'aller à 'messe à votre place" (emphasis added). This is the kind of addition which would pass unnoticed in performance, but which stands out when comparing the target text with the source text. Why, one wonders, did Tremblay feel the need to make this apparently minor addition? If one bears in mind that the "maîtres" whom the angel is addressing represent a distinct class which was regarded as dominating Québécois society – the financial and economic masters of the province – and that that class was inevitably associated with the Anglophones in the social discourse of the time, then the advice that the "maître" send the *crotté* to church in his stead takes on a specific meaning. The Anglophones are by definition protestants, and do not therefore go to mass; they are somehow exonerated from doing so, as their privileges are guaranteed by God Himself. Here, Tremblay mischievously shows God's angel letting them off the hook, so to speak; their wealth and power are apparently sufficient to ensure their salvation, whilst Quebec's

Francophones who were, traditionally, observant Catholics, can be counted on as regular Church-goers.

It should be borne in mind that in Quebec the Francophone's identity²⁹⁰ has historically been inseparable from his or her Catholic faith – the two go hand in hand – and the desire to preserve both religion and language (long regarded as the cohesive elements necessary for the struggle towards self-determination) has always been invoked by the Church as a reason for the Québécois to safeguard their Catholicism, seen as providing a powerful ideological bulwark against the threat of cultural assimilation. The Québécois may be a colonised people, held in subjection and dominated economically by les Autres, the English Powers-that-be, but their true independence stems from their religious and cultural (essentially, linguistic) difference – a difference which the clergy have continually represented as making them in a certain sense 'special', that is spiritually superior. Despite their poverty, they are able to aspire to a 'higher' purpose, their "mission héroïque" (Maheu, 1966:38):

C'est ainsi que notre idéologie traditionnelle nous prédisait un grand destin: nous étions appelés à convertir l'Amérique protestante. Petit peuple vaincu en apparence, nous étions en réalité plus grand que les autres par la vertu, et la Providence nous destinait à ses grands desseins évangélisateurs. (Maheu, 1966:46)

²⁹⁰ "Le processus de naturalisation de la religion s'accroît après la conquête anglaise. Les Anglais étant généralement protestants, la religion catholique apparaît de plus en plus au Québécois comme un élément culturel qui lui appartient en propre et le différencie du colonisateur étranger. Désormais catholique aura tendance à être couplé à français; on dira catholique et français pour marquer la différence avec l'autre (Rioux, 1974:36-38).

Thus, by inserting "à votre place", Tremblay is also commenting on the fact that religion has tended to have a greater influence on the poor – the crotté and his kind – who are in greater need of consolation and are thus more easily manipulated.

Whereas in the Italian the stratagem of encouraging the "villano" to believe that his soul will be saved is only hinted at, in the target text, it is explicitated. Tremblay (1973:67) adds:

Pour qu'y s'imagine que ça donne quequ' chose, dites-y qu'y'a une âme, pis que ça va y' aider à monter au ciel, si y prie le bon Dieu ben fort.

The insistence on duty and obedience as a means of achieving spiritual salvation was virtually a dogma in pre-Révolution tranquille Quebec; it was repeated from generation to generation. In 1849, the Bishop of Montreal wrote to his diocesans: "Soyez fidèles à Dieu et respectez toutes les autorités légitimement constituées. Telle est la volonté du Seigneur." He went on to say:

Croyez que vous pouvez très certainement conquérir les vraies libertés, celles qui rendent les peuples vraiment heureux, beaucoup mieux par une conduite morale et par une sage soumission aux lois, que par des violences qui nous exposeraient à ces mêmes malheurs que vous avez eu à déplorer et dont vous ne perdez jamais le triste souvenir.²⁹¹

Church teachings concerning submissiveness therefore served a dual purpose: namely, to maintain a faithful flock and to

²⁹¹ Quoted in Dumont, 1993:221 (added emphasis).

guarantee docile, compliant subjects for the foreign ruler. This ideology of dog-like devotion continued more or less uninterrupted until the *Révolution tranquille*. As the editorial board of *Parti pris* made clear in its "Présentation" (1963:3) of the first issue:

"L'élite" intellectuelle clérico-bourgeoise soutient de l'intérieur le pouvoir de ceux qui nous colonisent et nous exploitent en entretenant les mythes humanistes ou religieux qui perpétuent et justifient notre soumission.

The scene ends with a further addition by Tremblay (1973:67) which appears to reinforce the notion of collusion (also expressed, as we have, elsewhere) between the clerical class and the ruling class which was so widespread in the 1960s-70s. God is shown to be on the side of the powerful, the rich (Fo's inversion of the evangelical exhortation to adopt a life of poverty³² is clearly designed to draw attention to the way Jesus's message has been perverted by the Church):

Non, non, ayez pas peur, le ciel, c'est pour vous
autres, les maîtres, pas pour lui, le crotté!

The choice of the term "maîtres" which Tremblay has inserted here is by no means casual: even a superficial knowledge of the Québécois social discourse of the 1960s would reveal that this term recurs constantly in the writings of, amongst others, the *partipristes* – not surprising, really, since the desire to be

³² Cf. The Bible (1611): "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (St. Matthew, 5:3); and "Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God" (St. Luke, 6:20).

"Maîtres chez nous" lies at the heart of the process of emancipation initiated by the *Révolution tranquille*. The Québécois are not 'Masters in their own house'; and it is on these grounds that they aspire to independence. In Quebec the word *maîtres* was clearly as loaded as was the word *padroni* in Italy during the same period, although in each case the terms of reference are altogether different. In the Québécois context *maîtres* implies the English masters (synonymous with colonisers, rulers) whereas in the Italian context *padroni*, as mentioned in Chapter Two, implies the capitalist masters (synonymous with factory owners, captains of industry); *maîtres* is associated with the expression "Maîtres chez nous", the slogan employed by the Liberals during the 1962 elections (where they triumphed) and later incorporated into the Separatists' terminology; and "padroni" evokes the vocabulary of the trade unionists in the 1960s and 1970s and belongs to the language of the Italian left, particularly the PCI, at that time.

As has emerged from the preceding analyses, Tremblay's version highlights the conspiracy between the Church and the ruling classes which is a major theme of Fo's *Mistero buffo*. By repeating the accusation, and identifying the rulers as the English masters, Tremblay moves Fo's emphasis away from the class struggle to the 'colonial' struggle. Countless analyses in *Parti pris* regard the Church in Quebec as having contributed, historically, to keeping the English imperial forces in power. Chamberland (1964:21-22), for example, is in no doubt as to the

responsibility of the Church which he accuses in "Naissance du rebelle":

elles l'ont pris à ses six ans l'enfant cristal docile aux
vents chanteurs page illustrée des jeux d'étoiles
arraché aux chemins infinis de la sève à la turbulence
des tiges soeurs de son corps transparent
[...] arraché au scalpel du défi
arraché aux lanières du feu
arraché aux forêts culbutées sous le pas des guerriers [...]

God Against the People

In "La nascita del villano" Fo offers us the cruel spectacle of 'divinely sanctioned' oppression. This scene provides an exemplum of the cynical exploitation of the people, supposedly legitimised by a God who is portrayed by the Church as championing the dominant hegemony. That Fo regards the clergy as being in league with the ruling classes can be seen from the role he assigns to the figure of the angel throughout *Mistero buffo*; here, as in "Le nozze di Cana", the angel is the official representative of the establishment and pronounces a speech which is intended to have all the force of a legal document²⁹³ whose contents the elites wish to promulgate. In a fierce parody of the traditional agrarian calendar,²⁹⁴ he sets out, month by month, the precise contractual terms under which the villeyne is to be employed, or rather 'utilised'. Once again, Fo exposes the appropriation of popular culture by those in power to better

²⁹³ "Mo est stabilicto et scripto" (Fo, 1977:87). Cf. *supra*, Chapter Two, "In the Hands of the Lawmakers".

²⁹⁴ Cf. Paolo Camporesi (1991:78) "Il calendario popolare, o per meglio dire contadino, non ignaro di una sua semplice e rozza astronomia ma sprovvisto di nozioni matematiche, era sostanzialmente un calendario di programmazione dei lavori agricoli articolato sulle stagioni, i movimenti del sole e della luna, le scadenze solstiziali, l'aprirsi e il chiudersi dei cicli; la Chiesa invece, pur costretta a tener conto del computo agrario, aveva elaborato un *insidioso calendario-trappola*, matematico da una parte e agiografico dall'altra, incomprensibile nella sua duplice, artificiosa astrazione ai contadini." (The italics are mine.)

manipulate the poor and the ignorant. For, as Paolo Camposesi (1991:79) has pointed out:

Il possesso del calendario diventò un formidabile strumento d'organizzazione sociale e di condizionamento politico che sanzionava in modo impalpabile ma solido l'egemonia sociale, oltre che la supremazia religiosa, della Chiesa.

In his edict the angel gives the master *carte blanche* to deal harshly with his underlings. This, Fo suggests, is how both Church and government – the two are simply different sides of the same coin – have contrived to ensure that their ordinances carry the divine seal of approval, so to speak.²⁹⁵

This is, of course, akin to the classic argument, whereby absolute rulers justify their despotism, claiming the divine right of kings who profess to have been installed by God Himself. The analogy with Quebec before the *Révolution tranquille* – which has been described as a "théocratie"²⁹⁶ – is striking. As Maheu (1966:52) writes:

Le système se donnait comme un monolithisme inébranlable. Le Québec semblait devoir demeurer éternellement une sorte de ghetto théocentrique.

The extent to which the Catholic Church did indeed call the tune in Quebec, and the extent to which it was subservient to the

²⁹⁵ In an interview, published in 1973, Fo commented that "Mistero buffo vuole essere il discorso sull'uso che il popolo ha fatto della religione e dello sdoppiamento dell'uso della religione che ha fatto il potere" (Magrì, 1973:76).

²⁹⁶ "Dans la mesure même où les Canadiens français ont été dominés, amoindris, déshumanisés, la société canadienne française a été une théocratie" (Maheu, 1966:35).

British rulers is, naturally, debatable. In the view of many commentators, the Church exploited its position as intermediary between the people and their foreign overlords in order to strengthen the role of the clergy. In a letter dated July 1848, the Bishop of Quebec wrote to the Governor, Elgin:

Votre Excellence peut compter sur la loyauté du peuple tant qu'il s'occupera de fêtes religieuses et qu'il s'acquittera de ses devoirs envers Dieu. Or, pour cela, il faut nécessairement qu'il y ait un bon nombre de prêtres tout occupés de l'exercice de leur ministère. Je n'insisterai pas davantage là-dessus car je sais que Votre Excellence comprend parfaitement que la religion est le lien le plus fort qui attache un peuple à son gouvernement (emphasis added).²⁹⁷

Marcel Rioux (1974:41-42), for his part, notes that whilst the Church's cooperation with the colonial powers benefited the Catholic religion, the real masters of the Province were the British:

Depuis la Conquête, l'Anglais a vite reconnu que le clergé était la seule force stable sur laquelle il pouvait compter pour l'aider à gouverner la colonie. Le clergé n'a pas été long à spéculer sur cette renaissance et à essayer d'en tirer tous les avantages possibles pour la religion catholique et le peuple qui la pratiquait. [...] C'est plutôt dans le domaine institutionnel que le clergé, le haut clergé en particulier, a joué, au Québec, le rôle d'une classe dominante dont les valeurs et l'idéologie servaient non seulement de ciment à la formation sociale québécoise mais masquait le fait de la domination socio-économique des anglophones. C'est ainsi que la puissance coloniale anglaise, en s'appuyant sur le clergé pour dominer pacifiquement le Québec, l'a obligé à légitimer sa domination et à prêcher aux francophones la soumission et la résignation. [...] si les Québécois ne sont pas libres ni riches, c'est que la liberté est surtout d'ordre spirituel et que la vraie

²⁹⁷ Quoted in Dumont, 1993:221.

richesse est, plus que matérielle, surtout morale et religieuse. La récompense des justes n'est pas de ce monde; c'est après la mort que les récompenses seront distribuées (emphasis added).

Fernand Dumont (1993:220), however, offers a different view of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the British Conqueror in Quebec, one that is more in line with the analysis offered by *Parti pris*. Commenting on the Québécois clergy around the mid-1800s, he opines that it schemed to secure greater power for itself:

Protestant de son loyalisme envers le gouvernement britannique qui la tenait en lisières, défendant sa survivance en rusant avec l'autre pouvoir, l'Eglise en profitait pour s'émanciper et accroître sa propre organisation.

The clergy's connivance with the English rulers — "le concordat tacite", as Pierre Lefebvre (1965:14) puts it — is a theme which the *Partipristes* returned to almost obsessively, and one which also found its way onto the stage in the late 1960s. The symbolism may be heavy-handed but the message is unequivocal: "[...] the Queen in Gurik's *Hamlet, Prince de Québec* (1968) is the Catholic Church incestuously bedded with King Claudius or English Canada."²⁹⁸

It is not, therefore, surprising to find the Church's treachery under attack in Tremblay's *Mistero buffo*. When Christ

²⁹⁸ Benson, 1986:x.

accuses Bonifacio of killing monks, he denies the charge, hypocritically replying:

Co hait dito? che mi ho amazait i fraite? [...] ai fraite? ma no, che ghe vojo ben, mi g'ho sempre vorsudo ben ai fraiti [sic]. (Fo, 1977:119).

In his translation, however, Tremblay (1973:101) changes the definite article to a possessive article, thus:

Que c'est que tu dis là? Que j'ai tué mes frères? [...] J'ai pas maltraité mes frères [...] J'ai toujours aimé mes frères...

Since this alteration is in no way dictated by the syntax of the target language, it is worth reflecting on a change that is anything but innocuous. Whilst the noun "frères" is polysemous (unlike the Italian "frati"), with the change in deictic to "mes", the meaning of "brothers" (as opposed to "monks") is actualised here. Thus, Boniface's affirmation that he loves *his brothers* represents a radical semantic shift, and one that can be easily understood in the Québécois context where, as we have seen, the doxa of the period repeatedly asserted the Church's historic responsibility in collaborating with the ruling class. Tremblay (1977:101) parodies the unconvincing fashion in which Boniface rejects outland the accusation; his additions to Fo's text emphasise the fraudulence of ecclesiastical leaders who are now only deemed worthy of derision:

Chus tellement humble, pis tellement croyant, pis tellement... euh.... [...] C'est pas vrai, chus pas capable de faire du mal à une mouche...

That "mes frères" refers to the Québécois people, Boniface's own people whom he has betrayed – the notion of the *enemy within* is a

recurrent theme of much social discourse in Quebec²⁹⁹ – in order to safeguard his position of power, is subsequently confirmed. For, later on in the same passage, Tremblay (1973:101) substitutes "crotté"³⁰⁰ for Fo's "fraise", leaving the audience in no doubt that the "frères" in question are indeed the Québécois underdogs, the swinish multitude whom he evidently despises; the common man is, for him, "un laid, un affreux, un sale, un puant..."

²⁹⁹ One need only think of the Québécois's attitude towards the three Québécois cabinet ministers – one, a Prime Minister – who formed part of the Federal Government in the late 1960s: Jean Marchand, Gérard Pelletier and, of course, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, referred to as the "trois Colombes". They were branded as 'traitors' for having betrayed the (Separatist) cause of their own 'people'. And, more recently, Jean Chrétien has not escaped similar treatment.

³⁰⁰ The pejorative term *crotté*, commonly found in the Québécois social discourse of the time, was used to designate a sort of underclass of marginalised 'drop-outs', 'life's losers' whom society rejects. Elsewhere, in "La naissance du crotté", Tremblay translates "villano" as "crotté", thereby identifying the exploited serf with the exploited Québécois, and making the term *crotté* synonymous with the condition of the Québécois. Thus, Tremblay's insertion of this term in contexts where it can only refer to the Québécois projects the self-image of a people with a "complexe d'infériorité séculaire" (Bélair, 1972:35).

The Mystification of Religion

Not only does the Catholic religion manipulate the masses through the promise of paradise in the next world, but it also exploits their credulity by persuading them of the existence of miracles in this world. Such, at any rate, is the premise of "Resurrezione di Lazzaro", a scene which dramatises the way the Church has, over the ages, taken advantage of the people's belief in miracles, using it to control them, to render them malleable, and, especially, to keep them in awe of a religion that was constantly presented as being wrapped in mystery. Fo (in Allegri, 1990:139) explains that his intention here was "la satira del miracolo inteso come uso e speculazione da parte della Chiesa che ne fa spettacolo" and that he aimed to expose "la strumentalizzazione ad effetto dell'atto divino come numero eccelso di magia."

To this end Fo presents us with a crowd of people waiting for a miracle. The term is particularly significant in Italian social discourse, mainly because of the so-called 'economic miracle'³⁰¹ — an unprecedented and rapid growth in Italy's

³⁰¹ Whilst it undoubtedly helped improve the material situation of millions of Italians, the economic miracle also led to a drastic change in their lifestyles: "the social dynamic of the 'economic miracle' worked to increase the atomization of Italian civil society. [...] by linking rising living standards with accentuated individualism, [it] seemed to fulfill the American dream." (Ginsborg, 1990:248). Neither the Catholics nor the Communists were particularly pleased with these changes and their attendant values, the former because they felt that the "Catholic family was under dire attack" and the latter because the "younger generation had little time for the traditional collective pastimes and

economy occurred between 1955-1963 – which has even earned the Italians the title of "popolo del miracolo".³⁰² There is thus an implicit reference to a mentality that can perhaps be considered typical of Italian history, at least of its recent history: namely the desire for a 'hero-leader' – a Mussolini or a Berlusconi who rises to power on the promise of instant panaceas – capable of miraculously solving everything. Such a fideistic attitude towards politics is presumably a legacy from the country's Catholic heritage, but also a sign of the political credulity or immaturity which Fo detected. The crowd in "La resurrezione di Lazzaro" is in fact waiting for Jesus to arrive to perform a *scheduled* miracle, almost a routine event, it appears,³⁰³ one which they have been taught to wait for more or less patiently, and certainly *passively*, until it is 'served up'

activities of Case del Popolo [PC-organised cultural centres]. Participation in the various organizations of the party diminished drastically in the early sixties. [...] Television, consumerism and home-based living were blamed for the new isolationist trends." (Ginsborg, 1990:249)

³⁰² An expression coined by Fo in the early 1960s and used in the opening line of his ironic song, "Su, cantiam", which accompanied the signature tune of *Canzonissima* – the television review on which Fo and Rame worked in 1962: "Popolo del miracolo, / miracolo economico, / oh popolo magnifico, / campion di libertà. Di libertà di transito, / di libertà di canto, / di canto e controcanto, / di petto e in falsetto. / Chi canta è un uomo libero / da qualsivoglia ragionamento, / chi canta è già contento, / di quello che non ha. / Su cantiam, su cantiam, / evitiamo di pensare, / per non polemizzar / mettiamoci a cantar. / [...]" (Fo, 1974:85).

³⁰³ "L'altra volta son gnit a vede ol miracol d'un altro, sont stai mezza giurnada a speciare e pò ol miracolo a me l'hait fait in funda là! [...] Ma sta volta ca so al nom, me sont interesat, a treuvi ol nom in sù la tumba, a sunt ol primo!" (Fo, 1977:99).

to them: "No ariva? No è ora de sto miracolamento?" (Fo, 1977:101). Thus, Fo suggests, the Church periodically offers up similar divertissements so that the people do not have time to dwell too much on their misery here on earth.

It seems probable that the miracle-as-event, depicted in this scene, would have represented a potent image for a Québécois audience brought up with all the ceremonials and rituals traditionally associated with the Roman Catholic Church and which many commentators say was a particularly prominent feature of religion as practised in Quebec.³⁰⁴ Dumont (1993:233-34), for example, sees the emphasis on this aspect of Catholicism as being responsible both for an increase in religious fervour towards the middle of the nineteenth century, and for the abrupt falling off in interest after the *Révolution tranquille*.³⁰⁵

Au début des années 1840, un 'réveil religieux' découle d'une stratégie pastorale concertée [...]. Les missions et les retraites à grand déploiement préfigurent une religion populaire qui finira par

³⁰⁴ It is perhaps worth recalling, in this context, the "Procession du Saint-Sacrement", a procession which took place every year in July in all the parishes of Quebec and had all the appearances of a parade, with costumes and fanfares. It had a social value just as much as a religious one, involving as it did a large number of corporations and groups, such as les Soeurs de St. Anne.

³⁰⁵ During this period the whole liturgical apparatus was simplified, 'demystified' one might say (Latin was no longer used after 1963, and thus a good deal of the arcaneness of Catholicism disappeared at once). This was partly the result of certain changes introduced by Vatican II, and partly the result of the Québécois Church's own attempts to modernise itself; it sought to make the service and the priests more accessible to the people (guitar-playing, for example, was used in some churches in the early 1970s to try to attract the younger generation of disaffected Québécois).

empresoirer profondément la culture commune. La prédication utilise la peur de l'enfer, et elle y met parfois la plus furieuse éloquence. Le confessionnal tempère toutefois ces éclats. La morale y est moins austère qu'auparavant; ce qui explique peut-être la remontée de la fréquentation des sacrements. Cette religion met l'accent sur les cérémonies de toutes espèces, plantation de croix, processions, etc. Elle revêt un caractère festif: par ses liens avec le rythme des saisons et les grands moments de l'existence, par son insertion dans les fêtes même profanes, ces sorties du quotidien monotone qui est le lot du grand nombre. Cette religion est ritualiste: des enfants apprennent 'par coeur' des réponses stéréotypées de catéchisme; des adultes assistent à la messe en latin; des hommes chantent à vêpres des psaumes qu'ils ne comprennent pas. L'orthodoxie est sauve; qu'en est-il des croyances entretenues par ces bribes de liturgies et de traditions? Plus tard, lorsque les supports communautaires seront ébranlés, ce genre de culture religieuse résistera mal à la désintégration.

"La Résurrection de Lazare" would readily have been interpreted as a criticism of the Québécois Church's excessive attachment to ritual, a criticism often found in *Parti pris*.³⁰⁶ The parody of the Church's spectacle-making corresponds well with the Québécois experience: there is a certain analogy between the miracle of the raising of Lazarus, and other such wondrous phenomena which, we are told, take place regularly in the cemetery (acts that are advertised as being 'impossible', not unlike the hype surrounding circus stunts) and the miracles which

³⁰⁶ Cf. Maheu (1966:37-38): "Nous avons atteint un surprenant degré de conformisme. [...] Face à la réalité qui évolue sans cesse, [le système religieux] s'est maintenu par la répétition maniaque, le ritualisme, le verbalisme, la litanie sans cesse reprise."

occurred regularly in the Oratoire Saint-Joseph³⁰⁷ and at Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, the famous place of pilgrimage in a town north of Quebec City. To these one might add the 'mystery' of transubstantiation, a rite which the priest is supposed to perform daily (after the worshippers have contributed to the collection); this "religious truth" is the "marvellous event" which occurs as the consecrated bread and wine is "divinely revealed".³⁰⁸ In short, the manifestation of the divine and the notion of miracles were never far removed from the consciousness of the Québécois.³⁰⁹ Like the Italians, always waiting for the next economic (or political) miracle, in the early 1970s many Québécois were still waiting for a 'miracle' which might deliver them from their dependency. Such convictions, whether or not they were articulated, had long inhabited the imaginations of the Québécois, according to sociologists.³¹⁰

³⁰⁷ "Le thaumaturge Frère André (1845-1937), de l'ordre de Sainte-Croix, devint légendaire au Québec à cause du nombre incalculable de miracles qu'il aurait accomplis pendant sa vie et après sa mort." (Rioux, 1974:37). Construction of the Saint-Joseph Oratory in Montreal begun during the lifetime of the Frère André who was noted for his attachment to St. Joseph.

³⁰⁸ The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1976) offers the following definitions: a miracle is a "Marvellous event due to some supposed supernatural agency" and a mystery is a "Religious truth divinely revealed, esp. one beyond human reason."

³⁰⁹ The term 'mysteries' is often used to refer to the Eucharist. It is this "religious truth divinely revealed" which is surely most present in the lives of practising Catholics.

³¹⁰ Rioux (1974:85), for example, writes: "Que faire contre la neige, la pauvreté, les politiciens véreux et les Anglais sinon en rire? [...] Durer, continuer, attendre [...] voilà des attitudes séculaires des Québécois. De temps en temps, il y a, bien sûr, des miracles, qui rompent la quotidienneté grise et sans éclat. Tout

In Tremblay's version, a miracle is being 'staged' for the benefit of the clamouring crowd; the spectators treat the whole event as if they were in a sports stadium, chanting "Le v'là! Le v'là! horray [sic]!" (Tremblay, 1973:40) – whereas the Italian spectators exclaim "Ariva? Non ariva!" (Fo, 1977:101) – when they think they have spotted the 'star of the show'. There is little in their behaviour to suggest that this occasion might provide a spiritual experience. On the contrary, it bears all the signs of a mundane (because it is repeatable and hence predictable) event to be consumed in much the same way as the coca-cola and other

le monde y croyait, en avait vu et en espérait d'autres. On a l'impression qu'aujourd'hui encore, bien qu'il soit beaucoup moins religieux, le Québécois continue d'attendre Godot'. [...] De temps immémorial, les changements venaient de l'extérieur, de Dieu qui faisait les miracles et les tempêtes. Encore aujourd'hui, bon nombre de Québécois prédisent qu'il va certainement se passer quelque chose, sans se rendre compte que les changements ne peuvent venir que d'eux-mêmes" (added emphasis).

soft drinks³¹¹ they provide themselves with to stave off their boredom while they wait for Jesus to arrive.

There is an emphasis on the crowd cheering and rooting for Lazarus whom they are willing to life, so to speak, as though they were supporters gathered around a boxing ring: "Envoye, Lazare, lève-toé, montre-nous que t'es capable..." (Tremblay, 1973:45).³¹² After Christ has successfully carried off the miracle, he is applauded as if he were a sports hero: "Bravo, Jésus, belle performance!" and "Horray [sic] pour Jésus! Il a gagné ses épaulettes!" (Tremblay, 1973:45).³¹³ And finally, where Fo's crowd chants "Jesus, bravo! Jesus! Bravo!" in appreciation (a common, congratulatory, response in Italy to any successful outcome), Tremblay's crowd (1973:46) demands:

³¹¹ In Fo's text (1977:101), the crowd are offered "sardele" (grilled sardines), suitably rustic fare to conjure up the smells and appetites of a mediaeval fairground or market-place: "Sardele! Dolze le sardele! Doi bajochi le sardele! Dolze! Brustolide! Bone! Bone le sardele!" The street-seller irreverently suggests that his sardines are so delicious they would resurrect even the dead. Tremblay's vendor (40), on the other hand, is touting soft drinks: "Coke! Pepsi! Seven-up! Orangeade! Rafrachissez-vous! Coke! Pepsi! Seven Up! Orangeade! Vingt-cinq cennes avec la bouteille, trente cennes sans bouteille!"

In Tremblay's transposition to a modern (North American) consumer society we are presented, necessarily, with a different type of vendor. Rather than attempt to stimulate his prospective customers' taste buds, he has a more practical, direct approach to selling; his technique does not involve humour or any serious attempt at persuasion, such as his Italian counterpart (even today) is bound to resort to if he is to be successful. This rendition inevitably produces a different mental picture of the crowd: the scene appear to have shifted to a sports arena, or some such similar place where one might find the Québécois congregating (as opposed to a public square or even a street corner in Italy).

³¹² Here, Fo (1977:105) has simply: "- Alzati, Lassaro!"

³¹³ "Bravo Jésus!" (Fo, 1977:105).

"Encore! Encore! Encore!", thereby highlighting the iterability¹⁴ of Jesus's miracle, with the stress being laid on the "performance" (Tremblay, 1973:45) aspect of the act rather than on any intrinsic value it might have as a manifestation of the divine. It is as if those who have just witnessed the miracle are not only oblivious to its spiritual dimension, but have also become blasé: no longer dazzled by such feats, they need to see them repeated, to be offered more and more (no matter if it is more of the same); it seems that their interest can be maintained solely by the record-breaking aspect of a given spectacle or product, such that the media are constantly trumpeting. By introducing a sporting *isotopie* into this scene, Tremblay implies that sports has now substituted religion for the Québécois, who are shown to be both irreligious and materialistic.

Indeed, Tremblay (1973) has tended to focus on the irreverence of the crowd – which, in the source text, corresponds to the way the profane co-exists with the sacred in Italian popular religion – by inserting the type of oath for which his

¹⁴ Elsewhere, Fo (1977:103) comments effectively on this aspect of iterability. He targets the trivialisation of the sacred, its transformation into a cheap thrill to pull the crowds – and their ensuing infantilisation – in the following one-liner: "Jesus! Jesus, fag ol miracolamento dei pessi e dei pani come l'altra vólta, che i era 'sí boni!" In Tremblay's version (1973:42), the bread and fish are no longer good to eat, but good to laugh at: "Aie, Jésus! J'aimerais ça que tu me r'fasses le miracle du pain, pis des poéssons! Ca, c'était drôle!"

own writing is noted,³¹⁵ and generally making the spectators more vulgar.³¹⁶ Where the description "ul santo" is used by Fo (1977:101) as a synonym for 'Jesus', Tremblay's translation of the term by "le gars" (39) has an altogether different referent: from being a holy man endowed with extraordinary powers, Jesus has become an average Joe, someone who is ordinary by definition. The same phenomenon whereby Jesus is reduced in stature occurs later when, although he is mentioned as "[le] fameux Jésus" (sarcastically?), in the same breath he is also referred to as "le pauvre gars" (43). Subsequently he is described as "un faiseur de miracles" (44), with views diverging as to his aptitude for the 'contest':

- Moé, j'veus dit qu'y'est capable pareil! J'l'ai déjà vu faire [...]
- Moé, j'dis qu'y est pas capable!
- Combien tu gages qu'y'est capable?

Eventually, bets are placed on the likelihood of Jesus's accomplishing this seemingly impossible feat, whose difficulty has been kept hidden from him (presumably by the ecclesiastical authorities, whom the people regard as deceitful, both in Fo and Tremblay).³¹⁷

³¹⁵ E.g. "la sacramento" (36); "caliboire" (37); "bonyeu", (43).

³¹⁶ E.g.: "vos beaux p'tits steaks" (39); "le crotté" (39); "Ah, ferme donc ta yeule!" (42); "ta yeule!" (43); "les plottes", (44).

³¹⁷ "Y'est décomposé quasiment toute au complet! Pour une farce plate, ç'en est toute une! Y y'avaient dit qu'y'était mort rien que depuis trois jours. Si t'as jamais vu un faiseur de miracles prendre une débarque..." (Tremblay, 1973:44).

Signs of religiosity are mocked here (as elsewhere in the play) by Tremblay. To this end, he elaborates on the source text characters, emphasising their absurdity. One spectator, for example, calls out to Jesus, as if he were a pop star: "Jesus! Sempatego! M'ha schiscià l'ôgiu!" (Fo, 1977:103). In the target text, she is shown to be enamoured of Jesus, initially asking whether he is married (all the while devouring him with her eyes), and entering into a state of ecstasy when he succeeds in carrying out the miracle:

Il est debout! Il est debout! Miracle! ô miracle!
 Oh Jésus! ô douce créature! ô mon bien aimé! ô mon
 époux! [...] ô mon bien aimé! ô mon Jésus!
 (Tremblay, 1973:45-46)

Expressions such as "ô mon bien aimé" appear to satirise the type of invocation found in *L'Imitation de Jésus-Christ*, a book which the devout, in particular nuns, in Quebec would fervently read every day. Thus, the spectator's adulation ridicules the religious zeal of some believers, and suggests that faith is no longer something to be flaunted in Tremblay's Quebec... lest one end up depicted as a 'Jesus freak', chanting "Alléluia Jésus!" (Tremblay, 1973:35).

The rather proper, pious spectator whom Fo portrays as shocked by the blasphematory exclamations she hears all around her, is also mocked by Tremblay. She repeatedly calls the others to order: "Taisez-vous, vous! Blasphémateurs!" But her admonitions to the other spectators to stop blaspheming are jeered at and she is promptly put in her place by a disrespectful

"Lâchez-moé lousse, vous! Ma soeur!" (Tremblay, 1973:40). It is interesting to note that in post-Révolution tranquille Quebec the appellation *ma soeur* corresponds to a non-value, and is therefore intended as an insult, a parody of the traditional form of address for a nun.

Thus, the overall effect of Tremblay's 'lowering the tone', so to speak, in his version is, naturally, to diminish the figure of Christ and to ridicule religion, neither of which are aimed at in Fo's *Mistero buffo*. Instead, Fo insists on the way the commercial potential of miracles is exploited by the Church which realises the monetary and psychological advantage to be gained from them. The notion of miracles-to-order which forms the central object of Fo's satire in "Resurrezione di Lazzaro", rests on the presupposition that the people must pay for their incredulity. Here, they pay for the privilege of watching the spectacle in the cemetery (a metaphor for their dupability vis-à-vis the Church), although they criticise the mercenary attitude of the guard, a sort of beadle who takes advantage of the situation to line his pockets:

- Doi palanche o no's vede ol miracol
- Bon! As ben un bel furbasso anca te, va'!
- [...]
- On bel furbasso quello! Ol fa i dané coi miracoli.

(Fo, 1977:99)

- Cinquante cennes oubedonc pas de miracle
- T'nez, mon Dieu, le v'là vot'cinquante cennes...
profiteur!
- [...]

- il devrait avoir honte! Faire de l'argent sur le dos des miracles..." (Tremblay, 1973:35-36).³¹⁸

The commercialisation of religion which Fo parodies in this scene - the paid-for-miracle³¹⁹ - is, perhaps not surprisingly, accentuated in Tremblay's translation. After all, we are in a Quebec where consumerism is seen as a none-too-comforting alternative to religion:

Une éducation et une culture laïques prédomineraient dans la société de consommation et une civilisation des loisirs, où les loisirs et la consommation seraient dirigés par une minorité de plus en plus restreinte au détriment de l'immense majorité infantilisée et rendue irresponsable (Racine, 1966:20).

³¹⁸ Tremblay's translation renders a similar message, although interestingly the idea of *furbizia* or cunning, so frequent in Italian social discourse, has been displaced by that of profit-making and the shamefulness associated with it. There is thus an outright condemnation of profiteering, expressed in a tone of moral indignation, a reflection, perhaps, of the traditional Québécois attitude towards money, as preached officially by the Catholic Church. (Cf. in this connection, Yvette's sanctimonious reaction to Duddy's hustling Virgil in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (Richler, 1993:216-218). The Italian "furbasso", on the other hand, is not without ambiguity, with its implications of 'cleverness', or 'resourcefulness' - a criticism, certainly, but one expressed with the resignation of someone inured to the ubiquity of petty corruption in Italy.

³¹⁹ Cf. the famous sketch by *Les Cyniques* entitled, "La Visite de l'Oratoire Saint-Joseph" where the faithful are shown around by a tourist guide who turns the occasion into a sight-seeing visit, a kind of commercial 'spectacle' - the spirit of the sketch corresponds fairly well to Fo's vision of consumer-miracles in "Resurrezione di Lazzaro".

The Wealth of the Church

Un fraticello eretico, imputato di delitti contro la religione, e tratto davanti al vescovo e altri ecclesiastici, era in quei giorni sottoposto a severa inquisizione. [...] era in verità uomo molto pio, che aveva predicato penitenza e povertà, ripetendo le parole del santo Francesco [...]³²⁰

Thus far, we have seen how Fo's polemical condemnation of various forms of clerical influence either corresponds with, or has been adapted to suit, Québécois social discourse. In Fo's symbolic representation we are shown a Church which exploits the religious faith of ordinary people in order to control and rule over them, a Church which is concerned only with perpetuating its own power and prestige. Its behaviour is exposed as a travesty of the very message it purports to represent – the evangelical message of human love, humility and devotion to things spiritual. Throughout *Mistero buffo* Fo criticises this perverse state of affairs, commenting on the inevitable duplicity of such a Church; nowhere, however, is his attack quite as savage as in "Bonifacio VIII". Here he lambasts the mediaeval pope's hypocrisy and arrogance as he prepares, like a politician, to play his part before an audience for whom he has nothing but contempt: "Ma sí. Fasemo contenti sti mincioni...andemo" (Fo,

³²⁰ Eco, 1980:236.

contempt: "Ma sí. Fasemo contenti sti mincioni...andemo" (Fo, 1977:117).²²¹ A number of Freudian slips reveal something of the cruelty for which Boniface is ill-famed and for which Fo has effectively prepared us with his anecdotal introduction to this scene.²²²

Take, for example, Boniface's request to the cleric to hand him his crosier which he inadvertently refers to as a "baston":

Ol baston! (Gridando) Ol baston... No quel par picà,
andemo... quel col turcicón (Fo, 1977:115).

This detail is retained in Tremblay's version (1973:97) which presents Boniface as being equally, if not more, insufferable; several additional comments (shown below in italics) serve to emphasise this aspect:

Mon bâton! (En criant). Ben non, pas celui pour
frapper, p'tit niaiseux! Celui avec une torsade au
boutte, là, comment c'que ça s'appelle... Entéka...

²²¹ We are left in no doubt that Boniface is the very epitome of a politician in Tremblay's rendition (1973:99) of this line: "Allons-y [...] contentons la masse!" (emphasis added).

²²² This scene is preceded by a long introduction where Fo presents Boniface VIII as the pope who was so wicked Dante placed him in Hell even before he died. In particular, Fo relates a famous episode where Boniface organised an orgy on Good Friday in order to demonstrate his utter scorn for the criticism that was being levelled against his extreme self-indulgence and self-importance. Fo (1977:110-111) reminds the audience that Bonifacio is also infamous for having put to death members of those orders which lived in penury, preaching humility, and denouncing the ownership of property and material possessions: "Poiché questi frati pauperisti e legati ai 'catari', ad altri movimenti ereticali, avevano la cattiva abitudine di andare in giro a parlare male dei signori [...]". This provides Fo with the opportunity to refer to the mediaeval debate on the poverty of Christ which he illustrates with examples of heretics who tried to oppose the massive wealth and power of the Roman Catholic Church (cf. *supra*, Chapter Two).

Since it is clear that the figure of Boniface stands at once for prelate and politician – the abuses of whom are assimilated – Boniface's notorious cruelty may well have been associated in the minds of Québécois spectators with Duplessis's reputation for being ruthless:

A shrewd, but cruel man, Duplessis, while in office, delighted in humiliating his Cabinet members in the Assembly, yelling "Assieds-toi!" at any one of them who rose to speak without his permission. Acting as his own attorney general, he often sent out his notoriously brutal provincial cops to club [emphasis added] acquiescence into men in the picket lines. (Richler, 1992:86-87)

Elsewhere Fo's portrayal of this devious pope, a bully who tyrannises his entourage and maltreats members of the monastic orders, is transformed by Tremblay (1973:102) into the depiction of a despot (he describes himself as "le roi de l'Eglise") lacking in finesse and subtlety. Indeed, Tremblay's Boniface comes across more as a bully-boy,³²³ bellowing orders at his choristers whom he delights in taunting – an inept curé de campagne whose authority is confined to his tiny fiefdom³²⁴ –

³²³ Cf. (1992:78) who recalls: "I was brought up in a Quebec that was reactionary, church-ridden, and notoriously corrupt – a stagnant backwater – its chef for most of that time, Premier Maurice Duplessis, a political thug [emphasis added]".

³²⁴ Describing the authoritarianism which pervaded Québécois society before the Révolution tranquille, Maheu (1966:42) says it was more apparent than real: "[...] notre autoritarisme n'est que la face inverse de notre faiblesse. Et puis [...] il s'agit d'une certaine façon d'une mystification: les détenteurs de l'autorité

than as a pope who has conspired with cardinals in the corridors of power in Rome. Fo's *chierici*, or clerics, who in this scene combine the roles of personal assistants and political aides (they help him to dress and counsel him on matters of pontifical protocol), are replaced by Tremblay's choir-boys, a not altogether convincing substitution, particularly as regards their advisory capacity, but one which effectively reduces Boniface to the stature of a diminished despot. For, in Tremblay's characterisation, we witness a preposterous oppressor who pushes young children around whilst also using them as his counsellors – a sign of his own (ultimate) impotence²²⁵ – and stamps his feet when he cannot get his own way (he is enraged, first, at Christ's failure to recognise him and, later, at his refusal to sanction him as the official head of the Church).

Whilst the decision to give Boniface choristers as advisors inevitably ridicules his would-be grandness, the infantilisation of this character is also achieved by Tremblay's choice of vocabulary (the register is more vulgar than in the source text)

à l'intérieur du Canada français étaient des rois-nègres, et nous le savions. C'était une sorte de projection que la société faisait de la fonction d'autorité, qu'elle situait en somme hors d'elle-même. [...] Le Canadien français démissionnait devant son conjoint, son curé ou Dieu. On n'avait pas à lui imposer d'autorité; il cherchait au contraire de toutes ses forces à y croire, pour ne pas voir qu'il vivait dans une société qui en avait été dépossédée. [...] Elle se nourrissait de notre passivité, de notre démission, de notre impuissance. Et c'était une autorité d'impuissants. Même pas une tyrannie" (emphasis added).

²²⁵ Cf. Maheu (1966:41): "Je crois que chaque Québécois sait que son père, tyran tant qu'on voudra, était un homme soumis, faux tyran sinon faux jeton."

and a number of additions, which emphasise his ordinariness, his complaining character, etc. Tremblay (1973:97) insists, for example, on the fact that Boniface cannot remember the technical name for his 'stick' ("là, comment c'que ça s'appelle... Entéka...") and, at the end of the scene, he even refers to it as a "bâton croche" (Tremblay, 1973:102). His ignorance naturally makes a mockery of his high rank. Indeed, we are presented with the caricatured portrait of a nagging Québécois here rather than with the overbearing head of the Church. It is clear, however, that this complaining clergyman represents an aspect of the Québécois clergy which was familiar to everyone, namely the fact that it presented itself as a 'martyrised' caste. Furthermore, the figure of Boniface is also belittled by the way in which he frequently explicates his comments. Tremblay tends to over-explain (by over-translating) what is going on; he labours many points, thereby transforming Fo's wit into more obvious comedy, often resorting to unsophisticated gags. Take, for example, the passage where Boniface (having spotted Christ in the crowd), tries to make himself appear scruffy in order to look like an ordinary 'man of the people'. In Fo's text, he orders one of the clerics to help him smear some dirt onto his face so as to create the desired effect. The irony of the situation is lost in the target text where Tremblay (1973:100) adds:

Non, non, non, pas d'la vraie boue, r'garde dans le
fond de ma poche y me reste des barres de chocolat...
Si chus sale, au moins, ça va goûter bon...

This childish response by Boniface further reduces the character to a bumbling, almost inoffensive, fool, thereby transforming Fo's absurdist satire into pure slapstick; the result is a particularly popular, and popularising, brand of humour (*farce*) which aims, above all, to produce an instant reaction on the part of the audience. By so doing, some of the sting is inevitably removed from Fo's fiercely paradoxical humour.

Of Cardinals and Cadillacs

Au temps des premiers siècles de l'Eglise, voyait-on à Rome des chrétiens se promenant en chaises romaines comme aujourd'hui on voit des cardinaux en Cadillac?²²⁶

Nevertheless, the underlying themes exposed in Fo's representation of Boniface — namely the Church's self-importance and its disdain for Christ (and his teachings) — are themes which correspond well to the widespread criticisms that begun to be levelled openly against the Clergy in Quebec towards the mid 1960s. The wealth of the Church is vehemently denounced in the following editorial in *Parti pris* (1965:4):

²²⁶ Nadeau, 1966:157.

A défaut de données sur les biens de l'Église "dominante", sinon d'État, au Québec (c'est un *crypto-capitalisme* [emphasis added] que celui-là), disons que le pouvoir spirituel de rachat des âmes est aussi un tout ce qu'il y a de plus temporel pouvoir d'achat; et pouvoir d'achat qui achète de tout: aiguilles et tracteurs.

Il est tel, ce pouvoir d'achat des institutions religieuses, y compris "nos" écoles confessionnelles, qu'"AU QUÉBEC, NUL AUTRE MARCHÉ NE SE COMPARE A CELUI DES INSTITUTIONS RELIGIEUSES.

This piece of information, we are assured, comes neither from "quelque parti pris anticlérical" nor "cléricaliste nouvelle vague" but from a business magazine, *Le Fournisseur*, whose readership is drawn from, amongst others, "archevêchés, asiles, collèges, commissions scolaires, couvents, écoles apostoliques [...]".

In this context, the sight of the richly-clad pope taking part in a procession cannot failed to have struck a chord with the Québécois audience.²²⁷ The irony of the scene, it is worth recalling, lies in the fact that when Boniface comes across Christ he regards him with disdain as he is dressed in rags:

Guarda guarda... orcu... com a l'è cunzad... desgrasiò!
Adess cumprendi parché ol ciamen 'pover cristu'...
(Fo, 1977:117)

However, he realises it would be more politic to be seen talking to Christ in public, and therefore tries to present himself as someone whose behaviour is in keeping with the Christian concept

²²⁷Cf. Pierre Vallières (1969:55): "Mais les Québécois sont écoeurés de leurs prêtres en pantouffles qui mènent une existence de millionnaires dans leurs presbytères cossus et qui boivent du scotch avec l'argent des pauvres".

of humility. In a desperate attempt to appear modest and unassuming, he considers the most strategic course of action to take:

At díseto che l'è mejor che mi ghe vago a preso... che me fago vedar par la zente che mi son bon, che me fago vedar ad ajudarlo a portar la croze... magari che tûti me plaudeno, che dicon 'Ca bon ca l'è sto Bonifazio'... (Fo, 1977:117).

Compare Tremblay's version (his additions are indicated in italics):

Tu penses que j'devrais m'approcher? *Moé, m'approcher de ça!!!* Ah, pour me faire voir au monde! Pour montrer comment c'que chus bon! Tu penses que j'devrais aller jusqu'à porter la croix! *Aie, mets-en pas trop!* C'est vrai que le monde trouverait ça beau... *Un pape qui porte la croix...* Y m'appellerait peut-être 'le bon Boniface!' Ah, *pis un p'tit bain de foule me f'ra pas de tort* (Tremblay, 1973:99).

The translation comically emphasises both Boniface's disdain and disgust for the poor (epitomised here by the figure of Christ) and his desire to achieve popularity. The appropriateness of this portrayal in the context of Quebec's history is self-evident; the theme of ecclesiastical wealth was also (as the comments made in *Parti pris* during the previous decade so clearly anticipate) a particularly topical one. Indeed, the same year as Tremblay's *Mistero buffo* was produced, we find another play (on an altogether different subject) voicing similar complaints. Thus, in Jean Barbeau's *Le chant du sink* (1973:30), Verchères's accusation reflects the same attitude:

Une église qui prêche la pauvreté, l'humilité, mais dont les chefs demeurent dans les palais... Le Vatican, c'est une des plus grosses compagnies européennes... Vatican Incorporé...

Es-tu défroqué, coudonc?

As seen earlier, the climate of the early 1970s in Quebec meant that mocking any signs of religiosity was fairly standard. In "La Résurrection de Lazare" Tremblay (1973:35) adds (gratuitously?):

quand la gang de cochons qui viennent voir des miracles
s'en vont en chantant "Alléluia Jésus!" c'est ben beau
de chanter "Alléluia Jésus!" mais c'est pas une raison
pour toute salir, toute m'abîmer mes haies [...]

These supplementary details conjure up the image of 'Jesus freaks', a notion that is absent from the source text.

When the aveugle's sight has been restored by Jesus, he praises him ecstatically (as does the cieco):

Merveilleux saint fils unique de Dieu! Y'a pas de mots
pour dire comme ta pitié est grande... grande comme un
fleuve en crue, maudit!"

But also adds:

Merci, bonhomme! Peace-love, man! Hoon, le beau
papillon!... Hoon, que c'est ça, c't'affaire-là,
donc... J'ai jamais vu ça... Hoon que c'est beau!

The believer is therefore presented as a back-to-the-earth hippy, someone who is 'alternative' (to borrow the expression of the period), someone who marvels at everything, an airhead who spouts naive messages of 'love' and 'peace', proclaiming inanely that life is 'beautiful': "Hoon... Que c'est beau, les couleurs!" Tremblay gives him the typical modes of expression of the time, all of which emphasise that he is 'wowed' by everything, each exclamation denoting his wonder. Thus, his very fervour becomes

an object of ridicule: "Merci, Jésus, saint fils unique de Dieu! Youppiiiiii!" (Tremblay, 1973:94).

Another blatant example of how Tremblay has introduced into *Mistero buffo* the prevailing ideology concerning religion in the early 1970s is to be found in "Moralité de l'aveugle et du paralytique" where the cripple is derided for appealing to God in his misery. Here, Tremblay has increased these references which already exist in the source text, adding comments such as "Vous qui êtes dans le Ciel et qui êtes si bon des fois" (Fo, 1977:80); however, what is more striking is the running commentary by the *aveugle* who scornfully picks up the *paralytique* on several of his exclamations:

T'as toujours le bon Dieu au bord des lèvres, toé...
Es-tu défroqué, coudonc?

To the *paralytique*'s navigational instruction, "Oui, continue de même tranquillement, t'es sur le droit chemin...", he remarks: "Tu parles vraiment comme un frère..." (Tremblay, 1973:82)

It is clear that, apart from mocking religiosity, Tremblay's additions also reflect a social reality of the time, namely the astonishingly large number of priests, monks and nuns who decided to break their vows and leave the priesthood, or the monastic orders. Thus, the reference to 'defrocking' would have been highly topical in 1973; there was, naturally much talk of this exodus from the church for the sudden influx of ex-religious had to be integrated into society. For some, the transition was not easy, and one might be tempted to see here a criticism of a Church which has taught countless men and women how to prepare

for the priesthood but has left them ill-prepared for life in society at large. Now they had to learn to adapt. And it was not easy for everyone to cope with the stresses of the world beyond the protective walls of their parish church or monastery with its certainties and reassuring routine. Metaphorically, the cripple can be seen as a social reject, unable to adapt to the 'real world', unable to earn his living. When he fears Christ's 'miracle' (which would mean having to find a job), the cripple asks (Tremblay, 1973:87) the blind man desperately: "Es-tu capable de faire autre chose que de [...? text illegible]", a question which, it seems fair to infer, reflects the cripple's own anxiety concerning his unfitness for real work.

Authority and Authoritarianism

The scene of "Boniface VIII" appears to correspond particularly well to a psychological state of mind in which many Québécois spectators would have recognised themselves, given that "l'univers mental du Canadien français était envahi par la notion d'autorité" (Maheu, 1966:39). For, aside from the "côté dictatorial" of some twenty years of Duplessis's government, the Québécois had long been accustomed to authority being exerted over them, albeit with "un air de b nignit  " (Maheu, 1966:40), at school, at work, in church, and even at home — authority or authoritarianism, depending on one's viewpoint, was omnipresent.³²⁸ Thus, the emphasis on ridiculing Boniface's hypocrisy and petty tyranny does not seem to be accidental; it clearly allowed a writer such as Tremblay to vent his own feelings concerning the repressive past and, in doing so, to speak for majority of Qu  b  cois who, like Maheu (1966:40) had had to live with the duplicitous use of religion:

chacun savait que l'autorit   et la Loi camouflaient la corruption, et qu'au fond il s'agissait d'affirmer des principes tout haut et d'en profiter en secret.
(Maheu, 1966:40)

³²⁸ Cf. Maheu (1966:40): "L'autoritarisme   tait partout, mais quand on tente de dire o     tait l'autorit  , on la voit se d  rober sans cesse."

States of Corruption

In Fo's *Mistero buffo*, there are several references to Rome being a city of vice and corruption, for even in the Middle Ages, Rome was known as a centre of depravity and iniquity; and this representation of Rome is one that persists in Italian social discourse. Thus, when the *cieco*, terrified at the prospect of an imminent encounter with Jesus, is trying to think of somewhere 'safe' to go, a place where there is no likelihood of being found, he suggests fleeing to Rome, "un sito dove no podarà rivar gimai sto Jesus fiol de Deo" (Fo, 1977:49). The irony is evident: in that city the Pope resides in splendour, but there is no sign of Christ's presence. This reference is naturally removed from the Québécois *Mistero buffo*, but partly compensated for later on in an addition which reflects the *doxa* that the clergy everywhere is associated with perpetuating untruths, with deceiving the people: "Des mensonges gros comme des églises romanes [emphasis added]" (Tremblay, 1973:100-101).

The fierce satire which underscores "Boniface VIII" has, as we have seen, a specific resonance in Quebec and can be read as a warning to those members of the clergy who are still attached to their "anciens privilèges" and to their "mentalité autoritaire" (Racine, 1966:22) that the Québécois will no longer submit to such tyranny by a Church which demanded unquestioning obedience.

L'ange et l'ivrogne: An Allegorical Tale of Two Societies

Fo's maverick account of Biblical events would almost certainly have touched a raw nerve among the Québécois public, given the anti-clerical climate which prevailed at the time³²⁹; by the late 1960s the Church was being openly criticised for continuing to deviate from matters spiritual and interfering instead in politics:

[...] l'Église, de plus en plus, oublie le domaine spirituel et se consacre à gérer une religion qui sombre dans le ritualisme, quand elle ne se mêle pas de politique, et quand la gérance de ses propriétés matérielles lui en laisse le temps. Le politicien d'autre part, dont l'action repose sur n'importe quoi sauf des positions idéologiques, s'en remet à l'Église pour la définition des valeurs politiques, il finit par faire du ritualisme et de la soumission un titre de gloire, et on voit Jean Lesage défendre sa valeur de premier ministre en affirmant qu'il ne boit plus depuis quelques semaines et va à la messe tous les matins.³³⁰

³²⁹ For, as Elaine Nardocchio (1986:116) points out: "Until the middle of the twentieth century, the treatment of religion and politics was generally conservative with little critical content. During the 1960s, the Quiet Revolution promoted a re-evaluation of Catholicism and the role of traditional Christian values in society. Many indigenous works of this period reflect a new, critical awareness of the influence of Catholicism in Quebec. The works of Marcel Dubé, Françoise Loranger, and Michel Tremblay, to name a few, all contain negative references to the role the Church has played in Québec's history and culture; the blind defense of law and order, ignorance and superstition, crass materialism, hypocrisy, and a general narrow-mindedness have all been attributed to the way religion and morality were taught in Catholic Québec."

³³⁰ Maheu, 1967:182.

For, the transition from Church-run province to modern, lay *pays en devenir* did not take place overnight. In fact, many of the hoped-for changes were slow to come about. Writing in 1966, Chamberland could still lament:

Pour l'instant, l'institution cléricale ne paraît pas trop menacée au Québec et jouit même d'une assez heureuse liberté. Alors comment lui donner ce qu'elle tient déjà depuis toujours!"¹¹

Therefore, although considerable changes had overtaken Québécois society in the previous decade, it should not be forgotten that in 1973 all members of the theatre-going public over the age of eighteen would have been brought up under the 'old system', and so would necessarily have studied in pre-*Révolution tranquille* Catholic educational establishments. In other words, religious allusions, anti-clerical jibes and papal parody would have found a receptive audience, irrespective of whether it were in agreement or in disaccord with the general tenor of Michel Tremblay's *Mistero buffo*. Perhaps the response of the theatre critic of *La Presse*, Martial Dassylva, to the updated miracle-plays best sums up the range of audience expectations one would have been likely to find in 1973:

Les vieux croyants de stricte obédience en seront offusqués, voire blessés et crieront sans doute au

¹¹This polemical note was published in *Parti pris* as a response to a comment by Cardinal Paul-Emile Léger reported in *Le Devoir* the previous month: "Si un groupe de citoyens désire des écoles neutres, de la part de l'Eglise, il n'y aura pas d'opposition, mais je crois que cette liberté que nous accordons aux autres, nous demandons aux autres de nous la donner."

sacrilège; les chrétiens libéraux l'accueilleront probablement avec des sourires bienveillants et peut-être gênés; les agnostiques, schismatiques, anticléricaux et autres paroissiens des ténèbres extérieures applaudiront des deux mains.³³²

Within this perspective, Tremblay's *Mistero buffo* appears to offer a salutary reminder of the historic responsibility of the Catholic clergy in Quebec in allowing British rule to go unopposed. Indeed, one can read Tremblay's *Mistero buffo* as a portrayal of the confrontation between the old forces of Quebec and the new revolutionary forces; the play's symbolic force is particularly evident in the altercation between the clerical "ange" and the revolutionary "ivrogne" in "Les noces de Cana".

³³²Martial Dassylva, *La presse*, 19 December 1973.

Conclusion

L'historicité du traduire et de la traduction est première pour la poétique. Car traduire est une ré-énonciation. Une époque, une société, une classe produisent le traducteur pour un public. On a les traductions qu'on mérite. Chaque époque, selon le moment historique et les rapports entre langues, se montre dans ses traductions autant que dans ses oeuvres (Meschonnic, 1973:358).

In his article on 'theatre adaptation' quoted earlier,
Gruslin comments:

Il va de soi que faire une adaptation ne signifie en aucun cas se servir d'un autre pour véhiculer ses propres idées. [...] Il va de soi également que traduction et adaptation sont deux choses différentes.

It is, of course, one of the great commonplaces of translation to speak as if some pure entity known as 'adaptation' existed. Rarely defined, this category appears to be useful mainly for those who wish to reject a translation on the grounds that it is not a 'real translation' (either because it is felt that it does not stand up to the original, or because the transformations observed in the target text apparently disqualify it from the status of 'translation'). Yet, how does one measure where translating ends and adapting begins? To say that it is a question of degree is simply not good enough. Some parts of Tremblay's translation, for example, seem to follow the source text very closely, others deviate considerably. Are we then to

conclude that it is part-translation, part-adaptation, like the fabulous chimera of Greek mythology? There persists an Idealist distinction between translation and adaptation whose non-validity, it is hoped, has been demonstrated through the present study. This attempt at 'labelling', or classifying, has perpetuated a binary distinction between what is strictly speaking 'translation' and what is 'non-translation' – a description which relegates all visible skewing to the category of 'adaptation' and thereby neatly dispenses with the fuzzy areas of distortion or non-equivalence raised by every translation.

This notion of the 'zero degree of translation' requires the complicity of the translator in becoming 'invisible', or at least in claiming to do so. For this pure essence – the transparent translation – is no more than a fiction, perpetuated by what Venuti (1986) terms the 'ideology of fluency'. Correspondence theories bring us no closer to a distillation of the translational process, for the substance of a text, its discursive 'matter', resists extraction, and cannot be boiled down to some unadulterated decoction.

Translation adapts by definition. As Nida (1959:13) stated in his well-known paper, "Principles of Translation as Exemplified by Bible Translating":

The basic principles of translation mean that no translation in a receptor language can be the exact equivalent of the model in the source language. That is to say, all types of translation involve (1) loss of information, (2) addition of information, and/or (3) skewing of information.

Slanting or "skewing" is listed by Nida as a potential consequence of translation, but it seems inevitable that such slanting, whether voluntary or not, should take place.

In the case of theatre translation in Quebec during the 1970s and 1980s, Brisset (1990) has shown how a particular political ideology – nationalism – determined the ideology behind translation. What we have in Tremblay's *Mistero buffo* is, of course, an extreme example of textual manipulation; nevertheless, the addition or loss of any information in a translation always signifies a "distortion" (Nida, 1959:14) of the source text.

It is worth bearing in mind that for the Francophones of Quebec who represented themselves as living in the shadow of the English dominator, the practice of translation assumed a peculiarly symbolic role. The humiliating label 'nation de traducteurs' that has often been attached to them constituted a compelling reason not to be seen to be simply 'translating' or copying the Other but rather to be creating one's own text afresh. As such, the act of appropriating a source text and consciously adapting it to the Québécois context, which is a constant of this period, was an eminently political act: it was an act of differentiation that emulated the concerted attempt by the neo-nationalists to assert the distinct identity of Quebec's Francophone population.

In this perspective, it is clear that in selecting texts for translation certain themes and concerns were deemed to be more pertinent to the Québécois context of reception than others.

For, at a time of burgeoning theatrical creativity at home, only those foreign plays that seemed immediately relevant to Québécois audiences would have been called upon to supplement native production. Thus, the very choice of *Mistero buffo* as a text for translation (commissioned, it is worth recalling, by an established theatrical institution as part of its repertoire) is in no way an arbitrary one: the striking parallels between Fo's emancipatory (Marxist) discourse and the prevailing nationalist discourse in Quebec cannot have failed to draw attention to this play. Its politically engaged, didactic nature – its express desire to 'raise consciousnesses' – clearly struck a chord. Whilst the ultimate objective of Fo's play is to generate awareness of the condition of exploitation within capitalist societies, thereby lending support to the proletarian revolution, Tremblay's *Mistero buffo* can be viewed as an attempt to reinforce the Québécois's consciousness of being an exploited people, thereby urging another 'revolution' in Quebec, one that might finally bring about the results that the earlier 'quiet' or subdued revolution had, from the nationalists' point of view, signally failed to achieve. For in 1973 there would have been a deep sense of dissatisfaction with the lack of tangible social change (upon which Tremblay himself commented at around the time he was translating Fo's play) and frustration at the Parti québécois's failure to gain a position of power and to govern the province, despite its having won a sizeable consensus on the part of the Francophone electorate.

Similarly, the changes introduced by Tremblay are, as we saw in Chapter Four, by no means haphazard. When, for example, Tremblay transforms Fo's mediaeval villeyⁿ into a Québécois "crotté", this is obviously the result of a particular "projet de traduction" which determines his translation decisions at all levels: his choice of language (*joual*, as we saw, was *de rigueur* at the time and Fo's *padano* offered a further pretext, if one were needed, for its use)³³; his choice of register (in an exacerbation of Fo's irreverent vocabulary Tremblay's multiplies the occurrence of typically Québécois "sacres"); and, finally, his choice of altering some details of the source text whilst retaining others. For example, he decided (as we saw in the previous chapter) to replace Boniface's VIII's counsellors by Québécois choir-boys, to insert an allusion to the *crotté's* birthday in the monthly list of chores assigned to Fo's *villano*, yet elsewhere he apparently followed the source text closely. However, this too, was a choice, for where he retained details from the original it was simply because he regarded them as pertinent. Thus, the reference to a mountain in "Nascita del giullare" also appears in Tremblay's version of the scene, thereby suggesting (in conjunction with the mention of a valley and a river) an identification with the topography of Montreal. Anti-clerical jibes are considered par for the course and, if anything, heightened, with signs religiosity being mocked,

³³ Cf. Tremblay's comments on the subject in the letter contained in the Appendix.

whereas Fo distinguishes between the Church's instrumental use of religion to manipulate the masses and the egalitarian message contained in the Gospels, opposing the God of the rich and the powerful to the Christ of the poor.

As we have seen, difference in translation was politically and socially sanctioned by the social discourse of Quebec during a period of rising nationalism. As Paul Lefebvre and Pierre Ostiguy (1978:47) noted:

L'adaptation québécoise prouve la singularité de notre dramaturgie. Autrefois étouffée par le théâtre étranger, elle manifeste maintenant assez de force pour l'assimiler.

In Quebec, therefore, it would seem that ethnocentric translation practices were considered a positive sign which reflected the vigour of a culture which was now not only able to resist *l'Étranger*, but could also neutralise it by incorporating its discourse into its own value-system, absorbing what it regarded as pertinent and repelling anything that ran counter to its own ideology.

This analysis of Tremblay's *Mistero buffo* has sought to demonstrate that it is not possible to study a translated text without fully comprehending the context in which transformation has taken place, that is to say, by taking into account its sociocultural horizon, and then by comparing it with the source text whose sociocultural horizon has also been studied. By means of precise historical contextualisation, translation criticism is able to address all translated texts, thereby acknowledging the entire range of translation practices which exist within a given

society at a given time, rather than simply exalting those translations that are judged to be of 'aesthetic value', and rejecting outright those translations that do not meet the criteria for Meschonnic's "traduction-textes", since they are deemed to be "défectueux" (Berman, 1995:42) in some way, variously described as error-ridden, deviant or, at times – as Berman warns – even dangerous.

Avenues for Further Research

Several other important themes, which shed more light on the notion of pertinence in translation, emerged from the analysis of Tremblay's *Mistero buffo*: chief amongst these were the themes of exploitation, oppression and martyrdom. The value attached to language and self-expression in Fo's play is also a subject that has an obvious resonance in the Québécois social discourse, and therefore one that offers fertile ground for investigation. Furthermore, the decision to translate Fo's dialect by a sociolect raises a number of crucial questions for translation, questions which are particularly interesting in the context of theatre translation, given the specific constraints and possibilities of the genre.

It was simply not feasible, however, to develop fully all these themes within the scope of the present study, although they are undoubtedly worth pursuing. Further research into these

areas would serve to provide a more comprehensive picture of the discourses that circulated in Quebec during the 1960s and 1970s and of the manner in which they impinged on translation practices. By way of illustration, it is perhaps worth mentioning that the prevailing discourse on exploitation and colonisation has filtered into Tremblay's translation, thereby introducing a new frame of reference within which the struggle for liberation takes on a new meaning: thus, the symbolic representations of Fo's play are transformed in such a manner that the Marxist class war is no longer seen as the solution to oppression. Instead, it is suggested that only by opposing the colonial powers-that-be will oppression end within Québécois society. Similarly, the ideology that promotes the use of *joual* is implicitly invoked by Tremblay since his translation is written in this sociolect; furthermore, language itself is thematised through the addition of various linguistic allusions whereby the notion of 'difference' becomes a veritable isotopy in the text.

APPENDIX

E-mail to the author, February 14, 1996.

Chère Madame,

En réponse à votre lettre du 12 courant, voici quelques éclaircissements au sujet de ma traduction de *Mistero buffo* de Dario Fo. La commande avait été faite par le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, en 1973, dans le cadre d'une entente avec le consulat d'Italie. Je n'ai donc pas moi-même choisi de traduire cette pièce.

Je n'ai jamais été en contact avec l'auteur pour la simple raison qu'on m'avait donné trois grosses semaines pour faire mon travail.

Pour ce qui est de l'utilisation de la langue québécoise, je me suis inspirée du fait que Fo avait écrit sa pièce en lombard, langue qui n'existait pas non plus à l'époque du Christ, pour la rapprocher du public devant qui elle allait être jouée. De toute façon, de voir les personnages bibliques, même la Sainte Vierge, parler sa langue, ravissait le public montréalais.

J'ai travaillé sur une traduction littérale faite par une professeur [sic] de l'Université de Montréal, qui, elle-même ne comprenant pas tous les mots en lombard, m'avait livré un texte.... plein de trous. Aucune autre traduction de cette pièce n'existait à cette époque, je crois.

Je quitte pour Key West dans trois jours, il ne me sera donc pas possible de vous rencontrer...

J'espère que cette courte page aura quelque peu éclairé votre lanterne.

Au revoir

Michel Tremblay

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