

Context		Original Performance Conditions		Dario Fo	
Piazza Fontana 1969	The action of the play is focused on the real-life events of 1969 in the Piazza Fontana, Milan.	1	Fo often performed outside of conventional theatres, such as in public squares or occupied factories, wanting to bring his message to the common people.	1	24 March 1926 - October 13 th 2016.
The two main political parties in Italy :	Christian Democrats Italian Communists Underground forces conspiring to keep the Communists out of government, or to introduce a non-democratic system (possibly fascist or totalitarian)	2	Fo intended the play to be intensely political during its initial run in Italy in 1970.	2	Italian satirist, playwright, theatre director, actor and composer. Won the Nobel Prize in 1997 for Literature.
		3	The first performance took place in Milan 1970, just a few hours after a demonstration to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the Piazza Fontana bombing.	3	Fo's work is characterised by criticism of organized crime, political corruption, political assassination, the doctrine of the Catholic Church and the conflict in the Middle East.
		4	Fo did not advertise his play, yet even so, it was so popular - and so timely - that 500 people had to be turned away one night on the first run of performances.	4	Worked with his wife on TV and in theatre. Founded an acting group, 'Campagna Dario Fo – Franca Rame, in 1959. Plus many others over the years. Toured public spaces such as factories, gymnasiums and parks.
		5	Fo would also typically begin the evening by talking about current events and finishing with a discussion of the historical context. He rewrote the play many times during rehearsals and also made alterations based on public reaction or in response to ongoing events.	5	Also worked on TV show Canzonissima, with his wife, performing humorous sketches. Made them both popular and famous personalities.
Italy 1960s and 1970s	Italy in the 1960s and 1970s: Italy's working class was fed up with dangerous working conditions, long hours, low pay, expensive and uninhabitable housing, poor benefit packages.	6	There was a "third act" in each performance, a debate between the actors and the audience on the issues raised, with the intention of empowering the audience to think critically and hopefully take action.	6	Their style is described as 'agitprop theatre of politics, often blasphemous and scatological, but rooted in the tradition of commedia dell'arte'.
Protests and terrorism	The working classes began to march and strike. Left-wing organizations, gaining power, including those on the Far Left, favouring revolution over reform. Both left and right wing organisations began to turn to terrorism as a way to protest.	Main Characters			
Hot Autumn	The autumn of 1969 in Italy is known as the "Hot Autumn" of working class and student protests.	Maniac	Pivotal character. Considered "mad" but the sanest of all characters. Quick-witted and smart, can negotiate his way out of anything. He impersonates whoever he chooses. He exposes the contradictions in the play.	7	Wrote 70 plays, some of which have been translated into 30+ languages, modified to reflect local political /social issues
December 12 1969	173 bomb attacks occurred in Italy in a year during this time. The anarchist who died at Milan police headquarters and whose death is the subject of Fo's play , had been arrested on suspicion of carrying out a Hot Autumn bombing at the National Agricultural Bank in Piazza Fontana in Milan on December 12, 1969.	Bertozzo	He sets the context of the play in Act one and only returns in Act two to be a foil for a series of slap stick routines. Often the butt of jokes. He is abused verbally and physically. He is an indicator of the violent treatment the anarchist will have been subjected to. He also provides much slapstick humour.		
		Inspector or Pissani	He connects the action of the play to the actual events of the Milan explosion. Represents a higher level of bureaucracy and status that deconstructs during the play. He falls for the Maniac's disguise, and represents both the stupidity of the police, and their hypocrisy		
		Superintendent -	Oafish superior to Pissani. Chief of police. Falls for the Maniac's story just as Pissani does. A hypocrite, will go along with anything to save his own skin.		
		Felletti	The only female character. She represents "the press" and calls into question their role in events		

Political Theatre	
1	Purpose: Political theatre does not lecture an audience on a particular political belief system They are not interested only in entertaining their audiences.
2	Political theatre attempts to heighten the critical consciousness of its audience, furthering their ability to sort through the complexities of modern life so as to make informed decisions about weighty political issues.
3	ADOAA encourages its audience to think critically about events that were unfolding at the time in Italy.
4	Alienates audience by using techniques to destroy the 4 th wall.
5	Direct address
6	Self reflexive techniques (where the play describes itself as a play).
7	Populist dimension – Political theatre is not written to be elitist. Written for the average person, using plain language and slang. (Fo invites and allows translations of the original play to use modern/relevant slang to appeal to different countries and cultures).

Style and Features	
Satire	The use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues.
Farce	A type of comedy. Uses buffoonery, horseplay, crude and stereotypical characterisation and ludicrously improbable situations Physical humour, miscommunications, absurdity and unrealistic situations are used in order to make the audience laugh. Fo used Farce because " satirical laughter helps avoid the danger of catharsis. "
Alienation	Inspired by Brecht. Prevents the audience from identifying too closely with any particular character or immersed in the story line. Fo does this mainly in ADOAA by having the Maniac speak directly to the audience and also self reflexive techniques.
Meta-theatre	Techniques include: - the direct address of the audience - an acknowledgement that the people performing are actors (and not actually the characters they are playing). - an element whose meaning depends on the difference between the represented time and place of the drama (the fictional world) and the time and place of its theatrical presentation (the reality of the theatre event) - the play-within-a-play
Self Reflective Technique	When a play refers to itself as a play.
Commedia Dell'arte	Italian theatre tradition popular from the mid-16th to the mid-18th centuries. Actors wore masks. Actors at the heart of the playmaking process, improvising lines rather than precisely following a script. – Fo adapted his script, changing lines in response to the audience Maniac is updated version of the ARLECHCHINO. Each of the maniacs disguises are considered 'a mask'.

Plot Summary – Accidental Death of an Anarchist

Act 1 Scene 1	Bertozzo is interrogating a fraudster (Maniac) who outwits him. When Bertozzo leaves the room, Maniac intercepts a phone call from Pissani and finds out that a judge is coming to the station to look into the death of an anarchist while in police custody. Maniac impersonates Judge Malipiero to humiliate the policemen responsible for the supposedly accidental death.
Act 1 Scene 2	Malipiero, (Maniac), demands that Pisanni, Constable and Superintendent re-enact the interrogation. They fabricate events, turning it into a farce, acting as if it was friendly conversation not tense interrogation. Constable claims he grabbed the anarchist’s shoe to stop him falling. Maniac notes that the anarchist had both shoes on. Superintendent gets angry. Pissani reveals that Superintendent pushed anarchist out of the window. The phone rings. A journalist wants to meet them to clear up rumours about the interrogation and death.
Act 2	Policemen tell the Maniac to leave. This gives Maniac chance to disguise himself as a Roman forensic scientist named Captain Piccini. Feletti presents the policemen with evidence that might expose them. Piccini comes up with a story about how the anarchist died. Feletti is sceptical. Bertozzo arrives, with a replica of a bomb from an anarchist attack. Bertozzo, realises that Maniac is in disguise. He holds the policemen and Maniac at gunpoint, ordering Feletti to cuff them. Maniac reveals a tape recorder that exposes their role in the anarchist’s death. He strips off his disguise, his true identity is Paulo Davidovitch Gandolpho, aka “Prose Pimpernel of the Permanent Revolution.” He reveals that the bomb replica is functional and sets it on a timer. Feletti attempts to stop him killing the policemen, calling him an extremist and a maniac. He tells her she can save them and put him in prison, or she can leave them to die for their crimes and join him as an accomplice. He then leaves to spread the recording. The play ends as the Maniac turns to the audience, telling them that if Feletti leaves the policemen, they die. However, if she saves them, they take her prisoner because she knows too much. He asks the audience which ending they prefer.
Act 3	In the original run (1970), a 3 rd act was included following the end of act 2. This included a debate between actors and audience members on which characters were at fault and who was actually the ‘terrorist’ and ‘corrupt’ in the play. This would engage the audience to think about the issues raised and make connections to their own political, social and cultural circumstances.

Links for further information:

<https://thewire.in/the-arts/dario-fos-politics-absurdist-laughter>

<https://www.gradesaver.com/accidental-death-of-an-anarchist/study-guide/essay-questions>

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/accidental-death-anarchist>

Themes

1	Political corruption
2	Truth versus illusion
3	Reform versus revolution
4	Class struggle and oppression
5	Madness