

award Dario Fo: A Modern-day Jester

"Who emulates the jesters of the Middle Ages in scourging authority and upholding the dignity of the downtrodden"

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

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

Fo is an extremely serious satirist with a multifaceted oeuvre. His independence and clear-sightedness have led him to take great risks, whose consequences he has been made to feel while at the same time experiencing enormous response from widely differing quarters.

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

Another of the high points in Fo's extensive oeuvre is "Morte accidentale di un anarchico".

"Accidental Death of an Anarchist" from 1970. Its background was the right-wing extremist bomb attacks of 1969, which were blamed by the authorities and the press on the anarchists. During interrogations in Milan, an innocent suspect "fell" from a fifth-

floor window. The play deals with these interrogations, which are gradually taken over by a Hamlet-like figure (il Matto, the Maniac) who possesses the kind of lunacy that lays bare the lies of officialdom.

Other works that can be singled out are "Non si paga! Non si paga!" ("We Can't Pay We Won't Pay!") from 1974 and "Clacson, trombette e perracchi" ("Trumpets and Raspberries") from 1981.

The latter is a comedy of errors aimed at participants in the disreputable stratagems in high places. In recent years, together with Franca Rame, Fo has dealt with women's issues in several plays.

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

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

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

Profile

Dario Fo was born in 1926 in the village of Sangiano (Varese) in Lombardy, where while still young he came into



Italian playwright Dario Fo caught in one of his typical expressions at his arrival for a press conference in Milan Friday last.

contract with popular theatrical and narrative traditions (his grandfather was a well-known *fabulatore*). After studying art and architecture in Milan, Fo took part in radio programmes with a series of monologues *Poer Nano* (Poor Dwarf), made his debut as an actor in 1952 (Teatro Odeon, Milan) and in the same year began to write satirical cabarets and to act at the Piccolo Theatre. In 1954 he married the actress Franca Rame. In 1959 the couple founded their own company, in which Franca Rame was the leading lady and Fo, the writer, producer, mime and actor. He achieved international fame in 1960 with *Gli arcangeli non giocano a flipper* (Archangels Don't Play Pinball). In 1968 with left-wing support (ARCI/PCI) he founded the theatre-co-

operative "Nuova Scena," soon wound up because of ideological controversy. In 1970 Fo parted company with the Communist Party and the couple founded the theatre collective "La Comune." After having occupied Palazzina Liberty in Milan, the company was given a permanent theatre, which opened in 1974 with the success *We Can't Pay We Won't Pay!* Fo's opposition to conformism, the courage of his convictions, and his political and social commitment, have involved him in numerous court cases and controversies with the Italian state, the police, the censors, television (the "scandal programme" *Canzonissima*) and the Vatican (according to the Pope, *Mistero Buffo* had "desecrated Italian religious feelings"). In 1980 Fo was refused an

entry visa for a performance in the USA because of his membership in "Soccorso Rosso," an organisation supporting prison inmates. Together with Rame, Fo has written a number of monologues (for instance *Tutta casa, letto e chiesa*, "All Home, Bed and Church") inspired by the struggle of Italy's women for the right to divorce and legal abortion. His collected plays include 70 or so works. In 1981 Fo was awarded the Sonning Prize.

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And the Booker goes to ...

INDIAN writer Arundhati Roy on Tuesday won Britain's top literary prize for her debut novel and then said she might never write again.
Roy, who received a record one million pounds in advances worldwide for the book, was assured of instant literary celebrity by landing the 20,000 pound (13 lakh taka) Booker Prize for *The God of Small Things*.
She burst into tears on receiving the award and told reporters afterwards: "I don't know if I will write another book."
"Somebody has filed a case against me for corrupting public morality and obscenity," she told a news conference.
"The whole case was because somebody is annoyed by the success of the book, so further success could annoy them further," said the 37-year-old writer from New Delhi.
The author, daughter of a Christian mother and a Bengali Hindu father,

wrote a heart-rending tale of twins battling with the strictures of caste in southern India.
The prize, which is annually at the centre of controversy about the state of the modern novel, guarantees the winner international recognition as well as a place in bestseller lists.
"For me this prize is about my past and not my future. Having written this book I am back to square one," Roy said.
Over almost 30 years, the prize has been awarded to writers including Salman Rushdie, Kingsley Amis and Iris Murdoch.
But literary giants like Graham Greene have failed to win and critics have complained that the prize is too often given to second-rate novels by obscure writers.
Professor Gillian Beer and her fellow judges ploughed through 106 books from Britain, Ireland and 50 commonwealth countries to pick the finalists,



The beaming Arundhati

who included challengers from England, Northern Ireland and Australia.
After the judges unanimously picked the winner, Beer said: "With extraordinary linguistic inventiveness, Arundhati Roy funnels the history of South India through the eyes of seven-year-old twins. The story she tells is fundamental as well as local. It is about love and death, about lies and laws. Her narrative crackles with riddles and yet tells its tale quite clearly. We are all engrossed by this moving novel. Rejection, obsession and loss are the keywords," one critic said of the powerful tale, which has already been translated into 27 languages.
Northern Irish writer Bernard MacLaverty had been the bookmakers' favourite to land the prize for *grace notes*. A bittersweet tale of a young composer returning home from her father's funeral.
But Arundhati Roy's Booker Prize winning novel has not been without its

share of controversies in Kerala, which forms the setting for the novel.
While the left-oriented writers in general tended to prawn upon the novel for its far from factual portrayal of communists in Kerala, the novel was sought to be arraigned in a court on charges of obscenity.
Veteran Marxist leader, EMS Namboodiripad has taken exception to the way three communist characters have been portrayed in the novel which is set in 'aimanam', a village in Kottayam district during the late 1960s, when the Namboodiripad government was in power in Kerala.
Despite reservations expressed by leftists about the literary merit of the work and the social and political realities as depicted in it, a cross section of writers and critics have hailed Arundhati Roy winning the booker prize as a major cultural event for India.
— Story compiled at Star desk

travel Memorabilia

by Syed Waliullah

IT is my proud privilege to note that the learning process that began at the University of Dhaka, Punjab University Lahore, then at the U.C. Berkeley have immensely contributed toward my academic work at the university, in the government and the post retirement professions as well. What I learnt in these citadels of learning reminds me of a quote for a Teheran University professor of Philosophy, "... all learning is self learning. The teacher is only a guide. What one learns at the University is how to learn by himself." This principle and method of learning continues to remain with me, even today. Even during this extended visit with our son in Washington DC, I was in the environment of learning in public libraries, museums, particularly the Library of Congress, National Geographic Museum, that offer a rare opportunity one gets in one's life time.
While walking through the campus with Glen, Prof. J.S., Prof. Toney I saw all of them had affordable attitude toward their students and clients. I say clients for Glen also provides counseling services to his students in addition to carrying out his full professorial responsibility. Whenever they met a student they "hyed" and called them by

their first name. Students also reciprocated the same way by prefixing Mr./or Dr. with the last name. The candour and informality in these exchange were quite evident. While walking toward the Hub a student approached Prof Toney. They with her need for his signature on some official paper. Instead of asking her to see him in his office he asked for the paper and signed it.
Glen set up appointments with my professors. All of may professors are



now retired so is their student (writer). Visiting them after all these years was a delightful event for both the parties. My first visit was with Prof. Black & Mrs. Black. I saw Mrs. Black as gracious as ever. We all discussed, rather shared our present day life with children away living their own lives with their own nuclear families. Here we had a common ground. Both of us were retired. Interestingly we did not talk about our past teaching professions. We shared our thoughts on how to improve our own homes in matters of decor, furnishing and acoustics. His advise was to get down any idea that comes to mind and implement it "pue a pue" (bit by bit), as I may deem it fit for making the home of our liking.
Later in the day, he took me to his new home, miles away from the present one in town, mostly completed and made livable. Patches and mounds of snow were still lying there on the ground. It was a country home in the midst of miles of farm land and mountains. The land was awaiting the arrival of summer for cultivation. Excepting its lonely location it has everything of a home in the city. Obviously, there was no neighbourhood and no traffic on the street. There was no necessity of guarding the vacant property against burglars or intruders. Professor Black had to lock the front door only. For a

loner like me it was an ideal and a coveted place for recluse at least for a week. My visit with professor Black ended with a delicatessen for my delectation.
Professor Bylund is still the same, all smiling and vibrant. He taught social change. We reminisced our days of the early seventies. Next I visited Professor DeHart. He shared with us his present preoccupation with writing on social issues. He was a keen talker and a professor as ever. Unfortunately his movement is impaired by a stroke he suffered a few years back while his wife was paralytic for many years and bedridden. The couple hired a college girl to help them with their laundry cleaning, shopping etc. She works for them two days a week. Their children were earning their bread elsewhere in different parts of the country and visit them telephonically on a regular basis and physically during annual vacations, if not engaged otherwise.
One of our family friends was the Thrones. Dr Wynne Throne was then the Vice President of USU. Thornes gave us the not so usual status of friendship for they came to know that I was a Bangladeshi, and a one time teacher. This relationship was further developed in the process of our fund raising work for the university teachers of Bangladesh who fled the country in 1971. (While at the University of Cali-

fornia 1961-63 my avowed motto was "tuebor (I will defend) Pakistan" but within a decade I changed my motto in 1971 to "tuebor Bangladesh" during my stay at the Utah State University. Interestingly enough my motto until August 14, 1947 was tuebor the British Empire). Dr Thorne used to arrange meetings of business and professional groups where I was invited to speak on why Bangladesh.
He was one of the leaders among the US Professors, who supported the cause of our war of independence. He along with other professors of various parts of USA issued full page advertisements in top-notch national dailies and weeklies of USA in favour of our war of liberation, raised funds for supporting Bangladeshi professors in exile. As ill luck would have it he has passed away and I would not meet him again. Nevertheless, his wife Professor Alison is there and still full of life and energy and impressive with her erudition, an active member of the Women's Honorary Women in Economics. She has retired as a professor of Economics from the same university. At this age her memory was so sharp that she still remembered many issues relating our war of liberation and tit-bits of our family get together.
The Mormon Church: With some unexpressed reservation I accepted Glen's

invitation to attend the Sunday church prayer and other church activities of the day. I am glad that I did. There were aspects of the day's activity that seemed to important especially for the present day life and living complexities. These helped cultivate the family life assiduously while letting the young grow in this complex modern world with their individuality. Not a very easy task. The religion and the life of an individual, the family and the community are kept inseparable and integrated. Seldom a deviance is reported. Religion and its preaching have been kept apart from professional and paid preachers. It is for everybody to practice and preach as is the mission of Tablighee Jamat in the sub-continent.
One additional but unexpectedly memorable meeting that I had at the Church, must be mentioned here. This meeting was with the exalted son of Utah, Dr Don Leslie Lind, Professor of Physics and an Astronaut. I could not have met this personality had I not been invited to attend the Sunday Church. "I do not find any conflict between science and faith on the Almighty God". This was one of his remarkable comments in the course of our few minutes' discussion on his work and life. The same was once heard from another physicist and a noble lauriet, late Professor Abdus Salam.
To be continued