

M.A.
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The 'Madman' as the central character in Death of an Anarchist

According to Franco Rame, Dario Fo's wife, "His theatre is not based on characters, but on situation." Like Pirandello (Six Characters in Search of an Author), Fo's characters are creatures of the artist's imagination, some fully developed in personality, others half-developed - all of them in search of an objective truth or reality. The central character in *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* is an expert in putting on masks; he is a quick-change artist. First he puts on the mask of a madman to protect himself from the law. The play begins with an interrogation. The madman is accused of "fraudulent representation" a number of times, the latest being that of a psychiatrist that has brought him to Bestozzo for interrogation. He agrees to the charges, but says that he has not been convicted so far and that his record is "squeaky clean." He now pretends to be mad. "I'm mad, I'm a certified mental case." He is an actor who can mimic several characters like a ventriloquist.

By projecting himself as a bonafide insane, the madman starts "the play within a play". Then, he puts on the mask of a judge to expose the functioning of the judiciary. He presents himself as Marco Maria Malipero, first counsel to the High court, who has come to conduct a review of the enquiry in to the custodial death of the anarchist. Even in this role no police men suspect him as another person. He is able to tell give different



laws and sections before them. This shows his depth of knowledge. He argues that if 'raptus' is by definition a suicidal anxiety caused by provocation, there must be someone who provoked this anxiety in the railway worker accused of bombing. He asks the Superintendent and Inspector Pisani to reconstruct the scene of the railway worker's interrogation and advises the Superintendent not to shift the responsibility to his subordinates. He tells the Superintendent - "I want to hear exactly what you said that might word for word. Imagine I am the anarchist."

The audience thoroughly enjoys this "play within a play" with the madman impressively impersonating as the first counsel to the High Court and causing acute discomfiture to both the Superintendent and his subordinates. He asks the Superintendent whether he has any "incontrovertible proof" against the suspect because he is there "to conduct a serious enquiry, not to fuck about with kindergarten logic." He poses to be friendly to the policemen in order to bring out their callousness and inhumanity. Thus, the madman gradually builds up his case against the policemen, they being entirely responsible for the anarchist's accidental death. He also rescues them from the nagging reporter, Miss Maria Feletti, who has the reputation of being "the vulture."

The play is an open ended tragic farce"

involving a clown at the centre stage - a quick change artist who can cry, laugh and be serious as the situation demands, and who through his mime and gestures, creates funny situations to keep the audience spellbound. From the very beginning he controls the situation and deals with policemen as well as the reporter with aplomb and confidence. As a perfect actor, the madman manoeuvres and manipulates every other character and each situation to expose the corruption in high places. He cuts everyone to size - Bertozzo, Pisani, Maria Feletti as well as the constables with his quick intelligence and ready wit. He gives statements forcefully, compelling others to believe that what he says is true like when he tells the Superintendent and Inspector Pisani that the Home Secretary has been advised to dismiss both of them because of the scandal arising from the "accidental" death of the so called anarchist.

Thus, the madman is the most important character in Dario Fo's *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. He is the only character who is in the centre of all and is the mouthpiece of the playwright. He is not given any specific name.