

**A Rhapsody in Grotesque Minor:  
On Modern Dramatic and Theatrical Grotesqueness  
and the Italian *Teatro del Grottesco* in Particular**

Reinhold Grimm\*

**T**he phenomenon of the modern grotesque in drama and the theater boasts a long history, even prehistory; as a matter of fact, it can be traced, in theory as well as practice, back to the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As for dramatic theory, or dramaturgy, none other than the great French writer Victor Hugo (1802-1885) was, with the preface of his play *Cromwell* (the famous “Préface de Cromwell”) of 1827, the first to proclaim the grotesque or, to be precise, its mixture with the sublime: “[Il faut] mêler... le grotesque au sublime.” As for dramatic and theatrical practice, on the other hand, two German authors, both of whom were contemporaries of Hugo, must be mentioned, and most emphatically at that: to wit, Christian Dietrich Grabbe (1801-1836) and, even more

---

\*ศาสตราจารย์เกียรติคุณแห่งมหาวิทยาลัยแคลิฟอร์เนีย ริปเวอไซด์  
(PROF. DR. DR. h.c. REINHOLD GRIMM, University of California - Riverside)  
-กองบรรณาธิการวารสารขอขอบคุณนางสาวบุษราคม กัญยวงศ์หา ที่ช่วยพิมพ์บทความ

นี้ให้

**บทคัดย่อ**

ดังที่ชื่อบทความนี้บ่งชี้ไว้ บทความนี้จะสืบค้นถึงกำเนิดและพัฒนาการของการเสียดเย้ย<sup>1</sup>สมัยใหม่ในบทละครและการละคร นับจากตอนเริ่มแรกในต้นศตวรรษที่ 19 (วิกตอร์ อูโก ในฝรั่งเศส เกออร์ก บิชเนอร์ และคนอื่นๆ ในเยอรมนี) จวบจนถึงช่วงรุ่งเรืองที่สุดในศตวรรษที่ 20 บทความนี้เป็นการศึกษาเชิงเปรียบเทียบอย่างทั่วถึง นอกจากนักเขียนชาวฝรั่งเศสและเยอรมัน/ออสเตรียแล้ว บทความนี้ยังกล่าวถึงนักเขียนบทละครและผลงานจากรัสเซีย สวีเดน สเปน โปแลนด์ และสวิตเซอร์แลนด์ ตลอดจนกลุ่มนักคิดและกระแสแนวคิดต่างๆ เช่น เอ็กเพรชชันนิสม์ ดาดาอิสзм พิวเจอริสม์ และเซอเรียลลิสม์ บทความนี้มุ่งศึกษาเน้นกลุ่ม teatro del grottesco ของอิตาลี (ราว 1914 ถึง 1925) เป็นพิเศษ ด้วยเหตุว่ากลุ่มดังกล่าวใช้การเสียดเย้ยเป็นแก่นและแนวเดินเรื่อง กระทั่งยังใช้เป็นการประกาศท่าทีอย่างสมน้ำสมเนื้อดังที่เคยใช้มา

so, Georg Büchner (1813-1837). The former, as early as 1822, wrote a bluntly grotesque comedy titled *Scherz, Satire, Ironie und tiefere Bedeutung* ("Jest, Satire, Irony, and Deeper Significance") the repercussions of which can be felt as late as around 1900; the latter, in 1836/37, composed a seminal tragedy entitled *Woyzeck* (thus the name of the protagonist) which, however, remained a fragment and saw its publication only in 1879, and its world premiere, as unbe-

---

1. เนื่องจากไม่มีศัพท์ภาษาไทยที่ตรงกับคำว่า grotesque ศัพท์บัญญัติของราชบัณฑิตยฯ ใช้น่า "วิลิศณัม" ซึ่งกินความหมายเพียงบางส่วนเท่านั้น นอกจากนี้ที่พึงเข้าใจได้ยากต้องมานั่งแปลไทยเป็นไทยอีก ความหมายของ grotesque กินความตั้งแต่ ขยายให้ "ดูเว่อ" ทำให้แปลกประหลาด หรือดูน่าขนพองสยองเกล้า ทำให้ดูน่าเกลียด ทั้งนี้อาจเพื่อเป็นทั้งการล้อเลียนและเย้ยหยัน หรือเสียดสี หรือการสลายภาพลักษณ์เดิม ๆ ที่ยึด ๆ กันมา ทางกองบรรณาธิการจึงขอใช้คำว่า "เสียดเย้ย" ไปพลาง ๆ ก่อน ทั้งนี้หากทางท่านผู้อ่านมีข้อเสนอแนะว่าควรใช้คำภาษาไทยเช่นไร ทางกองบรรณาธิการจักขอบขอบคุณยิ่ง

**ABSTRACT**

As the title indicates, this essay investigates the origin and development of modern grotesqueness in drama and the theater from its inception in early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Victor Hugo in France, Georg Büchner etc. in Germany) to its culmination in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is a thoroughly comparative study discussing, apart from French and German/Austrian authors, playwrights and works from Russia, Sweden, Spain, Poland, and Switzerland, among others, as well as schools or movements such as Expressionism, Dadaism, Futurism, and Surrealism. Special emphasis is put on the Italian *teatro del grottesco* (ca. 1914 to 1925) because it made grotesqueness its central theme and style and even—and quite justifiably so—its battle cry, as its were.

lievable as it may sound, in 1913. Ever since, though, this play—an overwhelmingly “complete fragment,” to borrow Thomas Carlyle’s dictum—has rightly been considered a modern classic, serving, among other things, as the libretto of the sole full-fledged dodecaphonic opera: namely, Alban Berg’s *Wozzeck* (a misspelling due to an editorial misreading). And not just once but repeatedly and quite programmatically does the battle cry “grotesk!” resound in Büchner’s *Woyzeck*: it underscores, justifiably<sup>3</sup> indeed, the role and function of ludicrous caricatures such as the Captain or the Doctor and of various other grotesqueries.

So much for prehistory. The history proper of the modern grotesque as a dramatic and theatrical phenomenon begins, no question about it, shortly before the turn of the century and, from there,

extends not merely over the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but way beyond; in effect, it has been permeating and marking the major part of world drama and theater to this day. That such a widespread modern, and even present-day, grotesqueness, both in the scripts and on the boards, manifested itself in varying manner and degree, producing more or less distinct types of plays or of whole movements, ought to go without saying, just as the occasional overlapping of their rich and manifold textures and structures. The literary critic or historian is faced here with a veritable surfeit of examples that readily offer themselves. Hence, in the brief notes following, I shall content myself with listing, in roughly chronological order, the most conspicuous of those playwrights and their works as they have made their appearance from the 1890s onward.

For instance, in 1895, Oskar Panizza (1853-1921, a German despite his Italian surname) published his *Himmelstragödie*—"Heaven's Tragedy," thus its subtitle—*Das Liebeskonzil* ("The Council of Love"). This extraordinary play, celebrating, as it were, the quincentenary of the outbreak of syphilis in Europe, portrays the Lord as a decrepit old man, Jesus as a moronic youngster, and the Virgin Mary as a plain cocotte; it takes place both in Heaven, with the inclusion of the Devil, and at the papal court of Alexander VI, or Rodrigo Borgia. In consequence of this truly grotesque work, Panizza was accused of blasphemy, tried, and sentenced to a year of imprisonment—an experience from which he never recovered, gradually going mad until he died in an insane asylum. And only one year after the publication of *Das Liebeskonzil*, in 1896, the crude and vulgar grotesque *Ubu Roi* ("King Ubu") by the Frenchman Alfred Jarry (1873-1907) was performed in Paris...

or, more correctly, an abortive attempt was made at performing it, because its very first line, uttered as soon as the curtain had been raised, was the barely disguised four-letter word “shit”: “merd[r]e.” The scandal that immediately followed proved to be one of the wildest and noisiest, and surely one of the most memorable, in all French theater history.

But hadn't [Benjamin] Frank[lin] Wedekind (1864-1918, another German despite his American given names) brought out his controversial drama *Frühlings Erwachen*, subtitled *Eine Kindertragödie* (“Spring's Awakening: A Children's Tragedy”) as early as 1891? It was banned from the stage for no fewer than fifteen years, yet not because of the pre-expressionistic grotesqueries in which it culminates, but because of its alleged obscenity and “unheard-of filthiness,” as the censor chose to label it. Namely, Wedekind had had the effrontery of picturing the effects of puberty—note his figurative title—as they tend to reveal themselves in middle-class teenagers, whether male or female: i.e., masturbation, homosexuality—still a punishable crime in 19th- and most of 20th-century Germany—as well as sadism, masochism, precocious sexual intercourse and the ensuing pregnancy, a failed abortion, and so on. Evidently, topics such as these were conceived by a prudish Wilhelmian—or, for that matter, Victorian—society as even more grotesquely shocking than the play's culmination and ending, when a Masked Gentleman emerges from nowhere, and the suicidal youngster Moritz rises from his grave with his head under his arm. Granted, Wedekind's subsequent dramas were considerably less grotesque in so pre-expressionistic, indeed pre-surrealistic, a style; they were, however, equally shocking and, moreover, not devoid of a

certain, if subtler, grotesqueness, either. This holds true—to name but two other dramatic works of Wedekind's—both for his *Schauspiel* (“Play”) *Der Marquis von Keith* (“The Marquess of Keith”) of 1900 and for his bipartite “monster tragedy”—his own term—*Erdegeist* (“Earth Spirit”) and *Die Büchse der Pandora* (“Pandora’s Box”), each dating from 1893/94 but, as a work in its entirety, published much later. Its second part, by the way, contains, in addition to presenting Jack the Ripper, the first dramatic portrayal ever of a lesbian character...and, I venture to guess, not only on a German stage.

Doubtless, the one-act play *Der grüne Kakadu* (“The Green Cockatoo”) by the Austrian Arthur Schnitzler (1862-1931) is also imbued with a similar, both subtler and more subdued, grotesqueness; still, it proved as powerful and effective as the Wedekindian dramas. Quite fittingly, therefore, it was subtitled *Groteske in einem Akt* (“A Grotesque in One Act”) by its author. And what of that towering Russian playwright, Anton Chekhov (1860-1904)? Are not his dramas as, for example, *Vishnevyyi sad* (“The Cherry Orchard”) of 1904, likewise comparable to the aforesaid grotesque works of Wedekind and Schnitzler? To top it off, shortly thereafter—namely, in 1906—two plays by two slightly younger Russian authors appeared, and they betrayed a far more uncompromising, outspoken, and radically modernistic grotesqueness. The works in question are *Zhizn' cheloveka* (“The Life of Man”) by Leonid Andreev (1871-1919) and *Balaganchik* (“The Showbooth”) by Alexandr Blok (1880-1921). With reason, the latter’s first night on 30 December 1906, under the direction of the future ‘biomechanical’ innovator Vsevolod Meyerhold, has been dubbed “the birth of modern drama

and of grotesque theater in Russia.” Needless to say, more such plays—for instance, Andreev’s *Chernye maski* (“Black Masks”) of 1907—were to follow suit.

And yet, the most ruthlessly grotesque and, in that respect, most important drama in my bird’s-eye historical overview hailed neither from Germany or Austria nor from France or Russia but from Sweden. It is, as might be surmised, the epochal “chamber play,” also dating from 1907, *Spöksonaten* (“The Ghost Sonata”) by August Strindberg, who lived from 1849 to 1912—a work, in fact, so far-reaching as to predate and prefigure, with its parrot-like Mummy in the Closet, even Samuel Beckett’s bizarre characters that are buried in sand up to their necks, or, ludicrously enough, reside in garbage cans (*Endgame / Fin de Partie*). Of course, that there exist further Strindbergian plays which could be adduced in our context is well known: to wit, *Till Damaskus* (“To Damascus”), *Dödsdansen* (“Dance of Death”), or *Ett drömspel* (“A Dream Play”). They all were composed and published around the turn of the century, and at least one of them, “Dance of Death,” could easily be shown to reverberate as late as 1944 in Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Huis clos* (“No Exit”), which depicts the selfsame bourgeois hell as once did Strindberg’s text. Not surprisingly, the Swiss master of theatrical grotesqueries, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, adapted *Dödsdansen*—situating it in a ring, and counting rounds, as for boxing—under the title *Play Strindberg* in 1968/69.

Beckett (1906-1989), Sartre (1905-1980), Dürrenmatt (1921-1990); to be sure. And one could easily name additional celebrated representatives of 20<sup>th</sup> century world theater, among them no less a worthy than its giant, Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956). But I don’t want to

belabor Strindberg's enormous impact; rather, I wish to remind the attentive reader of a Spaniard who, for many decades, had fallen into near total oblivion even in his homeland. He is Ramón del Valle-Inclán (1869-1936), the greatest predecessor, in modern Spanish drama and theater, of Federico García Lorca, who was born in 1898, like Brecht, and who died—murdered by the Falangists, as will be recalled—in 1936, like his almost forgotten precursor. Valle-Inclán authored several dramatic works in the grotesque vein, starting out with his *Comedias bárbaras* (from 1907 on) and concluding, more or less, with the series of his *Esperpentos*, i.e., “absurd,” indeed “nonsensical,” plays, which came out between 1924 and 1930. It is, incidentally, not by chance that I am referring also to Lorca. For can't one, in point of fact, descry components and elements of modern grotesqueness in his plays, too, including his justly renowned *Bodas de sangre* (“Blood Wedding”) of 1935? And doesn't the very same apply, perhaps in a still larger measure, to Lorca's greatest successor on the Spanish stage: namely, Antonio Buero Vallejo (1916-2000)? His *El sueño de la razón* (“The Sleep [or Dream] of Reason”) in particular, which dates from 1970, virtually abounds with grotesque as well as cruel effects, as do, on closer scrutiny, most of his dramas.

Nor is, I hasten to add, the vast realm of English drama and theater entirely absent from this global—or, in any case, pan-European—development; indeed, some English texts are said to have exerted a noticeable influence precisely on the *teatro del grottesco*. Already the critic Adriano Tilgher, who wrote in the early 1920s, cited the Scotsman James Matthew Barrie (with his play *Dear Brutus* of 1917) as well as the Irishman John Millington Synge (with his grotesquely ribald comedy *The Playboy of the Western World* of



1906) as forerunners and, in all probability, stimulators of Luigi Antonelli's *L' uomo che incontrò se stesso* ("The Man Who Encountered Himself") and Luigi Chiarelli's *La maschera e il volto* ("The Mask and The Face") of 1918 and 1913/16, respectively. Both these dramas, which stem from the heyday of the Italian "theater of the grotesque," must be featured here, alongside Enrico Cavacchioli's *L'uccello del Paradiso* ("The Bird of Paradise"). However, with dramatists such as Sartre, Beckett, Buero Vallejo, Dürrenmatt, and even Brecht, or with a play such as *Dear Brutus*, the history of grotesqueness in modern drama and theater as it can be gleaned from the decades before the advent of the *teatro del grottesco* has long been left behind; what now remains to be sketched and/or supplemented, no matter how fleetingly, is the wealth of congenial and parallel movements from about 1910 to the mid-1920s and, last but not least, a couple of hints at the continuing manifestations of the dramatic and theatrical grotesque in 20<sup>th</sup> century world literature.

That German Expressionism developed side by side with Italian Futurism and, as far as its output for the stage is concerned, also with the *teatro del grottesco* is—or ought to be—a truism. To name but two of its most significant playwrights will suffice: to wit, Georg Kaiser (1878-1945) and Carl Sternheim (1878-1942). Kaiser, the author of what must be regarded, both in general and in terms of grotesqueness, as the most typical as well as most consummate drama of that entire movement, *Von morgens bis mitternachts* ("From Morn to Midnight") of 1916/17, had already subtitled his very first attempt at playwriting, *Schellenkönig* ("King of Diamonds") of 1895/96, *Eine blutige Groteske* ("A Bloody Grotesque"); Sternheim, more satirically inclined, authored such daring grotesqueries as, for example,

*Die Hose* ("The Panties") of 1911, indeed amassed a voluminous cycle of such plays which he summarily, and blatantly ironically, named *Aus dem bürgerlichen Heldenleben* ("From the Heroic Life of the Bourgeoisie"). And hardly less characteristic, and certainly abundantly grotesque as well, is the only extant dramatic work of Dadaism, a play by the German-French writer Iwan/Yvan Goll (1891-1950) that bears the telling if elaborate title *Methusalem oder Der ewige Bürger: Ein satirisches Drama* or *Methusalem ou L'éternel bourgeois: Drame satirique*—for Goll provided both versions—and which originated in 1919, appearing in German, with an introductory note by Kaiser, in 1922 and in French, with Goll's own introduction, in 1923. This *Methusalem or The Eternal Bourgeois: A Satiric Drama*, as its English translation of 1966 is faithfully titled, clearly and irrefutably anticipates the (mainly French) theater of the absurd that was to dominate the European, and not merely European, stages throughout the 1950s and 1960s. One scene from it, at any rate, might just as well have figured, and most prominently to boot, in the both plainly absurd and ludicrously grotesque farce *La Cantatrice chauve* ("The Bald Soprano") by Rumanian-born Eugène Ionesco (1909-1994), which was first performed, scoring a dazzling success, in Paris in 1950.

Yet there is more still, especially with regard to the Italian *teatro del grottesco*, that fast and sweeping school, or movement, developing contemporaneously with Kaiser's, Sternheim's, Goll's, and other playwrights' expressionistic or even dadaistic works. In truth, the Gollian *Methusalem* could, to all intents and purposes, and with equal justification, safely be subsumed under the heading of not only a theater of the grotesque but also of dramatic and theatrical

Surrealism. In his French introduction, Goll himself invoked, on the one hand, *avant-garde grotesqueness*—what we need, he declared, is “[des] masques: grossiers, grotesques.” And likewise “des marionnettes”—while, on the other hand, and in the same breath, favoring and propagating “le surréalisme et l’alogique.” Hence, can there be any doubt that his satirical drama, replete with a host of genuine grotesqueries as it is, has to be ranked next to the surrealist play *par excellence*, Guillaume Apollinaire’s *Les mamelles de Tirésias* (“The Tits of Tiresias”) of 1917? (Apollinaire, a Pole and elective Frenchman whose actual name was Wilhelm Apollinaris Kostrowitzki, lived from 1880 to 1918, creating his major contributions at the same time as did the Italian *groteschi*.) A similarly rhetorical question concerning so close if complex a kinship might well be asked and answered, I think, in regard to later plays of Surrealism such as those of Jean Cocteau (1889-1963).

There is, however, yet another Polish playwright who needs must be featured in this survey of mine: namely, Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, who called himself Witkacy (1885-1939, when he committed suicide). This “master of the grotesque,” as he has been dubbed, inherited both German expressionist and French surrealist modes and methods and passed them on, so it seems, to his compatriots Sławomir Mrożek (1930-) and Tadeusz Różewicz (1921-) even though he came to enjoy only a posthumous and very belated fame since the 1960s. Far more independently, and much earlier as well, Russian Futurism, a further momentous movement partaking of the overall rise of modern dramatic and theatrical grotesqueness, flourished during the second and third decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet it, too, was influenced by German Expressionism but, notably,

also by Italian Futurism, which in turn was closely associated with the *teatro del grottesco*. The indisputable “star” of this motley Russian movement was Vladimir Mayakovsky, most impressively with—apart from his ingenious and audacious poetry—so wildly grotesque pieces as *Klop* (“The Bedbug”) of 1928/29 and *Banya* (“The Bathhouse”) of 1930. Like Witkacy, Mayakovsky (1893-1930) committed suicide—and again, not unlike his Polish colleague and contemporary, he did so for political reasons.

Even the influential propagator and practitioner of “alienation” (*Verfremdung*) on the stage and in the house, the aforementioned German poet and, above all, dramatist as well as theorist and stage director Brecht, was obviously involved in the swell and spread of modern grotesqueness in playwriting and its theatrical realization. His *Das Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis* (“The Baden Didactic Play of Acquiescence”) of 1929 constituted, in all likelihood, the best and most brutal and, for a bourgeois audience at least, most repugnant example thereof. Brecht’s disciples, as is well known, have been legion, not only in Germany or Europe but worldwide; still, I shall restrict my already lengthy enumeration to the two weightiest followers of his: to wit, the [erstwhile East] German Heiner Müller (1929-1995) and the exiled German and elective Swede Peter Weiss (1916-1982). Each of them combined, in his specific way, the Brechtian heritage with that of the prophet of a “theater of cruelty” (*théâtre de la cruauté*) from 20<sup>th</sup> century France, Antonin Artaud (1896-1948), and thus wallowed, of necessity, doubly and extravagantly in sundry grotesqueries. It will be sufficient, I trust, to make reference to Weiss’s smashing 1964 hit *Marat/Sade*—as his *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung Jean Paul* [sic] *Marats dargestellt durch die*

*Schauspielgruppe des Hospizes zu Charenton unter Anleitung des Herrn de Sade* ("The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade") has conveniently been abbreviated—or to allude to comparable Müllerian plays, or mere scenarios, like *Hamletmaschine* ("Hamlet Machine"), which was first staged, interestingly enough, at the French Théâtre Gérard Philippe in Saint-Denis in 1979. Less influenced by Brecht, indeed opposed to him to a certain degree, was Dürrenmatt, alongside Max Frisch (1911-1991) undoubtedly the greatest Swiss playwright of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; nevertheless, he likewise indulged, with such global successes as *Der Besuch der alten Dame* (in English, simply "The Visit") of 1955 and *Die Physiker* ("The Physicists") of 1961, in both manifold and excessive grotesque inventions and effects. Nor are these lacking, as intimated before, in numerous minor works of Dürrenmatt or, for that matter, in the dramatic oeuvre of his fellow countryman Frisch. And one could easily go on, listing dramatists of the grotesque—and the absurd—as, for instance, the Franco-Spaniard Fernando Arrabal (1932-), the pair of Britishers Harold Pinter and Arnold Wesker (1930- and 1932-, respectively), or the American Sam Shepard (1943-).

And just as the affinities to, and countless creations of, the grotesque in drama and the theater can be gathered from the literature closely preceding, then paralleling and following, the *teatro del grottesco*, so, too, can they be spotted, as we found out, in the decades, indeed the whole century, anteceding it. I have already pointed to Hugo and Büchner as well as to Grabbe's comedy of 1822; what must now be added is the observation that this very play was

adapted—in 1902, and under the title *Les Silènes* (“The Sileni”)—by none other than the iconoclastic author of *Ubu Roi*. Equally important in our context is the fact that, in the selfsame year, Jarry gave a talk in Brussels titled *Conférence sur les Pantins* (“A lecture on the Puppets [or Marionettes]”). For it highlights, as we shall presently see, not only a key motif of the Italian “theater of the grotesque” but, furthermore, does lead us straight to the most prolific and accomplished playwright Italy can boast of in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a titan of literary grotesqueness who has been waiting in the wings, as it were, from the outset of my disquisition: of course, Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936). It is anything but a secret that, besides attending the Universities of Palermo and Rome, he also studied in Germany, earning his doctorate at Bonn University where he even taught, though merely for one year, as a lecturer of Italian; however, little known—if known at all—is his presumable indebtedness to German Romanticism precisely with his most distinctive or, at least, most popular drama, *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (“Six Characters in Search of an Author”) dating from 1921. Unmistakably, this truly avant-garde work was prefigured, perhaps inspired, by a comedy that came out, ironically claiming to constitute a translation from the Italian, as early as 1797: namely, *Der gestiefelte Kater* (“Puss in Boots”) by Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853). I for one am firmly convinced that Pirandello was aware of Tieck’s text, which boldly and provocatively unfolds a sovereign interplay between illusion and reality, the cast on the stage and (alleged) members of the audience, and thus bears a striking resemblance to the basic plot and problems of the great Sicilian’s masterpiece. At any rate, *Der gestiefelte Kater* proves to be, if in its own Romantic fashion, no less grotesque than

*Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore.*

(Let me interject in parentheses that Pirandello is quite likely to have been cognizant of still another typical and weirdly comical work from German Romanticism, yet this time one of fiction: to wit—I use, as is customary, the name of its hero as its abridged title—the three-volume novel *Siebenkäs* of 1796-97. What the author Jean Paul [actually, Johann Paul Friedrich Richter, who lived from 1763-1825] narrates in it reveals itself, according to the relevant portions of the work's full title, as nothing short of the *Ehestand, Tod und Hochzeit* ["Wedlock, Death and Marriage"] of said hero, who cunningly feigns death in order to escape a drab existence. Whoever is familiar with Pirandello's oeuvre as well as with the works of *i grotteschi* will—without any detailed explanation, I am sure—immediately be reminded, on the one hand, of the novel *Il fu Mattia Pascal* ["The Late Mattia Pascal"] that the writer from Agrigento published in 1904, and, on the other hand, of the figures of Paolo and Savina in Chiarelli's *La maschera e il volto*, two thoroughgoing grotesqueries both of whose protagonists succeed in feigning death, either in the form of a suicide or in that of a murder. And wasn't the same grotesque motif, now definitely derived from Jean Paul's *Siebenkäs*, employed by Dürrenmatt for his ludicrous gangster opera *Frank V.* ["Frank V"] as late as 1958? The multifarious paths of grotesqueness in modern drama and theater are, one might be tempted to joke, as grotesque and grotesquely entwined as is the phenomenon itself.)

But enough! It is, at all events, against this international historical background that the Italian *teatro del grottesco* must be viewed and gauged, just as Pirandello's seemingly unique contribu-

tion must be evaluated and viewed against the background of the *teatro del grottesco*. Contrary to what the mass of playgoers and the majority of both critics and scholars believe, or have believed until very recently, Pirandello's monomaniacal dramatic output is in no way isolated, whether in Italian letters or in world literature at large. Instead; and specifically, his relationship to Chiarelli, Antonelli, Cavacchioli, and so many others of their school and generation must be ranked and defined as that of a *primus inter pares* of sorts—if, admittedly, a toweringly imposing one. Yet there is no need here to discuss Pirandello's role and immense contribution to 20<sup>th</sup> century grotesqueness in drama and the theater any further; suffice it to remember and briefly ponder the unambiguous statements, even confessions, encapsulated already in several titles of his—revealing catchwords and veritable slogans indeed—such as *Erma bifronte* (“The Two-Faced Herm”) or *Maschere nude* (“Naked Masks”). As is well known, the author chose the latter heading for the collection of his plays, whereas the work to which the former refers was, in addition, prefaced by him with sentences so full of grotesquely bitter imagery that they leave scarcely anything to be desired. Pirandello perceived, we learn from this confessional foreword, a kind of vast and deeply frustrating labyrinth, so to speak, wherein the human soul is incessantly turning round in a circle, without ever discovering an exit. In the midst of it, moreover, a column with a herm has been erected, we are further told: that very herm which, Janus-faced as it is, keeps laughing with one of its faces while weeping with the other; in fact, it laughs with its one face at its other face's tears (*ride anzi da una faccia del pianto della faccia opposta*). Could, I'd like to ask, the essence of a profoundly grotesque experience of life and



the ensuing worldview be expressed more piercingly, more comprehensively? Small wonder, then, if Luigi Pirandello appears to have felt unable cogently to differentiate between the ideas of tragedy and comedy, applying such and similar terms to his many plays with equal and near absolute arbitrariness.

He also, as early as 1908, produced a half theoretical, half historical treatise called *L'umorismo* ("On Humor"); and it was with that title and text that he came to provide, or so it seems, the appropriate clue for a young fellow Sicilian of his who likewise, indeed without fail, belongs to the foremost representatives of the *teatro del grottesco*, but whose work for the stage has hitherto not even been touched upon by me. All the more decidedly must his name be uttered in connection with Pirandello. Piermaria Rosso di San Secondo (1887-1956; yet his real name was Pietro Maria Rosso) indubitably deserves to be mentioned at this juncture, and be praised to boot: both on account of his *Marionette, ch  passione!*... ("Puppets, What Passion!"), which premiered in Milan on 4 March 1918, and of his *La Bella addormentata* ("Sleeping Beauty"), which saw its first night, again in Milan, on 15 July 1919. This play of 1919 proves downright grotesque as well as grotesquely remarkable insofar as the reaction of the Milanese audience, all of a sudden, changed completely after the curtain had been lowered, turning an incredibly tumultuous scandal into no less unbelievable a triumph. And what of Rosso's foregoing play, which was extolled by his long time friend and promoter Pirandello as an exemplary "commedia grottesca," after all? Irrefutably, I dare say, it forms, from its programmatic heading right to the minutiae of its texture, the perfect and most audacious treatment of what I have labeled, if merely

in passing, as one of the key motifs of the Italian “theater of the grotesque”—the other two being masks and bizarre fairy tales—and which was aptly presaged, as it were, by Alfred Jarry in his 1902 lecture on the puppets, or marionettes. It at once recurred, significantly enough, and together with the puppeteer himself, in Cavacchioli’s *L’uccello del Paradiso* of 1919; in fact, it emerged once more in the same author’s 1921 *Danza del ventre* (“Belly Dance”) and was also taken up by minor and/or marginal adherents of the then faddish movement such as, for instance, Osvaldo Cantoni-Gibertini.

May I, though, take the liberty of rounding off my cursory survey on a somewhat personal note? For I frankly felt like a voice crying in the wilderness when I published, in 1962, my jumbo essay “Masken, Marionetten, Märchen: Das italienische *Teatro grottesco*” (“Masks, Marionettes, Fairy Tales: The Italian *Teatro Grottesco*”) as part and parcel of a volume by various hands entitled *Sinn oder Unsinn? Das Groteske im modernen Drama* (“Sense or Nonsense? Grotesqueness in Modern Drama”) which, by the way, came also out, shortly afterwards, in a Czech translation in 1966. Concerning Italy and her scholarship and criticism, however, no fewer than sixteen years had to pass until my text could finally appear, with the help of my friends Silvano Garofalo and Maria Fancelli, in Italian translation (for this belated discovery, see “Il teatro del grottesco,” *Rivista italiana di drammaturgia* III.8 [August 1978]: 77-116). As opposed to my disquisition on hand, which I have nicknamed, tongue-in-cheek, a rhapsody in grotesque minor, my original essay (plus renditions) evidently constitutes the corresponding piece in grotesque major, for it comprises a wealth of additional information:

both names and dates as well as other facts pertaining to the *teatro del grottesco* and its importance and peculiar place in literary and theatrical history. In truth, even though Italian critics and historians almost instantaneously caught on to my publication of nearly forty years ago—particularly, Gigi Livio with the 1965 collection *Teatro grottesco del Novecento* (“Grotesque Theater of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century”)—the famed drama scholar and renowned stage director Luigi Squarzina, who penned an introductory note for my and Garofalo’s Italian version of 1978, did not hesitate to declare, unequivocally if curtly, that my 1962 essay “remains still unsurpassed” (*tutt’ora...resta insuperato*).

In conclusion, let me quote a couple of phrases from two pithy and perspicacious testimonies regarding the position and, above all, the repercussions of the *teatro del grottesco*, either directly or indirectly. They were coined, on the one hand, by Adriano Tilgher, whom I cited before, and who must be recognized and lauded as perhaps the earliest, yet already amazingly insightful, chronicler of this entire movement; on the other hand, they proceed from the writing of the notorious, and likewise aforecited, archabsurdist dominating the boards of the 1950s and 1960s, Eugène Ionesco. Tilgher, in 1923, remarked that the “theater of the grotesque” might well turn out to have been the period richest in fruitful germs of Italy’s whole theatrical development; or, to quote him verbatim, “un periodo che è forse il più ricco di germi nella storia del teatro italiano.” And Ionesco, equally stringently though quite unwittingly—for he, too, was of course unaware of the *teatro del grottesco* like most people—did chime in nearly half a century later, in 1961, by musing, albeit rather generally:

Peut-être continuons-nous, chacun pour sa petite part, la grande révolution artistique, littéraire, de la pensée qui a commencé vers 1915 ou 1920...

To be sure, the all-embracing revolution in the arts and in literature, indeed in thought itself, which started during the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has been continued by many, not least in the theater, each one contributing a specific—and, every so often, grotesque—little or larger share to it. In particular, the development of grotesqueness in drama and the theater has undoubtedly been not only a European but an overall Western process (if we think, for instance, of phenomena such as the Living Theater of New York, the rise of the happening in the US, and so on). Or might this process actually reveal itself, on closer scrutiny, even as a global one to boot? There do exist indications thereof: *The Ballad of Ali of Keshan* by the Turkish playwright and storyteller Haldun Taner (1915-?), which premiered in Istanbul in 1964, would most certainly qualify; and a similar though subdued case could perhaps be made for a play such as *Opera Wonyosi*, written and performed in 1977, by the Nigerian author and Nobelist Wole Soyinka (1934-). Yet how about the drama and theater of Thailand and Japan, Taiwan and China, Korea and India? Have there occurred any comparable surges of grotesqueness also? I am, needless to say, in no position whatsoever to answer these crucial questions. But I am confident others will be.

# ใบสมัคร

วารสารอักษรศาสตร์  
มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร

เฉพาะเจ้าหน้าที่
เลขที่ใบสมัคร.....
เลขที่ใบเสร็จ.....
วันที่รับเป็นสมาชิก.....
สมาชิกหมายเลข.....
วันที่หมดสมาชิกภาพ.....

ข้าพเจ้า นาย/นาง/นางสาว..... นามสกุล.....

ที่อยู่ที่ต้องการให้จัดส่ง

เลขที่..... ตรอก/ซอย..... ถนน.....

ตำบล/แขวง..... อำเภอ/เขต..... จังหวัด.....

รหัสไปรษณีย์..... โทรศัพท์..... โทรสาร.....

สถานที่ทำงาน หรือหน่วยงานที่สังกัด.....

ที่อยู่.....

โทรศัพท์..... โทรสาร.....

ขอสมัครเป็นสมาชิกวารสารอักษรศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร (2 ฉบับ/ปี)

ตั้งแต่ปีที่..... ฉบับที่..... ถึงปีที่..... ฉบับที่..... รวม..... ฉบับ

ฉบับละ 60 บาท รวมเป็นเงิน..... บาท

พร้อมกันนี้ได้ชำระค่าสมัครเป็นสมาชิกเป็นเงิน..... บาท

(ตัวอักษร.....)

โดยแนบเป็น

☐ เงินสด ให้แก่.....

☐ เช็คธนาคาร (เลขที่.....)

☐ ตัวแลกเงินทางไปรษณีย์

ลงชื่อ.....

วันที่..... เดือน..... พ.ศ.....