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Puppetry and Dramaturgy

Western European Plays
for Puppet Theatre, 1582–2020

Didier Plassard

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The puppet is an optical device.
Marcel Temporal, *Marottes et marionnettes*, 1950.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

CHILD'S PLAY

A boy is playing. In each hand, he holds a figurine made of plastic, tin plate, perhaps even cardboard; the material does not matter. The figurines represent knights in armour, their swords drawn and held out in front of them. As the knights are not articulated figurines, the child bumps them against each other to make them fight. In his head, they are challenging each other. Each knight has its own role: there is the one who attacks, the one who defends. Little by little, a story is invented. The child makes his voice deep, then he makes it high. He borrows words from films, books, stories he has been told; words that resonate, that belong to the world of knights. At least that is what the child believes. And to play is to believe, to be entirely immersed in the act.

A child playing with figurines is not puppetry, nor do the origins of this kind of theatre lie in playing with dolls, as Charles Nodier believed.¹ It is not even a first draft: the childhood of individuals is not that of societies'. Yet, for audiences of all ages, a puppet show is an invitation to rediscover the childlike belief in the act. In watching duels with clubs between Polichinelle and the gendarme, the shining swords of Charlemagne's Paladins, and any speech that awakens artificial bodies, the spectators retrace the footsteps of their childhood. A long-forgotten door

¹ Charles Nodier, 'Les marionnettes', in *Nouvelles, suivies des fantaisies du dériseur sensé* (Paris: Charpentier, 1850), 398.

is suddenly unlocked; an imaginary world appears, resembling the one we invented for games in which we were at once actors and spectators. Yet, we are now only spectators.

The power of the puppet's appeal to the imaginary world is such that no technique or specific device is required. It can be created simply through movement or speech without a designated stage, without a curtain being raised or the house lights being dimmed. Since it re-activates the once-familiar mental operations from childhood, this mechanism, if one consents to it, is engaged in a spontaneous, almost unconscious way. The change takes place on a visual level: instead of seeing what is really produced, attention focuses on the mental image that covers it.

FICTIONAL PACT AND PUPPETRY PACT

A man holds in his hand a large stapler. He presents it in a way that when viewed in profile, the stapler resembles a sperm whale. A small undulating movement gives the impression of the whale advancing through the waves; when the stapler's mechanism is pressed, the animal closes its mouth on an invisible prey. This could be the beginning of a show of object theatre. The simplicity of the gesture offers a rudimentary demonstration of how puppet performances work: an actor, a spectator, a material object, and a mental image that does not correspond to this object.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge defined this temporary abandoning of our objective perception of the world in favour of a shared imaginary as 'a willing suspension of disbelief'.² For a clearly defined period, we deactivate the critical attention that we usually adopt in the world so as not to fall victim to traps. We decide to make it seem like we believe in it, and we become part of the act. Any fiction, whatever means by which it is recounted, demands this 'suspension of disbelief': it is necessary to accept to believe in the existence of the characters, in order to take pleasure or learning from watching what they do and listening to what they say. This fictional pact draws its strength from all the times it has been accepted since childhood, and the memory of the intermix of emotions and knowledge received from it.

² Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Adam Roberts (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, [1817] 2014), 208.

When applied to theatre, this pact means that the spectator accepts that what they are told takes the forms of what they are shown, despite the perceptible gap between these two worlds. Like children playing in the forest and imagining that each tree stump is a bear,³ the theatre-goer has an active part in the mimesis, as Kendall L. Walton defines it: an act of ‘make-believe’ engaging the audience’s imagination. The children in their game pretend the stumps are bears; the spectators at a performance of *Electra* pretend the scenery is the palace of the Atreides, the lighting is the light of dawn, and the actor Orestes who has returned to avenge his father. All the material or immaterial elements of the theatrical performance are ‘props’ which the audience draw on to construct the mental image of Sophocles’ tragedy. Yet puppet theatre brings us closer to a childlike state by introducing a second pact based on the belief in the animation: the puppetry pact. We must not only believe in the actions and gestures of the actors who claim to represent imaginary characters, but we must also accept to view the object that moves as if it were a conscious being, capable of moving autonomously.

The starting point for this book is a simple, somewhat naive question. It seeks to understand whether puppet theatre’s reliance on particular devices and the spectator’s disposition to adopt a particular state of mind (the doubling of the fictional and puppetry pacts) means that the stories recounted are also particular. Have specific works been written for these devices and, if so, what are their specificities? Or, instead, should puppet theatre simply be considered as a ‘diminished form of dramatic art’,⁴ without identifiable repertoires or dramaturgical techniques of its own?

‘THE PUPPET DOES NOT EXIST’⁵

Exploring the areas where traces of puppets are found, understanding the stages of their development, and distinguishing between verified knowledge and indeterminate traces is not a task that can be carried out without

³ Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the foundations of the representational arts* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 1990), 35–43.

⁴ Lothar Buschmeyer, *Die Kunst des Puppenspiels* (Leipzig: Oppelner Nachrichten C. J. Pohl, 1931), cited in Henryk Jurkowski, *Aspects of Puppet Theatre*, 2nd ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 17.

⁵ I thank François Lazaro for suggesting this phrasing.

the risk of error, even today. Before examining the dramaturgy of puppet theatres, it is necessary to clearly define the area covered by this branch of the performing arts whose divisions are highly complex and sometimes entangled. To do so requires starting from the following statement: ‘the puppet’, in and of itself, does not exist. This simple term offers only the illusion of a consensus, which immediately dissolves when one takes stock of the variety of devices designated as such. The questions then follow of whether this term brings together comparable objects and if it has clearly defined limits.

The issue of the objects themselves reveals various linguistic and cultural difficulties. Western puppet traditions are usually organised according to two groupings: first, those controlled from below and directly worn on hands; and, second, those controlled from above using strings, metal rods, or a combination of the two systems. Whilst some languages like Spanish (‘títere’) and French (‘marionnette’) use the same word for the two families, others, such as English, German, and Dutch, have different terms for the first (‘puppet’, ‘Puppe’, ‘pop’) and second groups (‘marionette’, ‘Marionette’, ‘marionet’). Italian distinguishes between three categories, ‘burattini’ (glove puppets), ‘marionette’ (string-marionettes), and ‘pupi’ (rod marionettes), which each belong to distinct symbolic universes. In an article on eighteenth-century Venetian puppet theatres, the literary historian Vittorio Malamani strongly contrasts the ‘burattini’, the ‘caricature’ of humans, with the ‘marionette’, their ‘imitation’.⁶ Naturally, this division is too simplistic even when discussing the eighteenth century. However, it is a reminder that the word ‘puppet’, far from referring to a homogenous group, brings together practices that must be differentiated according to the devices used, the performance conditions, and the target audience. This assessment leads to the assumption that these traditions also have distinct repertoires. Any analysis in this area must therefore take into account their differences.

In the second half of the twentieth century, as animation techniques diversified, more general designations began to be adopted: the German term ‘Figurentheater’ gave rise to ‘theatre of figures’ in English, ‘théâtre de figure’ in French, and ‘teatro di figura’ in Italian to refer to more contemporary forms. Gradually, these appellations, and others like ‘puppetry’, started to bring together new and old techniques within one single

⁶ Vittorio Alamani, ‘Marionettes at Venice: Marionettes and Burattini in Venice in the 18th Century’, trans. Dorothy Neville Lees, *The Marionette* 1, no. 11 (1918): 346–47.

yet highly heterogeneous conceptual field. This leads to the second question: can the limits of this field be defined? A recent companion work added ‘material performance’⁷ alongside ‘puppetry’ in its title to refer to ‘the use of raw materials such as craft paper, plastics, rope and fabrics as performing objects on stage’.⁸ In addition to the vast collection of puppets properly speaking, everyday objects, raw materials, or parts of the body may acquire the appearance of autonomous life when brought to the stage. Object theatre, in particular, makes abundant use of these devices: plastic figurines of a married couple who are suddenly confronted with the proliferation of their doubles on their wedding night⁹; a handful of sweets taken from a paper bag and an aspirin tablet that play out a drama of social exclusion¹⁰; large dried prawns that engage in different human activities.¹¹ Showing the process of creation to the audience has even become the very subject of the performance—for example, characters emerging from a heap of clay moulded in real time who become jealous of one another and face off.¹² The list of everything that could be transformed into a puppet seems to know no bounds.

These performances raise questions about the very notion of puppet theatre: where do the limits of the puppet lie? Whether object theatre belongs to puppetry is not always evident, including amongst artists. Yet the case of traditional performances is not entirely clear-cut either. Ventriloquism acts, for example, have not always been considered as part of the field of puppetry. Whilst John E. Varey¹³ includes demonstrations of automata, this choice is only rarely replicated since the presence of human operators, their interactions with the performance devices, and a rough outline of dramatic action appear as essential components. Even when all these conditions are met, doubts over what can be classified as a puppet may persist. This is the case, for example, for the articulated

⁷ See Dassia N. Posner, Claudia Orenstein, and John Bell, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance* (London: Routledge, 2014).

⁸ Alissa Mello, ‘Trans-embodiment: Embodied practice in puppet and material performance’, *Performance Research* 21, no. 5 (2016): 49.

⁹ Agnès Limbos (Compagnie Gare centrale), *Ó* (2008).

¹⁰ Gyula Molnár, *Tre piccoli suicidi* (1979).

¹¹ Hotel Modern, *Garnalen Verhalen (Sbrimp Tales)* (2009).

¹² Alice Laloy (Compagnie S’appelle reviens), *D’états de femme* (2004).

¹³ John E. Varey, *Historia de los títeres en España (desde sus orígenes hasta mediados del siglo XVIII)* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1957).

figures of Christ that could be detached from the cross and have their arms folded to represent the entombment during Holy Week.¹⁴ Similarly, simple crosses which some Anglo-Saxon religious communities of the tenth century wrapped in a shroud, then placed in a sepulchre for the same ceremony, have been recently analysed as ‘puppets’.¹⁵

ELEMENTS FOR A DEFINITION

This book does not seek to determine what must or must not be referred to as a ‘puppet’, either in the past or in the present, and nor does it propose a general history of the puppetry arts for Western Europe. Rather, the aim of this study is to examine what puppets recount and how they recount it, which involves deciding upon a clear definition of the scope of analysis. The puppet, here, will be examined exclusively as a theatrical device. Other usages of puppets (fun, educational, therapeutic) are not considered, and nor are appearances of puppets in cinema, television, or the visual arts. The use of puppets for religious ceremonies, such as during the Holy Week celebrations, are also beyond the scope of this study. Moreover, the narrative dimension of puppet appearances in music hall acts, circuses, and cabarets is too embryonic to justify any attention.

Given this focus, some precision concerning the very concept of theatre is required. Recent developments in semiology, which have renounced the text centrism of the 1970s in favour of focusing on the stage, can serve as a basis. As Eli Rozik states, theatre, whatever role language plays, is ‘fundamentally a non-verbal medium’.¹⁶ Its principal signifier is the iconic sign by way of a relationship of likeness between the world and the staging of it in the performance. By showing before telling, theatrical performances produce what Rozik calls ‘descriptions of worlds’.¹⁷ In other

¹⁴ See Kamil Kopania, *Animated Sculptures of the Crucified Christ in the Religious Culture of the Latin Middle Ages* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2010).

¹⁵ Debra Hilborn, ‘Relating to the Cross: A Puppet Perspective on the Holy Week Ceremonies of the *Regularis Concordia*’, in *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance*, ed. Dassia N. Posner, Claudia Orenstein, and John Bell (London: Routledge, 2014), 164–75.

¹⁶ Eli Rozik, *The Roots of Theatre: Rethinking Ritual and Other Theories of Origin* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), 20.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 186–87.

words, they represent ‘thinking in images’,¹⁸ elevated to possessing the power of a communication tool between individuals when it is ‘imprinted’ on the matter that becomes its ‘medium’, whether actor or puppet.¹⁹ If it can be considered, as Rozik does, that using an actor is ‘the imprinting of human images’ on ‘matter similar to the model of the image’,²⁰ the same must be true for puppets, apart from the fact that the ‘matter’ receiving the ‘imprint’ belongs to another domain—that of objects.

However, in both cases, considering theatrical performance as thinking in images relies on the spectator’s acceptance of one or more cognitive contradictions,²¹ recalling the notions of a ‘fictional pact’ and a ‘puppetry pact’, briefly mentioned above, which I shall now develop further. As Rozik explains:

The actors imprint on their own bodies images of indexes ... which are meant to refer not to themselves but to other beings, real or fictional. As a result of this deflection of reference such iconic indexes are eventually attributed to characters that are supposed to produce them. During this process the actors remain themselves and are perceived both as actors, who inscribe descriptions on their own bodies, and as texts that describe characters.²²

The fictional pact or the contract that the spectator adheres to when watching a theatrical performance resolves the contradiction that is born out of this double perception of the real person of the actor and the ‘text’ (the collection of signs) that they produce whilst attributing it to another. Presented in one and the same action and under the same type, these two series of information create amongst spectators what Jean-François Marmontel defined in the eighteenth century as a ‘half-illusion’: ‘the

¹⁸ Ibid., 250.

¹⁹ Ibid., 252.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ See Jack Goody, *Representations and Contradictions: Ambivalence Towards Images, Theatre, Fiction, Relics and Sexuality* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997).

²² Rozik, *The Roots of Theatre*, 73.

continual and unrelenting error mixed with reflection that contradicts it, that way of being deceived and not being deceived'.²³

In broad terms, the puppetry pact is no different in nature. Perception is again split between the object that one looks at—the puppet—and the 'text' of signs it produces, first and foremost that of an autonomous living being. This cognitive contradiction is so strong that it overshadows the fictional pact which is nevertheless present in puppet theatre. The strangeness of the support of these 'imprints', its belonging to the domain of inert matter, indifferent and without consciousness, constantly plays out in front of one's eyes. Whilst the fictional pact requires no special effort as it only asks for compliance with the familiar codes of fiction, the puppetry pact must be continually re-activated. We are forced to admit that our senses are being misled by the puppeteer's skills, by their ability to produce signs of a living being in something that belongs to another reality.

Steve Tillis's concept of a 'double vision' of the puppet, both as an inanimate object and as a living being, is therefore its fundamental characteristic.²⁴ That is precisely what 'makes a puppet'. As the puppeteer Hubert Jappelle explains:

The movement of the puppet is to be interpreted as the visible sign of an invisible thinking. The puppet does not appear to us as 'living' because it moves, but because it moves, it appears to be thinking. It seems that we are seeing its thinking act. The smallest of movements therefore will be perceived as the visible and expressive indication of its thought in action.²⁵

Whilst any object might become a puppet, it cannot be done in any way or through any method of making it move. Proschan's definition of puppets as 'performing objects' thus proves to be too broad: the 'material images of humans, animals, or spirits that are created, displayed, or manipulated

²³ Jean-Baptiste Marmontel, 'Illusion', in *Éléments de littérature* (Paris: Éditions Desjonquères, [1787] 2013), 635. All translations, unless otherwise stated, are by Stacie Allan.

²⁴ Steve Tillis, *Towards an Aesthetics of the Puppet Theater* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1992).

²⁵ Hubert Jappelle, 'L'interprétation du mouvement', in *Les Mains de lumière. Anthologie des écrits sur l'art de la marionnette*, ed. Didier Plassard (Charleville-Mézières: Éditions Institut International de la marionnette, 2004), 305.

in narrative or dramatic performances'²⁶ are not always puppets in the modern and Western meaning of the term. As such, it is not enough for the object conveying an image to be used or made to move. It is necessary—which is my criteria for the purposes of this study—that this movement indicates the presence of a conscient entity, and produces an effect of double vision. In other words, the object needs to be an instrument that produces a complete theatrical mimesis.

What then will be considered here as a puppet is any element used in the context of a theatrical performance that is simultaneously perceived as it really is—for example, an object or a body part—and imagined as an autonomous subject with its own consciousness.

INTO UNKNOWN TERRITORY

Very few studies have ventured into the territory of the dramaturgy of puppet shows. In the mid-nineteenth century, Charles Magnin wrote that 'one should rightly be astonished that no historian of our large or small theatres has undertaken a reconstruction of the puppet repertoire'.²⁷ Almost a century and a half later, only Henryk Jurkowski has taken up this challenge.²⁸ The number of works that he cites (around 500) gives some insight into the immense corpus assembled. However, this survey ends before the Second World War, so it does not address how the subsequent sociological, economic, and aesthetic transformations led to a fundamental reassessment of the puppetry arts and their dramaturgy in the second half of the century. Since Jurkowski's investigation relies solely on works produced by writers, it only represents the tip of the iceberg: many more texts were written by puppeteers, a significant proportion of which remain in manuscript form. Since these works were actually performed on stage, they make up the 'puppet repertoire' properly speaking that Magnin would have liked to see reconstructed. Texts by

²⁶ Frank Proschan, 'The Semiotic Study of Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects', *Semiotica* 47, nos. 1–4 (1983): 4.

²⁷ Charles Magnin, *Histoire des marionnettes en Europe, depuis l'Antiquité jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1852), 152.

²⁸ Henryk Jurkowski, *Écrivains et marionnettes. Quatre siècles de littérature dramatique en Europe* (Charleville-Mézières: Institut International de la Marionnette, 1991).

writers often remained theatrical dreams: sometimes not realised, sometimes ultimately confided to actors, they tell us less about the history of puppets than how poets and playwrights viewed them.

For a study of the textual structures for puppets in francophone Europe,²⁹ Roger-Daniel Bensky analysed around a dozen of the plays performed, from Charles-Jacob Guillemain to Michel de Ghelderode, including comedies from the Lyon Guignol. Bensky identifies two opposing trends for puppet shows: ‘flight towards the supernatural world’ and ‘social caricature’. These two registers are very far from accounting for the diverse range of repertoires that were performed to respond to audience expectations: melodrama, historical drama, and vaudeville occupied a large place in puppeteers’ programmes. Bensky’s ultimately slim corpus of works examined demarcates the limitations of his survey.

These examples reveal the practical difficulties of research in this area. To examine the repertoires of puppet theatres in all their diversity, it is necessary to consult thousands of manuscripts, brochures, and books published in very small print runs, scattered across libraries, museums, archives, and private collections. For each text, it is then necessary to identify the source of inspiration, the modes of development and transmission, the performance conditions, and the target audience. Therefore, the most decisive advances in knowledge were carried out on limited corpuses: regional traditions, baroque operas, Parisian fairground theatres, modernist or avant-garde experimentations. The research carried out by specialists in these areas has given visibility to the richness and variety of the works performed by puppets.

CHALLENGING ESTABLISHED KNOWLEDGE

Though a lack of knowledge persists in some areas, the composite landscape of puppet and marionette repertoires is beginning to be better understood. Critical anthologies have been compiled such as those

²⁹ Roger-Daniel Bensky, *Structures textuelles de la marionnette de langue française* (Paris: Nizet, 1969), 9.

by Roberto Leydi and Renata Mezzanotte-Leydi,³⁰ Klaus Günzel,³¹ Manfred Nöbel,³² and Norbert Miller and Karl Riha.³³ In Britain, Michael Byrom's edition of different versions of the *Punch and Judy Show* allowed for them to be compared with one another.³⁴ More recently, the texts of the *Bonecos de Santo Aleixo* have been collected together in Portugal,³⁵ the vast cycle of the *Drama for Fools* dreamt up by Edward Gordon Craig has been published in its entirety,³⁶ and a selection of puppet plays from the Parisian fairground theatres has appeared.³⁷ Open access online resources supplement printed editions: for example, the Portail des Arts de la Marionnette digital library³⁸ and the Theaville database.³⁹ As part of the European research project PuppetPlays, whose findings this book presents, a database of a thousand references has been created, which readers can refer to for detailed overviews of the works examined in the following chapters and, in some cases, links to online editions.⁴⁰

Critical reflections, in particular, are enriched by ambitious studies, opening up avenues to more nuanced understandings of works following

³⁰ Roberto Leydi and Renata Mezzanotte-Leydi, eds., *Marionette e burattini, Testi dal repertorio classico italiano dal teatro delle marionette e dei burattini* (Milan: Gallo grande, 1958).

³¹ Klaus Günzel, ed., *Alte deutsche Puppenspiele. Mit theatergeschichtlichen und literarischen Zeugnissen* (Munich/Berlin: F. A. Herbig Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1971).

³² Manfred Nöbel, ed., *Stücke für Puppentheater 1900–1945* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1974).

³³ Norbert Miller and Karl Riha, eds., *Kasperletheater für Erwachsene* (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1978).

³⁴ Michael Byrom, ed., *Punch and Judy, Its Origin & Evolution* (London: Perpetua Press Limited, 1972).

³⁵ Christine Zurbach, José Alberto Ferreira, and Paulo Seixas, eds., *Autos, passos e bailinhos: os textos dos Bonecos de Santo Aleixo* (Evora: Casa do Sul, 2007).

³⁶ Edward Gordon Craig, *Le Théâtre des fous/The Drama for fools*, ed. Didier Plassard, Marion Chénétier-Alev, and Marc Duvillier, Montpellier: Éditions de l'Entretemps, 2012).

³⁷ Françoise Rubellin, ed., *Marionnettes du XVIII^e siècle. Anthologie de textes rares* (Montpellier: Espaces 34, 2022).

³⁸ See <https://lelab.artsdelamarionnette.eu>.

³⁹ See <http://www.theaville.org>.

⁴⁰ See <https://puppetplays.eu>.

the foundational research of John E. Varey,⁴¹ George Speaight,⁴² Paul Fournel,⁴³ and Antonio Pasqualino.⁴⁴ John McCormick and Bennie Pratasik, in a study of popular puppet theatres in Europe in the nineteenth century,⁴⁵ sketched out a typology of theatrical genres performed and highlighted the international circulation of works. Other notable examples include research carried out by Beatrix Müller-Kampel on popular characters in German-speaking countries,⁴⁶ Susan Young on adaptations of Shakespeare in Italy,⁴⁷ and Giovanni Moretti on the circulation of a melodrama between puppet theatre, live theatre, opera, and ballet.⁴⁸ Piero Menarini has studied the transformation of three Spanish source texts into Italian plays for ‘burattini’.⁴⁹ H  l  ne Beauchamp has compared texts by modernist writers in Belgium, Spain, and France.⁵⁰ Circulations, transmissions, and transformations: increased knowledge of past forms of puppet theatre leads us to fundamentally reassess our understanding of the history of European theatre.

In parallel with this historical research, examining contemporary practices has led to numerous reflections and positions on the dramaturgy for puppets. Artists, writers, and researchers have discussed at length the characteristics of writing for puppets, thereby highlighting closer modes

⁴¹ Varey, *Historia de los t  teres en Espa  a*.

⁴² George Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre* (New York: John De Graff, 1956).

⁴³ Paul Fournel, *L’Histoire v  ritable de Guignol* (Lyon: F  d  rop, 1975).

⁴⁴ Antonio Pasqualino, *Dal testo alla rappresentazione: le prime imprese di Carlo Magno* (Palermo: Laboratorio Antropologico Universitario, 1986).

⁴⁵ John McCormick and Bennie Pratasik, *Popular Puppet Theatre in Europe, 1800–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁴⁶ Beatrix M  ller-Kampel, *Puppentheater im 19. Jahrhundert. Mit Kasperl und Pimpel, Hanswurst und H  nneschen, Peterl und Polichinell* (Graz: Unipress Graz Verlag GmbH, 2019).

⁴⁷ Susan Young, *Shakespeare Manipulated. The Use of the Dramatic Works of Shakespeare in Teatro di Figura in Italy* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996).

⁴⁸ Giovanni Moretti, *Attori e baracche: Il ‘Fornaretto’ nel sistema teatrale* (Torino: Edizioni Seb27, 2002).

⁴⁹ Piero Menarini, *Dal dramma allo scenario. Tre fonti spagnole nel repertorio italiano per burattini* (Modena: Mucchi editore, 1985).

⁵⁰ H  l  ne Beauchamp, *La Marionnette, laboratoire du th   tre* (Montpellier: Deuxi  me   poque, 2018).

of association between the text and the stage, the dramaturgical development and the visual construction of the show. However, in this area too, documentation remains difficult to collect, and the separation between generations, linguistic areas, and even individual aesthetics is an obstacle to synthetic views. Most of these discussions only warn against the risks of redundancy between speech and image.

Overall, the absence of historical or international comparisons means that the understanding of puppet theatre, in terms of the place that it occupies and the role that it plays in society, remains fragmentary. For too long, the fascination exercised by these miniaturised doubles, at once seductive and disquieting, has been a barrier to assessing what they recount, how they recount it, and why they recount it. Shedding some light on the dormant dramatic works written for them or performed by them, as this book and the PuppetPlays database propose to do, intends not only to fill a gap in knowledge, but also seeks to offer a better understanding of the internal dynamics in the field of the performing arts, the circulation of motifs and works, the distinction or lack of distinction between audiences, and the rivalries and complementarities between the theatre of live actors and that of their artificial doubles. In sum, it aims to bring a new building block, albeit a modest one, to the construction of a general history of Western European theatre.

A STUDY AND ITS METHODS

To carry out this analysis, the investigation must be confined to a clearly defined space. The territory represented by Western Europe is sufficiently extensive to allow for established knowledge to be challenged, and sufficiently circumscribed so that the exploration of resources would not lead to an excessive amount of data. Moreover, from the end of the sixteenth century onwards, itinerant troupes of professional artists travelled across this area, progressively shaping its theatrical and cultural identity, and facilitating the circulation of techniques, subjects, and puppet repertoires. Resemblances and differences thereafter constructed a coherent system whose evolutions are manifested with sufficient clarity.

By focusing on Western Europe, it is also easier to distinguish the different branches within the history of puppets. Their repertoires were developed in very different contexts according to the time periods, the performance conditions, or the target audiences. Addressing these contexts in turn thus seemed the best way to draw out the theatrical

usages of the puppet: for the first phase (until around 1800), shows performed in the street, performances in aristocratic palaces and theatre venues; then, during the following two centuries, the increase in popular traditions, the birth of a theatre for children, and experimentations by poets and writers. The return to an earlier period at the beginning of each chapter may be surprising for the reader, but it is my hope that this structure will help bring increased readability to each branch presented.

Puppet shows are not documented equally across Western Europe. The activities of puppeteers were not developed everywhere, or at every time, with the same intensity—far from it. The traces left by these activities also vary substantially in terms of quantity. In Britain, Spain, and Portugal, puppeteers almost never wrote down their texts for a variety of different reasons: they feared being plagiarised, they did not know how to write, or they possibly even did not see the use in setting down the outline of their shows. In contrast, in Germany and France, many more resources are available because, first, collectors endeavoured to gather them together, and, second, publishing plays for puppets was financially viable enough for a significant number of them to be printed. In Italy, where professional companies formed artistic dynasties, the manuscripts were preciously preserved, along with the puppets, the scenery, and the accessories, as a form of heritage that was passed down and enriched by each generation. Exceptional documentary collections were constructed, bringing together hundreds of ‘copioni’.

In some cases, it is thus necessary to reconstruct the repertoires using indirect sources, and in others, to carry out surveys within extremely large corpuses. For this reason, this work simply opens up a field of investigation, and invites further and more systematic research. Indeed, no general history of Western puppet theatres or a study of their entire repertoires is to be found here. Neither the simple revivals of works performed by live theatre nor the parodies of Parisian fairground theatres will be examined here, since they were not intended for puppets. The only question that this book seeks to answer has already been formulated: across their different manifestations: did puppet shows develop a specific dramaturgy? And if so, what are its main characteristics?

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Imprints and Traces

THE QUESTION OF ORIGINS

The oldest puppet in the whole of human history was found in Brno (Czechia), in the tomb of a shaman from a hunter clan during the Upper Palaeolithic, around 23,000 years ago.¹ It is an articulated male figure in mammoth ivory: the head and torso were made from the inner core of a mammoth tusk, around its natural cavity, allowing for these two parts to be held together when assembled and suspended with a piece of fibre. Evidently, it was made to be moved. Its presence in a shaman's grave suggests that it had a ritualistic usage, but nothing further can be deduced.

It would be unwise to view this discovery as evidence of a European or a sacred origin of puppets. No single origin for puppet theatre has ever been found; there is no initial point of departure from which traditions developed then spread across the world.² Performative practices appeared and disappeared in different places and at different times, under different forms, and with different functions; some of them left traces,

¹ Martin Oliva, 'The Brno II Upper Palaeolithic Burial', in *Hunters of the Golden Age. The Mid-Upper Palaeolithic of Eurasia 30,000–20,000 BP*, ed. Will Roebroeks, Margherita Mussi, Jiří Svoboda, and Kelly Fennema (Leiden: University of Leiden, 1999), 143–53.

² For a critical overview of these 'monogenist' theories of a unique, Indian (Richard Pischel) or Greek (Hermann Reich), origin of puppets, see Gert Taube, *Puppenspiel als kulturhistorisches Phänomen* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1995), 57–61.

others did not. Up until the modern era, their long-term transmission remains uncertain.

Carefully examining the archaeological traces and literary sources dating from classical Antiquity clearly shows that no continuity, or coherent tradition, can be extracted over the course of this period during which puppets very much existed. Only one classical source cited by Charles Magnin³ refers to an actual puppet theatre performance: in the *Deipnosophistae* (around 228 CE), Athenaeus of Naucratis reports that the Athenians once granted the puppeteer Potheinas authorisation to perform at the Theatre of Dionysus.⁴ The simple fact that the event was considered noteworthy suggests it was very likely a rare occurrence. Puppet acts existed in Ancient Greece, but as a private entertainment practice or, at most, in the form of small travelling shows, and they disappeared during Roman times. Indeed, no trace exists in classical Latin literature of a theatrical performance given with puppets. Roman society only took from the Greeks the practice of making articulated figurines for private, play, or religious usages, or potentially for entertainment purposes without going beyond the simple demonstration of animation, like the short act described in Petronius' *Satyricon* (Chapter 34). Only the hydraulic automata described by Hero of Alexandria in the first century CE has the potential to have represented short pieces of dramatic action (Hercules in battle, episodes from the Trojan War),⁵ but this example falls beyond the domain of puppets strictly speaking.

³ Charles Magnin, *Histoire des marionnettes en Europe, depuis l'Antiquité jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1852).

⁴ Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters, Volume I: Books 1–3.106e*, ed. and trans. S. Douglas Olson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 106–11. According to Mali Skotheim, Potheinas lived in the fourth century BCE, but no evidence is provided to support this date. See Mali Skotheim, 'The Puppet and the Puppet-Master in Ancient Greece: Fragments of an Art Form', *Open Library of Humanities* 8, no. 1 (2022): 1–25.

⁵ See Francesco Grillo, 'Hero of Alexandria's Automata: a critical edition and translation, including a commentary on Book One' (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 2019), c–cii.

BIRTH OF A REPERTOIRE (I): *CHANSONS DE GESTE* AND CHIVALRIC LITERATURE

There is a significant disjuncture, as clear as but persisting for even longer than the one that affects the history of live theatre, between the rare traces of puppet acts in Antiquity and the first evidence of puppet performances in the twelfth century. None of the devices, occupations, or medieval usages of puppetry was inherited from Greece or Rome. String and rod marionettes, the only forms for which there is evidence in Antiquity, only re-appeared during the Renaissance, while new processes of animation, such as glove puppets, jiggling puppets, and tabletop puppetry were invented in the intervening period. The artists who operated them were no longer called puppeteers ('nevrospastēs') as the aforementioned Potheinas was, which attested to the recognition of a specific skill. Instead, they were incorporated into the broad category of sleight-of-hand artists who performed different tricks and exhibited wild animals. Puppetry had to gain visibility before it could be attributed a name in its own right and serve as a medium to tell stories.

In 1273, the Occitan troubadour Guiraut Riquier submitted a request to Alfonso X of Castile to establish a clear distinction between different types of minstrels ('juglares').⁶ The king's response was perfectly clear: troubadours, musicians, acrobats, and jesters were distinct occupations. Puppet ('bavastelz') players belonged to the lowest category of entertainers, along with tamers of monkeys, goats, and trained dogs. These brutes ('cazurros')⁷ were prohibited from claiming the 'name of minstrelsy'⁸ for their activities. This invisibility of the puppeteer's occupation, incorporated into an indistinct assortment of entertainment forms, was common across the whole of medieval Europe. In some regions, this lack of distinction makes identifying precise references to puppets in written sources particularly difficult. In France for example, the 'jeux

⁶ In the Middle Ages, 'minstrel', as with 'jongleur' in French, referred to all performing artists from musicians and troubadours to acrobats and exhibitors of trained animals.

⁷ Henryk Jurkowski (*A History of European Puppetry*, 2 vols. [New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996–98], vol. 1, 55) interprets the choice of the word 'cazurro', referring to someone who speaks very little or uses crude language, by explaining that these exhibitors' shows were silent. Perhaps, in the case of the 'bavastelz', it was only prose or improvised dialogues compared to the poetic compositions of 'trovadores' and 'juglares'.

⁸ Cited in John E. Varey, *Historia de los títeres en España* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1957), 10.

de basteaux' referred to both animating puppets and conjuring turns with cups or dice in the linguistic area of the *langue d'oïl* during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. When this phrase appears in textual sources, it is not only impossible to determine the exact nature of the objects moved, but it is also a useless endeavour: travelling sleight-of-hand artists likely combined puppet acts and tricks at the same time as they exhibited animals. The consequences of this lack of differentiation would persist long after the medieval period, with monkeys, cats, and dogs participating in glove puppet shows until the beginning of the twentieth century.

The plurality of entertainment forms offered by minstrels might suggest that the use of puppets did not go beyond brief dance acts or knights in combat, such as those depicted in an illumination from the *Hortus deliciarum* (1159–75) by the abbess Herrad of Landsberg.⁹ Yet, from the thirteenth century onwards, several indications suggest that puppets were employed for more developed forms of performance. *Flamenca*, an anonymous Occitan romance composed in the second half of the thirteenth century, describes the festivities organised for the wedding of the Lord Archambaut and the beautiful Flamenca.¹⁰ A first list mentions all the 'minstrels'—musicians, singers, storytellers—assembled to entertain guests, amongst whom figures 'one [who] performed with marionettes' ('bavastelz'). A longer list then follows of the stories recounted or sung by these artists: episodes from the Trojan War, Greek mythology, the works of Ovid, the Old Testament, the Matter of Britain, adventures of Charlemagne's paladins, or the reigns of Clovis and Pepin the Short. The fact that the puppeteer is mentioned before this second list suggests that puppets could be used to illustrate some of these tales.

Combat scenes between knights, particularly assaults on castles, can be identified as the first seeds of a theatrical repertoire of puppets. In 1211, the Occitan troubadour Guiraut de Calanson advised the minstrel Fadet to join the court of Peter II of Aragon and recommended that he knew how to juggle well with knives and small metal balls, mimic bird song, and

⁹ Herrade de Landsberg, *Hortus deliciarum* (original destroyed). Image reproduced in Christian Moritz Engelhardt, *Herrad von Landsperg, Aebtissin zu Hohenburg, oder St Odilien, im Elsass, im zwölften Jahrhundert und ihr Werk, Hortus deliciarum* (1818), tab. v.

¹⁰ *The Romance of Flamenca*, ed. and trans. E. D. Blodgett (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1995), 32–39.

act with ‘bavastelz’, ‘making them attack castles’.¹¹ A miniature by Jehan de Grise in a manuscript of the Alexander Romance (1338–44) provides evidence of this practice: it depicts a group of men watching a glove puppet show. The puppet booth concealing the puppeteers has a series of crenels forming a rampart with two turrets, which gives it the appearance of a ‘small castle’—this detail can also be found on an even older miniature¹² and explains why the word ‘castelet’ was traditionally used for puppet booths in France. Four figures in armour are visible: two knights are engaging in a swordfight and two guards holding maces observe them from the turrets.¹³ Other literary¹⁴ and iconographical¹⁵ sources portray the confrontation of armed horsemen positioned on either sides of a table and being either moved by direct manipulation¹⁶ or attached to strings held horizontally like the fighting knights in the *Hortus deliciarum* illumination. Artists using this technique would conceal themselves behind a set of curtains to stage small tournaments or horseback combat, as two descriptions from the Florentine jurist Accursius and his disciple Odofred from the middle of the thirteenth century suggest:

The scena is a shaded space created using a curtain; it is set up in a private or public place, and it is called scena because of scenon, meaning ‘rope’, as the minstrels make the horses move with a rope as well as other similar things. (Accursius)¹⁷

¹¹ See Guiraut de Calanson, ‘Sirventes-ensenhamen’, in *Recherches sur les connaissances littéraires des troubadours occitans et catalans des XII^e et XIII^e siècles*, ed. François Pirot (Barcelona: Real Academia de Buenas Letras, 1972), 565.

¹² On a page in a manuscript of *Speculum doctrinale* by Vincent de Beauvais (first half of the thirteenth century) held at the Bibliothèque de Bruges (Ms. 251). I thank Yanna Kor for drawing my attention to this image.

¹³ *Li Romans du Bon Roi Alixandre*, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodl. 264, fol. 76r.

¹⁴ Hugo von Trimberg’s poem *Der Renner* (1290–1300) mentions puppets (‘Tatermänner’) of two knights fighting with lances. See Hans R. Purschke, *Die Entwicklung des Puppenspiels in den klassischen Ursprungsländern Europas. Ein historischer Überblick* (Frankfurt am Main: self-published, 1984), 19.

¹⁵ See notably Hans Burgkmair the Elder’s engraving (1514–16) of the romance *Der Weisskunig*.

¹⁶ Direct manipulation meaning to hold the object directly in the hand.

¹⁷ Cited in Dino Bigongiari, ‘Were There Theatres in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries?’, *Romanic Review* 37, no. 3 (1946): 201–24 (at 208). The etymology proposed for ‘scena’ is clearly fanciful.

The minstrels arrive and set up their curtains somewhere; they have wooden horses, remain inside the curtains and make the horses move using ropes. (Odofred)¹⁸

Since these citations suggest that a specific theatrical space was constructed for these shows, the battle scenes between ‘bavastelz’ cannot be reduced to the animation of a simple duel; rather, they produced a truly standalone performance. From the fourteenth century onwards, there is evidence in the ledgers of royal and aristocratic households¹⁹ of payments being made for theatrical puppet performances and, in the fifteenth century, notably in Spain and Portugal, assaults on castles were staged as interludes on the occasion of large festivities. The Valencian writer Jaume Roig makes reference to this practice in his romance *Espill* (1460). Other assaults were performed for the Duke of Calabria’s entrance into Barcelona in 1464,²⁰ and in 1490 at Evora for the wedding of Afonso, hereditary Prince of Portugal and Isabella of Aragon, though it is unclear whether they featured puppets.

Puppets were certainly used for Ferdinand I of Aragon’s coronation celebrations in Zaragoza in February 1414: the Archive of the Kingdom of Valencia contains a mention of the ‘large boxes where the puppets of the Moor minstrels will be’ from 17 January 1414,²¹ which seems linked to the preparations for the festivities. The description provided of these celebrations mentions the floats on which a model of a city was constructed with houses and roofs. At each side of the city was a castle in conflict with the other; knights energetically engaged in skirmishes, and bombards and war weaponry launched leather balls stuffed with tow.²²

¹⁸ *Ibid.* These descriptions are also cited in Simon Gabay, *L’Acteur au Moyen-Âge. L’histriion et ses avatars en Occident de saint Augustin à saint Thomas* (Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2015), 112.

¹⁹ In 1364 at Dordrecht, in the presence of Jean de Châtillon. In 1396, the owner of a ‘set of puppets’ (‘dockespil’) who came to perform in The Hague for Albert I, duke of Bavaria, received five pieces of gold in compensation for damage to his equipment. See Wim Meilink, *Doopeel van Jan Claeszen. Kroniek van het traditionele Poppenspel in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 1969), 12.

²⁰ See Francisco Porras, *Titelles teatro popular* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1981), 86.

²¹ Cited in Porras, *Titelles teatro popular*, 86.

²² See the description of this performance published by Jerónimo de Blancas (*Coronaciones de los serenísimos reyes de Aragon* [Zaragoza, 1641]) and cited in Varey, *Historia de los títeres en España*, 20.

The performance ended with a pact concluded between the masters of the two castles: the siege of the city of Balaguer in October 1413 and the victory of Ferdinand I against the revolt led by James II, Count of Urgell was thus re-created with puppets,²³ just a few months after the real events, to celebrate the shoring up of the new royal power.

Magnin cites another fifteenth-century source that suggests ‘bavastelz’ were used for actual theatrical performances on themes emerging from chivalric literature: the German translation of a Dutch poem *Malegijis*, which itself was derived from the *chanson de geste Maugis d’Aigremont*. Published in 1848 by the philologist Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen based on a manuscript held at the Heidelberg University Library, the episode mentioned by Magnin does not appear in the French version:

The fairy Oriande de Rosefleur, who has been separated for fifteen years from her beloved pupil Malagis, arrives dressed as a minstrel at the Château d’Aigremont, where a marriage is being celebrated. She proposes a puppet show; it is accepted; she asks for a table to serve as a theatre, and places upon it two elegant dolls representing a male and a female magician. Into their mouths she puts stanzas which tell her story and lead Malagis to recognise her.²⁴

These stanzas actually take the form of dialogue: the fairy Oriande ‘speaks both’²⁵ the male and female magicians in the first person, which she takes care to warn the spectators about, as if this practice was still unusual. Although part of a work of fiction, it is the oldest theatrical dialogue created for puppets known to this day in Europe. It functions as an intervention: staging the recognition between the male and female puppet-magicians, doubles of Malagis and Oriande who are made to kiss on the improvised stage, causes Malagis to emerge from the audience and kiss the fairy.

²³ The puppets must have been rather large (perhaps 80 cm or 1 m) as the balls fired by the bombardiers were as big as the head of a ten-year-old child.

²⁴ Magnin, *Histoire des marionnettes en Europe*, 272–73. The text of this fragment was published under the title ‘Puppenspiel’ by Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen in *Germania, Neues Jahrbuch der Berlinischen Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache und Alterthumskunde*, vol. 8 (Berlin: Hermann Schulze, 1848), 280–81. A modern critical edition has been produced by a team of researchers: *Der deutsche Malagis* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2009). The episode mentioned by Magnin is found in verses 22,197–291 (at 546–48).

²⁵ *Der deutsche Malagis*, 546.

BIRTH OF A REPERTOIRE (2): THE COMIC REGISTER

In Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (II, 26), Maese Pedro's puppet show stages the liberation of Melisendra, imprisoned by the moors, by her husband Don Gaiferos. This performance attests to the fact that the thrilling stories from the *chansons de geste* and chivalric literature traditions continued to form part of puppeteers' repertoires until the seventeenth century. From the sixteenth century onwards, the treatment of these adventures and the contexts in which they were performed considerably diversify. In *Mondi celesti, terrestri et infernali* (1583), the Italian writer Anton Francesco Doni defines what he calls 'fraccuradi':

Fraccuradi is a specific form of entertainment for the carefree masses where the show is performed by puppets (fantocci), placed on the tips of fingers, who hit each other, joust, joke, kill each other, take castles from one another.²⁶

This further reference to combat, jousting, sieges, and the capturing of castles shows that these performances remained marked by the same pieces of bravery that the 'bavastelz' performed three centuries earlier. It attests to the persistence of a theatrical genre specific to puppetry that drew inspiration not from live theatre, but from *chansons de geste* and, more broadly, the oral compositions of troubadours and minstrels.

Despite its brevity, Doni's account offers several important details about these 'fraccuradi' performances. The first is that he refers to glove puppets, 'placed on the tips of fingers', like in Jehan de Grise's miniature, and that the performance is given in the street since the 'carefree masses' are entertained by it: the practice thus moves out of the closed space of recitations and interludes in courtly society towards a new urban and popular format of puppet shows. This practice had evidently already existed for several centuries since minstrels and sleight-of-hand artists would not have been able to make a living from performing in castles alone; they also had to earn their keep travelling and performing at fairgrounds, markets, communal halls rented for the occasion, and small villages. However, the puppet performances mentioned in *Mondi celesti*,

²⁶ Anton Francesco Doni, *Mondi celesti, terrestri et infernali, de gli academici pellegrini* (Venezia: Nicolò Moretti, [1552] 1583), 91.

terrestri et infernali are clearly identified as such; they are no longer indiscriminately thrown in with illusion acts and turns of skill, which was still the case, for example, in a drawing by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (Illustration 2.1) where a glove puppeteer, a conjurer, acrobats, and contortionists are thrown together in a crowd of demons and monsters.

Actors—in Doni’s case a woman playing the ‘fraccuradi’—began to take over from peddlers, facilitating the emergence of puppet acts from the domain of general entertainment and its integration into the theatrical activities of the first troupes of the Commedia dell’arte. Lastly, Doni’s description shows that the performance is comic in nature: the ‘fantocci’ ‘joke’ (‘scherzano’) and the puppeteer makes them tussle (‘li fa azzufare’) rather than fight each other. Whilst the ‘fraccuradi’ continued to draw on the subject of knightly combat, it can be concluded that it was treated



Illustration 2.1 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Fall of the Magician*, drawing, 1564. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Rijksprentenkabinet

as parody, not to celebrate the values of epic poetry, but the opposite: to laugh.

Another account from the same period leads to the same supposition. In the *De subtilitate* (1550), Gerolamo Cardano wrote: ‘Now if I were to relate how many and what sorts of small wooden statues they have—the people call them Magatelli—the day would fail me. For they play, they fight, they hunt, they dance, they play the trumpet, they practise the culinary art.’²⁷ The heterogeneous nature of these actions suggests at least a partially comic usage for puppets, even if it perhaps refers to string-marionettes (the first mention of them since Antiquity) rather than glove puppets.²⁸

The diverse families of animated figures did not only make spectators laugh through parodies of chivalric literature in the Middle Ages and, to a lesser extent, during the Renaissance. Glove puppets, in particular, drew upon the repertoire of fabliaux, farces, and other entertaining sermons to perform complete plots and especially more trivial situations that would immediately get spectators laughing. A second miniature by Jehan de Grise in the same manuscript of the Alexander Romance, illuminated between 1338 and 1344, provides the proof: again, it shows a puppet booth, but this time, a man threatens a woman with a club.²⁹ The exclusively feminine audience of this scene are left to guess the moralising intentions of the illustrator through his message of submission to masculine power. Yet it is impossible not to see the recurring theme of the quarrelling couple found in literature and theatre at the time also being extended to puppet shows. Undoubtedly the favoured motifs of farce circulating through touring puppet booths enriched the repertoire of itinerant puppeteers.

Some historians even believe they can detect indications in medieval theatre texts that prove they were intended for puppets. George Speaight highlights the case of *Interludium de clerico et puella* (*The interlude of the cleric and the girl*), a fragment of dialogue written in thirteenth-century

²⁷ Cited in Philip Butterworth, *Magic on the Early English Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 132. Translation by Philip A. Shaw.

²⁸ Given that these puppets are ‘small wooden statues’, glove puppets can effectively be ruled out, but they could also be figures from mechanical raree show boxes. Hieronymi Cardani Mediolanensis, *De subtilitate libri XXI* (Lugdunum: apud Stephanum Michaelem, 1580), 634.

²⁹ *Li Romans du Bon Roi Alixandre*, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodl. 264, fol. 54v.

English, undoubtedly inspired by the fabliau *Dame Sirith*.³⁰ Speaight's somewhat unsubstantiated claim essentially relies on the fact that the text never has more than two characters on stage at once (the cleric and the young girl; the cleric and an old woman), which would have allowed one glove puppeteer to perform it.³¹ Michel Rousse³² formulates the more convincing hypothesis that the fabliau *Estormi* by Hue Piaucele (or Hugues Piaucele, who was active in the north of France at the end of the thirteenth century) may have been a rewriting in narrative form of a farce for puppets. The story presents a penniless couple Yfame and Jean who lay a trap for three priests courting the young woman. Yfame arranges to meet all three priests the same night at three different times, suggesting to each of them that they bring all their money. Jean kills them one after the other with the whack of a club, robs them, and then goes to see his brother-in-law Estormi, whom he informs that he has killed a priest and asks for help burying him. Estormi leaves with the first body but, when he returns to Jean's house, he is shown the second, making him believe the first has returned from the dead. Estormi leaves again to bury the second priest and then the third, believing it is still the first one. When he meets a fourth, very much alive, priest on the road, he believes the body has come back to life once again and kills him.³³

The comedy of repetition, murders by the blow of a club, and the pile of accumulating bodies are reoccurring devices in popular glove puppet performances, and it is tempting to recognise in *Estormi* the traces of routines that foreshadow those of Punch and Pulcinella. However, these elements are not the indications that lead Rousse to discern 'the imprint of the puppet booth' in the fabliau. His argument draws on an odd detail:

³⁰ See George Speaight, *The Earliest English Puppet Play? The Interlude of the Cleric and the Girl* (Bicester: Da Silva Puppet Books, 1997), and Wilhelm Heuser, 'Das Interludium de clerico et puella und das Fabliau von Dame Siriz', *Anglia* 30 (1907): 306–19.

³¹ In contrast, Ian Lancashire has shown that the mention of a theatre show called *Ioly Walte and Malking*, which reproduces the argument of *Interludium de clerico et puella*, in Grimsby (Lincolnshire) in 1431, undoubtedly refers to a puppet act. The text has not been preserved. See Ian Lancashire, "'Ioly Walte and Malkyng": a Grimsby puppet play in 1431', *Records of Early English Drama* 4, no. 2 (1979): 6–8.

³² Michel Rousse, 'Estormi ou l'empreinte du castelet', in *La Scène et les tréteaux, Le Théâtre de la farce au Moyen-Âge* (Orléans: Paradigme, 2004), 275–85.

³³ Hugues Piaucele, 'D'Estormi', in *Recueil général et complet des fabliaux des XIII^e et XIV^e siècles*, ed. Anatole de Montaiglon, vol. 1 (Paris: Librairie des bibliophiles, 1872), 198–219.

the fact that Jean, after having slain the priests, makes them stand up, and that Estormi also holds them upright before throwing them into the grave. Rousse sees the insistence on this strange posture as the sign that the glove puppets of the three priests were undoubtedly hung on the arch or the vault of the puppet booth, which is visible on the two illuminations in the Alexander Romance. However, the connection to Pulcinella's routine should not be discounted: Pulcinella repeatedly rests the body of his victim against the puppet booth as he struggles to drop it into the coffin. The comic play with empty coffins and lifeless bodies are constant features of these shows.

Seeing these echoes as evidence of a direct relationship between a hypothetical farce for puppets dating from the thirteenth century and shows whose first traces do not pre-date the sixteenth century would be questionable. Yet, it does not seem excessive to consider that a language of proven comic gestures, created for a limited range of situations and interactions between characters, could be transmitted across the centuries by taking the form of routines. These practices were certainly subject to shifts, variations, and reconfigurations: a disjuncture in terms of *vraisemblance* separates, for example, *Estormi*, where only one slightly unsophisticated character believes that a body can leave its tomb to return to where it was taken from, and *Pulcinella e il cane*³⁴ (*Pulcinella and the dog*) where the 'guappo' (yob), who is very much killed off, falls again and again down the side of the coffin that Pulcinella presents for him. The comedy of farce, based on the foolishness of one character hoodwinked by another who is cleverer than him, contrasts with the absurd, almost fantastic burlesque of a nuisance who persists in thwarting the hero's endeavours even after his death. Whilst the perspectives and the type of laughter they provoke are different, the same motif is employed: that of an obstinate corpse. No form acts out this theme better than a puppet show.

In sum, the miniature from the Alexander Romance proves the existence of comic performances using glove puppets from the middle of the fourteenth century onwards, and traces of dramatic action can hypothetically be connected to them. However, it was not until the sixteenth century that written accounts, such as that of Doni cited above, begin to describe these performances in more detail. In *Ragionamenti* (1534),

³⁴ A classic sketch for Neapolitan *guarattelle*. See Bruno Leone, *La guarattella. Burattini e burattinai a Napoli* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1986).

Pietro Aretino imagines one of them, presented by a Venetian who seems to have simply hid behind a door during a performance in a private home. The puppeteer, modifying his voice to play all the roles in the farce, presents a porter ('*facchino*') who asks an old woman to see her mistress with whom he begins some erotic jesting. In comes the lady's 'old senile husband' who chases him from the house, then undresses, gets into bed, and goes to sleep. The porter then returns, resumes his jesting with the lady, and ends up 'rumpling her love-ruff'. The comedy emerging from the traditional plot of cuckoldry combines with bodily humour in the snores and farts of the old man: 'he made all of us piss from laughing when, taking off the belt he had tied around him, he swore never to eat fatty foods again'.³⁵ The reference in Aretino's *Ragionamenti*, though brief, suggests that glove puppets were already being used in the first half of the sixteenth century to perform plays that featured dialogue and several characters. From this era onwards, the puppet was an established theatrical device, drawing inspiration from the comedy of farce and able to offer a thumbnail sketch comparable on all points to those of live theatre.

A FALSE LEAD: MOBILE SCULPTURES AND RELIGIOUS SERVICES

Emerging as lowly entertainment in the hands of minstrels, sleight-of-hand artists, and conjurers, the puppet in the Middle Ages only progressively became a theatrical device used in lay repertoires. Alongside these chivalric stories and farces, did a third repertoire for puppets exist during the medieval period that drew inspiration from the Bible and the lives of saints? Considering how the history of puppetry has long been presented as mirroring that of live theatre, re-emerging within churches before shifting to public squares, this question may appear surprising. However, adhering to the materiality of documented facts and, in particular, to the strict definitions laid down in the previous chapter, it is a pertinent one to pose. Whilst some evidence of puppets being used for performances of religious subjects can be gathered, it ultimately seems that this usage came later and happened outside of churches, that it was met with significant reluctance on the part of the ecclesiastical authorities,

³⁵ Pietro Aretino, *Aretino's Dialogues*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Stein and Day, 1972), 55–56.

and that it made use of specific devices: the indignity of conjuring tricks and glove puppets was incompatible with the respect required for sacred matter.

To untangle this question requires refraining from conflating the context of a religious celebration with that of theatre. As Rozik points out, for a community of devotees, a ritual is a real event that is supposed to have an effect in the world. In contrast, theatrical performances fall within the domain of fiction and depict ‘descriptions of worlds’³⁶—in other words, a commentary that only indirectly touches upon real life. Therefore, the Depositions of the Cross and entombments of Christ, already mentioned,³⁷ cannot be considered puppet performances; they are simply part of another field of experience, that of religion and the faith that gives meaning to it. Trick statues, used frequently by churches in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, are also excluded—examples include a Madonna and Child turning away when an offering was deemed insufficient³⁸; Christ with wounds dripping of blood³⁹; the impenitent thief shaking his head, sticking out his tongue, and rolling his eyes during a sermon⁴⁰; and even the head of the Devil appearing suddenly from a vestry cupboard.⁴¹ No ‘double vision’, as defined by Tillis, is at work here,⁴² and the animation of these figures does not rely on spectators

³⁶ Eli Rozik, *The Roots of Theatre: Rethinking Ritual and Other Theories of Origin* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), 27.

³⁷ See Chapter 1.

³⁸ See Johannes Tripps, ‘The joy of automata and Cistercian monasteries: from Boxley in Kent to San Galgano in Tuscany’, *Sculpture Journal* 25, no. 1 (2016): 7–28.

³⁹ For example, the ‘Mirakelmann’ of Döbeln (Saxony) or the Christ at Burgos Cathedral. See Kamil Kopania, “‘The idole that stode there, in myne opinion a very monstrous sight’”. On a number of late-medieval animated figures of Crucified Christ’, in *Material of Sculpture. Between Technique and Semantics*, ed. Alexandra Lipińska (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2009), 121–48.

⁴⁰ See Alfred Chapuis and Édouard Gélis, *Le Monde des automates, étude historique et technique*, vol. 1 (Paris: chez les auteurs, 1928), 95–96. Articulated wooden structure from the fifteenth century, from the Auvergne or Limousin, Musée de Cluny.

⁴¹ See Chapuis and Gélis, *Le Monde des automates*, 97–98. Italian furniture from the seventeenth century, Musée de Cluny.

⁴² In a recent study, Michelle K. Oing judges that Döbeln’s articulated Christ might be able to establish a type of double vision: see Michelle K. Oing, ‘Performing Death: A Medieval Puppet of Christ’, in *Puppet and Spirit: Ritual, Religion, and Performing Objects*, ed. Claudia Orenstein and Tim Cusack (London: Routledge, 2024), 197–207 (n. 62). However, this perspective does not seem to take into account Rozik’s warning,

consenting to fiction, the ‘voluntary suspension of disbelief’ defined by Coleridge: a miracle for some, a basic trick for others, animated religious statuary arouses belief or disbelief but nothing more.

Nevertheless, a close examination of some uses of animated statues, particularly between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries can help us to discern how much religious sentiment could be invested in an intermediary zone in which ritualistic celebration was accompanied by puppetesque effects to the delight of spectators. One significant example is the machines constructed in some churches in France and Spain to represent the Virgin Mary’s ascent to heaven during the Assumption mass. The most spectacular machine was created in Dieppe for the ‘Mitouries’, festivities organised to offer thanks for the victory over the English troops who besieged the city in 1443. Fastened to two large masts placed above the high altar, the machinery slowly elevated the figure of Mary carried on a bed by two angels during the service on 15 August. Above, angel musicians beat their wings to the rhythm of the organ, strike the bells of a carillon, bring a trumpet to their mouths or hold an illuminated candlestick. However, the attention of the congregation was specifically directed towards several small actions that provoked audible exclamations in the middle of religious chants: Mary, lying on her bed, lifts her head and arms to the heavens to show her desire to reach the throne of God (the effigy of an old man surrounded by clouds, a large sun, and stars), two angels turn away to stop their candles from being extinguished, and, in particular, a jester character, Grimpe-sur-l’ais,⁴³ appears at different places around the machine, plays dead and then gets up again, and claps to show his enthusiasm before taking refuge under the feet of God. Shocked by the cries and laughter of children that accompanied each of Grimpe-sur-l’ais’s pranks, the young Louis XIV, who was present with the Regent at the celebrations in 1647, asked for the spectacle to be prohibited. However,

in *The Roots of Theatre*, that we do not attend a religious service as we would watch a theatrical fiction.

⁴³ ‘Grimpe-sur-la-planche’ (Grimpe-on-the-board). From the historical descriptions, it cannot be determined with any certainty whether this fool was represented by a puppet, as Kamil Kopania, author of the most in-depth study on the subject, states. It is possible that several automata or semi-automata of the same character appeared in different places around the machine. See Kamil Kopania, ‘The Assumption of Mary in Dieppe: An Unusual Example of a Theatricalized Medieval Religious Ceremony’, in *Dolls, Puppets, Sculptures and Living Images from the Middle Ages to the End of the 18th Century*, ed. K. Kopania (Warsaw: The Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art, 2017), 34–57.

the Mitouries' Marian machine would continue to be used for several decades more before being definitively abandoned and then destroyed during the bombardment of Dieppe by the Anglo-Dutch fleet in 1694.

Another example of the theatrical development of animated statuary in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries also related to the Feast of the Assumption and was found in a chapel of Rouen Cathedral: 'a garden was located in that part of the church. There, one saw grotesque figurines and models depicting the twelve apostles, and witnessed, in the middle of noise, cries and licentiousness from all species, the defeat of Satan. Often the *Mystery of the Assumption* and the *Miracles of Notre Dame* were performed', wrote one historian.⁴⁴ The chapter of the cathedral progressively reduced the performance part in a bid to combat misbehaviour. In 1460, it 'did away with all the old burlesque usages so only the representation of the Mystery of the Assumption was left'. In 1506, the 'grotesque figurines and models' were banned from the church, before the garden itself was destroyed in 1521.

In the fifteenth century in Witney (England), the entombment and the resurrection were performed during Easter celebrations with figurines ('certain small puppets') representing Jesus, Mary, and the guardians of the tomb, including one dubbed Jack Snacker of Wytney, which produced a continual striking noise, undoubtedly the result of a mechanical fault of these semi-automata.⁴⁵ The scholar William Lambarde who reported this anecdote at the end of the sixteenth century, mocked this 'Popish Maumetrie' which would be destroyed, like so many examples of animated statuary, during the English Reformation.⁴⁶ In Spain, the dramatisation of the Descent from the Cross became widespread for around two centuries following the Council of Trent (1545–63): not only

⁴⁴ Pierre Le Verdier, cited in Armand Gasté, *Les Dramas liturgiques de la cathédrale de Rouen* (Évreux: Imprimerie de l'Eure, 1893), 76.

⁴⁵ William Lambarde, *Dictionarium Angliae topographicum et historicum* (London: Fletcher Gyles, 1730), 459.

⁴⁶ When he was a child, Lambarde himself saw a puppet performance of the resurrection of Christ at St Paul's Cathedral in London in 1546. See Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson, *British Drama 1533–1642: A Catalogue. Volume 1: 1533–1566* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 146–47.

was a puppet of the body of Christ used, but the Virgin Mary was also represented as a sculpture with articulated arms.⁴⁷

This selection of examples leads to two observations. First, the initial signs of puppetesque actions that were integrated into religious services produced enthusiasm and amusement, which put at risk the solemnity of the religion, and for that reason, they were subsequently condemned. Their popularity was very real: the curious flocked to see them, providing a source of commercial activity for towns, which made them richer and could lead to these animations being maintained even after they were prohibited. Second, the animated figures used in these ceremonies were constructed differently to the ‘bavastelz’ or glove puppets used for chivalric tales and farces. Though the remaining descriptions are incomplete, the large size of certain characters (notably those of the Mitouries) and the absence of references to movers suggest semi-automata or, at least, mobile sculptures manoeuvred with the help of strings or concealed gears, so not puppets properly speaking.

However, some rare accounts seem to report theatrical performances with puppets being delivered in churches. Germain Bapst, for example, mentions a Franciscan preacher who:

... carried around a puppet theatre that he set up close to the pulpit when he preached, and he accompanied his speeches with a dramatic demonstration using his set of dolls. He came to Metz to preach during Lent in the year 1515 and on Good Friday, he did the tale of the Passion. He paused at certain points of his sermon, gave a signal, and as soon as someone pulled on the curtain of the theatre, the congregation saw the events that he had just recounted before their eyes.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ See José María Domínguez Moreno, ‘La función del descendimiento en la Diócesis de Coria (Cáceres)’, *Biblioteca virtual Miguel de Cervantes*, <https://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/la-funcion-del-descendimiento-en-la-diocesis-de-coria-caceres/html/>. Since 2007, Nao d’amores, a company in Segovia, has performed *Misterio del Cristo de los Gascones*, a modern reinterpretation of these performances. See Esther Fernández, *To Embody the Marvelous: The Making of Illusions in Early Modern Spain* (Nashville: The Vanderbilt University Press, 2021), 45–55.

⁴⁸ Germain Bapst, *Essai sur l’histoire du théâtre, la mise en scène, le décor, le costume, l’architecture, l’éclairage, l’hygiène* (Paris: Hachette, 1893), 54.

Unfortunately, the direct source of this information⁴⁹ is not as categorical as the historian suggests: it certainly refers to a ‘small theatre’ set up next to the pulpit, but on which only a crucified Jesus could be seen, surrounded by burning torches. No animation seems to have been staged.

Puppet performances did take place in churches in the Iberian Peninsula at least, because the provincial synod of Orihuela in 1600 explicitly condemns them (Chapter XIV): ‘We prohibit, in churches and elsewhere, representations of the actions of Christ, those of the Virgin Mary and the lives of the saints by small moveable figures ... that are commonly called títeres.’⁵⁰ This condemnation is the only formal proof that has been found relating to the presence of puppet performances in religious buildings during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The historian of Spanish puppet theatre John E. Varey warns against the danger of interpreting this text too literally and seeing it as the proof of a frequent and widespread practice, as Magnin did. However, even if Varey chooses to disregard it completely, it is somewhat difficult to fully ignore the existence of this document.⁵¹

Following Francisco J. Cornejo,⁵² the hypothesis that I uphold is that these ‘small moveable figures’ to which the synod refers were likely part of the mechanical boxes for raree shows, sometimes referred to as a ‘motion’, whose use was widespread during the sixteenth century. For example, the Spanish writer Cristóbal de Villalón mentions in a work from 1539, without giving details of where he saw it, a box set up by some foreigners in which wooden figurines, powered by a clockwork mechanism, representing on one side the birth of Jesus and his Passion on the other.⁵³ As the abundance of iconography⁵⁴ proves, these types

⁴⁹ The source cited is Charles Abel in the preface of his edition of *Mystère de saint Clément* (Metz: Rousseau Pallez, 1861), xvii.

⁵⁰ Cited in Magnin, *Histoire des marionnettes en Europe*, 58. For the original text, see *Synodus Oriolana Secunda* (Oriolae: in Palatio Episcopali, per Didacum de la Torre, 1602), 52.

⁵¹ Varey, *Historia de los títeres en España*, 99.

⁵² Francisco J. Cornejo, ‘Del retablo a la máquina real. Orígenes del teatro de títeres en España’, *Fantoche* 9 (2015): 36–72.

⁵³ Cristóbal de Villalón, *Ingeniosa comparación entre lo antiguo y lo presente* (Madrid: Sociedad de bibliófilos españoles, 1898), 174.

⁵⁴ See Piotr Oczko, ‘A great theater of things: raree-show (’t Fraay Curieus) by Willem van Mieris’, in *Dolls, Puppets, Sculptures and Living Images from the Middle Ages to the*

of boxes, carried on the backs of travelling exhibitors, circulated widely on an international level. Initially called ‘boîtes de curiosité’ in France, ‘raree shows’ in England, ‘Himmelreich’ in German-speaking countries, and then ‘mundinovi’ or ‘tutilimundi’ almost everywhere in Europe, they were generally formed of two or three vertical panels that could be separated into different compartments that each showed a scene in miniature (Illustration 2.2). Sometimes in wood, but also in wax, clay, plaster, or papier-mâché, the figurines in these compartments could rotate on an axis or make simple gestures when the exhibitor turned a key to operate the mechanism whilst recounting or singing the story represented.⁵⁵ In 1637, the Swede Peder Månsson, a young student, mentioned in his journal a travelling singer at a fairground who had ‘an instrument carried on his back, and within it, artfully and skilfully carved, were some little wooden people, who moved and walked about to demonstrate the Final Judgement, the Prodigal Son and the Fate of John the Baptist’.⁵⁶

These boxes were generally associated with foreign exhibitors, such as Italians in England,⁵⁷ but in Spain and France in particular, they were most often referred to as Savoyards. The mechanical pieces made in the Arve Valley from the sixteenth century onwards for the watchmakers of Geneva may have been used in their manufacture. The insistence on their foreign origin and the fact that they were presented by travelling exhibitors prove that the performances condemned by the Orihuela synod did not emerge in churches, but that attempts had been made to adopt them in a religious context. Martin Luther’s *Table Talk* (1529–46) appears to confirm this assertion when he explains that some Catholic priests, after observing their congregations abandoning mass but rushing to puppet shows on market squares, began introducing these performances into their churches to convince ‘children and unlearned people’ to attend religious services.⁵⁸

End of the 18th Century, ed. K. Kopania (Warsaw: The Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art, 2017), 140–57.

⁵⁵ The most extensive description of these devices is from the entry ‘Mundinovi’ in the *Diccionario de Autoridades* (1734).

⁵⁶ Cited in Margareta Sörenson, ‘Sweden’, *World Encyclopaedia of Puppetry Arts*, <https://wepa.unima.org/en/sweden/>. The citation comes from *Diarium Gyllenianum* of Peder Månsson (Petrus Gyllenius), dated 7 March 1637.

⁵⁷ Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre*, 55–56.

⁵⁸ Martin Luther, *Colloquia mensalia* (London: William Du Gard, 1652), 331.

Illustration 2.2

Willem van Mieris, *The Rare-Show ('t Fraay Curieus)*, 1718, oil painting. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum



For a period of time, then, some travelling puppeteers were able to take advantage of their devices' capacity to reproduce the appearance of sculpted or painted triptychs, like a moving illustration of episodes from the Bible or the miracles of saints, and tried to present them in religious buildings during festivals. However, these attempts were quickly abandoned. If such practices had truly been widespread, other synods or councils, and not just one provincial synod, would have denounced them, like all forms of performances given in churches were from the thirteenth century onwards.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ See the anthology compiled in 'Sentiments de l'Église relativement au théâtre – I: Canons des saints conciles', in *Dictionnaire des mystères*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1854), cols. 24–32.

BIRTH OF A REPERTOIRE (3): SHOWS WITH RELIGIOUS SUBJECT MATTER IN SECULAR SPACES

Until the seventeenth century, there are almost no indisputable traces of puppet shows, according to the previously established definition, within churches.⁶⁰ A different picture emerges for performances of a religious repertoire within a secular context: for example, in private residences, public buildings, fairground huts, and educational institutions. The first known example relates to the Nativity: in 1362–63, the accounting ledgers for the Counts of Holland mention a payment made to a man who performed a Three Magi act⁶¹: the literary historian Gerrit Kalff, who discovered this reference, interprets the fact that one single actor was remunerated as proof that it was a puppet show. From the end of the fifteenth century, verified evidence of performances exists,⁶² which shores up the hypothesis that puppets were not readily accepted as actors of sacred histories. Only the employment of specific devices, mechanical boxes, seems to have allowed for the use of animated figures (by definition suspect)⁶³ to propagate the faith.

The accounts of the town of Amboise in 1501 contain the trace of a payment owed to a minstrel who gave a single performance of the Passion. In 1510, a puppeteer from Burgundy asked the municipality of Nuremberg for permission to present another show of the Passion, ‘very certainly’ with the help of a box according to the historian Hans R. Purschke.⁶⁴ Permission was not granted, but numerous sources attest

⁶⁰ In 1677, the Discalced Augustinians of Rouen organised a performance of the Passion by large puppets in the church that had been entrusted to them, but this show was very badly received: an anonymous pamphlet in verse, *Histoire de ce qui s’est passé dans la chapelle des Augustins Déchaussez du Faux-Bourg Martainville de Rouen* (Orléans: Éléazar Bonne-Foy, 1678), denounces at length ‘this so dishonest and so frivolous machine’. The dimensions of the figures suggest semi-automata.

⁶¹ Cited in Meilink, *Doopeel van Jan Claeszen*, 12.

⁶² In 1472, the ledger of the Römer market in Frankfurt mentions expenses for the construction of several ‘himmelrichhütten’ (huts for the Himmelreich, a motion with religious subjects). Others would follow in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. See Kaus Wolf, *Kommentar zur ‘Frankfurter Dirigierrolle’ und zum ‘Frankfurter Passionspiel’* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2002), 284, 301, 325, in particular.

⁶³ Puppeteers have sometimes been grouped together with wizards and necromancers and condemned as such. See Magnin, *Histoire des marionnettes en Europe*, 58–60.

⁶⁴ Purschke, *Die Entwicklung des Puppenspiels*, 26.

to the growing spread of these performances in the second half of the sixteenth century. Although itinerant puppeteers moved from town to town, they were not vagabonds, and some even enjoyed a sizeable reputation. For example, the Swiss Heinrich Wirri was a renowned ‘Pritschenmeister’⁶⁵ who performed his *Passion Christi mit Figuren* between 1557 and 1570 as far afield as Germany and Alsace. Another artist Jörg Wetzl asked the authorities in Nördlingen (Bavaria) in 1583 for permission to perform the sacrifice of Isaac, the beheading of John the Baptist, and the principal episodes of the life of Jesus, from the Annunciation to the Resurrection.⁶⁶ The same year, in the small Swiss town of Büren an der Aare near Biel/Bienne, travelling artists presented their different talents at the local hall. The description left by the pastor Johannes Hutmacher in the church register demonstrates the extent to which a story taken from the Gospels, such as the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, could inspire a comic interpretation, that a ‘Himmelreich’ could be followed by a farce performed by glove puppets, and, in particular, how puppet shows and technological wonders could be interspersed within the same performance:

Sunday 11 June 1583, in a corner of the large room at the town hall ... a peddler from Esslingen performed [the story of] the rich man and Lazarus with small images he showed from behind a curtain, and he made each character speak aloud with a deep or soft voice in a comic manner. He had an associate, a minstrel who stood next to the door of the room and so skilfully played a zither between acts. When the show was over, the minstrel placed the laid table in the middle [of the room] and, standing upon it, he skilfully juggled three Muscat cups, yarn, grain, flour, wine, a metal ring, a padlock, and other things for which he asked a Kreutzer from anyone who wanted to watch him. After that, everyone had an evening drink, and the first man played Meister Hämmerlin with a cooking grid while the other stood on a chair, stuffed a large handful of *wärck*[?] in his mouth and breathed out fire several times.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Organiser of public festivals, master of ceremonies, and poet charged with composing the work to recount the event.

⁶⁶ Hans R. Purschke, *Die Anfänge der Puppenspielformen und ihre vermutlichen Ursprünge (Puppenspielkundliche Quellen und Forschungen)* (Bochum: Deutsches Institut für Puppenspiel, 1979), 33.

⁶⁷ Cited in Leif Rüdiger, ‘Spil im radthuss’, *Figura* 33 (2001): 4–6. Thanks to Lars Rehn for having brought this source to my attention.

Often these mechanical boxes were simply placed on a table, but they also existed in very large dimensions. The Saxon Andreas Rothe, whose activities can be traced from 1591 and 1599, had a box alongside which three actors performed and some parts had dialogue. The humanist Martin Crusius, who saw one of their performances in 1596 at the grain hall in Tübingen, spoke of ‘a comedy or rather a tragedy about the rich man and Lazarus’ (Luke 16) delivered in front of hundreds of spectators.⁶⁸ In 1612, José de Valdivieso’s poem *Ensaladilla del Retablo* mentioned the performance of a raree show of the Nativity presented at the Corral de la Cruz in Madrid, which suggests that a large audience was present. A transition can thus be established between the shows given by traveling puppeteers and the performances of large puppets which, under the name of ‘máquina real’, would be delivered by professional companies in ‘corrales’ (theatres) from 1632 until the start of the nineteenth century.⁶⁹

The scarcity of detailed descriptions and the vagueness of denominations make it very difficult to interpret mentions relating to raree shows. The words ‘retablo’, ‘motion’, and ‘Himmelreich’ can be applied to very different performance devices ranging from small compartmentalised boxes that travelling sleight-of-hand artists transported on their backs to very large scenes, positioned horizontally and not vertically, with more imposing figures that invisible mechanics controlled from beneath, for which only rare iconographical traces have been found.⁷⁰ On the border between puppet shows and theatre of automata, the performances given using these large boxes necessitated, like that of live theatre, permission from the local authorities. The requests submitted by the artists give information at the very least about the subjects performed—particularly popular were the Creation of the world, the Book of Jonah, the Nativity, the Passion, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, and the Last Judgment.

Some of these performances, using the terms ‘comedy’ and ‘tragedy’, demonstrate the same literary or theatrical ambitions as those given by troupes of actors. In 1593, Andreas Heinrich asked the municipal councils

⁶⁸ Purschke, *Die Entwicklung des Puppenspiels*, 26.

⁶⁹ See Francisco J. Cornejo, ‘La máquina real. Teatro de títeres en los corrales de comedias españoles de los siglos XVII y XVIII’, *Fantoche* 0 (2006): 13–31.

⁷⁰ An engraving in Sebastián de Covarrubias’s *Emblemas morales* (1610) shows two puppets positioned on a table and a lute player alongside them, without any visible control device. The simplicity of the drawing, however, limits its documentary value.

of Nördlingen and Ulm for permission to perform his ‘spiritual show or comedy of the prodigal son and the beheading of John the Baptist with splendidly beautiful artistic tableaux’. The decision of the Ulm council, which permitted him to perform but limited the admission charge to a pfennig per person, describes Heinrich as a ‘player of tragedies’.⁷¹

Another travelling artist Balthasar Klein had the text of one of his shows, an adaptation of the Book of Jonah, printed in Schweinfurt in 1582, which can be considered the oldest play for puppets ever published in Europe. This significant piece of work (five acts, 23 characters) was the result of a collaboration with the Latinist, translator, and playwright Simon Roth.⁷² There is evidence that the play was performed in several Bavarian towns between 1578 and 1582. *Jonas* is an adaptation of Roth’s *Comedi von dem H. Propheten Jona* (*Comedy of the Prophet St Jonah*) intended for live actors. Klein shortens certain lines, integrates passages from a play by Meistersinger Hans Sachs on the same subject,⁷³ and, most significantly, develops the visual dimension of the performance: God is actually represented on stage, while in Roth’s version He only appears as an invisible voice; the episode of Jonah’s sea voyage during which the giant fish swallows him⁷⁴ is performed and not simply recounted; and the miraculous growth of a squash plant to shelter the prophet’s head from the sun’s rays is also shown on stage. From this period onwards, puppet theatre seems to have been perceived as a theatrical medium suitable for portraying the supernatural.

This intervention of non-humans in raree shows is also documented for smaller compartmentalised boxes, which generally performed a lay repertoire. Thomas Mürner in his satirical work *Narrenbeschwörung* (*Exorcism of Fools*, 1512) describes the show given by a puppeteer with a ‘Himmelreich’. The puppeteer performed a succession of different episodes with

⁷¹ Hans R. Purschke, *Die Puppenspieltraditionen Europas. Deutschsprachige Gebiete* (Frankfurt: Puppen und Masken, 1986), 12.

⁷² Simon Roth and Balthasar Klein, *Jonas. Ein lustigs, auch kurtzes, und nicht minder nutztes Spiel, von der Buszpredigt Jona des Propheten zu Ninive, und wie alles Volck der Stadt, seine wortenglaubt, und ernstliche Busz gethan habe. Durch Simon Rothen und Balthasar Klein in einfeltige Reime gestellet* (1582). Long considered lost, the only known copy of this edition is now held at the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków.

⁷³ Hans Sachs, *Comedia mit 10 personen, der gantz prophet Jonas, und hat 5 actus* (1551).

⁷⁴ ‘Then the boat moves away, and the fish can still be seen a little. It then spits out Jonah.’ See Roth and Klein, *Jonas*.

no connection between them, including one borrowed from the *Roman de Renart* cycle in which the wolf Ysengrin steals a roasted joint of meat. This example shows that the same word ‘Himmelreich’ referred to both large scenes that used semi-automata to perform dialogued plays of an essentially religious subject matter, in direct competition with live theatre, and small boxes, which could be transported on the back of a man or an animal, with religious or lay subjects whose animation was accompanied by spoken word or song. The words ‘retablo’ in Spain and Portugal and ‘motion’ in England also had the same multi-purpose usage. Whilst some boxes with compartmentalised scenes, which the peddler presented or revealed bit by bit, depicted disparate subjects, others, like that of Maese Pedro in the second book of *Don Quixote* (Chapter XXVI), presented different episodes from the same story. In Cervantes’s novel, it is highly likely to be a vertical box and Maese Pedro successively animates each tableau (Don Gaiferos playing draughts, reprimanded by Carlomagno; Melisendra, prisoner in the tower, forcefully kissed by a Moor; the punishment of the Moor on the orders of Marsilio) as his assistant addresses the audience.

However, it is difficult to imagine what the performances given with these boxes were like on the basis of these indirect sources, particularly as works of fiction only mention them in a satirical way. Writers mocked the pomposity of the speeches and the puppeteers’ anachronisms and incoherences. For example, Henry Chettle and John Day, in the play *The Blind Beggar of Bednal-Green* (1600), describe a motion in the following terms: ‘You shall likewise see the famous City of Norwitch, and the stabbing of Iulius Caesar in the French Capitol by a sort of Dutch Mesopotamians ... Or if it please you shall see a stately combate betwixt Tamberlayn the Great, and the duke of Guyso the less, perform’d on the Olympick Hills in France.’⁷⁵ Popular shows are a source of ridicule in literature: writers mock the ambition of staging the greats from ancient and modern history, and refuse to see anything other than a comical simulacrum in the animation of figures. The case is true for the religious repertoire: Tomás Rodaja, the protagonist of *The Glass Graduate*, one of Cervantes’s *Exemplary Stories*, declares that puppet exhibitors ‘treated divine matters with

⁷⁵ Henry Chettle and John Day, *The blind-beggar of Bednal-green* (London: R. Pollard and Tho. Dring, 1659), iv, 1.

an indecent lack of respect, because they reduced worship to mockery in the figures they paraded in their theatres'.⁷⁶

At the end of the sixteenth and start of the seventeenth centuries, puppet performances, whose first appearances date from the medieval period, begin to be established as a standalone and clearly identified practice. Though tricks and animal taming continued to accompany puppeteers, and the primary source of their income from their activities, like those of travelling actors, remained the sale of charlatan remedies, their performances were most often organised around a main argument, either exhibited by a peddler or delivered by characters in action and conversing between themselves, in this case adhering to all the codes of a dramatic composition. Out of puppet shows, puppet theatres emerged with a tripartite repertoire—chivalric, comic, and religious—and reached a wide audience.

⁷⁶ M. de Cervantes, 'The Glass Graduate', in *Exemplary Stories*, trans. Lesley Lipson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 124.

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Street Theatres: Sketches of Humanity

A RANGE OF DIFFERENT DEVICES

Like the sleight-of-hand artists who preceded them and the actors with whom they were sometimes conflated, puppeteers long remained travelling performers. Yet this itinerance took very different forms depending on the type of show performed. To protect the mechanisms of their devices from the hazards of the outdoors and inclement weather, sixteenth and seventeenth-century peddlers who took to the roads to exhibit their large ‘retablo’, ‘motion’, or ‘Himmelreich’ gave performances under the shelter of fairground huts, in public buildings, and private homes in towns and cities, or inns and barns in the countryside. The time required to set it up necessitated a stay of several days at each destination; the enclosed space meant that an entry fee could be charged. In certain urban areas, artists had to obtain written authorisation from the municipal authorities, resulting in documentary evidence that allows for their routes to be traced and for the titles of the works performed to be known. This requirement represents a small first step towards puppeteers being recognised by public powers.

Less is known about the much more precarious and ephemeral work of street puppeteers—a few minutes on the corner of a side street or a market square could suffice to set up a puppet booth and perform a sketch. Rather than requests for authorisation to perform, municipal archives contain decrees prohibiting puppeteers’ shows and expulsion orders issued against them. Nonetheless, since puppet shows contributed

to the cultural life of towns and villages, these performances attracted the attention of artists who captured their imagery in paintings and drawings. Until the turn of the nineteenth century, iconographical evidence constitutes the principal source of information on this subject with a small corpus of textual traces offering some complementary information. Three main control methods are documented: jiggling puppets, small portable raree shows, and glove puppets.

The simple design of jiggling puppets limited their performance to the staging of animation: one or two strings passed through their bodies between a stake driven into a piece of wood and the controller's leg, which were pulled horizontally to make them bounce on the spot. Heirs to the knights fighting on a table in Herrad of Landsberg's *Hortus deliciarum*, jiggling puppets appeared alone or in pairs and most often would present a short dance following the rhythm of the music played by the puppeteer, fight each other, or even bow to each other. In the mock-heroic poem *Malmantile racquistato* (1688), Lorenzo Lippi draws a humorous comparison between the greetings of two characters and the *fantoccini* that can be seen on the streets of Florence.¹ With such rudimentary devices, no narrative development was possible; it was a simple form of entertainment rather than a dramatic performance.

The second group, the portable raree show boxes, which evidence suggests circulated until the first decades of the nineteenth century,² did allow for a short story to be staged and recounted by the operator or an assistant. None of the texts that were recited or sung are known, but a few seventeenth-century comedies include short performances as a miniaturised form of theatre within theatre that may have employed this animation technique. Raymond Poisson's comedy *L'Après-souper des auberges, ou les Marionnettes* (1654)³ was performed at the court of the young Louis XIV to bring a masquerade to a close. Although the stage

¹ Perlone Zippoli [Lorenzo Lippi], *Il malmantile racquistato* (Florence: Michele Nestenus, Francesco Moücke, 1731), 9 (I, 34).

² One of the last illustrations showing these boxes is a non-dated drawing by Gottfried Mind (1768–1814) held at the Burgerbibliothek of Berne. In 1838, Cyprian Kamil Norwid drew a peddler in front of a simpler device comprising one scene with mechanical figures. See Henryk Jurkowski and Thieri Foulc, eds., *Encyclopédie mondiale des arts de la marionnette* (Montpellier: L'Entretiens, 2009), 554.

³ Raymond Poisson, *Le Baron de la Crasse et L'Après-souper des auberges*, ed. Charles Mazouer (Paris: Nizet, 1987).

directions only mention that ‘the Puppets dance the *Courantes*, a ballet with six entries, and act in a short farce’,⁴ the speed at which this performance is set up within the scene of the comedy and the role played by dance suggests a succession of mechanical tableaux like those of curiosity boxes, possibly accompanied by glove puppets for the ‘short farce’.

As an extension of the masquerade, the very context of the performance creates a distancing effect: the entertainment that preceded it, entitled *La Réception faite par un gentilhomme de campagne à une compagnie choisie à la mode, qui le vient visiter* (*Reception hosted by a country gentleman for a select group who comes to visit him*—a work very likely by the Duc de Saint-Aignan),⁵ mocks rustic lifestyles. The 16-year-old king himself even danced wearing a peasant costume in the last entry. During the masquerade’s eighth entry, the lord of the provincial chateau is warned of the arrival of a troupe of actors who he fears will steal his turkeys, and he reluctantly accepts their offer to perform a comedy. It turns out to be none other than Poisson’s play: a single act in verse with a group of stock characters (the Gascon, the Norman, the Flemish man) and provincial noblemen, almost all with very pronounced accents or verbal tics, who find themselves together at a Paris inn. With the group wanting some after-supper entertainment, the Gascon leaves in search of actors and returns with puppeteers who have their figurines perform the dances and the farce. The only detail known about the farce is that Pantalon appears: his puppet shouts at the Gascon, imploring him to be quiet. The double framing—the puppets in the comedy, the comedy in the masquerade—adds to the ridicule of the provincial characters who must be satisfied with a popular show because they do not have a taste for serious theatre: the previous night, the Flemish man had watched Pierre Corneille’s tragedy *Othon*, which he did not like (he calls it the similarly sounding *L’Automne*), and he has difficulty summarising the story for the rest of the inn’s guests.

Another short scene, yet more developed than the one in *L’Après-souper des auberges*, (*The after-dinner at inns*) is included in *Le Régat des dames*, (*The ladies’ delight*), a comedy performed by the troupe from the Comédie-Italienne at the annual Saint-Germain fair on 2 May

⁴ Poisson, *Le Baron de la Crasse et L’Après-soupe des auberges*, 200.

⁵ See Manuel Couvreur’s review of Charles Mazouer’s edition cited in the previous footnote in the *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire* 69, no. 3 (1991): 733–36.

1668. Only a summary survives in the *Scenario*, the famous Arlequin performer Domenico Biancolelli's handwritten compilation of his repertoire.⁶ Disguised as a Savoyard chimney sweep, Arlequin carries a curiosity box on his back with the intention of deceiving the watchful eye of the old Scaramouche and encouraging Eularia to join her lover Octave. Following a short drinking song, the performance given by Arlequin is preceded by a recommendation that seems to point to a specific form of entertainment from this period: 'Imagine', he says, 'that everything you see takes place in a new world.'⁷ In the second half of the seventeenth century, views of exotic landscapes would feature as a subject of 'tutilimondi' or 'mundinovi': large boxes with a hole covered by magnifying glass that individual spectators would look through to see the static or animated images of monuments, cities, and battle scenes enclosed inside.⁸ It is impossible to discern whether the 'curiosity' exhibited by Biancolelli's troupe was one of these fairground attractions, or if it was a raree show box portraying a brief narrative in a far-flung country. However, two conclusions can be drawn: on the one hand, already during this period, the repertoire of miniature theatres was no longer limited to stories with a religious subject or chivalric adventures as it had been in previous centuries; and, on the other hand, a progressive transition via these curiosity boxes was underway between the mechanical boxes of the Renaissance and the peep shows that would become increasingly common during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This evolution offers an explanation of why all these boxes, whether they are open and display scenes placed in different compartments or they invite spectators to look through a lens at a view set inside a closed box, are referred to using the same term in English: a raree show. However, chivalric tales from the medieval tradition do not seem to

⁶ The original version of the *Scenario* has been lost: only its French translation by Thomas-Simon Gueullette survives and is held at the Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra. Brothers François and Claude Parfaict adapted the summary of *Régale des dames* in their *Histoire de l'ancien théâtre italien depuis son origine en France jusqu'à sa suppression en l'année 1697* (Paris: Lambert, 1753), 307–25.

⁷ Parfaict and Parfaict, *Histoire de l'ancien théâtre italien*, 314.

⁸ For the *Mojiganga del Mundi Nuevo*, a show performed on the occasion of the birth of Philippe IV's son in 1661, the Spanish playwright Vicente Suárez de Deza y Ávila included a 'mundinovi' with an Italian exhibitor. The characters that emerge from the box, performed by actors, are Portuguese, Valencian, Indian, and Black dancers, a mermaid, and a centaur: this account confirms that the peep shows offered by these inventions were constructed as a series of short acts and not as a narrative.

have been entirely abandoned by these miniature stages as the following example of a comedy, whose dramatic action includes a performance given by puppets from a curiosity box, shows.

In the anonymous play *Les Souffleurs, ou la Pierre philosophale d'Arlequin* (*The prompters, or Arlequin's philosophical stone*, 1694), intended for the Italian actors at the Hôtel de Bourgogne theatre in Paris, a brief puppet show is once again employed to distract an old man, allowing lovers to communicate with one another. In the first act, Arlequin and Mezzetin, disguised as Savoyard chimney sweeps, appear before Isabelle and her father Cintio to recount the legend of Pierre de Provence and the Belle Maguelone using a 'curiosity': the figurines act in silence and Mezzetin takes on the role of interpreter. The story that he endeavours to tell is not that of the romance between Pierre and Maguelone, but a summary of the comedy's first scenes which serves to inform Isabelle of her lover Octavio's intentions. Cintio expresses praise for curiosity boxes, which is an additional indication of the old man's blindness, fooled by the young people's actions:

CINTIO: Is it not better to be entertained by these little machines than go and waste your time and money at the Comédie [theatre] where the only actors you see are real people who talk, who walk, and who gesticulate? I'm not surprised either that most spectators fall asleep in the theatre, joke around in the boxes, chat in the amphitheatre, and that they do nothing but laugh and whistle in the stalls. What's more, with these kinds of shows here, young girls do not see any examples of vanity that spoil their mind and corrupt their mores. That's what makes me value this innocent form of entertainment so much.⁹

Another example, this time from England, is John Lacy's farce *The Old Troop* (1672),¹⁰ in which a curiosity box is very likely brought on stage by a Frenchman who goes to the Bristol fair to earn some money with his show. Raggou, the French cook of a regiment, borrows the set of puppets in exchange for his clothes to evade the 'constables' who are searching for him. When they appear, Raggou is forced to improvise a show: he performs the King of Spain playing the bagpipes in front of his

⁹ *Les Souffleurs* (Paris: Veuve de Ch. Coignard, 1694), 49.

¹⁰ John Lacy, *The Old Troop, or Monsieur Raggou* (London: William Cook & Thomas Dring, 1672). I thank Cécile Decaix for bringing this text to my attention.

council, then the Judgment of Solomon in which he confuses the character with the child exhibiting wisdom. Next, interspersed with a song in Macaronic Latin, appearances are made by the ‘queen of Swiveland’, the Whore of Babylon making love to a maypole erected on the Strand, the King of Denmark and Norway who is taught to juggle by the ‘Bishop of Munsera’, and a silent minister giving a long ‘preach’ in a theatre. Beyond the comedy produced by this succession of incongruous and absurd acts, the lay and pseudo-epic nature of the stories recounted using curiosity boxes suggests the continuation of a tradition bringing together royal and legendary figures as documented in earlier periods.

In the following centuries, the lowly reputation of the shows performed by these travelling exhibitors would only be cemented further. Curiosity boxes no longer served as a support for a broader narrative that was either recounted or sung, but presented brief and incoherent numbers, for example, of acrobats or craftsmen at work, as some nineteenth-century engravings depict. Facing competition from both the illustrated ballads of story singers (‘cantastorie’, ‘Bankelsänger’)¹¹ and peep shows (‘tutilimondi’, ‘mundinovi’), forerunners to magic lanterns and other forms of ‘pre-cinematographic’ attractions, they would progressively disappear.

PUPPET BOOTH SHOWS

Whilst jiggig figurines were too rudimentary to present a theatrical action and the few traces left by curiosity boxes suggest that they were accompanied by recounted or sung narration rather than dialogued scenes, the third category—glove puppet shows performed in the streets—certainly did employ a dramatic mode. In front of the booths, as Jean Bérain’s drawing (1679) portrays (Illustration 3.1), stood peddlers who were responsible for attracting spectators, keeping the audience at an appropriate distance, and making them pay into the hat. The puppets performed the action and conversed between themselves, as several examples in the previous chapter showed.

¹¹ See Christian Besson, ‘Le chanteur, la baguette et la peinture historiée (une iconographie européenne)’, *Romantisme* 187, no. 1 (2020): 59–78. These travelling singers used a stick to point to the different actions featured in a painted image, which each corresponded to a sung verse.

Illustration 3.1 Jean Bérain, *A Puppet Showman*. Drawing, ink and watercolour, 1679. London, British Museum



From the seventeenth century onwards, an abundance of iconography attests to the presence of glove puppet shows on town squares, at markets, in streets, at fairgrounds, and even at village fêtes. Often perched on the edge of trestle stages for actors, other times set up on the cobblestone or beaten earth, the small puppet booth, inside which a single puppeteer would conceal themselves, is the device by far most frequently represented. Other staging apparatuses did exist, notably the use of an opening created on the facade of a house where the puppets appeared within the frame of this sort of window. This arrangement is depicted in an engraving by *Boëtius Adams Bolswert*, which illustrates the anonymous work *Duyfkens ende Willemynkens pelgrimagie tot haren*

beminden binnen Ierusalem¹² (*The Pilgrimage of Duyfkens [Dove] and Willemynkens [Wilful] towards Their Beloved in Jerusalem*) published in 1627 in Antwerp: a peddler on a stand calls out to a group of onlookers and points to the show featuring two glove puppets taking place on the first floor of a house.

Similarly, in Valencia (Spain) in 1619, puppets performed a short farce from inside a private residence on the occasion of a parade honouring St Dominic, which was quickly denounced by the Inquisition tribunal:

Two puppets appeared at a window, one was dressed as a monk from the Dominican Order, the other as a secular priest. The Dominican had his cassock hitched up over his buttocks as the priest forcefully spanked him. Not far away, there was a third puppet that looked like a young girl, and once the monk was duly whipped, he went to woo her in the most tender way.¹³

The comedy of glove puppetry is very often bold. Closely linked to that of farce, it also prolongs the satirical dimension of the medieval fabliaux that mocked feudal lords, rich merchants, and members of the clergy. Actors and puppets could even act together in the same performance as a drawing by Abraham van Diepenbeecke in an emblem book from 1631 shows: two actors dance and sing in front of a curtain from behind which two glove puppets emerge. The same character Matamore is portrayed twice, by an actor and by a puppet, illustrating the idea expressed in the emblem that audiences like to be deceived by ‘the double whisper of the actor’,¹⁴ just like young women who listen to the doublespeak of their seducers.

This doubling of the actor and the puppet was motivated by economic reasons: until the end of the eighteenth century, theatre performed in the streets primarily served to promote the sale of miracle remedies or teeth pulling, the principal sources of income for these artists, and touring

¹² *Duyfkens ende Willemynkens pelgrimage tot haren beminden binnen Ierusalem (Antwerpen: Hieronimus Verdussen, 1627).*

¹³ Henri Mérimée, *Spectacles et comédiens à Valencia (1580–1630)* (Toulouse: Edouard Privat, 1913), 88. See also John E. Varey, *Historia de los títeres en España* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1957), 96–98, for the original citation from the Inquisition tribunal.

¹⁴ Antoine de Bourgogne, *Linguae vitia et remedia expressa...* (Antverpiae: apud Vidua Cnobbaert, [1631] 1652), 55.

companies often brought together puppeteers and actors. It is thus unsurprising that several comic archetypes of farce appeared as both human and puppet. For example, the fool Jean des Vignes, a companion of Tabarin and Franc-à-Tripe, mentioned in Guillaume Bouchet's *Sérvées* (1588), was later revived under the form of a puppet: a mid-seventeenth-century engraving by Pierre Richer even depicts an actor playing him looking at his own puppet which gloves his right hand.¹⁵ Similarly, there is evidence of the characters Juan de las Viñas in Spain¹⁶ and Zan della Vigna in Venice¹⁷ being played as puppets. Another example is Burattino, second Zanni in the Compagnia dei Gelosi, whose stage name would later refer to the whole family of 'burattini', Italian glove puppets. Numerous comic figures thus emerged in Europe, circulating from one country to another and being reproduced from one actor to another, and who were common to all forms of burlesque shows improvised in the street, whether played by actors or by puppets. Some of these 'lustige Figuren' (comic characters), the term used by German-language researchers, can be traced back to their inventor: the Austrian actor Johann Valentin Petzold (1648–1721) created Kilian Brustfleck, a gauche peasant who was later revived by Goethe in his farce sketch for puppets *Hanswursts Hochzeit oder der Lauf der Welt* (*Hanswurst's Wedding or the Way of the World*). Yet, the origins of most lustige Figuren remain unknown, and their individual characteristics can be hard to detect: as Johannes Minuth demonstrates, the character Meister Hämmerlein, who appeared in the sixteenth century and can be considered one of Kasperl's predecessors, can take on the role of various figures, such as a Devil, a servant, a peasant, or even a fool.¹⁸

This circulation of characters between trestle stages and puppet booths in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries raises the question of whether actors and glove puppets performed the same repertoire. This does not seem to be the case for two reasons: first, as already noted, there is a

¹⁵ Engraving reproduced in Victor Fournel, *Les Rues du vieux Paris* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1879), 475.

¹⁶ J. E. Varey, 'Representaciones de títeres en teatros públicos y palaciegos', *Revista de filología española* 38, no. 1/4 (1954): 178.

¹⁷ Tommaso Garzoni, *La Piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo* (1585), cited in Massimo Cali, *Burattini e marionette tra Cinque e Seicento in Italia* (Azzano San Paolo: Edizioni Junior, 2002), 88.

¹⁸ Johannes Minuth, *Das Kaspertheater und seine Entwicklungsgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Puppen & Masken, 1996), 25.

lack of consistency within these first comic archetypes. Beyond the actors who first invented them, Meister Hämmerlein, Pickelhering, Jean Potage, Hans Supp, and Knapkäse were, above all, just names: a basic costume with which artists, treading the boards or in puppet booths, cloaked their protagonists from undoubtedly pre-existing stories, giving new life to the Devil's appearances in medieval mystery plays or carnival buffoonery. George Speaight, for example, highlights the role played by Vice, a character in sixteenth-century English morality plays, in the progressive development of the repertoire of popular puppets.¹⁹ Transmitted through oral traditions and copied from one troupe to another, the individual characterisation of these comic figures long remained subject to fluctuations. The changing appearance of Polichinelle in seventeenth-century France attests at once to the international circulation of characters and the modifications introduced in the process of their transmission: replicating the white blouse of the Italian Pulcinella or wearing a red and yellow striped suit, with or without the half mask and its protruding nose, the white ruff, or the humpback and potbelly. As figureheads with a specific function—to make the audience laugh—the identities of these characters were still very malleable, so care must be taken not to essentialise them. From one pop-up stage to another, from the theatre to the puppet booth, the reoccurrence of a name does not lead to the conclusion that similarities existed either between these characters or their repertoires.

The second reason why it is rather unlikely that glove puppets and actors performed identical or even comparable plays when they embodied the same characters relates to their physical proximity. Since actors shared the same stages with puppet booths, their performances could not have been reproduced with small figures; at most, puppets were an extension to their shows by serving as an advertisement or an interlude to attract spectators and convince them to be patient whilst the live actors prepared, changed costume, or rested. Instead of replicating live theatre, the first known traces of puppet shows in public spaces suggest that a particular type of performance was developed very early on, and it was distinct from the comedy of farce and the plots of the *Commedia dell'arte*, with a more markedly subversive dimension.

¹⁹ George Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre* (New York: John De Graff, 1956), 45–47.

THE LAUGHTER OF VENGEANCE

The constraints of the puppet booth's small opening and the staging of a pair of figures barely bigger than the hands animating them meant that glove puppet shows needed to follow a rhythmically rigorous construction to retain the spectators' attention for long enough that they would throw a coin in the hat or plate presented to them. These shows also had to elicit surprise with the sudden appearance of characters, make the audience laugh through pleasantries or performing burlesque scenes, and extend the dramatic space through the shrill sound of the 'swazzle',²⁰ which distorts the protagonist's voice by giving it an unrealistic quality to signal it belongs to another world. Yet the comic impact of these performances was at its most powerful when it portrayed a temporary reversal of the world order—or, at least, that of society. Whilst this element prolonged the carnivalesque traditions analysed by Mikhail Bakhtin,²¹ the laughter the glove puppets provoked was loaded with a particularly critical dimension, which was linked to the status of the artists who were considered as vagabonds or charlatans. Moreover, the puppeteers playing in the streets long constituted a theatre of insolence, vengeance, and social revenge that the authorities sought to reprimand or shut down.

In 1630, the local council in Bridport ordered a company of puppeteers to leave the county of Dorset as they 'wander up and down the country with blasphemous shows and sights which they exercise by means of puppet-playing, not only by day but late in night ... so that the townsmen cannot keep their children and servants in their houses'.²² In 1696, Bossuet, the Bishop of Meaux, wrote a letter to Louis-Roland de Vernon, the king's prosecutor in the town:

As you are taking so much care to repress the unconverted, I entreat you to keep a watchful eye on the education of Catholics as well, and to prevent puppets whose shameful performances, impure discourses, and even the

²⁰ A 'swazzle' ('sifflet pratique' in French; 'pivetta' in Italian; 'lengüeta' in Spanish; 'palheta' in Portuguese; 'Zungenpfeife' in German) is a small reed that is concealed in the mouth and, when it is positioned against the palette, gives a shrillness to the puppeteer's voice.

²¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984).

²² *Bridport Records and Ancient Manuscripts*, cited in John Tucker Murray, *English Dramatic Companies 1558–1642*, vol. 2 (London: Constable and Co. Ltd, 1910), 206.

hour of their shows can bring no good. It vexes me that, as I endeavour to instruct the people in the best way I can, I am faced with such workers who destroy more in one single moment than I could ever teach through extensive effort.²³

This recommendation was subsequently followed: a year later, the day after a performance that caused a new scandal, Bossuet was informed that an order had just been published ‘against some sleight-of-hand artists, tightrope dancers, and puppet players, idle and lazy strangers’.²⁴ It obliged them to leave the town within 24 hours or face a fine of 100 livres and a period of imprisonment.

Further evidence of the subversive potential of puppets can be found in the ‘mazarinades’, satirical publications that vehemently attacked Cardinal Mazarin between 1648 and 1653, which include several references to Polichinelle. One of them, a letter from Polichinelle to Mazarin, is signed ‘I am POLICHINELLE / who acts as sentinel / at the Porte de Nesle’,²⁵ undoubtedly an allusion to the puppeteer Pierre Brioché,²⁶ as if the puppet itself is speaking in this lampoon. Whether they performed in the street, in a hut (‘loge’ in French),²⁷ or even if they occasionally set up their puppet booth in a tennis court,²⁸ travelling puppeteers amplified the emotions of the people and, as such, were always closely monitored.

There were also legal attempts to restrict performances in certain areas across Europe. In 1676, when the local superintendent wanted to prevent

²³ Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, letter dated 18 November 1686, in *Correspondance de Bossuet*, vol. 3 (Paris: Hachette, 1910), 322.

²⁴ Nicolas Payen, letter dated 24 November 1687, in *ibid.*, 449.

²⁵ *Lettre de Polichinelle à Jule Mazarin*, cited in Charles Magnin, *Histoire des marionnettes en Europe, depuis l'Antiquité jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1852), 122.

²⁶ The Brioché family lived at the Château-Gaillard, a small house with a corbelled tower on the Seine between the Pont-Neuf and the Porte de Nesle. Outside of the period of the Saint-Germain Fair (from Shrovetide to Palm Sunday) where they had a hut, they gave performances in their neighbourhood. The family is also referred to under the name Datelin as Pierre, founder of this puppet dynasty, was originally *from Atelin* (‘d’Atelin’ in French) in the parish of Saint-Hilaire near to Rouen: see Françoise Rubellin, ed., *Marionnettes du XVIII^e siècle* (Montpellier: Espaces 34, 2022), 90.

²⁷ According to Antoine Furetière’s dictionary (1690), a ‘loge’ is a ‘small shop that is rented temporarily or for the duration of a fair’.

²⁸ As was the case for the troupe expelled from Meaux on the orders of Nicolas Payen.

François Datelin (known as Fanchon Brioché) from playing in the street, Datelin appealed to King Louis XIV, who, perhaps remembering the performances given over several weeks at Saint-Germain-en-Laye in 1669 to entertain the dauphin, lifted this interdiction.²⁹ In 1780, with the aim of ‘eliminating situations in which the people would waste their time unnecessarily and be deceived’, the Grand Duke Leopold I had an edict published that prohibited shows of travelling charlatans, acrobats, ‘cantastorie’, puppeteers, and jugglers across the whole of Tuscany. Offenders would be imprisoned and then banished in perpetuity.³⁰ In 1793, Frederick Augustus III, Elector of Saxony, banned all puppet shows.³¹ In 1837, in Vienna, Chancellor Metternich reduced Hanswurst to silence: the puppeteers who had set up their booths in the Wurstelprater, an amusement park on the left bank of the Danube, were henceforth required to perform silently—a restriction that would be upheld until 1918.³²

In addition to these severe interdictions and constraints, many puppeteers were confronted on a daily basis with the widespread risk of arrest and short detentions. Gaetano Santangelo (1782–1832) from Rome, nicknamed Ghetanaccio, was famous for improvised skits in which he lambasted the abuses and dishonesty of contemporary society. His favourite character Rugantino, who he often performed in dialogue with Pulcinella, was a familiar figure of the lower classes from Rome. Half swaggering soldier, half arrogant yob, the traits that Ghetanaccio lent to the character varied significantly if the accounts compiled by Filippo Chiappini are to be believed. Rugantino mocks the pope and laughs at the defeats of his army; he is victim but also oppressor. A chestnut seller recently turned judge, he threatens to jail a woman who recognises him and laughs at his ignorance; as a father of a poor family, he is threatened

²⁹ *Correspondance administrative sous le règne de Louis XIV*, vol. 2 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1851), 562.

³⁰ Ranieri Giunti, *Editto* (Florence: Gaetano Cambiagi Stampatore Granducale, 1780).

³¹ John McCormick and Bennie Pratasik, *Popular Puppet Theatre in Europe, 1800–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 27.

³² Lars Rebehn, ‘Die lustige Figur im Handpuppentheater: Kasper & Consorte. Eine Annäherung an ein europäisches Phänomenon’, in *Theater der Dinge: Puppen-, Figuren- und Objekttheater*, ed. Markus Joss and Jörg Lehmann (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2016), 54.

with eviction by his landlord who, moved by his children's cries, gives him an extension—but for a quarter of an hour only!—to pay the rent.

In one of the anecdotes collected by Chiappini, Ghetanaccio, furious after having received bad service from a dishonest pork butcher, sets up his puppet booth in front of the shop. In the skit that he then improvises, Rugantino appears lamenting the fate that has befallen him. A spirit (a puppet with the wings of a chicken) asks him the reason for his despair. Rugantino responds a Romani predicted that, of his three children, the first would kill, the second would be killed, and the third would steal. The spirit advises him to make the first a doctor who would know how to bump off his patients without being suspected, the second a soldier because he would die for the fatherland and receive honours, and the third a pork butcher who would be able to quietly rob his clients. 'That's true!', Rugantino exclaims, before recounting how that very morning the man watching the show from the step of his shop gave him two thin links of sausage for the price of two large pieces. Fearing the anger of the crowd assembled in front of the puppet booth, the butcher hastily closes up.³³

Ghetanaccio's shows, as presented in Chiappini's descriptions, are evidently not representative of the ordinary repertoire of street puppeteers in Europe between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries: improvising a complete plot and dialogues was likely an exception. Yet, it helps explain why artists like Ghetanaccio were regularly imprisoned and had their shows banned. The use of informal and spontaneous speech peppered with swearing, bawdy pleasantries, and audible farts resulted in frequent reproaches for impropriety. On a deeper level, the powerful identification between the working-class audience and the characters and situations presented, when coupled with the unpredictability of improvised dialogues that made their shows a space of volatility and suspect emotions, was accused of endangering public order (Illustration 3.2).

A EUROPEAN REPERTOIRE

The authorities' close monitoring of puppeteers undoubtedly played a role in the formation of a first repertoire for glove puppets; not all puppeteers could have Ghetanaccio's proverbial courage to have Pulcinella greet the Ambassador to France's entrance with a fart during a

³³ Filippo Chiappini, 'Gaetanaccio, memorie per servire alla storia dei burattini', in *Il volgo di Roma*, ed. Francesco Sabatini (Rome: Ermanno Loescher & Co, 1890), 15–16.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Illustration 3.2 Bartolomeo Pinelli, A street puppet-show, *Raccolta di cinquanta costumi pittoreschi incisi all'acqua forte*, etching, 1809. Courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France

performance given at his residence.³⁴ Ghetanaccio would die in poverty, reduced to begging after Pope Leo XII used the year of the 1825 jubilee as a pretext to ban all shows from the streets of Rome. In all likelihood, economic necessity drove street artists to draw upon an increasingly stable set of shows that were built around reoccurring situations and stage acts and in which improvisation only played an ancillary role—for example, prolonging a situation that the audience was especially enjoying or increasing allusions to the performance context. Having abandoned

³⁴ See Luigi Zanazzi, *Usi, costumi e pregiudizi del popolo di Roma* (Torino: Società Tipografico-Editrice Nazionale, 1908), 107–8.

teeth pulling³⁵ and the sale of orvietan in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the travelling puppeteers could only rely on what they made from their shows. Knowing how to offer an immediate response to current affairs, exploit an incident, and elaborate a chosen theme on the spot were qualities that provoked surprise and interest from audiences, but they would not retain them for long enough to open their wallets. A set of stories or at least dramatic situations was needed to prolong the performance. For shows given in private homes, which offered an additional source of income, prior agreement on the repertoire to be performed was also required, thereby, at least partially, setting it.

Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, glove puppet shows progressively separated from theatre on trestle stages, animal taming exhibitions, and the acts of jugglers, acrobats, and tightrope dancers. This process was accompanied by some decisive mutations: the declaration of a specific form of art, the development of reoccurring characters, negotiations for reserved spots on promenades, in parks, and on city squares, and the introduction in some cases of regular hours (whose main function, as John McCormick and Bennie Pratasik highlight, was to facilitate police controls).³⁶ Accordingly, traditions were gradually established and, with that, repertoires were defined, developed, and then transmitted to the next generation.

Tracking the names of protagonists does not lead to discovering what these repertoires were or where and when they appeared: as I have shown, it is misleading to base hypotheses about what street puppeteers could recount using Pulcinella on the performances of live actors. The same applies to Polichinelle and Punch. The attempts of historians, like George Speaight³⁷ and Domenico Scafoglio,³⁸ who seek to show the coherence and permanency of these character archetypes across the centuries and different modes of performance, are confronted with the materiality of the

³⁵ Laurent Mourguet (1769–1844), creator of Guignol, still offered teeth pulling and his first puppet shows staged in the walkways of the Petit-Tivoli gardens in Lyon served to attract clients.

³⁶ McCormick and Pratasik, *Popular Puppet Theatre*, 26.

³⁷ ‘The Punch show of the streets is the direct descendant of the Punch show of the fairs; Punch the glove puppet is the same person as Punch the marionette’: Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre*, 182.

³⁸ Domenico Scafoglio and Luigi M. Lombardi Satriani, *Pulcinella, il mito e la storia* (Milan: Leonardo, 1992).

facts: no precise correspondence can be established between the iconographical and textual traces that document the work of street puppeteers and the performances in theatres of actors or rod-marionettes fitted with a ‘fil d’archal’³⁹ in which Pulcinella, Polichinelle, and Punch appeared. Neither the complex plots of the ‘pulcinellate’ performed on stage in Rome and Naples⁴⁰ nor the parodies at the annual Saint-Germain and Saint-Laurent fairs in Paris, in which Polichinelle was one of the emblematic figures, or the Harlequinades of the London stage,⁴¹ shed the smallest amount of light on what the artists recounted at the end of their two outstretched arms as they performed outdoors, in squares, in the streets, and in public gardens.

In contrast, a comparison of the different glove puppet shows across the whole of Western Europe reveals a series of reoccurring episodes. Some of them have very early origins: the quarrelling couple, an obligatory part of the *Punch and Judy Show* which is also found in an 1838 transcription of *Polichinelle*⁴² (the wife here being Mère Michel), is clearly an extension, across the centuries of farces and carnivalesque acts, of the disputes fought with clubs by medieval puppets who appear in the illumination from the Alexander Romance previously mentioned. Similarly, fights against the Devil and Death, two key moments for Punch, Pulcinella,⁴³ Jan Klaassen, and Polichinelle, are inherited from fifteenth-century morality plays. Both these two elements can still be found in

³⁹ Until the mid-nineteenth century, most marionettes had a ‘fil d’archal’: a metal string or a triangle attached to the top of its head, which facilitated its control. Invented in Venice at the end of the eighteenth century, string marionettes would only slowly replace them.

⁴⁰ The ‘pulcinellate’ are popular comedies from the Commedia dell’arte, performed in theatres and produced in large numbers in Rome and Naples from the seventeenth century onwards.

⁴¹ Between 1720 and 1780, Punch appears with Harlequin, Scaramouche, Pierrot, and Colombine as one of the recurring characters, for example, on the stages of Lincoln’s Inn Fields, Theatre Royal Drury Lane, and Covent Garden Theatre. See *The London Stage Database 1660–1800*: <https://www.eighteenthcenturydrama.amdigital.co.uk/LondonStage/Database>.

⁴² *Polichinelle, farce en trois actes pour amuser les petits enfants*, ed. Jules Rémond (Paris: Delarue, 1828), 23–24.

⁴³ The character of the Devil does not generally appear in the scenarios of Neapolitan guarattelle, but drawings and engravings by Bartolomeo and Achille Pinelli attest to its presence in Rome in the first third of the nineteenth century.

O castelo dos fantasmas (*The Castle of Ghosts*), one of the plays in the Portuguese Dom Roberto repertoire, as José Gil performs it today.⁴⁴

Another scene present in most of the first traditions of glove puppets is the hero's fight against an animal, a legacy from the past when puppeteers also performed animal taming. In 1821, an article in the *Miroir des spectacles* mentions the appearance of a live cat in a show given by a Parisian puppet booth. Polichinelle is first briefly confronted by the animal; then, after he has killed his wife and taken flight, the cat is saddled with the coat of his master and finds itself arrested in his place:

Justice is served. Minet is condemned to hanging by the Devil. The gallows are erected, the old cat acts friendly until the moment when the Devil goes to slip the rope around its neck; that is when Minet, in one of the twists and turns that always produce such a great effect on the theatre, grabs hold of the Devil and takes pleasure in hanging him.⁴⁵

The participation of a live cat in Polichinelle performances in street puppet booths is corroborated by an abundance of iconography and several written accounts; however, its role, is most often limited to exchanging a few whacks of the paw with the executioner, not taking on Polichinelle's role of hanging him.

In Austria, in Vienna and Graz, a live rabbit appears to have done a few tours before leaving the stage in the sack of Hanswurst or Pimpernelle.⁴⁶ In London, a dog named Toby was one of the long-established obligatory characters in the *Punch and Judy Show*. In a letter to his wife dated 23 November 1826, Prince Hermann von Pückler-Muskau described Punch's fight against a dog that bites his nose, but it was only a puppet,⁴⁷ like in present-day performances of *Pulcinella e il cane*, the emblematic play of the Neapolitan *guarattelle*. Henry Mayhew interviewed an anonymous Punchman from London in 1850 who attributed the decision to replace the puppet with a live animal to someone named

⁴⁴ José Manuel Valbom Gil, *Teatro Dom Roberto* (Alcobaça: S. A. Marionetas, 2023).

⁴⁵ 'Théâtre de Polichinelle', *Miroir des spectacles*, May 15, 1821.

⁴⁶ Johannes Emil Rabe, *Kasper Putschenelle* (Hamburg: C. Boysen, 1912), 31.

⁴⁷ See *Touring England, Ireland, and France: In the Years 1826, 1827, 1828, and 1829... In a Series of Letters by a German Prince* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1833), 45.

Pike.⁴⁸ Yet a live dog had already been depicted standing up to Pulcinella a century earlier in Pietro Longhi's *Il Casotto del Borgogna* (1760) painted in Venice. For this element, like so many others, iconographical sources help show that it would be misguided to seek one single point of origin.

The repertoires developed by Italian, French, German, British, and Dutch glove puppeteers in street puppet booths between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries bear such a high number of similarities that, rather than sharing a common origin, a continual dynamic of reciprocal borrowing and imitations must have existed. The itinerant lifestyle of these street performers offers the main explanation for this practice sharing. Through their voluntary or forced travels, artists met each other, copied from each other, and learnt from one another: every new idea that had the potential to extend the show's length and increase its takings was immediately put into practice, regardless of who the protagonist was. When puppeteers arrived in a new town, they sought to fulfil audience expectations by adapting their pre-prepared acting routines for popular figures from local traditions without worrying about the coherence of these transplantations. Their priority was not respecting the potential specificities of each local figure or imitating what was being played inside theatres, but pleasing the audience on the street so that they could make a living from their trade. These puppeteers thus did not invent a new repertoire by mirroring what the spectators were accustomed to seeing a character do; rather, they continued to employ the dramatic situations that they had memorised and adapted them in a superficial way for that particular character.

The case of Dutch puppet theatre perfectly illustrates this process of recycling a common set of routines under the new costume of a local figure; as Arnold Ising demonstrates, the Jan Klaassen repertoire directly drew upon that of French puppeteers who, upon arrival in the Netherlands at the end of the seventeenth century or more likely the eighteenth century, changed the name of their puppet Polichinelle to capitalise on the

⁴⁸ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, vol. 3 (London: Griffin, Bohn & Company, 1861), 43. The interviews carried out by Mayhew first appeared in *The Morning Chronicle* before being compiled in volumes in 1851.

success of the legendary figure Jan Claesz, protagonist of several comedies by Thomas Asselijn (1620–1701).⁴⁹ Similarly, Giovanni Piccini,⁵⁰ a puppeteer born in Piacenza, created the first glove puppet show with Punch⁵¹ in London around 1779 by adopting the name of a comic character, who had been in vogue during the first half of the century but had since fallen out of favour,⁵² for the hero of a series of actions performed in France under the name of Polichinelle and, in most cases, under the name of Pulcinella in Italy. In some Bavarian inns in 1803, another Italian puppeteer performed his ‘Purichinello’, the murderous servant who kills his master and his wife, their baby and a first Devil before a second takes him to Hell.⁵³ In 1830, an engraving by Bartolomeo Pinelli shows Pulcinella in Rome holding a swaddled baby seemingly about to be thrown out the window, which traditionally is the opening scene in the puppet booth shows of Punch and Judy and of Jan Klaassen and Katrijn.⁵⁴ Episodes that seem specific to one local tradition (the murder of a baby in the *Punch and Judy Show*, the fight against the dog in the Neapolitan ‘guarattelle’ or that against the Devil in the French Polichinelle) in reality circulated across a very large part of Europe from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards.

Whilst the first model for these shows is unquestionably of Italian origin, it was in all likelihood enriched by contributions from across the

⁴⁹ Arnold Ising, *Jan Klaaszen en andere kluchtspelen* (Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1879), 48–49. In German-speaking countries, in contrast, the puppet seems to have kept its Italian or French name for a longer time: Policinello is recorded in 1649 in Nuremberg; Policinell in 1672 in Bremen; Pollicinell in 1688 in Innsbruck. See Hans R. Purschke, *Die Puppenspieltraditionen Europas. Deutschsprachige Gebiete* (Frankfurt: Puppen und Masken, 1986), 66–67, and Rabe, *Kasper Putschenelle*, 46.

⁵⁰ See Michael Byrom, *Punch Polichinelle and Pulcinella* (Gillingham: Millbrook Press, 2007), 30.

⁵¹ Before Piccini’s arrival, glove puppeteers were already performing shows at fairs (see William Hogarth’s 1734 engraving *Southwark Fair*) in which Punch appeared as a comic figure, but without his own repertoire. In the children’s book *The Fairing, or Golden Toy* (London: P. Charles, A. Allardice, and J. Thomas, 1781), 72–73, he only has a short dialogue with the violinist who accompanies him, which serves as a prologue to the story of *Dick Whittington and his Cat*.

⁵² See n. 41 above, *The London Stage Database 1660–1800*.

⁵³ See *Kurbaierisches Münchener Tagsblatt*, 5 April 1803, cited in Rebehn, ‘Die lustige Figur im Handpuppentheater’, 53.

⁵⁴ Tijl Uilenspiegel, ‘Jan Klaassen wordt Vader’, in *Jan Klaassen’s Leven en Heldendaden* (Kassel: Adolph Jacobi, 1880), 40–45.

Alps. For example, the famous hanging scene, in which the hero convinces the executor to slip his head into the noose to show him how it is done, before pulling on the rope to get rid of him, was performed in France, England, and Germany very early on, but it was only documented for the Neapolitan *guarattelle* at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁵⁵ The earliest known mention of it from 1798⁵⁶ indicates that the French *Polichinelle* was likely the first to perform this scene. Evidence of its inclusion in Piccini's show from 1826 suggests either that the puppeteer must have adopted this routine during a stay in France before heading to London, or that the artists performing *Polichinelle* and *Punch* were in contact, even sporadically, between 1798 and 1826.⁵⁷ The use of the song 'Malbrough s'en va-t-en guerre' at the beginning of his *Punch and Judy Show* confirms an undeniably French influence on some aspects of Piccini's act.⁵⁸

A MODULAR REPERTOIRE

Beyond some reoccurring theatrical processes, such as distorting the puppeteer's voice using a swazzle or drawing on a common set of dramatic micro-actions, the main characteristic of the oldest glove puppet

⁵⁵ This scene was part of the repertoire of Antonio Zampella, who died in 1932. See Anna Leone, *Pupi et guarattelle, les marionnettes de Naples et de Palerme. Une korémachie italienne* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2022), 65. However, Frédéric Mercey mentions having seen it being played much earlier in Naples in 1840, but by actors from the Teatro San Carlino: see Frédéric Mercey, 'Le théâtre en Italie III', *Revue des deux mondes* 22 (1840): 847.

⁵⁶ 'What friend to human beings does not moan at the daily sight of the children of the poor on our public squares avidly watching puppets whose shows consist of knocking each other out with clubs, hanging and killing each other?': François-Hilaire Gilbert, 'De la barbarie envers les animaux', *La Décade philosophique et littéraire* 28 (1798): 38.

⁵⁷ It would be erroneous to believe that popular puppeteers were not informed of what their colleagues in neighbouring countries were doing. Without ever having visited France himself, the *Punchman* interviewed by Mayhew demonstrated that he knew the work of Parisian puppeteers. See Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, 59.

⁵⁸ However, it was the inclusion of 'Malbrough s'en va-t-en guerre' in Beaumarchais's *Le Mariage de Figaro* (1781, two years after Piccini likely arrived in London) that made the song popular. Prince von Pückler-Muskau's account in the previously cited letter confirms the presence of the song and the executor's hanging in the *Punch and Judy Show* he attended in 1826. Cf. John Payne Collier, *Punch and Judy* (London: S. Prowett, 1828).

repertoires is their modular construction. Performances link sequences that rarely logically follow on from one another, meaning they can be deconstructed and reconstructed at will.⁵⁹ Each sequence is centred on a confrontation and structured through a routine of acts including: fighting with different sized clubs, a duel with an animal, hanging the executioner, the skit with a coffin that the deceased refuses to get into, and disappearing and re-appearing corpses. The dialogue comprises short retorts and tit-for-tat exchanges, and only serves to progress the action; its role is to maintain the rhythmic structuring of the performance outside moments of combat. As Nunzio Zampella advises Bruno Leone:

Don't forget the rhythm of the performance, you can improvise all you like, but whatever nonsense you say must be part of this rhythm; speech is the music and movement is the rhythm, and together the music and rhythm become one single music giving the show the charm that enchants the audience.⁶⁰

Since causal links between the scenes are rare (the fight against the dog might lead to one with its owner; a fall from a horse justifies the appearance of a doctor), the only overarching narrative structure is limited to the crime/punishment pairing: due to the misdemeanours the protagonist commits, he must be hung and taken to hell.

Contrary to conventional dramatic structures (those, for example, that emerge from a structural analysis in semiotics), Pulcinella, Polichinelle, and Punch are not engaged in the pursuit of an object for which they must triumph over an adversary. Driven by their anger, they encounter a string of opponents, varying in number according to the performance context, with ever-increasing stakes. The only identifiable progression is that of a growing range of transgressions: from the family unit (the wife, the baby) to the social sphere (the verger, the doctor); from human justice (the gendarme, the commissaire, the executioner) to divine justice (death, the Devil). The protagonist's radical negativity, his obliviousness and destructiveness, are not linked to any narrative plan that develops in a complex world made up of allies and enemies. He comes into

⁵⁹ This notably emerges in the editorial choices of some transcribers who present each episode separately: e.g., Rabe, *Kasper Putschenelle*, and Tjil Uilenspiegel, *Jan Klaassen's Leven en Heldendaden* (Kassel: Adolph Jacobi, 1880).

⁶⁰ Leone, *La guarattella, burattini e burattinai a Napoli*, 14.

conflict with all the figures he encounters, who form a gallery of barely sketched silhouettes, shattering notions of affective bonds, moral touchstones, social barriers, and even religious beliefs. Any liberating act that may be present⁶¹ does not emerge from a specific narrative plan and only happens by accident through the embarrassment provoked by the crying baby, the protagonist's first victim.

The journeys of Punch and Polichinelle—as well as, to a certain extent, those of Jan Klaassen and Kasper⁶²—generally begin with the murder of the most innocent soul (the baby) and end with that of the incarnation of absolute evil (the Devil) via the cast of 'classical' victims and other additional figures: a comic sidekick (Pierrot in France; Scaramouch, Merry Andrew, or Joey the Clown in Britain); a blindman; a foreigner who speaks in a distorted and incomprehensible way (a Jew for Hanswurst and Kasperl; an Italian servant or a Blackman for Punch); a character who undergoes the transformation of their neck becoming excessively longer (Scaramouch for the Punchman interviewed by Mayhew; Langhals for Kasperl and Jan Klaassen); and sometimes the ghost of the assassinated wife. In Germany and the Netherlands, a crocodile puppet replaced the live cat or dog. Whilst the start and end points may be the same, the combination of characters and situations,⁶³ like the number and order of intermediary episodes, remains fluid. Therein lies the possible margin for improvisation.

From what can be reconstructed, it seems that the development of these shows reinforced the effect of a modular construction (even that of seriality) by dictating that each encounter ends with a fight from which the protagonist emerges as the winner. Pretty Polly and Charlotte, the two young women that Punch and Polichinelle respectively wish to court after having knocked out their husbands, would disappear from the 1840s onwards, and the Devil, who in the oldest accounts took

⁶¹ Punch's final words in the show of the anonymous puppeteer interviewed by Mayhew are: 'Satan is dead ... we can now all do as we like!': Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, 59.

⁶² See the texts compiled by Rabe, *Kasper Putschenelle*, 133ff. Franz von Pocci's first comedies, before he had collaborated with Josef Schmid, also seem to be inspired by traditional glove puppet shows. See Jean Boutan, 'Death, the Devil and the Wife: Danse Macabre Motifs in Nineteenth-Century Puppetry, from Punch to Kasperl', *Skenè* 8, no. 1 (2022): 103–20.

⁶³ With Jan Klaassen, as in the Polichinelle show described in *Le Miroir des spectacles* (see n. 45 above), it is the Devil who carries out the executioner's duties.

away his victim,⁶⁴ would end up more frequently being killed as well. Indeed, it is the very radicality of the protagonists that gives them their theatrical force: their refusal to submit to any obligation, their destructive rage, at once irresistible and unmotivated. In the simplified and almost abstract world in which they live, the characters that they meet are only thin outlines and obstacles to overcome regardless of the level of threat, difficulty, or simply annoyance that they represent.

FROM ORAL TO WRITTEN: THE PITFALLS OF PUBLISHING

Any attempt at an in-depth comparison of the different local traditions mentioned in this chapter struggles with the rarity, disparate nature, and the unreliability of sources. For Pulcinella, deemed to be the oldest show with the guarattellari performing it from the sixteenth century,⁶⁵ the first detailed iconographical representations date from the eighteenth century and the first precise descriptions from the mid-nineteenth century.⁶⁶ No previous transcriptions existed prior to those carried out by Bruno Leone based on the performances of Nunzio Zampella between 1979 and 1981.⁶⁷ Similarly, whilst there is evidence of the work of travelling puppeteers in Portugal from the end of the eighteenth century, no texts of Dom Roberto would exist without Mestre António Dias having transmitted his repertoire to João Paulo Seara Cardoso and new generations of puppeteers in 1982.⁶⁸ In Spain, where there is mention of ‘purchinelas’

⁶⁴ ‘You, Polichinelle, [...] you will be invincible and, therefore, always triumphant. You, the Blind Man, you will let yourself be killed by him; you, Commissaire; you, the Swiss man with the moustache; you, Archers: you all, you will also be knocked out by him one after another, and the Devil will arrive to take you away’: Jean-Baptiste Gouriet, *Personnages célèbres dans les rues de Paris depuis une haute antiquité jusqu’à nos jours*, vol. 2 (Paris: Lerouge, 1811), 233.

⁶⁵ See Leone, Pupi *et* guarattelle, 192–96.

⁶⁶ Enrico Cossovich, ‘I teatri. Gli spettacoli popolari – Le bagattelle’, in *Usi e costumi di Napoli e contorni descritti e dipinti*, ed. Francesco De Bourcard, vol. 1 (Napoli: G. Nobile, 1857), 251–66. Another description appears in a novella published ten years earlier, but it is considered less reliable due to the fictional context: Nicola Connò, ‘La figliuola del bagattelliere’, in *Napoli in miniatura. Ovvero il popolo di Napoli ed i suoi costume*, ed. Mariano Lombardi (Napoli: Arturo Berisio, [1847] 1965), 311–59.

⁶⁷ Leone, *La guarattella, burattini e burattinai a Napoli*.

⁶⁸ See José Valbom Gil, *Teatro Dom Roberto. O teatro tradicional itinerante português de marionetas* (Lisbon: Museu da Marioneta/EGEAC, 2013).

shows in the *Diario de Barcelona*⁶⁹ from 1798 onwards and of the presence of Don Cristóbal at the Seville Fair⁷⁰ from 1847 onwards, almost nothing is known about the repertoire performed during these shows: their transmission was exclusively oral and no one was concerned about writing them down.⁷¹

The historian Johannes Emil Rabe discovered a reference to a Polichinelle show being played with glove puppets in Hamburg in 1794, yet he was unable to precisely date the oldest of the ‘scenes of Kasper from old Hamburg’ that he found: *Der Feldhuszar* (*The Hussar*).⁷² In this episode, a soldier returns to his country so exhausted from military campaigns that he falls asleep on the ground as Kasper incessantly torments him, first by tickling him, then lying on top of him and finally by fighting with him. This skit, as Rabe notes, is generally followed by the classic hanging scene,⁷³ which confirms the predominance of routines based on the typification of characters in the first glove puppet repertoires: the protagonist of these shows performed in the streets of Hamburg would sometimes be called Polichinelle (or Putschenelle) and, other times, Kasper.

The transcriptions of the *Punch and Judy Show* by John Payne Collier in 1828 or of the French Polichinelle by Jules Rémond,⁷⁴ Eugénie Foa,⁷⁵ and the anonymous author of *Les Grottesques*⁷⁶ offer an unparalleled opportunity for historical study due to their age compared with other street puppet-booth traditions. The first written traces of glove puppet shows nevertheless present certain pitfalls that must be avoided. First,

⁶⁹ See Francisco Porras, *Titelles: teatro popular* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1981), 794.

⁷⁰ Francisco J. Cornejo, ‘Titeres y titiriteros en el siglo XIX: Don Cristóbal y el Tío Juan Misa’, *Fantoche* 1 (2007): 13.

⁷¹ In the article previously cited, F. J. Cornejo nevertheless reproduces the description of a show performed at the 1882 Seville Fair with dialogue for one scene: Don Cristóbal fights against a parish priest who seeks to convince him to give all his assets to the Church.

⁷² ‘Der Feldhuszar’, in Rabe, *Kasper Putschenelle*, 133–37.

⁷³ ‘Kasper soll gehängt werden’, *ibid.*, 138–42.

⁷⁴ *Polichinelle, farce en trois actes pour amuser les grands et les petits enfants*, ed. Jules Rémond (Paris: Delarue, [1838]).

⁷⁵ Eugénie Foa, *Mémoires d’un polichinelle* (Paris: Ébrard, 1840).

⁷⁶ ‘Drame du Polichinelle français, écrit sous sa dictée aux Champs-Élysées’, in *Les Grottesques, fragments de la vie nomade, recueillis par un archéologue, petit-fils de Turlupin* (Paris: P. Baudouin, 1838), 19–30.

these transcriptions tend to establish a single outline for a theatrical reality that was necessarily fluid to continue to interest audiences. The most complete and reliable account available for Punch is that of the anonymous puppeteer interviewed by Mayhew, who stresses how he varied the register according to the circumstances of the performance: when invited to private homes, he performed more slowly for ‘these sentimental folks’ and removed the ghost, the coffin, and the Devil. On the street, his audiences above all expected comedy, which led him to prolong certain scenes—for example, the routines featuring the baby or the frying pan and the sausages stolen from an innkeeper by Joey and Punch.⁷⁷

The show this puppeteer presented to Mayhew also contains several transformations in comparison with Collier’s published transcription, in particular the addition of a Jim Crow puppet following Thomas D. Rice’s London tour in 1836 and the insertion of songs from Rice’s minstrel shows. These variations, like those found in an edition published in 1856 by Robert Barnabas Brough under the pseudonym Papernose Woodensconce Esq.,⁷⁸ demonstrate that these shows, far from being fixed with an unchanging scenario, long remained material that was modifiable at leisure, a combination of situations that puppeteers freely arranged and updated. The conservatism with which the ‘Professors’⁷⁹ of the *Punch and Judy Show* are reproached today is largely a result of capturing speech in writing through the numerous editions of the text compiled by Collier and George Cruikshank’s engravings that accompanied it.

Second, the conversion of oral practices into published texts proves to be misleading due to the lack of fidelity in these publications. As popular shows, the performances by street puppet booths might appear almost interchangeable from one country to another. Given the previously mentioned circulations, it is unsurprising to discover translated texts using different names for the protagonists, even when it is not simply a case of plagiarism: the gap between local traditions was thought to be insignificant and the translation choices, which favoured ‘erasing alterity’⁸⁰ and conformity to the cultural references of the target audience, only further

⁷⁷ Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, 43.

⁷⁸ Papernose Woodensconce Esq., *The Wonderful Drama of Punch and Judy* (London: James Blackwood, 1856).

⁷⁹ Title given to performers of the *Punch and Judy Show* since the Victorian period.

⁸⁰ Jean Delisle, *Notions d’histoire de la traduction* (Québec: Presses de l’Université Laval, 2021).

reinforce the confounding of different characters. For example, Carl Reinhardt's series of illustrated plates published in the *Münchener Bilderbogen* (1852) presenting six classic episodes from the Kasperl story⁸¹ was reprinted a few years later for release in the Netherlands under the title *De poppenkast*: the dialogue accompanying Reinhardt's drawings is a translation of the original text, but the protagonist becomes Jan Klaassen.⁸²

Whilst Prince von Pückler-Muskau's description of the *Punch and Judy Show* he saw two years before the publication of Collier's text confirms its authenticity, the transcriber, who was no stranger to literary forgery,⁸³ introduced a footnote into the second edition during a seduction scene between Punch and Pretty Polly. Directly inspired by the famous scene between Richard and Lady Anne in Shakespeare's *Richard III* (I, 2), this addition, which Collier assures us was 'popular in 1795 and 1796',⁸⁴ is evidently apocryphal. The success of George Cruikshank's 29 illustrations for this book, in particular, caught the attention of publishing houses abroad. In France, Olivier and Tanneguy de Penhoët published a translation of Collier's text in 1836 under the title *Polichinelle*, without mentioning his name, and clumsily copied Cruikshank's engravings.⁸⁵ A year later in Stuttgart, the publisher Paul Neef made new copies of the same engravings and gave Johann Peter Lyser the paradoxical task of rewriting the accompanying text to make the story of the protagonist (here called Polichinell) acceptable from a moral point of view. The result is a strange 'dramatic fairytale for well-behaved children, big and small' in which the hero, who is fundamentally good, completes the whole series of Punch's traditional misdeeds, as illustrated by Cruikshank, but with the mission of fighting against different incarnations of evil. The baby (falling

⁸¹ *Kasperl als Rekrut in der Türkei* (Kasperl, a recruit in Turkey), *Don Juan*, *Frau Kasperl und die Köchin* (Mrs Kasperl and the cook), *Kasperl und der Teufel* (Kasperl and the Devil), *Das geheimnisvolle Tier* (The mysterious animal), *Kasperl und der Tod* (Kasperl and death).

⁸² This series is part of the Tony Leininger collection at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

⁸³ Notably his edition added a *Sonnet to Punch* attributed without substantiation to Lord Byron and an anonymous poem *Punch's Pranks* from, as he would later acknowledge, his own hand.

⁸⁴ J. P. Collier, *Punch and Judy*, 2nd ed. (London: S. Prowett, 1828), 113.

⁸⁵ *Polichinelle, drame en trois actes*, ed. Olivier de Penhoët and Tanneguy de Penhoët (Paris: Bureaux de l'histoire pittoresque d'Angleterre, 1836).

accidentally out of the window) becomes the little girl Unart (meaning naughtiness), her mother Bosheit (wickedness) takes the place of Judy, and so on. After having killed the Devil and all his accomplices, Polichinell can marry Princesse Miauline, whom he frees.

A final transformation of Collier and Cruikshank's book was published by Éditions Sansot in 1906 as *Polichinelle (de Guignol)*, which was preceded by a study by Gustave Kahn. The publisher's foreword presents the work: 'M. Gustave Kahn has discovered an integral and faithful version of a heroic farce that you will surely recognise as one that could be heard on the Champs-Élysées and elsewhere twenty years ago.'⁸⁶ The apparent reference to the puppet from Lyon in the title should not mislead; during this period, the name 'Guignol' was used to refer to all street puppet booths regardless of the protagonists in the stories performed. Yet, far from having 'discovered' this text, Kahn only copied word-for-word the translation of the *Punch and Judy Show* published in 1836 by Olivier and Tanneguy de Penhoët: his text is nothing but a wholesale plagiarism of a book released 70 years earlier. Benefiting from far more visibility than the publications by Jules Rémond and Eugénie Foa or *Les Grottesques*, Kahn's book overshadowed actual transcriptions of *Polichinelle* by French glove puppeteers in research on the tradition, and thus comparisons between these texts and the *Punch and Judy Show* were not made.

The conversion of a show from an oral tradition into a written and published text marks its modest entry into the domain of literature. Whilst the work itself may become fixed, this process also lays the foundations for a never-ending house of mirrors, made up of rewritings, translations, adaptations, and sometimes even plagiarisms.

⁸⁶ *Polichinelle (de Guignol), précédé d'une étude par Gustave Kahn* (Paris: E. Sansot et Cie, 1906), 8.

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Aristocratic Puppet Theatre: The World in Miniature

FROM ONE AUDIENCE TO ANOTHER

In the austere or luxurious environments of palaces and private residences, far from the tumultuous streets, puppet shows were generally disdained. However, from the start of the seventeenth century onwards, there were some circumstances in which performances featuring different types of puppets could be given in aristocratic spaces.

The first of these documented contexts is cases in which puppeteers were invited to perform for the sovereign's children or aristocratic circles. The *Journal de la vie active du roy Louis, exactement décrit* (*Journal of the Active Life of King Louis, Precisely Described*), in which the doctor Jean Héroard meticulously recorded the daily activities of Henri IV's son, includes several mentions of performances given in the royal apartments at the Palais du Louvre. On 14 December 1610, for example, a nine-year-old future Louis XIII barely ate his supper 'because of his impatience to watch the puppets'. His interest in these shows was so strong that performances often happened during supper, as the entries of the *Journal* from 22 February and 3 March 1611 reveal. On 3 November 1614, he watched another performance with his mother Marie de' Medici whilst bedbound due to illness.¹

¹ See the edition published under the title *Journal de Jean Héroard sur l'enfance et la jeunesse de Louis XIII*, 2 vols. (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1868), vol. 1, 422, 423, 425; vol. 2, 42, 55, 166.

Half a century later, Fanchon Brioché performed for the son of Louis XIV, Louis the ‘Grand Dauphin’ of France, every day at the Château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye during the summer and autumn months of 1669. Distinguished puppeteers were awarded different forms of recognition: Brioché was designated an ‘ordinary performer of the Menus-Plaisirs du roi’ (department responsible for the ‘lesser pleasures of the King’) and the shadow theatre master Dominique Séraphin would be authorised to use the title ‘Show for the Royal Children of France’ in 1781 after having performed for the family of Louis XVI. Whilst no indication of the repertoire or the types of puppets used in the performances for the future Louis XIII and the older son of Louis XIV can be ascertained, one key piece of information can be drawn from them: they are the first known examples of puppet shows given for children prior to the practice becoming widespread at the end of the eighteenth century. From the reign of Henri IV onwards, the awareness of a special relationship between puppets and childhood began to emerge.

These types of performances were also given in the semi-private setting of court festivities. In 1772, for example, as part of the entertainment organised at the Château de Villers-Cotterêts following the coronation of Louis XV, temporary huts for market stalls, games, and stages were erected in the inner courtyard. Presented by actors from the Paris Opéra, these festivities recreated the atmosphere of a Parisian fair for the young sovereign and his circle. ‘Italian sketches’ from the Commedia dell’arte were performed at one of the huts, and another showed puppets, like those that could be seen at the Saint-Germain fair.² In September 1757, a puppet show was set up in a grove of the Parc de Bagatelle in Paris for a festival given in honour of Stanisław Leszczyński, former King of Poland, who received a ‘compliment from Polichinelle’³ as he passed in front of the ephemeral theatre. Enlisting the Brioché family to perform, imitating fairgrounds, and the mention of Polichinelle suggest that the

² ‘Dernière partie de la relation du Sacre et du Couronnement du Roy’, *La Gazette*, 1 January 1722, 629–30.

³ *Mémoires du duc de Luynes sur la Cour de Louis XV*, vol. 16 (Paris: Firmin-Didot Frères, 1864), 164. A puppet show was also included in the official programme of festivities in Sorgues on 10 August 1714, on the occasion of Marie-Casimire-Louise de la Grange, widow of John III Sobieski, passing through the town. See *Relation de ce qui s’est passé à l’occasion du passage de la Reine de Pologne dans l’État d’Avignon, le 10 Aoust 1714* (Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds Rondel, ms. Ra4 404).

puppet shows given for members of the royal family were the same as those that puppeteers would perform for their usual audiences. On this basis, it would be reasonable to suggest that neither the theatrical devices, nor the animation techniques (likely string- and rod-marionettes) or the repertoire differed from the normal codes for this form of theatre, profanities included. This hypothesis is confirmed by the existence of two plays, which were created as private entertainment.

The first, *Polichinelle demandant une place dans l'Académie* (*Polichinelle Requests a Seat at the Académie*), was performed 'on several occasions by the Brioché puppets in the presence of the most esteemed individuals of the Court',⁴ as the publisher of its first edition states. This short farce was created in December 1704 at the home of Nicolas de Malézieu in Châtenay for Louise de Bourbon-Condé, wife of the Duc du Maine, the legitimised son of Louis XIV and Madame de Montespan. The Duc's former tutor Malézieu organised lavish parties given by the duchesse for her family and close friends called the 'Divertissements de Sceaux', which would culminate in events in 1714 and 1715 under the name 'Grandes Nuits de Sceaux'. For these occasions, Malézieu composed poems, songs, and different comedic sketches performed by and for the duchesse's friends in society.

Polichinelle demandant une place dans l'Académie draws inspiration from real-life events. Malézieu was named as a member of the Académie Française in 1701 and would play a decisive role in the dispute surrounding the Duc de Bourbon-Condé and the Duc du Maine's wish to promote the candidacy of the Abbé de Chaulieu, part of the inner circle at Sceaux, for the chair at the Académie left vacant following Charles Perrault's death. The other members preferred Chrétien-François I de Lamoignon, then, after he refused, considered other candidates before agreeing on Armand-Gaston-Maximilien, Prince of Rohan and Bishop of Strasbourg. Malézieu composed this short play with its crude humour as an exercise in style to ridicule his fellow Académie members. Performed by one of Fanchon Brioché's sons (either Charles Datelin, born in 1673, or Louis Jean-François, born in 1679), it centres on wordplay jokes that verge on the obscene:

Polichinelle

⁴ 'Polichinelle demandant une place dans l'Académie', in *Pièces échappées du feu*, ed. Albert-Henri de Sallengre (Piacenza, 1717).

Hello Neighbour, do you know about the plan that *pissed* through my mind?

The Neighbour

Pissed? I think you mean passed.

Polichinelle

Bloody hell, it has not passed since it is still there.

The Neighbour

Ah well! What is this plan?

Polichinelle

It is that I want to request to be received at the *Cas de ma Mie Française*.⁵

When the Neighbour argues that to be admitted to the Académie française, one must know how to ‘make verses’ (‘faire des vers’ in French, with ‘vers’ also meaning worms), Polichinelle responds: ‘I might have made them without knowing it; but from now on, I will always closely watch my bowel movements, especially when I have a bad stomach.’ The Académie members themselves are mocked: alleged to have eaten the hay delivered for their horses and called ‘Mes chieurs’ (my pains-in-the-arses) instead of ‘Messieurs’, they are harangued in absentia in a speech that mocks their ambition to ‘putrifier’ (sully, from ‘pute’ meaning whore), rather than ‘purifier’ (purify), the French language. Circulating under the form of an anonymous handwritten copy, the provocative play was very quickly attributed to Malézieu and caused such an uproar that it inspired numerous outraged lambasts and responses.⁶ Nevertheless, it was highly successful amongst the friends of the Duc and Duchesse du Maine who had it performed several times during the winter of 1704–5.

The second example of puppets performing for literary and aristocratic circles is *Polichinelle lazziste*, a comedy in three acts composed in 1732 by the Comte de Caylus and his secretary Charles-André Salley. The ‘Lazzistes’ were a small group of friends comprising, in addition to Caylus and Salley, the Comte de Maurepas (secretary of state for the king’s household and maritime minister), the Comte de Livry (lieutenant general of the army), Alexis Piron, and three actresses including Jeanne-Françoise Quinault, a member of the Comédie-Française. Each took it in turns to organise a supper accompanied by a ‘lazzi’, a surprise entertainment for the rest of the circle—for example, a ‘parade’ (a short comic sketch), a

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ See Regnier Desmarais, *Relation de la querelle de Malezieu avec l’Académie française*, ed. Ioana Galleron (Rennes: Licorn Publishing, 2017).

satire, a magic lantern screening, and fireworks. A puppet show involving Nicolas Bienfait, who ran a hut at the Saint-Germain and Saint-Laurent fairs, was chosen for their fifth meeting.

Polichinelle lazziste holds up an ironic mirror to this small circle: Polichinelle, who becomes a lazzi seller to maintain his six mistresses, sees the puppets of all the ‘Lazzistes’, sculpted and dressed to the likeness of their model seated in the room, coming towards him to place an order. The performance is thus based on self-reference. The effect of a play within a play undergoes a second doubling through the appearance on stage of another, smaller theatre on which ‘a small figure turns extraordinarily quickly and speaks with such speed that one cannot understand it’.⁷ Attention is drawn to the specific conventions of puppet shows through humour: when Polichinelle straddles a broom to go to a Witches’ Sabbath, the sidekick (‘Compère’) addresses the audience:

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe I am obliged to warn the honourable company that there is no need to be afraid when you see actors in the air. First, they are attached in such a way that they cannot fall and, second, when they do fall, they will not hurt themselves as they are not natural beings. You should know that they are only wooden and cardboard figures.⁸

Several elements from Malézieu’s farce are also present here: the dialogue between Polichinelle and a foil (the Compère played by Maurepas) who questions him, corrects his puns, and reproaches him for his inappropriate use of language, evocations of sexual connotations, farts, and scatological humour:

Polichinelle
Would you like to see a beautiful medal?
Mr Luchon
Show me then.
Polichinelle (*revealing his buttocks*)
There you go, the Emperor Trajan.⁹

⁷ ‘Polichinelle lazziste’, in *Histoire et recueil des lazzis*, ed. Judith Curtis and David Trott (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1996), 147.

⁸ ‘Polichinelle lazziste’, 121.

⁹ ‘Polichinelle lazziste’, 129.

The only explanation for these similarities is that they both copy the same model: the plays from the popular tradition that Brioché, Bienfait, and other Parisian puppeteers performed in the same period, prior to specialising in comic operas and parodies. An anonymous manuscript from the Soleinne collection confirms this process of imitation. *Répertoire des petites pièces de Polichinelle*¹⁰ brings together four anonymous plays performed at the Saint-Germain fair in the first years of the eighteenth century: *Le Marchand ridicule* (*The Ridiculous Trader*), *L'Enlèvement de Proserpine par Pluton roi des Enfers* (*The Abduction of Proserpina by Pluto, Ruler of the Underworld*), *Polichinelle Grand Turc* (*Polichinelle the Great Turk*), and *Polichinelle colin-maillard* (*Polichinelle and Blind Man's Buff*).¹¹ Featuring the same dialogues with the Compère, the almost same burlesque actions, and the same obscene pleasantries, there is significant overlap between the modes of composition of these short plays, recorded by an almost illiterate scribe, and those of the texts performed at court in Sceaux and for the Lazzistes circle. From the Duchesse du Maine, who once hoped for Louis XIV's death so that she and her husband could succeed to the throne, to the commonest of Parisian audiences, the crude comedy of farces continued to delight spectators in the first decades of the eighteenth century, and from what can be identified in these few direct or indirect traces, the traditional repertoire of street puppets clearly responded to these expectations.¹²

¹⁰ Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms. fr. 9312.

¹¹ Due to a confusion between two manuscripts bound in the same volume, these plays are sometimes attributed the date of 1695. They more likely date from 1705–8. See Françoise Rubellin, ed., *Marionnettes du XVIIIe siècle. Anthologie de textes rares* (Montpellier: Espaces 34, 2022), 28–42.

¹² In addition to the previously cited examples, plays featuring Polichinelle were performed for Voltaire at Cirey, including one in which Polichinelle's wife believes she is able 'to kill her husband by singing *fagnana! fagnana!*' (letter from Mme de Graffigny to François-Antoine Devaux, 17 December 1738). Other performances were organised by Marie Pélissier in her dressing room at the Paris Opéra. See Ernest Maindron, *Marionnettes et guignols. Les poupées agissantes et parlantes à travers les âges* (Paris: Félix Juven, 1900), 148–49.

PLAYING WITH PERSPECTIVE

During this period, puppetry was not only used in popular theatre. From the Renaissance onwards, puppets served very different purposes, and this diversity would only increase in the theatrical practices of the periods that followed. Refined theatrical forms, developed by renowned poets, musicians, architects, and painters, used artificial actors to better replicate human figures in the scenery constructed according to the new laws of perspective invented in Italy. To give the illusion of greater depth to their stages, scenography designers played with an accelerated perspective, which compresses the proportions of the scenery that is furthest away and makes it necessary to use figures of several sizes to populate the different backdrops.

At the end of the second book in his treatise on architecture (1545), Sebastiano Serlio explains how the ‘figurette’ that run along the boards work, allowing for a scene to be animated in the absence of actors, particularly in the interludes:

The architect will have ready some processions of small figures, of an appropriate size, cut of heavy cardboard and painted. These are fastened to a strip of wood and pulled across the scene at some arch in a swallow-tail runway. In the same way can be shown musicians playing instruments or singing, and some one behind the scene will supply the music softly. At other times a troop of people passing over, some on foot, some on horseback, with the muffled sound of voices and drums and trumpets, will greatly please the spectators.¹³

Serlio’s master, the painter and architect Baldassarre Peruzzi, had previously experimented with cut-out and painted silhouettes in the stage design for a performance of Plautus’s comedy *Bacchides* given in the courtyard of the Palazzo Sforza Cesarini in Rome in 1531. There, under an arch in the background scenery, spectators saw ‘false human figures a palm and a half tall¹⁴ that represented real humans, and most represented

¹³ Sebastiano Serlio, *The Second Book of Architecture*, trans. Allardyce Nicoll, in *The Renaissance Stage: Documents of Serlio, Sabbattini, Furttentbach*, ed. Barnard Hewitt (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1958), 35.

¹⁴ Around 30 cm according to Philip Steadman’s calculations (‘Baldassare Peruzzi and Theatrical Scenery in Accelerated Perspective’, *Nessus Network Journal* 22 [2020]: 553–76). These dimensions are nevertheless improbable.

well-known men from Rome painted in a very natural way'.¹⁵ Other cut-out silhouettes blend into this procession, including lance-knights, cobblers, mule drivers, and street vendors. A century later in 1634, the device described by Serlio was followed to the letter for a performance of Prospero Bonarelli's tragedy *Il Solimano* given in Venice by the Accademia degli Immobili. During the interludes, arias composed by Natale Monferrato were sung by hidden singers as flat cut-out figures, proportional so as not to destroy the illusion created by the scenery in perspective, glide on boards at the back of the stage¹⁶: a company of calvary, a squadron of foot soldiers, chariots, and camels. All 'were wonderfully painted and cut-out cardboard figurines, which, by moving on runners, had an overall naturalness that captures the attention with astonishment and wonder'.¹⁷

However, in the intervening years, other usages of these silhouettes began being developed with even more spectacular results. For example, a performance of Giovanni de' Bardi's *L'amico fido* was lavishly staged by Bernardo Buontalenti on the occasion of the wedding of Cesare d'Este and Virginia de' Medici. The description of the six interludes incorporated into the performance offers a glimpse not only of the luxurious costumes, scenery, and props, but also the extraordinarily quick and visible changes of scenery, metamorphoses, and the general lifelikeness of these figures, such as when Neptune emerges from the water:

It began with the appearance of his dripping wet head, with hair and a beard the colour of seawater, but almost verging on black, seated and driving a chariot. After this so-called statue, little by little, the heads of twelve Nymphs sitting in the chariot appeared, then their whole body ... When the chariot arrived, it seemed that the fountains and aforementioned rocks rejoiced as all of them started to show it with different jets, and a very sweet smell came from the gushing water ... The chariot was being pulled by four horses, the same colour as the wave, who seemed alive because as soon as their heads were out of the water, they started to neigh and, all foaming from the mouth, gnaw at the bit; and it seemed that in

¹⁵ Letter from Marco Cademosto da Lodi, cited in Paola Campanini, *Marionette barocche. Il mirabile artificio* (Azzano San Paolo: Edizioni Junior, 2004), 67.

¹⁶ Melanie Zefferino, 'Dramatic Figures in the Venetian Republic: Performance, Patronage, and Puppets' (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2014), 86–87.

¹⁷ *Descrizione dell'apparato del Solimano* (1636), cited in Campanini, *Marionette barocche*, 68.

rising up they were swimming in a very natural way, then because they were restrained and brought to a halt as they swam, they hit the water with their front hoofs; and when the horses moved forward, the wheels of the chariot turned.¹⁸

Half a century later, the Marchese Pio Enea II degli Obizzi had *L'Ermiona* performed in Padua in 1636, for which he composed the libretto with music by Giovanni Felice Sances: a composite 'Festa teatrale', in which a solo cantata, a ballet, and a tournament on horse or on foot are interspersed through each of the parts (*Il rapimento d'Europa, Gli errori di Cadmo, Gl'Imenei*). The stage, designed by Alfonso Chenda, had different animated figures appearing alongside the characters played by actors. These figures included fantastic animals, such as a flying hydra, an eagle with seven heads, and a dragon with an articulated tail that is seen devouring a servant of Cadmos. Other figures represented angels singing in the sky, divinities appearing on a cloud, and armed warriors in helmets emerging from the ground after Cadmos scattered the teeth of the dragon. Moreover, the accompanying book recounting the event has several engravings clearly depicting characters of different sizes, which suggests that the idea of combining giant figures with live actors may have developed from the principle described by Serlio.¹⁹

BAROQUE ENCHANTMENT

From the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, other types of shows in which the only actors visible on stage were animated figures emerged within aristocratic courts. No longer limited to the peripheries of the dramatic action, the time reserved for interludes, or special effects, the 'figurette' assumed the entirety of the theatrical performance with concealed actors or singers lending them their voices. As the Jesuit Gian Domenico Ottonelli explains in his treatise *Della christiana moderazione del teatro* (1652), two animation techniques could be used to create this

¹⁸ Bastiano de' Rossi, *Descrizione del magnificentissimo apparato, e de' maravigliosi intermedi fatti per la commedia rappresentata in Firenze nelle felicissime nozze degl'illustrissimi, ed eccellentissimi signori il Signor Don Cesare d'Este, e la Signora Donna Virginia Medici* (Florence: Giorgio Marescotti, 1585), 18.

¹⁹ See Nicolò Enea Bartolini, *L'Ermiona del S. Pio Enea Obizzi* (Padua: Paolo Frambotto, 1628); and Zefferino, 'Dramatic Figures in the Venetian Republic', 94–96.

effect: operation from above through a metal rod attached to the top of the marionette's head and black silk thread connected to its legs and feet, or from below using an ingenious system of runners and counterweights:

On a raised stage of the size that is customary for the scene of comedy, there are wooden channels. Cardboard figures of various shapes, measuring half a *braccio* in height, move from the start of these channels towards the centre of the stage, and from there to [the] other end by means of hidden counterweights. Some of these are attached to the shoulder of the figure, so that the latter can be handled and arranged in graceful postures.²⁰

Ottonelli's commentary, which states that these marionettes served to create 'sacred sung works', suggests that this theatrical device could be used for some musical dramas with religious subject matter. Popular during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these animated statues were less likely to produce a comic effect and thus were more appropriate for staging edifying comedies, which prolonged certain processes used in the large mechanical raree shows from the Renaissance. Yet, the very small amount of information available, their approximative descriptions, and the absence of almost any iconographical traces²¹ means that it is difficult to measure precisely the extent of their usage.

Despite what is sometimes claimed,²² it is, for example, highly debatable that the original production of *La comica del cielo ovvero la Baldassara* (*The Actress from Heaven, or the Baldassara*) by Cardinal Giulio Rospigliosi was created with puppets. Set to music by Antonio Maria Abbattini with the theatrical direction confided to Gian Lorenzo Bernini (known as The Bernin), the play was performed at the Palazzo Rospigliosi in Rome on 1 February 1668, some months after the Cardinal had ascended to the Chair of St Peter under the name of Clement IX. Even within a private context, the rather exceptional decision to stage a play

²⁰ Domenico Ottonelli, *Della christiana moderazione del theatro* (Firenze: Giovanni Antonio Bonardi, 1652), 464–65. Translation cited from Zefferino, 'Dramatic Figures in the Venetian Republic', 90–91.

²¹ Only a drawing by Jacinto Marmi of a puppet theatre constructed at the Palazzo Pitti in Florence in 1684 has been identified. It is reproduced in John McCormick, Alfonso Cipolla, and Alessandro Napoli, *The Italian Puppet Theatre – A History* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2010), 25. From this sketch, it seems a system of 'channels' serve as runners for the puppets.

²² See, e.g., Zefferino, 'Dramatic Figures in the Venetian Republic', 114.

written by the Pope using puppets would not have gone unnoticed. Yet, none of the reviews of the performances written by the Genoese correspondent Ferdinand Raggi²³ mentions it. Raggi's lengthy correspondence only makes one brief allusion to a performance given by the puppeteer Domenico Filippo Patriarca during Carnival for the sisters at the Santa Maria della Concezione convent alongside that of a revival of *La comica del cielo* performed for the same group of nuns. The ambiguous syntax of the sentence sheds no light on whether or not the puppet show and the revival were one and the same performance.²⁴ Alessandro Ademollo's²⁵ suggestion, based entirely on this citation, of a reduced staging for Patriarca's²⁶ 'burattini' seems even less convincing given that Raggi praises, as he had previously done, Bernin's costumes and scenery. Even if 'burattini' can be understood in the generic sense of puppets, it seems difficult to conceive that a miniature replica of the production at the Palazzo Rospigliosi was created. In all likelihood, two distinct shows were performed: Patriarca's puppets on the one hand, and the revival of the Rospigliosi comedy on the other.

However, *La comica del cielo* could take on a particular significance in puppet theatre, because the work, following a paradox characteristic of Baroque poetics, centres on the theme of condemning theatre within the drama itself. This argument was not original; it reproduces that of *La gran comédia de la Baltasara*, a Spanish 'comédia' by Luis Vélez de Guevara, Antonio Coello, and Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla, first produced in 1634 in Madrid and then published in 1652, which was inspired by the life of Francisca Baltasara de los Reyes. A very famous actress in the

²³ An agent of the Republic of Genoa in Rome, Ferdinando Raggi is the author of an important diplomatic correspondence, the *Avvisi di Roma*. His reviews of the performances of *La comica del cielo* can be accessed online via the Giulio Rospigliosi database: <http://www.nuovorinascimento.org/rosp-2000/opere/comica.htm>.

²⁴ '[The Princess of Rossano] had the famous Patriarca come after dinner with a puppet show at the door of the monastery where all the nuns ran to and there was performed a play called La Baldassara, the converted comedic actress, a famous work, composition by the Pope, good music, well-acted, extravagant costumes, beautiful and vague, curious and unpredictable appearances by virtue of The Bernin's inventions': Raggi, *Avvisi di Roma*, Carnevale 1668.

²⁵ Alessandro Ademollo, *Il teatro a Roma nel secolo diciassettesimo* (Rome: L. Pasqualucci, 1888), 104–5.

²⁶ See the entry on Patriarca in the *PerformArt* database: <https://performart.humanum.fr/schede/P-022-100-145/>.

early seventeenth century, notably for the roles in which she cross-dressed as a man, Francisca Baltasara de los Reyes reportedly renounced theatre in the middle of a performance after having experienced a divine revelation. Whilst it is unlikely that the work of Clement IX was performed by Patriarca's puppets, *La gran comédia de la Baltasara*, its model, was presented in this way in 1635 for King Philip IV to respect the prohibition on actors appearing on stage during Lent: Bernardo Monanni, a secretary of the Tuscan embassy in Madrid, reports it in his correspondence.²⁷

The technique of puppets with counterweights, whose invention Ottonelli attributes to Bartolomeo Neri, was adopted and perfected by Filippo Acciaiuoli (1637–1700), nicknamed 'il Gran Burattinajo' (the Great Puppeteer). Acciaiuoli's technical fine-tuning commanded admiration from his contemporaries: the miniature theatre that he presented in the 1660s to Ferdinando II, Grand Duke of Tuscany, included at least 24 changes of scenery and 124 figures, 'all made with such artistry that he manages the work alone with his own hands, having no help other than with preparing the scenery and adjusting the figures on the runners'.²⁸ A Knight of Malta who completed a tour of the world, Acciaiuoli came from an illustrious Florentine family and his older brother was a cardinal who once aspired to be pope. He was a complete artist: as playwright, composer, and scenographer, he created shows for both large aristocratic theatres and puppets. The ingenuity of his scenography productions culminated in these performances in which he was simultaneously the creator and the operator, the artist and the engineer. Such a personal involvement in the material production of the performance was clearly unique for this period. Paola Campanini suggests that it could have harmed the papal ambitions of Acciaiuoli's brother, as many satirical writings alluded to.²⁹

Exploring the dramatic works for puppets left by Acciaiuoli—*Girello* (1668), *L'empio punito* (*The Punished Non-believer*, 1669), *Il novello Giasone* (*The New Jason*, 1671), *Damira placata* (*Damira Appeased*, 1680), *L'Ulisse in Feaccia* (*Odysseus in Phaeacia*, 1681), and potentially *Chi è cagion del suo mal pianga se stesso* (*Let He Who Caused His Ill-Will*,

²⁷ See Shirley B. Whitaker, 'La Baltasara in performance 1634–1635. Reports from the Tuscan Embassy', in *Antigüedad y actualidad de Luis Vélez de Guevara*, ed. George C. Peale (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1983), 204.

²⁸ *Notizie storiche degli Arcadi morti*, vol. 1 (Rome: Antonio de Rossi, 1720), 359.

²⁹ Campanini, *Marionette barocche*, 186.

Weep for Himself, 1682)—unusual connections between private performances and public theatres on the one hand, and between live theatre and puppet theatre on the other emerge. The gaps in documentary traces and the uncertainties of historians significantly contribute to this impression: librettos from the period are rarely originals (*Il novello Giasone* abridges the plot of *Giasone* by Giacinto Andrea Cicognini and Francesco Cavalli created in 1649) and are generally published anonymously; the musical parts were sometimes rewritten by other composers and often lost; and, lastly, the way works circulated was such that it is difficult to establish who their authors were and how they were performed. For these reasons, numerous doubts persist over performances of Acciaiuoli's shows in Rome's aristocratic palaces and some city theatres (Tordinona, Capranica) during the 1660 s and 1670 s, even if the interest in metamorphoses, as shown in *Il noce di Benevento o il consiglio delle streghe* (*The Walnut Tree of Benevento or the Council of Witches*) and *L'Inferno* (*The Underworld*) whose texts are now lost, would have certainly drawn on the technical possibilities that puppets offer. Crescimbeni, who described the huge success that these works enjoyed, mentions 'infinite, unpredictable transformations from one thing to another',³⁰ which elicited admiration.

Acciaiuoli's performances staged at the Teatro San Moisè in Venice between 1680 and 1682 (*Girello*, *Damira placata*, *L'Ulisse in Feaccia*) are better documented due to the publication of the texts. Out of his entire oeuvre, these plays are the ones that were unquestionably performed with puppets: 'natural wooden figures with an extraordinary work of artifice'³¹ for *Damira placata* and wax figures for *Girello* and *L'Ulisse in Feaccia*. However, it cannot be ascertained whether these performances were open to a broad audience; they took place on a temporary stage because the theatre was about to be demolished to make way for private housing. Whilst Gran Burattinaio's works may have been revived by live theatre, the choice to use puppets remains the result of a conscious decision. In an introductory poem to *Damira placata*, Acciaiuoli even goes so far as to claim that the audience must admit: 'That in small figures / Art knows how to do what Nature does not do.'³² One

³⁰ Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni, *Commentari di Gio. Mario de' Crescimbeni sulla sua istoria della volgar poesia*, vol. 1 (Rome: Antonio de Rossi, 1702), 211.

³¹ Giovanni Carlo Bonlini, *Le glorie della poesia e della musica* (Venice: C. Bonarigo, 1730), 91.

³² [Filippo Acciaiuoli], *Damira placata* (Venice: Niccolini, 1680), 3.

hundred and thirty years before Heinrich von Kleist's essay on puppet theatre, this is the first example in a long series of comparisons between the live actor and their artificial double, to the benefit of the latter.

'IN PICCIOLA FIGURA'

'In small figures', Acciaiuoli's puppet shows offer a condensed form, as in a reduced size on the level of theatre production, but not on that of dramatic writing, of the 'dramma con musica' during the Baroque age. The plays that he composed for performances at the Teatro San Moisè do not inherently differ from the rest of the production within this theatrical genre in the seventeenth century. All of them include the following visual elements: appearances of divinities on clouds, burlesque entrances on the back of an animal (a dolphin for Delfo, Ulisse's hunchbacked servant in *Ulisse in Feaccia*), and quick changes of scenery in the middle of an act. The same applies to other theatrical elements—for example, the comic characters and erotic double entendres that are generally part of baroque theatricality as it developed in the second half of the seventeenth century through performances given in Rome's aristocratic palaces.³³

As a consequence, it would not be appropriate to search for the hallmarks of a dramatic writing specifically for puppets in Acciaiuoli's works beyond some discreet mentions of the devices used.³⁴ At most, the playwright may have increased the moments of pure spectacle—such as for *L'empio punito* with 11 changes of scenery, danced interludes, a shipwreck, a descent to Hell in several tableaux, and a statue that takes flight—which would suggest the performances given at the Teatro San Moisè were the culmination of his research, allowing him to bring together the movement of scenery and the movement of characters in one and the same theatrical machinery. At certain points across his corpus, the scenery and objects even become characters: statues start dancing

³³ See Luca Ambrosio, *Drammi, commedie e favole musicali all'Ombra del Colosseo. Modi, forme e contesti dell'opera a Roma tra il 1668 e 1689* (Pavia: Università degli Studi di Pavia, 2017), 103.

³⁴ Girello even says of himself 'I remain a beautiful puppet' just after a magician puts on the king's clothes. See [Filippo Acciaiuoli], *Girello* (Ronciglione/Rome: Bartolomeo Lupardi, 1668), 34.

(*L'empio punito*)³⁵; a painting detaches from the wall and falls to the ground to demonstrate the anger of the wife portrayed in the portrait who was thought to be dead (*Damira placata*). The latter example offered Acciaiuoli an opportunity to reassert, through the voice of one of his characters and in a mode of pleasantries, the superiority of art over nature: 'There is only one difference / Between you beautiful women and the painting / This alone is entirely art, and you nature.'³⁶

The same concentration of visual effects from baroque theatricality can be found in Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni's (1667–1740) musical dramas, which were performed in Rome at the Palazzo della Cancelleria: *L'amor eroico tra pastori* (*Heroic Romance amongst Shepherds*, 1696), *Il Costantino pio* (*The Pious Constantine*, 1710), *Teodosio il giovane* (*The Young Teodosio*, 1711), and *Il Ciro* (*Cyrus*, 1712). The puppets created for these performances were four-foot high (around 1.20 m) and likely controlled using runners and counterweights. The most successful parts of these performances were the music, created by high-profile composers like Carlo Francesco Pollarolo and Alessandro Scarlatti, and the opulent scenery designed by the architect and scenographer Filippo Juvarra. Ottoboni's librettos are generally criticised for lacking literary qualities and their intended Manichaeism.

To a greater extent than the 'pupazzi' delivering the dramatic action of which almost nothing is known, these theatrical machines created for performances at the Cancelleria conveyed a puppet imaginary: celestial apparitions, objects in flight, and visible transformations that animate the matter, indicating life in what was thought to be only a piece of scenery. In *Il Costantino pio*, a triumphant chariot becomes eight gladiators who fight each other before the first act concludes with a ballet.³⁷ In *Teodosio il giovane*, a fountain transforms into a gigantic female figure and then a group of Persian squires. At the end of the play's second act, a chair in Teodosio's library suddenly changes into a large bat that carries Eridione in the air, puts him back on the ground, then swiftly flees; six small tables become six nymphs inviting Eridione and Acrisia to dance with them. Objects and living beings blend with one another, culminating in

³⁵ Although the plot is transposed onto a neoclassical Macedonia, *L'empio punito* is one of the first rewritings of Tirso de Molina's *Burlador de Sevilla e convidado de Piedra* (1630); the theme of the statue that comes to life occupies a prominent role within it.

³⁶ [Acciaiuoli], *Damira placata*, 17.

³⁷ [Pietro Ottoboni], *Il Costantino pio* (Rome: Antonio de' Rossi, 1710), 35.

a theatricality that rests less on the double play of the invisible voices of singers and the limited movements of puppets—a device seemingly similar to the one used for the oratorios at the Palazzo della Cancelleria where the singers were hidden as mechanical angels appear in flight³⁸—than on the unexpected transformation of pieces of scenery and props, between the reign of matter and animated forms.

More than that of metamorphosis, the motif of reduction progressively appeared in different ways in musical dramas for puppets from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards. It first took the form as symbolic reduction. What was referred to in Italian as ‘figure’, the ‘fantocci’ and the ‘burattini’ were increasingly often associated with childhood through the use of the word ‘bamboccio’, meaning child, and its derivatives: ‘bambocceria’, for example, was used for both a ‘fantocceria’ (a fantocci show) and a ‘cosa da bambocci’ (something for children, ‘puerilitas’ in Latin) according to the Accademia della Crusca’s dictionary.³⁹ In Acciaiuoli’s *L’empio punito*, the animated statues are described as ‘strange bambocci’ and the statue of Tidemo’s ascent to the sky is reported as the ‘story of the flying bamboccio’.⁴⁰

The motif also appeared as material reduction: these musical dramas played with the visual effect of different scales by staging both gigantic figures (the fountain from *Teodosio il giovane*) and humanity in miniature through the mythological characters of the Pygmies, the elbow-high humans mentioned by Homer who were said to be perpetually threatened by cranes. Pier Jacopo Martello’s *Lo starnuto di Ercole* (*The Sneeze of Hercules*, 1717) uses the contrast between the puppets of Pygmies and the gigantic proportions of Ercole, who is only seen on stage as a head or a hand, to relate the dramatic action. The playwright presents the piece as a ‘bambocciata’: the ‘bambocci’, as he describes, could be set in movement either from above with strings or from below using springs (‘molle’). Having observed how much children enjoyed and applauded

³⁸ See Teresa Chirico, “‘Balconi dorati per i musici’ – La prassi rappresentativa dell’oratorio alla corte del cardinale Ottoboni tra il 1690 e il 1708”, in *Spectacles et performances artistiques à Rome (1644–1740)*, ed. Anne-Madeleine Goulet, José María Domínguez, and Élodie Oriol (Rome: Publications de l’École française de Rome, 2021), 178–95.

³⁹ See ‘Bamboccio: Bambino, Bambolo. *Lat. Infans.*’, in *Compendio del vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, vol. 1 (Florence: Domenico Maria Manni, 1739), 292.

⁴⁰ [Filippo Acciaiuoli], *L’empio punito* (Ronciglione/Rome: Bartolomeo Lupardi, 1669), 98, 104, 109.

these performances, which he states were an invention of Italian engineers, he endorsed the pleasure of sitting with them to watch ‘their short fables, whether pleasant or serious’ for two or three hours at a modest price.⁴¹ Marked by his experience as a spectator—perhaps acquired in the puppet theatres of Piazza Navona in Rome as he was secretary of the ambassador of Bologna to the Holy See—Martello composed *Lo starnuto di Ercole*. Whilst nothing is known about the first performance in Rome in 1717, Carlo Goldoni recounts having himself staged the play using an abandoned puppet theatre and having a giant puppet head made for a performance in Vipacco (present-day Vipava in Slovenia) at the home of Count Lantieri in 1726.⁴²

As Martello stresses in the introduction to a publication of *Lo starnuto di Ercole*, the playful invention presents the theme of reduction in multiple ways. First, the subject matter is condensed: the Pygmies attempt to fight Ercole who has come to claim their king’s two daughters; smoke causes him to sneeze, which suddenly scatters them (Illustration 4.1). Moved by the courage of the Pygmies, Ercole renounces using his strength against them, abandons his plan, and allows the two daughters to marry. Second, most of the characters have short, monosyllabic names: Kom is the king, Nec and Has his daughters, and Vam his general. Only the hero Occe, Ercole’s rival for Nec’s heart, has a longer name. Third, the lines that the Pygmies speak are short: the playwright, who enjoyed playing with prosodic constraints (he invented the ‘martelliano’, a verse form imitating the French alexandrine), has them express themselves in verses half as long as those of Ercole. The first published edition of the play (1723) even presents this unequal sharing of roles on a typographical level: the Pygmies’ replies appear in two columns and in a body of text smaller than Ercole’s lines, which occupy the whole width of the page.

A comparable fascination for the miniature appears in the operas performed during the festivities for the Venice Carnival from 1745 to 1748 at the Palazzo Labia. There, Angelo Maria Labia had constructed the Teatro San Girolamo, a miniature replica of the Teatro San Giovanni Grisostomo, including its scenography machinery. For an audience of

⁴¹ Pier Jacopo Martello, ‘Proemio’, in *Lo starnuto di Ercole, Opere di Pierjacopo Martelli*, vol. 5 (Bologna: Lelio dalla Volpe, 1723), 249. Note that the two spellings, Martelli and Martello, are both documented.

⁴² Carlo Goldoni, *Memoirs of Carlo Goldoni*, trans. John Black (Boston: Osgood, 1877), 97–98.

Illustration 4.1 Lo starnuto di Ercole, *Seguito del teatro italiano di Pier Jacopo Martello*, parte ultima. Bologna: Stamperia di Lelio dalla Volpe, 1723



invited guests, this ‘nuovo teatro di bambocci’⁴³ successively presented abridged versions in three acts of the *Lo starnuto di Ercole* (1745), Girolamo Zanetti and Adolf Hasse’s *Eurimedonte e Timocleone* (1746), Antonio Gori and Ferdinando Bertoni’s *Il cajetto* (1747), *Didone abbandonata* (*Dido abandoned*) by Apostolo Zeno (after Metastasio) and Ferdinando Bertoni (1747 and 1748), and finally Apostolo Zeno and Geminiano Giacomello’s *Gianguir* (1748). As a souvenir from these extravagant performances, the spectators were given a libretto specially printed in the minuscule in-24 format. Instead of the actors’ names, those who played the different roles appear as Signor Antonio

⁴³ Name given to the Teatro San Girolamo on the title page of its edition of *Lo starnuto di Ercole* (1745).

Bamboccio, Signor Alessandro Burattini, Signor Francesco Figurina, Signora Maddalena Statuina, Signora Margherita Pua, and so on.⁴⁴

Forty years before Martello, the classical myth of the Pygmies had already provided the material for a puppet show in France. Dominique de Normandin, known as Sieur de La Grille, received authorisation from Louis XIV in 1675 to create a ‘Troupe Royale des Pygmées’, which, he argued, ‘will not be only of an extraordinary grandeur but it will even perform comedies with curious scenery and machines, imitate dancing, singing and the human voice perfectly, and do all the arts studied in the Académies’.⁴⁵ The preface to the summary of the troupe’s first show *Les Pygmées* provides some valuable information on the performances that took place in 1676. The ‘extraordinary grandeur’ of the performers was only in comparison to the usual dimensions of puppet shows:

Never seen before until now, there will be lavishly dressed, four-foot-high human figures in very large numbers in a vast and superb Theatre performing plays in five acts, featuring Music, Ballet, newly invented flying Machines, and Scenery changes. They will recite, walk, and act like living people without being suspended.⁴⁶

This final detail reveals that the figures were controlled from below, like those in use in Italy, and they were the same size (1.20 m) as the puppets that Cardinal Ottoboni would make in the subsequent decades. With his Troupe Royale des Pygmées, La Grille was likely attempting to introduce to France puppets using a runner and counterweight system that Filippo Acciaiuoli had been developing for some time with comparable devices.⁴⁷

The scenography and theatrical elements of the performance are also similar to those used in ‘dramma con musica’ in Italy. The theme of *Les Pygmées* is based on a conventional plot of thwarted romances involving

⁴⁴ [Antonio Gori], *Il cajetto* (Venice: Luigi Pavini, 1747). ‘Pua’ is Venetian for ‘bambola’ (doll) or ‘fantoccio’ (puppet).

⁴⁵ *Registres du Parlement*, cited in Émile Campardon, *Les Spectacles de la Foire*, vol. 2 (Paris: Berger-Levrault et Cie, 1877), 287.

⁴⁶ [Dominique de Normandin, Sieur de La Grille], ‘Sujet général des Pygmées’, in *Les Pygmées* (Paris: Christophe Ballard, 1676), 5–6.

⁴⁷ An English engraving from 1644 shows puppets controlled from below from a board of the stage, but the drawing is too simplistic to draw any precise information from it. See Edmund Kerchever Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), 281.

the two daughters of the Pygmies' king—Parvulie believes her fiancé to be dead and refuses a new one; out of her two suitors, Pichonine fears having to marry the one she does not love—set against the classic imagery of their people's war against the cranes. This offers the pretext for different visual effects: a chariot carrying two messengers and drawn by four eagles flies from one wing to another; four characters enter the stage carried by cranes in flight; a battle sees the Pygmies and the cranes fight; triumphant entrances and ballets celebrate the victory; Mars, Mercury, the Sun, and Jupiter appear in celestial splendour, each in turn praising France and Louis XIV, who granted permission for the creation of the show.

The names of the characters are also a nod to their small size: Microton, Parvulie, Pichonine, Sémiandre, Picolus, and Homoncius. However, this depiction of humanity in miniature is not to be laughed at. On the contrary, the emotions that inspire the Pygmies' action and the virtues that they cultivate attest to an elevated spirit equal to any tragic hero. From what can be gleaned from the text published by the playwright (a detailed summary of the action accompanied by the lyrics of the main sung arias), no parodic dimension can be discerned in the performance of *Les Pygmées*, which respects theatrical conventions throughout, attributing noble acts and lofty sentiments to the tragic hero and comic accidents and trivial thoughts to the servants.

La Grille and Troupe Royale des Pygmées' second show *Les Amours de Microton ou les charmes d'Orcan* (*Microton's Romance or the Spells of Orcan*), performed in November 1676, similarly adheres to these rules. Presented as a 'cheerful tragedy, mixing unique and entertaining effects', the work, which no longer mentions the Pygmies myth, presents the same theme of thwarted romance, but combines it with some comedic subject matter (the tutor acts as the obstacle to his pupil's romantic idyll because he wants to marry her himself) and elements from the pastoral genre.⁴⁸ Microton is not the advisor to the Pygmic king, but an old man who attempts to impede the romance between the shepherdess Philis and the young Silvandre. To do so, he seeks the help of potions from the magician Orcan who is persuaded to do the opposite and makes his desire for Philis

⁴⁸ The cover of the copy held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France and available online via Gallica, displays the handwritten correction 'pastorelle' next to the printed description 'tragédie enjouée'. See [La Grille], *Les Amours de Microton ou les charmes d'Orcan* (Paris: Hostel des Pigmées).

disappear. Rather than celestial glories and flying machines, the spectacular emerges from the visible changes of scenery, hellish apparitions, and metamorphoses that, as later with Ottoboni, transform objects into living beings:

Orcan with his Wand brings forward eight cypress trees from the dense Wood, & which form a Pathway with different compartments.

Microton rejoices, & the Magician immediately asks the cypress trees to change into Statues that form a large Pathway. The Flats open & we see the whole Garden bordered with Statues to the horizon. The Statues then dance & sing in support of Lovers, to whom all must be permitted to be happy.⁴⁹

The spectacle continues with a tree bowing, porcelain glasses filled with flowers transforming into ‘figures’ and dancing, a large dragon breathing out fire and then spitting out a frog, and some meat and fruit placed on a table that suddenly emerge from beneath the stage and change into snakes and toads. Like the works of Acciaiuoli and Cardinal Ottoboni, the Troupe des Pygmées’s two performances used the reduced dimensions of the puppet stage and the double vision that it implies to take baroque poetics to new heights: metamorphoses, tricks of perception, and the tension of opposites (big and small, life and death, object and living being). The musical theatre endorsed by royal and aristocratic powers at the end of the seventeenth and start of the eighteenth centuries offered a space in which the expressive potentialities inherent to the paradox of the puppet, the sudden appearance of life in inanimate matter, could emerge.

However, this highlighting of the device’s intrinsic qualities was only an ephemeral phenomenon: no trace of it can be found, for example, in the shows of Joseph von Pauersbach (1737–1802) for the puppet theatre at Prince Nikolaus I Esterházy’s summer residence Esterháza in Fertőd between 1773 and 1783. Famous for the music having been composed by Joseph Haydn, these ‘Marionetten-Operetten’⁵⁰ still drew on the magic of visible changes of scenery and apparitions of divinities in the sky, and sometimes played with different dimensions. At the beginning of *Hexensabbas* (*Witches’ Sabbath*, 1773), minuscule figurines of magicians fly in

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁰ The term ‘Marionetten-Operette’ notably appears on the title pages of *Philemon und Baucis* (Vienna, 1773) and *Alceste* (Oedenburg: Johann Joseph Siess, 1775).

from the backdrop and become progressively larger before entering the stage in their definitive size.⁵¹ Yet when metamorphoses happen, they transform one object into another (for example, a tombstone becomes a gloriette)⁵² without the boundary between things and living beings ever being breached. In these works, the poetics of miniaturisation essentially play out through changing the register: the comedy of parody replaces the tragic genre's nobility. *Alceste* (1775) is thus presented as a 'parodic translation' of Rainieri de' Calzabigi's libretto for Gluck's opera. Alceste's first aria

I do not ask, eternal gods / that all heaven should be serene for me. /
But at least let some ray of pity / comfort my suffering.⁵³

becomes

I do not ask (eternal gods!) / For a luge in January / Good weather in the
month of May / So that I may take a stroll / Do not whisper – silence –
yes, a little patience / But well (instead of bodily pleasures) / That some
small ray of your mercy / Comforts my bitter suffering.⁵⁴

The limited visual effects and the parodic intention can be discerned from the first performance given at Prince Esterházy's puppet theatre on 2 September 1773, on the occasion of a reception in honour of Maria Theresa of Austria. Philipp Georg Bader's⁵⁵ libretto uses the story of Philemon and Baucis as rewritten by Johann Gottfried Bauer

⁵¹ [Joseph von Pauersbach], *Der Hexenschabbas. Ein Marionettenfest* (1773), Erster Auftritt. Only one copy of this brochure has been preserved and is held at the Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek in Weimar, <https://haab-digital.klassik-stiftung.de/viewer/resolver?urn=urn:nbn:de:gbv:32-1-10016537475>.

⁵² *Alceste*, 53.

⁵³ Christoph Willibald Gluck, *Alceste*, trans. Keith Anderson, which is available online: <https://www.naxos.com/Media/Files51016793/85a19b030f28427abee27e328cd8156b.pdf>.

⁵⁴ *Alceste*, 9–10.

⁵⁵ [Philipp Georg Bader], *Philemon und Baucis, oder Jupiters Reise auf die Erde* (Vienna: mit von Ghelenschen Schriften, 1773).

a decade earlier⁵⁶: to repay the poor peasant couple for their hospitality, Jupiter does not change them into interlaced trees after their death, but he resurrects their son Aret and his fiancée Narcissa who had been killed by a storm the previous year. The main action of *Philemon und Baucis* is treated in all seriousness, ending with a grand finale in which the Hungarian people reaffirm their allegiance to the imperial crown (Jupiter's visit to the Phrygian peasants echoes that of the empress to prince Esterházy's lands). However, its performance was preceded by the prologue *Der Götterath* (*The Council of Gods*), which comically presents an increasing number of trivial details and ruptures in tone. The Gods and Goddesses of Mount Olympus argue over the order in which they will speak to Jupiter and present him with the humans' problems. After Ceres praises the peasants and gives an account of their suffering, Mercury recognises that thieves are triumphing everywhere, but he asks his 'lightning daddy' to punish their protected competitors (bankers, merchants, stockbrokers). A debate erupts over the best way to punish humanity: by a storm or a war. Venus and Apollo complain about seeing their temples abandoned. Jupiter gets annoyed with Neptune, Diana, and Mars, chases them away and decides to go with Mercury to see for himself what the mortals are doing. *Der Götterath* presents petty jealousies and quarrels over order of importance delivered through informal expressions, dialogues with a smattering of French words, and burlesque rhymes.

By substituting mythological figures' grandiosity with the pettiness of ordinary humanity, including their disputes and ridiculousness but also the mischievous pleasure of wordplay, another form of reduction is at work in this parodic rewriting. The operas performed at Esterháza usher in a new mode of aristocratic puppet theatre, which would be staged in venues until the French Revolution: parodies of human-sized theatre.

⁵⁶ Johann Gottfried Bauer, *Philemon und Baucis* (Strasbourg, Johann Gottfried Bauer, 1763).

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The First Performances in Public Theatres: From Major to Minor

THE DIFFICULTIES OF HISTORIOGRAPHY

In the previous chapter, published editions and archival materials allowed for the development of puppet theatre to be traced through private performances at princely courts and within aristocratic circles in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, the same approach cannot be applied to the repertoires of public theatres during the same period. With the exception of the handwritten and printed texts of plays performed with marionettes at the Théâtres de la Foire held in M. de Soleinne's collection,¹ almost nothing is known about the shows that paying spectators could watch in public venues.

However, the division between private and public performances was not absolutely clear-cut. Some of the examples previously discussed were also performed for larger audiences: the Troupe Royale des Pygmées became the Opéra des Bamboches at the Saint-Laurent fair in 1678; in Venice, Rome, and Florence, Ottoboni's and Acciaiuoli's *drammi per musica* almost seamlessly circulated between private and public theatres; and the operas composed by Haydn for Prince Esterházy continued to be

¹ Most of this collection is held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France. See Françoise Rubellin, ed., *Marionnettes du XVIIIe^e siècle, Anthologie de textes rares* (Montpellier: Espaces 34, 2022).

performed throughout the year for the general public.² Yet, hundreds of works performed with marionettes during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries left absolutely no trace.

Nonetheless, it is important to remember that the widespread choice of using rod- and string-marionettes or more rarely puppets on runners for performances in theatre—glove puppets remained confined to the streets—does not necessarily mean that a specific repertoire was established. Close competition between companies and the absence of standard regulations protecting authors' copyright³ led puppeteers to appropriate works that had previously been performed by actors to capitalise on their success—for example, in a tennis court near the Saint-Germain fair in February 1666, the puppeteer Francizin staged Claude Boyer's tragedy *Amours de Jupiter et de Sémélé* (*Romance of Jupiter and Semele*), created in January of that year by the actors from the Théâtre du Marais. Francizin's show also included a concert and appearances from Polichinelle, Dame Antonia, and Francisquine, likely as part of a farce.⁴ In 1678, the Troupe des Marionnettes Italiennes presented Molière's *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (*Scapin the Schemer*) and *Le Malade imaginaire* (*The Hypochondriac*) at the Saint-Laurent fair. The posters advertising the show referenced Molière, even if Polichinelle's introduction into *Les Fourberies de Scapin* means that the play certainly had been reworked.⁵

Another point to bear in mind is that employing puppets for circumstantial reasons and in limited ways did not provide the ground for companies to seize upon the theatrical possibilities of the device, and even less so for the emergence of a specific repertoire. Theatres at Parisian fairs faced particular challenges from 1680 onwards as playwrights and theatre entrepreneurs regularly had to negotiate with the privilege

² See Klaus M. Pollheimer, *Das Marionettentheater zu Eszterház* (Vienna: Hollitzer Wissenschaftsverlag, 2017).

³ This was not the case in Spain, where a system of contracts and official authorisations regulated the relationship between companies, authors, and the corrales. See Piedad Bolaños, 'La realidad del teatro español en el Siglo de Oro. (De comediantes a/y titiriteros: de tal palo, tal astilla)', in *La máquina real y el teatro de títeres de repertorio en Europa y América*, ed. Francisco J. Cornejo (Madrid: UNIMA Federación España, 2017), 15–42.

⁴ See Mayolas, letter dated 21 February 1666, *Molière21*, <https://moliere21.cnrs.fr/les-spectacles-et-la-vie-de-cour-dans-les-continuateurs-de-loret-en-1666/>.

⁵ The poster is held at the Archives nationales and was reproduced in *Revue d'Histoire du théâtre* 4 (1950), 470.

accorded to the Comédie-Française, which was monitored to varying degrees depending on the year. The lowly Troupe de tous les plaisirs, which incorporated a comedy combining actors and puppets into the middle of their show at the 1681 Saint-Germain fair, was one of the first victims of the war that privileged institutions waged against private entrepreneurs. On behalf of the Comédie-Française, La Grange had an official report of the performance written up, tore down a poster as proof of the infraction committed, and then requested the lieutenant general of police ban the troupe from performing comedies, have their theatre demolished (or authorisation for its destruction be granted), and fine and imprison its director Languicher (or Languichard). The report drawn up at La Grange's request offers an insight into the hybrid nature of shows at the fair during the seventeenth century. It recounts how, after having danced on a tightrope, Languichard and two other actors performed 'a sort of farce':

then they brought on stage three Bamboches with a young girl dressed as Actrice. They, Actrice, Gilles, with the Bamboches performed a sort of comedy. The comedy was apparently *L'Âne de Lucien*, having brought on stage a donkey. This so-called comedy was interspersed with dance, perilous leaps, and a voice.⁶

The show's poster includes the incriminating work's complete title: *L'Âne de Lucien ou le Voyageur ridicule (Lucien's Ass or the Ridiculous Traveller)*, 'a new comedy accompanied by many scenery changes and surprising machines'. It promised that spectators would see 'leaps as perilous as the extraordinary poses, with a Gigue worthy of admiration from the whole of Paris'.⁷ Recalling an argument going back to Antiquity with the mentions of tightrope dancing, acrobatics, puppets, changes of scenery, machines, and animal taming, the marvellous spectacle of Italian theatre is combined with the ancient skills of minstrels, showing the extent to which popular traditions and elite theatrical forms could coexist.

⁶ Report by Anne Lemaistre, superintendent at Châtelet, Archives de la Comédie-Française, https://www.theatrales.uqam.ca/foires/mss_cf02.html.

⁷ See <https://www.theatrales.uqam.ca/foires/languich.html#poster>. For the letter to the lieutenant general of police, see https://www.theatrales.uqam.ca/foires/mss_cf03.html#titre.

In response, the Comédie-Française fought to have their privilege respected by imposing a compartmentalisation of these two modes of representation—live actors and puppets—that artists did not necessarily practise. Puppets, which were originally only a theatrical device added onto a composite performance, became a substitute for actors in the companies that clashed with the privileged theatre monopolies. As Françoise Rubellin⁸ has shown, some works initially written for actors were ultimately performed by puppets. For example, *Pierrot Romulus ou le Ravisieur poli* (*Pierrot Romulus or the Courteous Kidnapper*), a parody of *Romulus* by Houdar de la Motte, that Fuzelier, Lesage, and d’Orneval had originally written for Opéra-Comique, was performed by La Place’s Marionnettes Étrangères at the Saint-Germain fair in 1722. Conversely, a work created for puppets, *Le Mariage de Momus ou la Gigantomachie* (*The Marriage of Momus or the Gigantomachy*) by Alexis Piron, was granted authorisation to be played by actors for its final performances at Francisque’s hut at the Saint-Germain fair. The Comédie-Française’s multiple submissions against the Parisian fair theatres caused such uncertainty that it led to a blurring of the respective repertoires of actors and puppets. Therefore, it is sometimes difficult to identify whether a work belongs to one or the other.⁹

THE BIRTH OF A LITERARY PUPPET THEATRE

The situation was very different in Spain, where a relatively large network of venues, the ‘corrales de comedias’, provided the opportunity for theatre companies to tour their productions around the major cities from the end of the sixteenth century onwards. Some of these companies specialised in puppet shows and used the stages of the corrales to present what they initially continued to refer to as their ‘retablo’.¹⁰ These companies progressively broke with the vertical terracing of action in the repertoire of the Golden Age. The puppets were usually operated by rods or strings,

⁸ Rubellin, *Marionnettes du XVIII^e siècle*.

⁹ See Françoise Rubellin’s introduction to the anthology *Marionnettes du XVIII^e siècle*, 12.

¹⁰ José de Valdivieso’s poem ‘Ensaladilla del retablo’ (*Romancero espiritual*, 1612) offers an account from this intermediary period: it describes the performance of a retablo, *La entrada del Rey pobre*, at Corral de la Cruz in Madrid.

but sometimes from below, and required the construction of a temporary Italian-style scenery box, which needed to be reconstructed in each new venue.¹¹ From around 1630 onwards, this device took the name of ‘máquina real’ and was used until the first decades of the nineteenth century.¹²

Two major characteristics distinguish the ‘máquina real’ companies from those of live theatre: first, their theatrical performances, in the seventeenth century at least, were combined with acrobatic numbers and tightrope dancing, like the troupes of puppeteers and ‘sauteurs’ in Paris. Second, only ‘máquina real’ companies were permitted to continue their theatrical activities in Lent (from Ash Wednesday until Easter Sunday), a period during which the Church banned actors from treading the boards. There is evidence that some actors moved to other troupes to become puppeteers and ensure a more regular income, which led to the emergence of specialised companies that were active for the whole year.

Transferring between troupes was no issue since the máquina real shared the same repertoire as the rest of theatrical activity in Spain during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As Francisco J. Cornejo’s research has shown, performances followed the same structure: ‘loa’ (prologue), ‘comedia’ in three ‘jornadas’ (acts) separated by ‘entremeses’ (interludes) or ‘bailetes’ (ballets), and, to conclude, a brief presentation (‘escena festiva’, ‘mojiganga’) or a ‘baile’ (dance). The distribution between the different genres performed was also comparable and reflected the changing tastes of audiences: until 1750, ‘comedias de santos’ (comedy of saints) far outnumbered ‘comedias de capa y espada’ (cloak and sword drama); from 1750 to 1840, the preference was for comedic ‘sainetes’ (one act farces), ‘comedia de magia’ (comedy of magic), and adaptations of foreign plays, with the continued presence of other genres, such as ‘comedias bíblicas’, ‘comedias evangélicas’, and ‘comedias históricas’. The choice of subject matter is unsurprising because, as John

¹¹ See the reconstitution suggested by Francisco J. Cornejo, ‘El repertorio de la máquina real’, in *La máquina real y el teatro de títeres de repertorio en Europa y América*, ed. Francisco J. Cornejo (Madrid: UNIMA Federación España, 2017), 43–97.

¹² See Adolfo Ayuso, ‘Disolución y muerte de la máquina real: los autómatas Narbón’, in *La máquina real y el teatro de títeres de repertorio en Europa y América*, ed. Francisco J. Cornejo (Madrid: UNIMA Federación España, 2017), 219–61.

E. Varey explains,¹³ the ‘comedia de santos’ and ‘comedia de magia’ were characterised by a strong visual dimension, with appearances from the Devil and angels, metamorphoses, objects in flight, and changes of scenery. These types of effects were also used by actors, but puppeteers could achieve them much more easily from inside their stage boxes. In *Las tentaciones de San Antonio Abad* (*The Temptations of Anthony the Great*) by Antonio Enríquez Gómez (known as Fernando de Zarate), a play performed in 1694 in Valladolid by José de Loaisa’s ‘máquina real’, a crow swiftly arrives to feed the hermit saint a piece of bread, then the comic valet (‘gracioso’) makes his entrance on a flying dragon. In *Los encantos de Medea* (*The Charms of Medea*, 1645) by Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla, performed in 1717 in Valence by Manuel de Fresneda (Pesoa), the sorceress similarly flies in on a dragon who breathes fire.¹⁴

The works themselves were also common to puppets and live actors, which suggests that the ‘máquina real’ shows were the first performances in Europe of a literary theatre for puppets. For example, the puppet repertoire included: Lope de Vega’s *El mejor alcalde, el Rey* (*The Best Alcalde Is the King*), *La creacion del mundo* (*The Creation of the World*), and *La vuelta de Egipto* (*The Return to Egypt*); and Pedro Calderón de la Barca’s *La hija del aire* (*The Daughter of the Air*), *La Sibila del Oriente y Gran Reina de Sabá* (*Sibyl of the East and the Great Queen of Sheba*), and *El Tetrarca* (*The Tetrarch*). Companies also performed foreign works such as Molière’s *Le Médecin malgré lui* (*The Doctor in Spite of Himself*), Carlo Goldoni’s *La locandiera* (*The Mistress of the Inn*), and even *La Andrómaca* (*Andromache*), likely, as Francisco J. Cornejo suggests, that of Euripides, adapted in 1700 by Luciano Francisco Comella. No ‘comedia’ written specifically for the ‘máquina real’ has ever been identified, so it is unlikely that any actually existed.

Established works that had already been performed by actors brought puppeteers the most success. For example, the ‘comedia de santos’ *El esclavo del demonio* (*The Devil’s Slave*) by Antonio Mira de Amescua (1612) was revived by different companies in 1692, 1694, 1723, and 1735. The play recounts how a wise and religious man Don Gil and a young girl Lisarda were led down the wrong path, both accumulating

¹³ John E. Varey, *Historia de los títeres en España (Desde sus orígenes hasta mediados del siglo XVIII)* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1957), 180–87.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 182.

sins until they eventually sign a pact with the Devil. In the end, the two characters are saved: Lisarda by paying penance as a slave, and Don Gil after triumphing with his guardian angel in a duel against the Devil. The ‘comedias de santos’ were undoubtedly edifying and moralising in nature, but the focus on the transgression of taboos and the protagonists’ trials and tribulations in this tale of fall and redemption contributed greatly to its success amongst audiences.

Whilst the repertoires of the companies of actors and ‘máquina real’ may have been almost identical, they did not develop synchronously. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the puppeteers continued to draw on a Baroque repertoire from the Golden Age, whilst live theatre performed on new ‘Italian-style’ illusionist stages and adopted neoclassical rules. The description, cited by Charles Magnin, of a performance of *La Mort de Sénèque* (*Seneca’s Death*) watched by François Arago in 1808 in Valencia, attests to how performance modes derived from medieval theatre were still in use through ‘máquina real’ shows:

... this famous philosopher, the honour of Córdoba, ended his life, like in history, by opening his veins in a bath on Nero’s orders. The streams of blood that gushed from his two arms were imitated quite well by the movement of a red ribbon. The drama ends with a very unexpected miracle. Upon the noise of a firework, the wise non-believer was carried off to the sky in a *glory*, from the top of which he expresses with gravitas a profession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ to everyone’s satisfaction.¹⁵

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, such flights of fancy had long been banished from the live theatre. Seeking to carry out fundamental reforms to Spanish society, King Fernando VI (1746–59) and King Carlos III (1759–88) fought against what they saw as the immoral mixing of sacred stories, romance plots, and supernatural elements, which led to the ‘comedias des santos’ and the ‘autos sacramentales’ being banned. Thereafter, only the máquina real companies could continue to draw upon repertoires based on religious subjects. The corrales de comedias were progressively transformed into or replaced by Italian-style theatres, and puppeteers were invited to perform Nativity plays in private residences.

¹⁵ Charles Magnin, *Histoire des marionnettes en Europe, depuis l’Antiquité jusqu’à nos jours* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1852), 106.

As in many other European countries, puppetry began being used for forms of popular religiosity that no longer had a place in theatres.

METAMORPHOSES AND METATHEATRICALITY

Even closer links between literary writing and puppet theatre were forged by António José da Silva (1705–39), undisputedly considered as the great Portuguese playwright of the eighteenth century, and one of the major figures in the history of the country's theatre. In 1744—five years after his death on one of the Inquisition's last pyres for being a Marrano—eight plays were published anonymously, which are generally attributed to him: *Vida do grande D. Quixote de la Mancha e do gordo Sancho Pança* (*Life of the Great Don Quixote and the Large Sancho Panza*), *Esopaida ou vida de Esopo* (*Esopaida or the Life of Esope*), *Os Encantos de Medeia* (*The Charms of Medea*), *Anfitrião ou Júpiter e Alcmena* (*Amphitryon or Jupiter and Alcmena*), *Labyrintho de Creta* (*The Cretan Labyrinth*), *As Variedades de Proteu* (*The Metamorphoses of Proteus*), *Guerras do Alecrim e da Manjerona* (*Wars of Rosemary and Marjoram*), and *Precipicio de Faetonte* (*The Fall of Phaethon*).¹⁶ All these plays were performed at the Teatro do Bairro Alto in Lisbon between 1733 and 1738 by puppets of which little is known apart from they were quite large in size and made from cork. Some of the stage directions and special effects would have required that they were controlled from above with rods or strings, but that does not exclude, like for the 'máquina real', operation from below also being used.

The Teatro do Bairro Alto, also called the Casa dos Bonecos (House of Puppets), attracted a socially mixed audience: aristocratic, bourgeois, and working class.¹⁷ Until the earthquake that devastated the city in 1755, it presented minimalist forms of opera (no dancers, a small number of singers) that were more accessible than the costly performances of Italian works. In contrast to the plays by Spanish companies whose tours still made up most of Lisbon's theatrical offering, they were performed in Portuguese. Like the great repertoires of the Elizabethan period or the Golden Age, António José da Silva's oeuvre addressed two audiences, elite

¹⁶ To this list, a play in Spanish should be added, *El Prodigio de Amarante* (Amarante's Prodigy), as well as several others that have been lost.

¹⁷ See Ana Rita Palma Mira Delagado Martins's doctoral thesis, 'A Fábrica do Teatro do Bairro Alto (1761–1775)' (Universidade de Lisboa, 2017), 31–37.

and popular, which afforded him the freedom to simultaneously present borrowings from classic culture and macaronic Latin, the elegance of a prized lyricism and its burlesque parody, multiple changes of scenery and apparitions, mirrored plots, and the gaffes of the comic valet, the ‘gracioso’ or ‘tonto’. In addition, the playwright systematically drew attention to the puppet (‘boneco’, ‘bonifrate’) through direct references in his plays.

In *Esopaida*, for example, Esopo complains to his master Xanto that he is called upon day and night as if he was ‘some cork puppet’ (II, 7); in *Anfitrião*, the servant Cornucópia, wife of Saramago, complains to Mercúrio, who she believes to be her husband, that he scorns her, which he would not do if she was ‘one of those small painted dolls’ (I, 2); and Saramago, unaware he is facing his double, asks Mercúrio in reference to himself: ‘And your Grace, was she not convinced by this figure and this puppet as well?’ (II, 3). Sancho Pança, who is made to believe that he disillusioned Dulcineia, is congratulated for this action ‘worthy of being imprinted on cork with white lead’¹⁸ (*Vida do grande D. Quixote*, I, 7). In Dog Latin, Caranguejo, Proteu’s servant, comments on Proteu’s relationship with his brother Nereo: ‘Quando fratres sunt boni, sunt bonifrates’ (*As Variedades de Proteu*, III, 2).

In contrast to the ad hoc mentions to ‘bambocci’ in Filippo Acciaiuoli’s works, António José da Silva’s wordplay with ‘boneco’, ‘cortiça’ (cork), and ‘bonifrate’ are not isolated instances, but part of a general poetics of representation characterised by a strong metatheatrical component. Two strands appear within these poetics: first, a series of equivalences established between reality and simulacrum, living being and object; and, second, an astonishingly ‘modern’ demonstration of theatrical fiction and its workings.

The examples of the first type, equivalences, are particularly striking in *Anfitrião* in which, following Júpiter’s decision to adopt the appearance of Anfitrião to enjoy the favours of his wife Alcmena, the motif of substituting identities is multiplied. Amongst the characters, Juno, who endeavours to identify which of the two Anfitriãos is her husband Júpiter, introduces herself as Princess Flérida, herself concealed under the name of Felizarda; Iris, who accompanies her, passes herself off as another mortal named Corriola. In a more troubling way, this substitution also

¹⁸ Pigment used for actors’ make-up and likely for painting puppets’ heads.

occurs between living beings and their representations. It is not Cúpidio in person, but his ‘simulacro’ (simulacrum, statue) who, as Júpiter affirms, made him infatuated with Alcmena. Júpiter’s first action is also to destroy a statue of the god of love (I, 1). Taking him for the Theban general, Tírsias triumphantly welcomes him to the Senate by announcing not that they will erect a statue to him, but that he himself will also become a new ‘simulacro’ in the temple of the god Marte (I, 7). When Juno descends to earth to search for Júpiter, she speaks not with Iris, but with the painted image of her on a cloud (I, 4). Convinced that he does not exist, Saramago asks Mercúrio if he is at least a thing and receives the response: ‘You are something, but an artificial and fake thing’ (II, 3).

In other plays, the characters are described as objects. When the knight Montesinos enters the stage, Sancho Pança declares: ‘This Montesinos appears as a piece of animated felt and a living brush’ (*Vida do grande D. Quixote*, I, 7). Conversely, objects almost become living. Periandro confides to some garden statues, which are positioned in such a way so as to repeat an echo of human speech, the task of having to listen to his romantic lament as if it was a puppet show (*Esopaida*, II, 9). Non-human characters are even involved in the theatrical action: trees move from one side of the stage to another (*Precipicio*, II, 2); a dog enters on stage and its barks are interspersed with an aria that Saramago sings (*Anfitrião*, I, 3).

The second strand of metatheatrical poetics in António José da Silva’s opera librettos, shifts between inanimate object and living being, is, of course, a founding principle of the puppetry arts. Here, da Silva expands its effect to the extent that it deconstructs the fiction. Like the repeated illusions to the artificial nature of the cork figures, the dialogue plays upon different short circuits between the dramatic space and the place of performances. Esopo declares: ‘My whole life has always been prodigious; in the way that it has already been recounted in books across the world; and now I’m told it is performed at the Bairro Alto’, alluding to the area of Lisbon in which the theatre was located (*Esopaida*, I, 1). These effects are multiplied in the *Vida do grande D. Quixote* (II, 1), which emphasises the contrast between the hero’s fanciful visions and the sceptical and disillusioned views of his squire:

Don Quixote
Do you know where we are?
Sancho

I know exactly where we are.

Don Quixote

Where then?

Sancho

We are at the Teatro do Bairro Alto.

As they descend into the Cave of Montesinos, Don Quixote is overwhelmed by what he sees as a palace decorated in jasper, whilst Sancho perceives only the theatre scenery and observes: ‘It seems like all this is painted on planks of pine’ (I, 7). Then, when they get into a boat, Don Quixote’s enthusiasm for the speed with which they have covered an enormous distance in a few instances clashes with the scepticism of Sancho, who asks: ‘How can it be that we haven’t covered so much as two fathoms, and we can still see my donkey and your Rocinante from here?’ (II, 1).

These disconnections from upholding the fiction in the dialogue are closely linked to the dramaturgy. They reinforce the dramatic situation (the blurring of identities in the story of Anfitrião, the world of illusions in which Don Quixote lives), all the while establishing a sense of complicity with the audience. The metatheatrical dimension then contributes to the manifestation, at once lyrical (through the game of equivalences) and ironic (through ruptures in tone), of the ‘joco-sério’ (humorous-serious) genre of which António José da Silva’s works are part.¹⁹ The playwright also plays with the specific qualities of the puppet on the level of stage action. He draws upon the puppet’s reduced dimensions and ability to achieve feats that would put an actor in danger to enhance the visual effects of baroque machinery (objects in flight, clouds, visual changes of scenery)—for example, when Jason and Medeia are carried on a cloud (*Os Encantos de Medeia*, I, 4), or when Jason, mounted on the winged horse Pégaso, approaches the fire-breathing dragon that guards the Golden Fleece (I, 5). Further examples include: in *Labyrintho de Creta*, Esfuziote, Tezeo’s ‘gracioso’ valet, flying in with a pair of wings (II, 7); in *Vida do grande D. Quixote*, the horse transporting Don Quixote and Sancho Pança through the air crashing to the ground (II, 7); and in *Precipicio de*

¹⁹ See Carlos Junior Gontijo Rosa, ‘A tragicomédia espanhola como modelo: a ópera joco-séria de António José da Silva como tentativa de superação’, *Desassossego* 6 (2011): 4–15.

Faetonte, the flight and fall of a chariot driven by the son of the Sun God (II, 3).

The metamorphoses, a central process in baroque poetics as Jean Rousset²⁰ has shown, are particularly complex and numerous. Like Filippo Acciaiuoli and Pietro Ottoboni some years earlier, António José da Silva expands the range of transformations well beyond the animal kingdom to plants, objects, and even elements of the landscape. In *As Variedades de Proteu*, the ‘gracioso’ Carenguejo is changed into a pig (I, 3), but also a chair (II, 2), whilst his master Proteu takes the form of a mountain (I, 3), a clock (II, 2), and a king (III, 2). Both of them are also transformed into flower bushes (III, 1). In *Anfitrião*, Mercúrio changes Saramago into an olive tree, which he and Cornucópia hit with a stick to make the olives drop; Anfitrião, who engraves a ten-line love poem to his wife Alcmena on its bark, is surprised when the point of his dagger causes blood to drip from the trunk (II, 4). Moreover, several spectacular transformations are made possible by using puppets: whilst singing, Carenguejo transforms into a giant and then a gnome (III, 3); the nose of Chichisbeo grows and becomes monstrously deformed (*Precipicio*, I, 2); Cornucópia’s head turns on her neck to reveal another face (*Anfitrião*, II, 5); after being slapped by Arpia, Sacatrapo’s head detaches from his body and swings in the air before hitting Arpia in return (*Os Encantos*, I, 4). These examples show how much António José da Silva drew upon the expressive potential of the device: by extending baroque poetics of metamorphosis, the performance techniques he created prefigure the marvellous burlesque of the *féerie* genre.

FROM ‘DRAMMA IN MUSICA’ TO ‘OPERA BUFFA’

In comparison to the exceptional density of ‘puppetry’ effects employed in António José da Silva’s theatrical writings, little distinguishes the works composed during the same period performed by rod- and string-marionettes in Italian public theatres from other dramatic productions. Of the small number of texts that have been preserved, most do not include any stage actions that could not also be done by actors, and, very often, actors and puppets performed them in the same way.

²⁰ Jean Rousset, *La Littérature de l’âge baroque en France: Circé et le paon* (Paris: Corti, 1954).

Puppets sometimes benefited from a desire to reproduce the lavishness of aristocratic baroque opera in public theatres. *Il Leandro*, a rewriting by Camillo Badovero of the tragic story of Hero and Leander, offers a case in point. Initially performed as a *dramma per musica* in 1679 at the Teatro alle Zattere, a small ephemeral room in a private house in the Dorsoduro area of Venice,²¹ the work was then revived with sculpted wooden puppets in 1682 at the Teatro San Moisè, under the title *Gli amori fatali* (*Fatal Romances*). Staged immediately after Filippo Acciaiuoli's three seasons performing his operas with puppets at the venue, the work similarly brings together multiple changes of scenery, objects in flight, and metamorphoses: Venere (Venus) appears in a cloud then on a chariot covered in stars, a procession of Nereidi emerges from the waves in a conch of coral and pearls, some Amorini carry Leandro off to the clouds, and Hero is changed into an oleander bush. Several ballets are also part of the action, including one of drunken sailors smoking tobacco in pipes, a technical trick later used by fairground puppeteers.²²

Nevertheless, such examples were isolated. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, only a few works for puppets performed in public theatres were published and identifying them very often presents difficulties. The presence of certain characters that are today associated with puppet theatre should not mislead: Pulcinella, along with Polichinelle and Punch, were also (if not especially) favoured by live theatre, and a large number of comedies, the 'pulcinellate', were composed for companies in Rome and Naples.²³ The texts or even the frame in which these characters appear were thus not destined to be played by rod- or string-marionettes. Moreover, no relationship existed with the glove puppet shows on the streets that developed a specific dramaturgy after borrowing the names of these characters. In the majority of cases, it is almost impossible to identify a repertoire exclusively destined for puppets in public theatres in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: either it did not exist, or it was not preserved. In any case, performance venues that exclusively offered puppet shows were rare.

²¹ Camillo Badovero, *Il Leandro* (Venetia: Giovanni Francesco Valvasense, 1689).

²² This is notably the case for the puppet of Mother Simpson, held at the Musée des Arts de la Marionnette – Musée Gadagne (Lyon), which belonged to the Middleton dynasty, who were British puppeteers active in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

²³ See Domenico Scafoglio and Luigi M. Lombardi Satriani, *Pulcinella, il mito e la storia* (Milan: Leonardo, 1992).

Nevertheless, the name Pulcinella appears in the title of two librettos of musical dramas printed at the start of the eighteenth century that specify the instruction ‘to be performed by figurines’: *Pulcinella speciale in villa* (*Pulcinella, the villa’s apothecary*) and *Pulcinella guardiano de’ pazzarelli* (*Pulcinella, warden at the asylum*) were published anonymously, but have since been attributed, directly or indirectly, to the librettist Giovanni Cosimo Villifranchi (1646–99). Both works were performed by puppets at the Teatro de’ Granari in Rome during Carnival in 1728, but have very different histories. *Pulcinella speciale in villa* is the anonymous reworking in three acts of Villifranchi’s *Lo speciale di villa*, an opera created in 1684 at the Medici villa in Pratolino, which was highly successful at the end of the seventeenth and the start of the eighteenth centuries. Previously copied, imitated, abridged in prose, and set to music by different composers, the work was frequently performed by companies of live actors. Its revival by puppets for the 1728 Carnival is but one step in its theatrical success. In contrast, only one previous production of *Pulcinella guardiano de’ pazzarelli* was recorded prior to the one at the Teatro de’ Granari: it was performed during Carnival in Lucca in 1705 with puppets.

Despite the fact that *Pulcinella speciale in villa* was usually performed by actors and revived once by puppets and *Pulcinella guardiano de’ pazzarelli* was only performed with puppets, these two drammi in musica present certain similarities. In both works, Pulcinella is an old man who presents an impediment to a romantic plot involving the next generation; at the end of multiple reversals of the action, he remains alone and does not marry, despite previously having the desire to do so. In *Pulcinella speciale in villa*, he is an apothecary and supposed father of Rosaura, the lover of Filarco. Dalmira, a young woman seduced and later abandoned by Filarco, disguises herself as a man named Lisardo and is introduced as an assistant in the apothecary’s shop to avenge her seducer; Pulcinella, in turn, wants to marry Rosaura with the doctor Damone. In addition to the double threat of Dalmira’s vengeance on Filarco and marriage with Damone for Rosaura, Pulcinella plots to marry Cannetella, the servant of his daughter, who has fallen in love with Lisardo. Feigning madness, Rosaura chases away Damone, who discovers her true identity in an act of revenge: she is not Pulcinella’s daughter, so does not have to obey him and can marry whoever she chooses. Dalmira then reveals her true identity, which convinces Filarco to reunite with her. In the end, Rosaura accepts to marry Damone as Cannetella rejects Pulcinella, who, despite everything, is content with being an apothecary.

A similar series of thwarted romances is found in *Pulcinella guardiano de' pazzarelli*. Pulcinella is about to marry his ward Corinda to Florante, but Delia, one of the patients in the asylum who is only feigning madness, suddenly appears and reminds Florante that he seduced and abandoned her. The magician Vaiano, who wants to win Corinda's heart, has Pulcinella delay the marriage by making him believe that his destiny is to marry her himself. At the end of innumerable misunderstandings, brief reconciliations, and unfounded accusations of infidelity, older links once again prove to be the strongest: Delia and Florante marry, whilst Corinda is united with Vaiano, and Pulcinella rejects the old matchmaker Garbina, arguing that 'if no flesh touches me, I don't want the bones'.²⁴

The play is enhanced by fantastic elements when Pulcinella, who goes to a wood in search of a hidden treasure that Vaiano told him about, draws two magic circles to make demons appear; the supernatural spirits arrive in the middle of a lightning storm, the apothecary finds himself at the summit of a cave, astride then backwards on a donkey (Pulcinella's traditional companion in the comedies in the Rome tradition),²⁵ whose tail slaps him in the face. The scene ends with the appearance of new monsters. With the exception of this episode where transformations and apparitions could efficiently be realised using puppets, *Pulcinella guardiano de' pazzarelli* and *Pulcinella speciale in villa* seem better suited to actors than string- or rod-marionettes: the dialogues, fragmented by numerous asides, call for the flexibility of the acting style characteristic of the Commedia dell'arte actors.

Attesting to the ongoing emergence of a genre (the introduction of the *pulcinellata* in the musical domain of Rome-style opera buffa), the two works are noticeably distinct from the traditional performance of this character mask as the Commedia dell'arte defined it. In terms of his social position, Pulcinella is no longer a valet like in his first appearance in *Lucilla costante* (*The constant Lucilla*) by Silvio Fiorillo (1632), who invented the character; he is, in contrast, in a modest position of power. On the level of dramaturgy, he assumes the role of the comic old man who controls the dramatic action and has to renounce his scheming so that the

²⁴ [Giovanni Cosimo Villifranchi], *Pulcinella guardiano de' pazzarelli* (Lucca: Marescandoli, 1705), 58.

²⁵ Scafoglio and Lombardi Satriani, *Pulcinella, il mito e la storia*, 416–21. As Scafoglio states, a donkey ride with one's face turned towards the hindquarters of the animal is a punishment used in charivaris for mismatched couples.

marriages of the young people take place. The librettos do preserve some fundamental characteristics of the role: Pulcinella's Neapolitan manner of speaking and his characterisation as a 'sciocco' (fool) who is ready to believe anything he is told. Nevertheless, as works, *Pulcinella guardiano de' pazzarelli* and *Pulcinella speciale in villa* are too distinct and too isolated. The links between them and the activities of puppeteers are not documented well enough for their analysis to offer some understanding of the repertoire performed by puppets in the venues in Rome that sometimes accommodated these shows in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in particular the Teatro Tordinona, the Teatro Capranica, and the Teatro Pallacorda.²⁶ In any case, it was not in these productions but rather in those of the itinerant companies that circulated internationally around European cities that the Italian puppeteers, drawing on practices of improvisation from the Commedia dell'arte, were able to develop their rich repertoires.

The character Pulcinella spread very quickly in Europe and was simultaneously adopted by actors, puppeteers, and all sorts of street artists. From 1649 onwards, the Maltese magician Blasius Manfredi, who was famous for numbers in which, after having swallowed some water, he spat out wine, beer, oil, and milk, added to his performance a show of a 'PoliZenello with small dolls', which he toured from Nuremberg to Memmingen and then onto Vienna.²⁷ A decade later, between 1657 and 1659, the company of Pietro Aggimondi, known as Bologna, travelled around German-speaking countries, as Hans Richard Purschke's reconstruction of their tours attests.²⁸ Bologna introduced 'Pollicinella' to London in 1662,²⁹ and appeared at the Saint-Laurent fair in 1678 with his Troupe des Marionnettes Italiennes, which advertised the two comedies by Molière on the poster cited at the beginning of this chapter. These

²⁶ See Davide Marzattinocci, *Cassandrino al Teatro Fiano, Il teatro di marionette a Roma nella prima metà dell'Ottocento* (Azzano San Paolo: Edizioni Junior, 2006), 16–21.

²⁷ Hans R. Purschke, *Die Puppenspieltraditionen Europas. Deutschsprachige Gebiete* (Frankfurt: Puppen und Masken, 1986), 69.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 70–71. The puppeteer's surname is sometimes recorded as Gimondi or Gimonde. See also Christian Neuhuber's summary "dass Hertz und Augen ihren grösten Contento werden darob haben" – Der Pulcinella-Spieler Stefano Landolfi und Graz', <https://www.hlk.steiermark.at/cms/beitrag/12950011/153524465/#tb4>.

²⁹ See George Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre*, 2nd ed. (Bury St Edmunds: St Edmundsbury Press, 1990), 73.

details show that itinerant companies were not content with using their own repertoire: they gradually enhanced them through their travels and drew on live theatre to give themselves more chances of success.

Whilst these repertoires would become considerable in the nineteenth century, they were already quite large in the second half of the eighteenth century. In 1777 in Prague, a poster for Girolamo Renzi's company listed the titles of 28 different plays, including 12 that mentioned the name Pulcinella.³⁰ Since no copy of these texts has been preserved, and titles were often modified to appear as if they were original works, it is impossible to compare them with what actors were performing at the time. Companies could also pass from one mode of performance to another according to the places they stopped and the local regulations that they had to obey. International circulations and successive appropriations thus contributed to upholding the lack of distinction between live theatre and theatre with rod- or string-marionettes whose shows royal privileges attempted to put an end to.

THE TRIVIALISATION OF ELITE CULTURE

Like John E. Varey's work on Spain, George Speaight's groundbreaking research from the 1950s onwards sheds light on the place of puppet shows in English theatre during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Despite the precise nature of the evidence he cites, some of Speaight's conclusions can be challenged, in particular the prime place he attributes to the glove puppet during the early modern period. According to him, it was 'the typical English puppet of the age of Shakespeare'.³¹ However, almost all available evidence relates to mechanical raree show boxes with their repertoires of plays drawn mainly from the Bible and an 'instrument of strange motions' used by travelling companies of Italian artists whose presence is recorded in London from 1573.³² It is impossible to ascertain whether this 'instrument' used rod- and string-marionettes, puppets controlled from below the stage as a

³⁰ John McCormick, Alfonso Cipolla, and Alessandro Napoli, *The Italian Puppet Theatre, A History* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2010), 102.

³¹ Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre*, 66.

³² Edmund Kerchever Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), 281.

satirical engraving from 1644 shows (Illustration 5.1),³³ or the cut-out, painted figures that Serlio describes.³⁴

Similarly, Speaight believes he is able to identify glove puppets in the most famous scene of theatre-within-theatre that features a puppet show: the performance given by Lanthorn Leatherhead in Act 5 of Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614). His assumption is based on two details: that the puppets are transported in a basket, and the 'whole slapstick business' between the characters who insult each other and exchange blows.³⁵ However, as John McCormick³⁶ has shown, many aspects of Leatherhead's performance contradict this interpretation and suggest a more complex stage device instead (for example, rods and strings, figures from a raree show): the show charges an entrance fee, which means that it would have been given in a closed room or under a tent, whereas glove puppeteers usually performed in the open air for coins in the hat; it is referred to as a 'motion' like the mechanical boxes; and Leatherhead is presented as 'the mouth of'em all' (V, 3), which reveals that he appears in front of the stage and lends his voice to the different characters, whereas glove puppets are made to speak between themselves. Other details lend further weight to the argument proposed by McCormick: the play performed was written earlier by John Little-Wit, whereas the glove puppet show was based upon improvisation; the show is said to be accompanied by 'Fire-Works', 'good Vapours', and 'Water-Works' (V, 4), which would involve complex stage machinery; and finally the famous gesture of the puppet of Dionysius, who lifts up his habit to reveal he has no genital organs, cutting short Zeal-of-the-Land Busy's diatribes against cross-dressing roles (V, 5), would be difficult to enact with a simple glove puppet without resorting to using the other hand. Whilst

³³ *The Arch-Cheate, or the Cheate of Cheats* (London: printed for M. W. at Grays Inne Gate, 1644). I thank Cécile Decaix for drawing my attention to this source.

³⁴ Their use in a simplified form is indeed recorded outside of Italy: on 1 March 1644, John Evelyn describes a performance he saw in Paris at a small theatre on the Rue de Seine, where a pedlar had characters converse while animating their figures painted on cut-out boards (*The Diary of John Evelyn, Esq., F.r.s., from 1641 to 1705–6* [London: W. W. Gibbings, 1890], 51).

³⁵ Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre*, 65.

³⁶ John McCormick, 'Interpreting, illustrating, adapting and creating – five centuries of puppet repertoires in Britain', in *La máquina real y el teatro de títeres de repertorio en Europa y América*, ed. Francisco J. Cornejo (Madrid: UNIMA Federación España, 2017), 209.



Illustration 5.1 'As in Puppet plays or other motions under neath guides all'. *The Arch-Cheate, or the Cheat of Cheat*, 1644. Courtesy of British Library

the rapidity and crudity of the dialogue, the disputes, and the punch-ups may suggest glove puppet comedy, it is far more likely that this play within the play used rod- and string-marionettes or marotte-style puppets controlled from below the stage, as shown in the 1644 engraving.

Regardless of the device Ben Jonson actually imagined, Act 5 of *Bartholomew Fair* warrants a close reading for the information it contains about the puppet shows in London at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Most references included in the play can be corroborated by sources from the period³⁷: for example, the titles of plays cited by Leatherhead (*Niniveh*, [*The Destruction of*] *Jerusalem*, and *The Gunpowder Plot*) or the name of the puppeteer he identifies as his master, Captain Pod (V, 1).³⁸ In contrast, the subject of John Little-Wit's play *The Ancient Modern History of Hero and Leander*, is a departure from the repertoires of the time, which centred on episodes from the Bible (the Creation, the Flood, Jonah, and Nineveh) or history from Antiquity (the assassination of Julius Caesar) or more recent times (the Gunpowder Plot). Only a century later would puppeteers like Martin Powell draw inspiration from Ovid and classical literature more generally.³⁹

As Leatherhead explains, he will not be performing the story of Hero and Leander 'according to the printed book' since 'that is too learned and too poetical for our audience'. For this reason, he calls upon Little-Wit, who has written an adaptation that is 'a little easy, and modern for the times': rather than the banks of Hellespont, he sets the action on those of the Thames; Leander becomes the son of a dyer and Hero a wench from Bank-Side; Cupid, transformed into a drawer at a tavern, makes Hero fall in love by striking her with a pint of sherry; finally, the two friends Damon and Pythias, from Valerius Maximus's *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium* and not Ovid's *Heroides*, suddenly appear at the tavern.

³⁷ In particular, see the precious inventory compiled by Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson, *British Drama 1533-1642 - A Catalogue*, vols. 4-5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014-15).

³⁸ See Scott Cutler Shershow, "'The Mouth of'hem All": Ben Jonson, Authorship, and the Performing Object', *Theatre Journal* 46, no. 2 (1994), 200.

³⁹ One of Ben Jonson's publishers, William Gifford, suggested that in *Bartholomew Fair* the playwright drew upon and added the text of a play he had written earlier for puppets. See Shershow, "'The Mouth of'hem All": Ben Jonson, Authorship, and the Performing Object', 198.

These transformations can be read on at least two levels.⁴⁰ First, the puppet show provides the means for Jonson to mock the works of his contemporaries: Christopher Marlowe's poem *Hero and Leander* continued by George Chapman (1598), Richard Edwards's play *Daemon and Pythias* (around 1564, printed in 1571), and potentially Thomas Nashe's *Lenten Stuffe* (1599).⁴¹ This play within a play would then be the first example of using puppets for parodic means in theatre history. To illustrate his audience's difficulties of understanding elite culture and justify asking Little-Wit to undertake a rewriting, Leatherhead cites several expressions taken from the first verses of Marlowe's poem.⁴² He wonders: 'What do they know what Hellespont is, guilty of true love's blood? or what Abydos is? or the other, Sestos hight?' (V, 3).

Second, Little-Wit's transposition of the tragic story of the two lovers onto working-class London passes through an abrupt change of register. With obscenities, exchanges of insults, and some fisticuffs, the realist details and burlesque rhymes are not the only elements that provoke laughter. There is also the general triviality within the dialogues and situations: 'O Leander, Leander, my dear, my dear Leander', whispers a groggy Hero after having drunk three pints of sherry, 'I'll for ever be thy goose, so thou'lt be my gander' (V, 5). After being interrupted by Damon and Pythias's untimely entrance into the tavern, the romantic babbling leads to a kiss at which Damon exclaims 'Mistress Hero is a whore'; a furious Hero responds 'Kiss the whore o' the arse', and it comes to blows.

In *Bartholomew Fair*, the parodies of elite culture and trivialisation are directly linked to the inclusion of the puppet show, which opens up an avenue that is still so frequently taken that it sometimes entirely overlaps with puppetry, as if the simple choice of puppets de facto leads to the register of parody. A closer reading of Jonson's text nevertheless reveals another structuring dimension of the puppet comedy: Leatherhead breaking with the performance and his narrative position as he makes his

⁴⁰ Another reading could be a network of allusions to the scandal emerging from the request to annul the marriage of Frances Howard and Robert Devereux, 3rd Earl of Essex. See James E. Savage, 'Some antecedents of the puppet-play in *Bartholomew Fair*', *Studies in English* 7 (1966).

⁴¹ See *ibid.*

⁴² 'On Hellespont, guilty of true love's blood, / In view and opposite two cities stood, / Sea-borderers, disjoin'd by Neptune's might: / The one Abydos, the other Sestos hight': Christopher Marlowe, continued by George Chapman, *Hero and Leander* (I, 1–4).

puppets act. Positioned in front of the stage, in the intermediate space between the puppet show and the audience, Leatherhead assumes the role of interpreter, the spokesperson who addresses the spectators, introduces the subject of the story, and presents the characters. He is thus in the role of an omniscient narrator, overseeing the dramatic action, explaining and commenting on its conclusions, and, if necessary, responding to questions directed to him. Yet, from the moment Hero enters the stage, he begins to converse with the puppets, asking them about their intentions. Leatherhead enters into a relationship with them on an equal footing: he receives a blow to the head from Cole, the owner of the boat transporting Hero, because he does not understand his responses, and is treated as a liar before being knocked over by Damon and Pythias. Act 5 of *Bartholomew Fair* therefore marks the entry into literature of a key element of puppet dramaturgy, the reversal of the relationship of domination between puppets and humans.

PARODIES AND SATIRES

As Speaight has shown, puppet shows performed inside huts constructed at fairs, markets, and some open spaces in London (Lincoln's Inn Fields, Charing Cross) were presented by companies that also toured the rest of the country. These companies would progressively diversify their repertoire at the end of the seventeenth and throughout the eighteenth centuries by increasingly drawing on live theatre productions. In addition to the traditional subjects from the Bible, these plays recounted historical episodes borrowed from Marlowe (*Tamburlaine, Massacre at Paris*) and even Shakespeare (*Julius Caesar*), as well as edifying stories that had been made famous by popular ballads and colporteur literature such as *Patient Grisell, Arden of Faversham, and Dick Whittington and His Cat*. Confined to temporary structures, fairground huts or cabins, puppet shows were pushed to the margins of the theatrical landscape, but this peripheral positioning meant that puppeteers could continue their activities during the English Civil War and the puritan Commonwealth of England established by Oliver Cromwell when theatres were ordered to close between 1642 and 1660.

When the monarchy was restored, theatrical activities were quickly re-established and further developed with the granting of royal privileges to the King's Men and the Duke's Men, the construction of several venues, the introduction of a new generation of comedians, and a growing interest

in ‘spectaculars’ imitating Italian and French baroque operas. Popular shows also underwent a revival following the arrival of foreign troupes, including, as already mentioned, the puppeteer Pietro Aggimondi or Gimonde, known as Bologna, who introduced London audiences to ‘Pollicinella’. The diarist Samuel Pepys saw his show in Covent Garden in May 1662. These shows were so successful that King Charles II invited Bologna to perform at the Palace of Whitehall in October that year, for which a 20 × 18-ft stage (around 6 × 5.50 m) was constructed. The stage was relatively high with a side door inserted under it,⁴³ which suggests manipulation from below. Other Italian companies soon followed and performed their own versions of ‘Polichinello’. Whilst nothing is known about the repertoire performed, Pepys stresses the variety of these shows which provided ‘an extraordinary good entertainment’.⁴⁴

In 1672, one of these artists, ‘Antonio di Voto, punchenello’, who had been renting a hut for the five previous years in Charing Cross for his puppet shows, attempted to stage John Dryden’s tragedy *Amboyna, or the Cruelties of the Dutch to the English Merchants* which had recently been performed by the King’s Men at the Lincoln’s Inn Fields Theatre. Twice-daily performances were planned, followed by farces ‘acted by men and women’,⁴⁵ but the show was quickly banned by the Lord Chamberlain, who defended the royal privilege granted to the King’s Men.⁴⁶ Antonio di Voto’s show was certainly not a parody: the mention of the Amboyna massacre (1623) and the torture of the prisoners committed by the Dutch was no laughing matter in the context of the Third Anglo-Dutch War (1672–74). Yet this incident shows the extent to which puppeteers in London, just like in Paris, were not content playing their own repertoires and started looking for new inspiration in live theatre, likely beginning with their immediate competitors at markets and fairs, but also, as this example shows, sometimes taking the risk of coming into conflict with the monopoly of privileged theatres.⁴⁷

⁴³ See Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre*, 77.

⁴⁴ See *ibid.*, 73–76.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴⁶ See Joseph F. Stephenson, ‘Redefining the Dutch: Dryden’s appropriation of national images from Renaissance Drama in *Amboyna*’, *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660–1700* 38, no. 2 (2014): 63–81.

⁴⁷ On the progressive evolution of the repertoires of British puppeteers in the eighteenth century, see David A. Brewer, ‘Rethinking Fictionality in the Eighteenth-Century

The reverse is also true: seeing the success of Punchinello, whose name was soon shortened to Punch, actors performing in fairgrounds theatres did not hesitate to employ the character themselves. In 1673, for example, Francis Kirkman published the second volume of the collection *The Wits, or Sport upon Sport*,⁴⁸ in which he brought together short comedic plays (farces and drolls) by different authors performed by travelling troupes of actors. He includes *Ænone*, a pastoral taken from *Actæon & Diana with a Pastoral Storie of the Nymph Ænone* by the actor Robert Cox (d. 1655), all the while adding a scene in which the characters Punch and Margery appear. In the interlude of Cox's original play, secretly performed around 1650,⁴⁹ two shepherds Amintas and Dorilas, who are in love with Ænone, mock the pretensions of a third shepherd Hobbinall, who believes that the nymph prefers him. They spy on Hobbinall reading aloud to himself a poem dedicated to Ænone for her birthday; then, after some discussions with the nymph, the shepherds dance a Morris and finally the god Pan appears followed by satyrs who, in turn, also begin to dance.

Staged just before Pan's entrance, the added scene in the version published by Kirkman creates a play within a play of the pastoral: Punch and Hobbinall compete for Margery's heart, Hobbinall reads a second poem which is even more ridiculous than the first, and the two pretenders dance a Morris. The episode seems out of place due to the abrupt change in the register: the burlesque of farce emerges in the middle of the bucolic romances between the shepherds and the nymph. The effect of introducing Punch to *Ænone*, a clearly parodic act, breaks with the ethereal sentimentalism of the pastoral through the lexicon of bodily humour:

Puppet Theatre', in *The Afterlives of Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, ed. Daniel Cook and Nicholas Seager (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 180–81. An interesting piece of evidence is the poster printed by John Harris around 1700 with details of the programme of shows he performed at Bartholomew Fair (Harvard Theatre Collection, TS 555.1). It included two plays: one is the story of the Fair Rosamund (d. 1176), mistress of Henry II, with 'the merry humours of Punchinello' and the Pendle witches (trial in 1612); the second is an adaptation of *The Honourable History of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, the comedy by Robert Greene (c. 1590).

⁴⁸ [Francis Kirkman, ed.], *The Wits, or Sport upon Sport* (London, 1673). I thank Cécile Decaix for drawing my attention to this work.

⁴⁹ Robert Cox, *Actæon & Diana with a pastoral storie of the nymph Ænone* (London: Edward Archer, 1656). The text was performed at the Red Bull Theatre, a tavern in Clerkenwell that sometimes defied the ban on theatres under Cromwell.

Punch

I will justifie that a man had better have the Devil ride through his guts with a brambill of briars at his arse then to be in love; but, as the Devil will have it, here she comes that is the cause of it.

Enter Margery.

Whither so fast, fair Margery?

Margery

To meet you.

Punch

O happy day: pox on't, here's Hobbiball too.⁵⁰

Though the rarity of available sources for English puppet theatres in the second half of the seventeenth century means that prudence must be applied, it might legitimately be supposed that Punch was included in other performances in similar ways. In all likelihood, puppeteers adopted this new character as an added-on element, a trivial interlude without any connection to the main plot or necessarily a clear idea of what role to give him: until then, the 'comical humours' advertised in the show titles appear to have been limited to a burlesque dance. Joseph Addison's Latin poem *Machinae gesticulantes, Anglice a Puppet-Show* (1698) confirms this hypothesis by emphasising Punch's physical attributes, that his enormous potbelly and humpback (taken from the French Polichinelle) makes him appear as a giant amongst Pygmies. The crudeness of his language and clumsiness of his uncouth movements always creates a break with the dramatic action, no matter how serious it is:

E'en when some serious action is displayed
And solemn pomp in long procession made,
He uncontrolable, of humour rude,
Must with unseasonable mirth intrude.⁵¹

This desacralising function of the character Punch, enacted simply through his appearance on stage, is corroborated by some eighteenth-century plays for puppets in which he features. These shows were no longer performed in temporary huts at fairs and markets, but were

⁵⁰ *Cenone*, a pastoral, in [Kirkman], *The Wits, or Sport upon Sport*, 16.

⁵¹ Joseph Addison, 'Machinae gesticulantes', in *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: E. Curli, 1719), 64. Translation by Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre*, 89.

productions that progressively became integrated into the heart of London's theatre life. Puppeteers began performing in more comfortable venues,⁵² and irony and satire were increasingly appreciated by audiences at established theatres. In *Venus and Adonis, or the Triumphs of Love* by Martin Powell (d.1729), performed at Punch's Theatre in Covent Garden in 1713, Cupid hits Punch with his arrows so he falls in love with Proserpina, laments seeing her disappear to the underworld, then finds her again thanks to Jupiter who transforms him into Mars. The couple formed by Punch and Proserpina (who, according to Powell, was performed by 'a monkey lately dead')⁵³ is the burlesque and incoherent reflection of the couple Venus and Adonis, with their storylines alternating throughout the play. Whilst the subject matter is treated comically, the lines of the mythological characters retain something of their tragic grandiloquence; Punch, in contrast, ridicules the romantic lyrics of the great sung arias and reproduces his diatribe from Kirkman's version of *Cenone* almost word for word, which is further proof of the porosity between live theatre and puppet theatre. Whatever the mode of performance, mentions of viscera and their natural orifices seem to have become central to the role:

Punch

I will justify, that a man had better have the Devil ride through his guts with a bundle of thorns at his bre[e]ch, than to be in love; and as the Devil would have it, with Proserpine. Sure I was in a woundy heat when I went to hell to choose a mistress: it was the other day that I was railing against love and poetry; and now I think of nothing else, speak of nothing else, and eat nothing but poetry, and now it wombles to come forth. See, she comes.⁵⁴

Martin Powell's other plays, of which only the titles and some mentions in the press have been preserved, seem to have been composed using a similar model: Punch's facetiae add comic relief to a well-known story without changing its sequence of events or developing his role. In this mould, Punch dances with his wife on Noah's Ark in *The Creation*

⁵² See Brewer, 'Rethinking Fictionality in the Eighteenth-Century Puppet Theatre', 176–77.

⁵³ Martin Powell, 'Dramatis personae', in *A Mock Opera, call'd Venus and Adonis; or, The triumphs of love* (London: G. Parker, 1713). Jupiter is played by a 'mischievous monkey'.

⁵⁴ Powell, *A Mock Opera, call'd Venus and Adonis*, 4.

of the World (1709), and he appears as Jupiter in *The False Triumph, or the Destruction of Troy* (1712). Representing the gods of Mount Olympus through techniques used in comic theatre is a recurring process in English parodies from this period, whether performed by actors or puppets: a performance of the dramatic entertainment *The Royal Chace, or Merlin's Cave* (1736) at the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden included the 'grotesque pantomime' *Jupiter and Europa* in which Jupiter appears 'in the character of Harlequin, Pluto as Punch, Neptune as Pantaloon, Pan as Scaramouch, Hercules as Brigella (sic), Apollo as Mezzetin, and Mars as Leander'.⁵⁵

Double characterisation also featured in shows at the Théâtres de la Foire in Paris (Illustration 5.2). In the anonymous play *Apollon Polichinelle* (1734), a parody of the heroic pastoral *Issé* by André Cardinal Destouches and Antoine Houdar de la Motte, the role of Philémon is given to Polichinelle, Pan's to the Compère, Hylas's to Pierrot, and Doris's to Dame Gigogne. In Denis Carolet's *La Noce interrompue* (*The Interrupted Nuptials*, 1734), a parody of the musical tragedy *Pirithoüs* by Jean-Joseph Mouret after Jean Puget de la Serre, the puppet of Polichinelle appears in the titular role and that of Dame Gigogne as Hippodamie, whilst Pierrot is Thésée and Arlequin is Eurite. This device was not specific to puppet shows; it was also used, for example, in Alain-René Lesage's play *Arlequin Thétis* (1713), a parody played on the 'écriteaux'⁵⁶ of the musical tragedy *Thétis et Pélée* by Pascal Collasse and Fontenelle: Arlequin is Thétis, Colombine is Doris, Mezzetin is Jupiter, Pierrot is Mercure, and Léandre is Pélée, whilst three mermaids are played by Scaramouche and two Gilles.⁵⁷ A successor to the Commedia dell'arte's mask play, double characterisation was a formidably impressive weapon in the parodic register, since it had the effect of making the audience see, under the dignity of great figures from classical culture, their trivial reflections from popular trestle stages.

⁵⁵ *A New Dramatic Entertainment Called the Royal Chace, or Merlin's Cave* (London: T. Wood, 1736), 6.

⁵⁶ To circumvent the privilege of lyrical art granted to the Opéra, actors at the Théâtres de la Foire used signs called 'écriteaux' to show spectators the words of the arias to sing.

⁵⁷ Transcriptions of these texts are available on the *Theaville* database created by the CETHEFI (Centre d'Études des Théâtres de la Foire et de la Comédie-Italienne) at the Université de Nantes, which is available online: <http://www.theaville.org/kitesite/index.php>.



Illustration 5.2 Louis-Nicolas van Blarenberghe, A marionette theatre at the Foire Saint-Germain, Paris, miniature painting on a tobacco-box, 1763. MET Museum, New York

The phenomenon of double characterisation also reached puppet shows where the parodic inspiration directed against elite culture and its institutional representatives (theatres and operas protected by royal patent) is expanded to a critique of society. This satirical vein was particularly developed on the English stage in the eighteenth century, with the puppet itself being one of its favoured devices. In 1707, for example, Martin Powell had *The Town Rake, or Punch Turned Quaker* staged, seemingly at the request of the government.⁵⁸ In 1721, Thomas Sheridan wrote the prologue of a farce entitled *Punch Turned Schoolmaster*. In 1736, in a short anonymous play, *Burlesque upon Magistracy, or Punch out of Humour*, Punch plays the son of a ridiculous judge.⁵⁹ In 1738 at her Punch's Theatre, Charlotte Charke recorded Henry Fielding's *The Mock Doctor* after *Le Médecin malgré lui* by Molière in the repertoire, giving the role of Gregory (Sganarelle) to the Punch puppet. As she explains in her autobiography, she had the heads of her puppets sculpted to resemble

⁵⁸ Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre*, 101.

⁵⁹ *Burlesque upon Magistracy; or, Punch out of Humour* (London/Dublin, 1736).

‘several eminent persons’,⁶⁰ thus presenting an additional mode of characterisation in her theatrical satire. For *The Beggar’s Wedding* by Charles Coffey, which she revived in 1739, the model for the puppet of Hunter, son of the beggar king, was the castrato Farinelli. Puppets resembling well-known figures also seem to have been used for a private entertainment performance organised by several ladies from London’s high society, which Eliza Heywood’s periodical *The Female Spectator* reviewed in April 1745.⁶¹

Two anonymous publications, which are presented as theatre texts involving Punch, reflect the period’s enthusiasm for political satire. The first, *C. and Country* (1735),⁶² is ‘a Play of Seven Acts, in which will be revived the Entertaining Scene of the Blundering Brothers, to which is added the Comical Humours of Punch, the whole concluding with the Grand Masque called The Downfall of Sejanus’. It was performed as entertainment during a masked ball at Haymarket on 16 January 1735, and, in the guise of a play retracing the ascent, trial, and condemnation of the rich man Dives⁶³ by the Roman Senate, echoes the accumulating grievances of opponents of Prime Minister Robert Walpole, who had been in power since 1721. There is no trace of Punch’s ‘comical humours’ in *C. and Country*: the character only appears in a part entitled *The Downfall of Sejanus* for a short dialogue with the Hangman about the forthcoming execution of Sejanus, another name for Dives.

The second text, *Politicks in Miniature, or the Humours of Punch’s Resignation* (1742), opens with a dialogue between the puppeteer (‘the Master of the Puppet-Show’) and Punch, two masks under which the audience would have immediately recognised King George II, who, born in Hanover, was often mocked for his approximative English and strong German accent, speaking to Robert Walpole:

⁶⁰ Charlotte Charke, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke, Youngest Daughter of Colley Cibber, Esq., Written by Herself* (London: Whittaker, Teacher, and Arnot, 1829), 51.

⁶¹ See Brewer, ‘Rethinking Fictionality in the Eighteenth-Century Puppet Theatre’, 180.

⁶² *C. and Country* (London: T. Monger, 1735). ‘Court’ and ‘Country’ are the names given to the two opposing political parties: partisans of absolute monarchy and those of parliamentarism.

⁶³ ‘Dives’ (the rich, the opulent) is the Latin name sometimes retained as a proper noun in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19–31), a traditional subject for puppet theatres.

Master

Plots! What you call plots, Master Punch?

Punch

I'll tell you what I call plots. – You know that I have been the hero of the stage for twenty years: I have acted the principal parts, I have diverted the public with several ingenious pranks, made heroic and witty speeches, knocked down those puppets that affronted me, kicked off the stage that contradicted me, introduced those that complimented me. This have I reigned, with distinguished lustre, at the head of the company of your wooden politicians.

Master

Vary well, Master Punch, but vere be dis grand plot? You have often talk'd of de lot, and de plot; but vere be dis Plot?

Punch

There are parties formed against me, and some of the puppets have been bold enough to say that I should not be at the head of the company any longer.⁶⁴

After his meeting, Punch receives the visit of different puppets who come to plot with him, but he ends up having to present his resignation to the Master of the Puppet-Show, just like Robert Walpole had to present his resignation to George II in the same year.

THE WAR OF THEATRES

When traces of this controversial use of puppets do exist, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether it was a show created in a private or semi-private setting, or if it was a satirical piece of writing in the form of a theatrical dialogue without the intention to have it performed. Its imagery would find its way into the graphic arts with the development of caricature.⁶⁵ Several engravings published in this period depicted a puppet show as a means to tackle the subject of British political life⁶⁶ 'since the performers are mute and senseless till put in motion by the manager,

⁶⁴ *Politicks in Miniature, or the Humours of Punch's Resignation* (London: J. Mechell, 1742), 3–4.

⁶⁵ See Augustin Filon, *La Caricature en Angleterre* (Paris: Hachette, 1902).

⁶⁶ For example, *Punch's Opera with the Humours of Little Ben the Sailor* (London: Edwards & Darly, 1756) or *The S... Puppit-Shew or the Whole Plays of King Salomon the Wise* (London: E Sumpter, 1763). See also *Credulity, Superstition, and Fanaticism* by William Hogarth (1762) in which a preacher at a pulpit controls a string-marionette of a witch on a broom.

and then speak and act no more that he would have them'.⁶⁷ Rod- and string-marionettes were therefore attributed the negative connotation of beings without their own will, prisoners of their roles and manipulable at leisure—an imagery that would experience an inexhaustible success in the following centuries.

However, the target of the most developed satires was artistic life itself. Puppets were used on the English stage to criticise and ridicule the period's popular literary and theatrical modes. Samuel Foote (1720–77) in particular employed this technique in *Tragedy-a-la-Mode* (1760), whose first version was performed in 1758 at the Drury Lane Theatre under the title *The Diversions of the Morning*.⁶⁸ In the play, an actor played by Foote himself wishes to punish 'that insolent, self-sufficient race of people, called players'.⁶⁹ Proposing to replace actors with puppets, he demonstrates the merit of his plan by performing a miniature and bombastic tragedy *Love till Death*. This play within a play presents the hero Golcondus, lover of the Princess Lindamira who commits suicide after having been raped by King Crontes. Golcondus kills Crontes, then turns his weapon on himself, but interrupts his act to ask his confidant Tribus, who is about to do the same, not to kill himself so that he can bear witness to this sad story. Only Golcondus is played by an actor, whereas the other roles have no lines and were represented by human-sized cardboard cut-out figures that were gradually slid in on boards during their entrances and exits. The text of this tragedy lends itself to laughter by alternating between pomposity and banality. Golcondus's monologues begin in verse before disintegrating into confused exclamations:

⁶⁷ For a commentary on the engraving *Punch's Opera...*, and its reproduction, see 'The Explanation', in *England's remembrancer or, A Humorous, Sarcastical, and Political Collection of Characters and Caricaturas* (London, 1758), Plate XXXVII (at 13).

⁶⁸ *The Diversions of the Morning* was the generic title that Foote gave to a series of comedic shows from 1737 onwards. The two versions were published by the actor Tate Wilkinson in *The Wandering Patentee*, 4 vols. (York: Wilson, Spence and Mawman, 1795): vol. 4, 238–50, for *The Diversions of the Morning*; and vol. 1, 285–99, for *Tragedy-a-la-Mode*. The date 1760, rather than 1763 often given for *Tragedy-a-la-Mode*, is that of the manuscript submitted to the censor: see Marc Martinez, 'Satire et théâtralité dans les spectacles de marionnettes de Henry Fielding et Samuel Foote (1730–1773)', in *L'Écriture littéraire pour marionnettes en Europe de l'Ouest (17^e–21^e siècles)*, ed. Carole Guidicelli (Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée, forthcoming 2025).

⁶⁹ Samuel Foote, 'Tragedy-a-la-mode', in *The Wandering Patentee*, ed. Tate Wilkinson, vol. 1 (York: Wilson, Spence and Mawman, 1795), 290.

Oh, my sad soul! What means that haggard eye!
 That drooping lip! – (*whispers*) – Ah! poison'd sayst thou?
 Is it so: – ha! see, she dies! she dies! (*Princess falls*).
 She's dead.
 Well! well! well! what – what then becomes of me?
 Oh! I will follow my advent'rous love.⁷⁰

In this satire of French-style Aristotelian tragedy, the puppet serves to reveal the artificiality of dramatic conventions. It is not employed for its inherent qualities, but its faults: its stiffness, its clumsiness, its comic imitation of humans. Yet, as Foote's favoured actor Tate Wilkinson reports, the initial project for *Tragedy-a-la-Mode* was not a hit with audiences; it was only during its revival by 'accoutred ridiculously pompous'⁷¹ actors and through imitating puppet play that it became a success.

Foote once more employed puppets for satirical purposes with *The Primitive Puppet-Shew*, performed in 1773 at the Haymarket Theatre, in which a play of miniature theatre *The Handsome Housemaid, or Piety in Pattens* is included. The target here is the vogue for sentimental comedies, in particular *The Maid of the Mill*, Isaac Bickerstaffe's adaptation of the famous novel *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* by Samuel Richardson.⁷² Through shocking contrasts and the implausible acceleration of situation reversals, the action of *Piety in Pattens* ridicules the professions of virtue and the nobility of the soul that made sentimental literature successful. Polly Pattens, a poor chambermaid, is coveted by her master, the rich Squire, who proposes that she becomes his mistress in exchange for a very large sum of money. Overhearing this conversation, the butler Thomas warns Polly and offers her his hand in marriage. Polly rejects her master, who is so moved by her virtue that he declares that he now wants to marry her. Polly responds that she would prefer to marry Thomas, which prompts the Squire to offer them the gift of a small rent for their wedding. So as not to hurt the feelings of either Thomas or the Squire, Polly then decides not to marry anyone.

In *Piety in Pattens*, those playing the characters are human-sized marionettes controlled by rods and strings, devices that puppeteers developed in eighteenth-century Britain for fairground shows, but which seem to

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 298.

⁷¹ Wilkinson, *The Wandering Patentee*, vol. 1, 286.

⁷² See the introduction in Samuel N. Bogorad and Robert Gale Noyes's edition of the play: 'Samuel Foote's Primitive Puppet-Shew', *Theatre Survey* 14, no. 1a (1973): 1–15.

have been quickly abandoned.⁷³ Like a peddler, Samuel Foote intervenes during the performance by humorously commenting on the play: ‘the dialogue’s a little insipid, it’s true; but’tis done to heighten the rest’.⁷⁴ Even more than the choice of puppets for *Piety in Pattens*, the frame of the performance made *The Primitive Puppet-Shew* itself a theatrical event. The play is preceded by an introduction (Exordium) delivered by a puppet who, in terms that would not discredit Edward Gordon Craig, praises the puppets from Antiquity and regrets the lack of consideration presently attributed to them. The introduction continues with a list of the wood varieties that would likely be suitable for constructing each puppet based on the character represented (creeping ivy for lovers, weeping willow for Methodists, petrified wood for tragedians, birch for poets). The Exordium then singles out two figures: Arlequin, the ‘offspring of an incestuous marriage between folly and extravagance’, and Punch, whose ‘manners are too rude and licentious for the chastity of the present times’.⁷⁵ This ironic judgement is clearly designed to emphasise the fact that Foote chose an exaggeration verging on the absurd of the characteristics of sentimental comedy for the weapon of his parody, rather than debasing them through an interposition of triviality. At the end of the performance of *Piety in Pattens*, a commotion suddenly erupts in the theatre immediately after Polly Pattens has expressed her refusal to marry, which makes it appear as if some sort of incident is happening. A constable arrives, seizes the puppets, and arrests Foote. The performance resumes with the staging of a parodic trial against the playwright, but, in the end, it is ruled that since Foote has a wooden leg,⁷⁶ he is part-puppet and therefore cannot be prosecuted.

⁷³ See Brewer, ‘Rethinking Fictionality in the Eighteenth-Century Puppet Theatre’, 177–80.

⁷⁴ Bogorad and Noyes, ‘Samuel Foote’s Primitive Puppet-Shew’, 26.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 19. This mention of Punch may have been added after the first performance (15 February 1773). Foote reworked the text for the second performance (6 March 1773) and, to respond to the critics who reproached him for Punch’s absence in *The Primitive Puppet-Shew*, introduced an epilogue in which he converses with the puppet. See *ibid.*, 53, n. 7, and 80–82.

⁷⁶ Foote lost a leg during a hunt, and the financial compensation he received from those responsible for the accident allowed him to become the owner of a theatre.

Despite his praise of puppets and the play of personal identification that he had with them,⁷⁷ Foote abandoned what he had constructed for *Piety in Pattens* and, as he did with *Tragedy-a-la-Mode*, revived the play with actors in August 1773, the mode in which it was then regularly programmed at the Haymarket Theatre for several years. Much more than the exploration of possibilities offered by the puppet as a unique theatrical form, it was the effect produced by the animated object itself, in its imperfect representation of living beings, and, in turn, its capacity to reveal the stiffened, inhumane parts of living beings, that inspired its use in eighteenth-century parodies and satires. The puppet was less the signifier than the signified; it was a weapon brandished in the war in which performance venues and companies, actors and theatrical genres were engaged. The flaw that it opened up in the performance would only be employed in one way, as the adversary or the competitor that served to discredit it.

Using actual puppets was not even necessary; it sufficed to give the impression of them in the acting style, as Foote did in revivals of *Tragedy-a-la-Mode* and *Piety in Pattens*, or even like Henry Fielding (1707–54) in *The Author's Farce* (1730). Fielding's play portrays a dramatic poet whose works have been rejected by publishers and theatre directors, and his landlady threatens to throw him out onto the street. The writer, named Luckless, decides to write a play for puppets, *The Pleasures of the Town*, then is convinced to have it performed by actors. The third act of *The Author's Farce*, in which the performance of *The Pleasures of the Town* is inserted as a play within a play, gives Fielding the opportunity to ridicule the different types of shows that share the London stage: the allegorical figures of Signior Opera, Don Tragedio, Sir Farcical Comick, Dr Orator, Monsieur Pantomime, and Mrs Novel appear alongside Punch and his wife Joan. The action draws together the two plots, which Luckless summarises in the following terms: 'the Goddess Nonsense is to fall in love with the ghost of Signior Opera'.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Due to its public notoriety, Foote's use of puppets could also be a source of mockery. In 1775, Charles Dibdin presented in the Grand Salon of the Exeter Exchange a puppet show, *The Comic-Mirror*, in which a puppet of Samuel Foote appeared and recited the 'Exordium' from *Primitive Puppet-Shew*. See Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre*, 114.

⁷⁸ Scriblerus Secundus [Henry Fielding], *The Author's Farce and The Pleasures of the Town* (London: J. Watts, 1730), 29.

A twofold distancing device is introduced between the action staged in *The Pleasures of the Town* and its real and fictional spectators. First, several reminders that the characters should have been played by puppets are issued in the interventions of Punch and Joan, whose first appearance follows the outline of what appears to have become their classic scene: a dispute ending up in a comic dance. Second, Luckless reveals that all the characters are in fact dead and only appear as ghosts after having paid the toll to Charon to cross the Styx. At the end of the play, the intervention of the Presbyterian Murder-text, who believes that ‘a puppet-show is the Devil’s house’⁷⁹ and thus wants to burn down the theatre, introduces a first breach in this device. After having reproached Luckless for having overindulged in excessive nonsense, Murder-text and the accompanying Constable themselves shift the action into the absurd: they are seduced by Mrs Novel and start singing and dancing, thus participating in the show that they had come to interrupt. Yet, it is the untimely arrival of characters from the first two acts—Mrs Moneywood, Luckless’s landlady, her daughter Harriot whom he is in love with, and his friend Witmore, accompanied by an envoy from the kingdom of Bantam—that definitively breaks the partitioning between the two levels of fiction, that of the frame-play and that of the play within the play. A cascade of revelations reveals the respective royal lineages of Luckless and Harriot, then that of Punch, who discovers he is the son of Mrs Moneywood, queen of Old Brentford, and the brother of Harriot. The show ends with the ‘triumph of the king of Bantam’⁸⁰ Luckless, who inherits the crown from his conveniently dying father.

Starting as a satire of London theatre life, Fielding’s comedy goes far beyond simply having actors perform a text supposedly written for puppets as a play within a play. It also incorporates direct references to Punch and Joan’s actions in puppet shows, producing a collage effect, and transposes the eclecticism of their performances onto the stage of the Haymarket Theatre. As Marc Martinez explains, *The Author’s Farce* ‘reproduces the structure of fairground puppet plays, which, through employing the burlesque mode, brought together high and low culture, the sublime of the mythological underworld and the grotesque of the exchanges between Punch and Joan’.⁸¹ As such, Fielding, with

⁷⁹ Ibid., 52.

⁸⁰ *The Daily Post*, 3 April 1730.

⁸¹ Martinez, ‘Satire et théâtralité dans les spectacles de marionnettes de Henry Fielding et Samuel Foote (1730–1773)’, forthcoming.

astounding freedom for his time, pre-empts the implementation of a model of popular artistic forms that writers and artists would only begin developing some decades later.

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The Theatre of the People

THE GOLDEN AGE OF PUPPETRY

Puppet theatre in Western Europe underwent some of its most significant developments in the long nineteenth century, from the French Revolution to the outbreak of the First World War. During this period, puppet shows became deeply rooted in social life, reaching the most modest audiences and those furthest from urban centres. These developments were part of a broader context of increasing activity within the field of the performing arts, but puppet theatre's closer connection to the lower classes makes it a unique case. This relationship can notably be seen in the creation of heroes who were supposed to represent this section of society, the recurring use of local dialects and manners of speaking, financial precarity, which affected almost all artists, and the puppeteers' basic level of education.

This proximity was viewed with suspicion. Some authorities refused to allow new venues to open, others simply banned puppets or attempted to restrict them to the category of 'spectacles de curiosité' (curiosity shows),¹ and many had their activities closely watched. In Lyon under the Second Empire, such surveillance was justified by the argument that 'these establishments are generally only frequented by the most repugnant

¹ In France, the *Décret concernant les théâtres* of 8 June 1806 (Article 15) classified puppets as 'spectacles de curiosité', which prohibited them from using the appellation 'theatre' and, consequently, from performing the dramatic repertoire.

individuals from the working class' and that 'the scenes they perform are composed of the most detestable rhapsodies and rarely does the play end without advocating for rape and murder'.² Yet these accusations, which reveal more about the dominant classes' prejudices than the reality of the shows performed, did not succeed in dampening popular enthusiasm for puppets, which, after all, was simply an enthusiasm for theatre in and of itself, but made more accessible due to its low cost. As with large theatres, spectators flocked to puppet shows for the stories they recounted, the characters appearing on stage, and the technical skills and the artistic power they presented.

It would be impossible to establish a common chronology for all the regional contexts studied here. For example, as John McCormick and Bennie Pratasik have rightly highlighted, this 'golden age' continued until the 1950s in Sicily.³ However, at the very least, evidence proves that the numbers of artists and performance venues almost everywhere continued to grow across the whole of the nineteenth century and reached their peak around 1900. Itinerant companies also developed considerable levels of activity: in Saxony, for example, 150 travelling string-marionette theatres were active at the turn of the century, reaching a combined total of around two million spectators each year, primarily in towns and villages.⁴ During the same period, Liège (157,000 inhabitants) had 65 performance spaces for puppets⁵; Lille (210,000 inhabitants) had around 50⁶; and in Amiens (between 83,000 and 91,000 inhabitants), as many as 19 were operating simultaneously between 1891 and 1900. Performances were given in ground floor shops, cellars, and sometimes even the bedrooms

² Extracts from assessments submitted concerning requests for authorisation to open a Guignol show, cited in Paul Fournel, *Guignol – Les Mourguet* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995), 42–44.

³ John McCormick and Bennie Pratasik, *Popular Puppet Theatre in Europe, 1800–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4.

⁴ Olf Bernstengel and Lars Rebehn, *Volkstheater an Fäden. Vom Massenmedium zum musealen Objekt – sächsisches Marionettentheater im 20. Jahrhundert* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2007), 11.

⁵ Rodolphe de Warsage [Edmond Schoonbroodt], 'Conférence faite à la Soupente par M. de Warsage, le 17 novembre 1927', transcription, Fonds Léopold Dor, Musée des Arts de la Marionnette – Musée Gadagne, Lyon.

⁶ Joan Gross, *Speaking in Other Voices. An Ethnography of Walloon Puppet Theaters* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001), 49.

of private homes⁷ for an admission fee, which was often less than the price of a half pint of beer.

Whilst many street puppeteers were now performing on squares and promenades, in public gardens, in front of chairs and benches reserved for paying spectators, others took up residence for entire seasons in city theatres and even managed some of these establishments. The old division between glove puppets mainly performing in the open air and string- and rod-marionettes in enclosed spaces began to blur. From 1838 onwards, the Guignol tradition in Lyon was developed in cafes; it also found a home in the living rooms of private individuals and, in the 1880s, even the ornate rococo-style construction of the Théâtre du Gymnase which Pierre Rousset had acquired. These new performance conditions radically transformed the experience of watching puppet shows, which henceforth were longer and had a more complex construction. The number of spectators also increased. Fairground string-marionette companies used transportable theatres that could be assembled in each town: one constructed for Émile-Isidore Pitou in 1891 could accommodate up to 400 spectators.⁸

In addition to the growing numbers of performance spaces, audiences, and professional and semi-professional artists, the texts within repertoires also increased. In northern Italy in particular, where ‘famiglie d’arte’ passed down ‘copioni’ (manuscripts) from one generation to the next, some dynasties accumulated collections whose size represents a challenge today for both archival institutions and researchers. From his small puppet booth on Piazza Maggiore in Bologna, the ‘burattinaio’ Angelo Cuccoli (1834–1905) performed a different show every night for four months (15 May to 15 September): his repertoire, held at the city’s Biblioteca comunale dell’Archiginnasio,⁹ includes more than 300 ‘canovacci’ (scenarios). The travelling puppeteer Christian Heinrich Niedermeier (1836–1913),

⁷ ‘I saw a performance in a shop where the shutters were closed on an evening, others performed in a cellar; I saw some in a bedroom where we had to stand, but those who paid the most could sit on the bed; the children were put in the wardrobe’: de Warsage, ‘Conférence faite à la Soupepte’, 2.

⁸ *L’Indépendant du Cher*, 31 May 1891, cited in Yanna Kor, ‘Émile Pitou’s *Memoirandum*. The life of a French traveling puppeteer at the turn of the 19th Century’, *EASTAP Journal* 2 (2020): 594–605.

⁹ Albano Sorbelli, ‘Angelo Cuccoli e le sue commedie’, *L’Archiginnasio* 4, no. 6 (1909): 233.

who was active in the Ore Mountains, left a collection of 200 handwritten plays. In Sicily, the ‘opranti’¹⁰ wrote down in notebooks the summaries of the adventures of Charlemagne and his knights, which were performed across dozens of daily episodes, sometimes stretching out over a year.¹¹ At Brussels’s Théâtre Toone, the same approach was used for the novels of Paul Féval and Michel Zévaco, each providing the material for theatrical series lasting several months.

The repertoires themselves were astonishingly diverse: from melodrama to vaudeville, farce to dramas based on current affairs, the lives of saints to those of highwaymen. Edmondo de Amicis’s article from the end of the nineteenth century about the Lupi family of string-marionette puppeteers, who had been active in Turin since 1818, offers insight into this diversity:

You asked about the composition of their repertoire.

That’s a daunting question. To respond, I would need to write an entire volume. Between dramas, comedies, farces, revues, ballets, and fantasies, the repertoire encompasses the universe across space and time; from the great flood to the siege of Mekelle,¹² including myths, national histories and local news stories; it extends from China to California, from Kaffraria to Greenland, from the heavens to the bottom of the ocean, from the spheres of paradise to the circles of Hell. It is made up of the old *commedie dell’arte*, dramas cobbled together from all literatures, ballets by Pratesi and Manzotti, operas by Meyerbeer and Verdi, all the great pages of the nation’s military history from the Battle of Goito to the occupation of Rome,¹³ then all the congresses, earthquakes, epidemics, floods, coronations, exhibitions, and great discoveries that followed one another across the two continents in the last fifty years. All the sovereigns, all the great statemen, generals and heroes, all the Italians famous in whichever field or for whatever they have done, from 1821 to our days, have appeared on stage, not only mentioned by name but as effigies, carefully sculpted with

¹⁰ Name given to puppeteers from the *Opera dei pupi*.

¹¹ Anna Leone has been able to identify up to 370 episodes in the version by Peppino Celano, ‘oprante’ and ‘cuntista’ from Palermo active in 1950s, which was copied by his pupil Mimmo Cuticchio who holds it in his archives. Anna Leone, ‘Il repertorio non cavalleresco della famiglia Cuticchio e le serate speciali: dai canovacci ricopiati e tramandati ai testi d’autore’ (forthcoming).

¹² A city in Ethiopia where the Italian army were defeated in a battle in 1896.

¹³ The Battle of Goito (30 May 1848) and the taking of Rome by the French troops (July 1849) who came to fight the short-lived Roman Republic and re-establish power to Pope Pius IX within the Papal States.

an incredible likeness, dressed as they were dressed, reproducing where possible their mannerisms and their voices, presenting the most important acts of their public lives and the most well-known details of their private lives.¹⁴

Evidently, in some contexts, puppet theatre was not simply a cheaper rival to live theatre; it also became a repository that combined cultural memory and artistic life, the great pages from recent history and current politics, scientific discoveries and human-interest stories. Taking into account the subjects covered and the social diversity of audiences, puppet shows were mass media ahead of their time, as Olf Bernstengel and Lars Rebehn have quite rightly described.¹⁵

Not all centres of puppetry activity covered such a broad scope. Many with more limited staging means specialised in smaller repertoires, but what is evident is a vast diversity in the activities of artists and companies who needed to offer spectators much more than the simple imitation of an ordinary evening at the theatre. In practice, this meant supplementing the usual combination of one long form (drama, melodrama, vaudeville, comedy) and one short form (farce, one act) with brief entertainment acts such as songs, ballets, mechanical figurine shows, and shadow play. Whilst divisions between different animation techniques remained the general rule, some overlap did begin to occur when some companies switched from one type to another (for example, the Sales-Belloni in Turin traded gloves for strings in the mid-nineteenth century to target a more sophisticated audience)¹⁶ and techniques were combined within the same show to maintain interest. Shadow play and marionettes were often employed one after the other: at the end of the eighteenth century, Johann Georg Geisselbrecht progressively introduced rod- and string-marionettes into the middle of his shadow puppet and pyrotechnics shows (smoke and fireworks accompanying the apparition of a bust of Albrecht Dürer, for example) for which he obtained authorisation from the city of

¹⁴ Edmondo de Amicis, 'Un piccolo teatro celebre', in *La vita italiana*, book 3, vol. 1 (1896–97), reprinted in *Ricordi d'infanzia e di scuola* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1913), 210–11.

¹⁵ Bernstengel and Rebehn, *Volkstheater an Fäden*, *passim*.

¹⁶ Roberto Leydi, 'Il repertorio e le marionette', in *Eroi, mostri e maschere. Il repertorio tradizionale nel teatro di animazione Italiano*, ed. Antonio Pasqualino and Janne Vibek (Florence: Artificio, 1990), 24.

Nuremberg.¹⁷ In the 1850s, the Guignol puppeteers Louis Josserand and Victor-Napoléon Vuillerme-Dunand began their performances at the Café Condamin with a shadow puppet act, which allowed them to prolong the evening's entertainment until 11.30 pm, whereas their competitors generally finished at 9 pm.¹⁸

Across all the techniques that puppeteers employed, two constant characteristics emerge from the relationship to their respective repertoires. First, they always maintained a distance to the text performed, which was a general rule on European stages during the nineteenth century: the actor had no qualms about modifying their role and, having generally only rehearsed for a week beforehand, held the audience's attention more through their dynamic acting style than by its precision. One of the first battles in the modern 'mise-en-scène' would be to impose a stricter conformity to the dramatic work. However, these liberties are hardly comparable with those used by puppeteers who were largely still working from memory alone, either because they avoided writing down their repertoires through fear of plagiarism or they lacked the writing skills which prevented them from doing so. Moreover, those who possessed manuscripts did not necessarily consult them for their performances—for example, a puppeteer like Niedermeier, who, as previously mentioned, had a large collection of manuscripts, knew by heart the 20 or so plays he usually performed.¹⁹

Written text, even when it was copied in legible handwriting and available to puppeteers during the performance (as evidenced by the worn condition of the notebooks and the darkening of their page corners that had been turned hundreds of times), only served as a backup: rather than pinning down the details of the performance in advance, ink and paper recorded an outline of what had to be done to reproduce it. In cases where a complete copy and not a simple scenario exists, the text written down by nineteenth-century puppeteers, like those of medieval minstrels, is not a finalised theatrical work; it is 'a crystallisation suspended between

¹⁷ Gerd Eversberg, *Das Marionettenspiel vom Doktor Faust. Georg Geisselbrecht und seine Faust-Version um 1800* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2012), 28–32.

¹⁸ Fournel, *Guignol*, 37.

¹⁹ See Lars Rebehn, 'La bonne mémorisation', *Séminaires PuppetPlays* 1 (2020): <https://nakala.fr/10.34847/nkl.f55bzz17>.

two oralities',²⁰ the trace left by a series of performances, rather than the materialisation of a project of dramatic writing. These texts must also be read with much caution, bearing in mind their performance for an often-restless audience,²¹ which involved some improvisation each time. Only from the end of the nineteenth century onwards and in increasingly less popular contexts, such as the theatres of Guignol and Kasperl, were puppeteers' plays recorded in a definitive written form: some of them desired literary recognition as the increasing number of texts published, the growing use of versified forms, and even the admittance into writers' societies²² attest.

The second constant in the relationship between puppeteers and their repertoires is a disregard for the original authors. Across all linguistic and cultural areas, the majority of plays that have been preserved are anonymous. Seeking to identify who wrote them is an impossible task: when names do appear on the manuscripts, they belong to the owner or the transcriber of the copy. Rather than an 'original work' as understood through the modern concept of copyright, those who produced texts for puppets considered them a material object to be inherited or sold, and which would need to be copied again when it was too worn out through use. For the manuscripts submitted to the censor's office in the second half of the nineteenth century, the names included are either that of the theatre manager or the most educated member of the troupe who had written up the text to obtain authorisation to perform it.

Only long-established families of operators endeavoured to preserve the memory of works produced by prominent members of the dynasty. Once again, these members were not necessarily the authors of the works, and this memento was created especially for plays that had ceased being revived after their passing. Crossing out, additions, and corrections reveal that the texts of shows still being performed were regularly modified by

²⁰ Taku Kuroiwa, Xavier Leroux, and Darwin Smith, 'De l'oral à l'oral: réflexions sur la transmission écrite des textes dramatiques au Moyen Âge', *Médiévales* 59 (2010): 38.

²¹ The tradition of installing a thin metal railing or a net between the stage and the room potentially emerged, as is generally affirmed, from the desire to hide the rods and strings from the eyes of the public. Moreover, it provided protection for the puppets against schoolchildren and students amusing themselves by throwing objects.

²² Gaston Cony, who managed a Guignol theatre in the Parc des Buttes-Chaumont in Paris, was accepted as a member of the Société des Auteurs, Société des Gens de Lettres, and the Société des Poètes Français at the end of the First World War.

successive artists. As works without authors, plays for puppets are without authority: others remodelled them or rewrote them at will to adapt to new audiences as a review of the Guignol shows in *La Gazette de Lyon* attests:

There is still the house move scene, that of the donkey milk, the poodle, and so many others as their number continues to grow, or rather they are being modified, transformed according to the events and customs of the day.²³

The continual updating of works did not stop puppeteers from sometimes foregrounding the age of a text as seen in a handwritten copy of the féerie *Le Voyage de Guignol dans la Lune* (*Guignol's travel to the Mond*) held in the Fonds Léopold Dor archive at the Musée Gadagne in Lyon.²⁴ The name of Louis Josserand père (1796–1855) and the date '1852–1854' appear on the cover²⁵; but another Guignol puppeteer Joanny Durafour (1853–1938) reveals in the notebook's last pages that it was actually copied by his own hand in 1905. This copy is a rare example of scrupulous documentation with Durafour identifying in his comments the elements introduced in the half century since the play was created: an interlude of 'mechanised dancers' (likely articulated silhouettes) brought from Paris by Louis Josserand père who saw them being used at Théâtre des Pantagoniens where he worked during the Directory²⁶; a procession of animals accompanying Guignol's balloon voyage, an invention by his two sons Laurent and Louis Josserand; several versified passages inserted in 1889 during the last performances in Lyon given by Henry Delisle; 'La Lune à un mètre', a tableau that Durafour himself added for a revival in Marseille in 1903, and clearly inspired by Georges Méliès's film *A Trip to the Moon* (1902); and, lastly, different versions of a 'grand finale'.

²³ M. de V., 'Lyon et ses monuments', *La Gazette de Lyon*, 25 December 1847.

²⁴ Louis Josserand père, *Le Voyage de Guignol dans la Lune* (1852–54), Fonds Léopold Dor, D88, Musée des Arts de la Marionnette – Musée Gadagne, Lyon.

²⁵ Another copy of this play includes the handwritten detail 'Mourguet, 1830', which would make it the oldest dated Guignol text, but it seems very unlikely.

²⁶ The Théâtre des Pantagoniens, managed by Claude-François-Maurice Maffey, was a puppet show famous for its mechanical figurines. See Émeline Rotolo, 'Stratégies et réseaux d'entrepreneurs de spectacles de marionnettes, les Maffey (1793–1845): approches économique, terminologique et prosopographique', in *Spectacles et artistes forains XVII^e–XIX^e siècles*, ed. Pauline Beauccé, Bertrand Porot, and Cyril Triolaire (Reims: Épure, 2004), 357–79.

As plural works, the handwritten copies of plays for puppets are what remain of a subtle, and generally invisible, stratification of successive interventions. They are not designed to preserve a tradition, but represent its continual reinvention through contact with new audiences and new artistic contexts. The theatrical environment in which puppeteers worked changed considerably throughout the nineteenth century: a complex system was progressively implemented, including, on the one hand, an ever more varied and extensive offering of shows (opera, ballet, pantomime, melodrama, vaudeville, comedy) and, on the other, the various activities of amateur circles from which numerous puppet theatre artists emerged. As a stakeholder in this ‘theatrical system’²⁷ in which the same narrative material was used over long periods of time on different stages and in different performance languages, puppet theatre fought to find its place, sometimes aligning with aspects of the theatrical modes of the time,²⁸ other times fiercely preserving its uniqueness. Only the temporal distance between then and now, by overlooking the puppeteers’ need to live from their art and continually renegotiate their role within the theatrical system, could lead to the belief that unchanging traditions existed.

THE BIBLE AS SOURCE TEXT

Across many regional contexts, the presence of episodes borrowed from the Old and New Testaments in their repertoires is one of the distinguishing features of popular puppet theatres. From the Middle Ages onwards, as the previous chapters have shown, the Creation of the world, the Great Flood and Noah’s Ark, the story of the prophet Jonah, and the arrival of the three Magi were popular subjects for different types of animation shows: ‘motions’ in England, ‘retables mécaniques’ in France, ‘Himmelreich’ in German-speaking countries, exhibitions of wax

²⁷ This expression is owed to Giovanni Moretti. His study *Attori e baracche. Il fornaretto nel sistema teatrale* (Torino: Seb27, 2002) examines the transformations of the historical drama *Il fornaretto* (The Little Baker) by Francesco Dall’Ongaro (1846) in the different theatres for which it was adapted.

²⁸ One of the big successes for the fairground puppeteer Émile Pitou, for example, was the theatrical adaptation *Tour du monde en 80 jours* based on Jules Verne’s novel. For the show, he copied exactly the scenery and special effects seen at the Grand-Théâtre in Saint-Étienne.

animated figures or semi-automata,²⁹ ‘mundinovi’, and all sorts of peep shows presented at fairs and markets. However, it would be erroneous to conclude that these examples formed traditions spanning centuries as some historians have suggested, sometimes even drawing a continuous thread from the medieval mysteries to the puppet shows of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the entry for ‘Marionnette’ in the *Dictionnaire universel des littératures* (*Universal Dictionary of Literatures*, 1876), for example, Gustave Vapereau wrote:

... in Paris, in the middle of the eighteenth century, one still sees the last of the dramatic Mysteries performed by wood and wax actors: *L’Origine du monde et la chute du premier homme* (1763) by the operator and impresario Josse on Rue Greneta.³⁰

In reality, this ‘performance of paint, mechanics, and music’³¹ in five acts created in 1763 by the fan manufacturer and stamp seller Pierre-Charles Josse in a room of his workshop can in no way be considered the heir to medieval theatre. According to Josse, his source of inspiration was John Milton’s epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667). However, its direct model is very likely *La Chute des anges rebelles*³² (*The fall of the rebel angels*), a show, also inspired by Milton, performed in 1758 by Giovanni Niccolò Servandoni at the Salle des Machines in the Palais des Tuileries. Far from being the last link in an uninterrupted chain of transmission from the Middle Ages, Josse’s setting of the poem to imagery and music is part of a movement in the second half of the eighteenth century that revived small theatrical forms on religious subjects, far from the professional stages, and in which puppets were one of the preferred devices.

Space constraints do not allow for this book to establish the reasons why many performances with puppets of subjects taken from the Bible appeared in several regions of Western Europe in this period, or how they

²⁹ For a description of a Passion performed using wax figures at the end of the nineteenth century in a fairground hunt in Nuremberg, see Oskar Panizza, ‘Das Wachsfigurenkabinett’, in *Dämmrungsstücke* (Leipzig: Friedrich, 1890).

³⁰ Gustave Vapereau, ‘Marionnette’, in *Dictionnaire universel des littératures* (Paris: Hachette, 1876), 1338.

³¹ [Pierre-Charles Josse], *L’Origine du monde et la chute du premier homme* (Paris: Claude Hérisant, 1763).

³² *Description du spectacle de La Chute des anges rebelles* (Paris: Imprimerie Sébastien Jorry, 1758).

might have been transmitted. Aside from sharing a source of inspiration, these shows generally had nothing in common with the fairground exhibitions of the previous centuries. Two fundamental differences distinguish them: a strong local rooting embedded in the performance through the use of local dialects, and the development of characters, situations, and even autonomous narrative sequences. For example, in 1798, the date for the first trace of the Bonecos de Santo Aleixo in Alentejo province Southern Portugal, the priest Vicente Pedro de Rosa had so-called Santo Aleixo 'titeres' seized and burnt outside his house, including one that represented Padre Chanca in a 'dishonest and vile' way.³³ Padre Chanca (or Chancas), a burlesque parish priest, and his sidekick Mestre-Salas form a comic duo whose dialogues punctuate the whole performance according to the version that was written down in the mid-nineteenth century at the latest.³⁴ In this repertoire of popular and essentially rural theatre, each show is structured around an episode from the Bible, but it also mixes different registers from innocent illustrations of sacred history to the most irreverent peasant farces.

Christine Zurbach, José Alberto Ferreira, and Paulo Seixas, who published these texts,³⁵ classify them according to three categories. The 'autos', performed first, are the main part of the show: they recount stories taken from the start of Genesis to the punishment of Cain, the Nativity, and even the Passion of Christ. The second part, the 'passos', features comic scenes with profane subject matter. For example, the *Passo do Barbeiro* (*Barbershop Scene*) portrays a barber and his client who will not stop dancing, criticises his equipment, then refuses to pay, and in the end, Mestre-Salas kills him. *A confissão da Beata* (*The Confession of Beata*) begins with a series of absurd dialogues and then takes the theme of a

³³ Padre Joaquim José da Rocha Espanca, *Memória de Vila-Viçosa*, 36 vols. (Viçosa: Câmara Municipal de Vila Viçosa, 1983–[92]), vol. 35, 133. See Christine Zurbach, 'Le répertoire du théâtre de marionnettes au Portugal: le cas des Bonecos de Santo Aleixo', in *La máquina real y el teatro de títeres de repertorio en Europa y América*, ed. Francisco J. Cornejo (Madrid: UNIMA Federación España, 2017), 106.

³⁴ On the history of this preservation effort, see Zurbach, 'Le répertoire du théâtre de marionnettes au Portugal', 99–111.

³⁵ Christine Zurbach, José Alberto Ferreira, and Paulo Seixas, eds., *Autos, passos e bailinhos. Os textos dos Bonecos de Santo Aleixo* (Évora: Casa do Sul Editora/CENDREV, 2007).

traditional tale from the Iberian Peninsula³⁶: the Padre Chancas, hearing Beata's confession, learns that she has stolen a suckling pig, but just as he is about to impose a penitence, she reminds him that he ate the best pieces and demands payment for what she gave to him. In *Filomena e Zeferino*, a matchmaker helps the barber Zeferino to seduce the young Filomena. Zeferino promises that Filomena will not have to work, but as soon as the marriage celebrations are over, he beats her for making him have to, then he addresses the young women in the audience to warn them against such misadventures. The third category of texts is made up of songs and short danced interludes that can also contain dialogue, like the *Baile dos cágados* (*Dance of Turtles*), in which the turtle keeper makes his entrance with his head down, then two turtles join him, poke their heads out of their shells, attack the keeper, and make him fall on his feet before exiting. Using one-string-marionettes (the traditional animation technique for the *Bonecos de Santo Aleixo*), this sequence is the equivalent of the short transformation numbers that fairground puppeteers in other contexts performed with shadow puppets or mechanical silhouettes as part of their shows.

With the musical accompaniment of the Portuguese guitar and the heavenly ballet of cherubs with lit oil lamps above the stage to begin and end each performance, the disputes of Padre Chancas and Mestre-Salas (who is armed with a baton that he uses to beat the priest whenever he can) are one of the main structuring elements of these shows, especially in the second comic part (the first being reserved for religious subject matter). Yet the division between the two materials, sacred and profane, is not always clear-cut: in the second part, Padre Chancas's presence allows for the conflict between the small rural people of the Alentejo and the power of the Church, which is ridiculed, to be staged in the mode of farce. In *O sermão do Padre Chancas* (*Father Chancas's Sermon*), the visibly drunk Catholic priest praises wine, drunkenness, and the god Baco (Bacchus). In *A confissão do Mestre-Salas* (*The Confession of Mestre-Salas*), the titular character, before admitting his first sin to Padre Chancas, requests that he be served a Pantagruelian meal washed down with copious amounts of alcohol, at the end of which he vomits on his confessor. Even the episodes from the Bible, staged in the first part, can

³⁶ See José Manuel Pedrosa, 'A confissão da Beata: entre la comedia de títeres y el cuento anticlerical', in *Autos, passos e baílinhos. Os textos dos Bonecos de Santo Aleixo*, ed. Christine Zurbach, José Alberto Ferreira, and Paulo Seixas (Évora: Casa do Sul Editora/CENDREV, 2007), 27–34.

be subverted through laughter: in the *Auto da Criação do Mundo* (*Auto of the Creation of the World*) just after the creation of the Sun and the Moon, the entrance of Padre Chancas and Mestre-Salas interrupts the dialogue of heavenly bodies. The two partners then argue at length to decide who will speak to the audience first. When the animals parade in front of Adam so he can give them names (Genesis 2:19), Mestre-Salas intervenes each time with an argument or a joke. When Cain, after having killed his brother Abel, arrives in Hell, he sits down at a table with three Devils to begin a card game.

By closely mixing an expression of religious faith, and even sentimental attachment to certain figures from sacred history (the angels, Adam and Eve, the baby Jesus), with the farce-like treatment of the Catholic clergy and its ministry, the Bonecos de Santo Aleixo offer an entirely unique perspective. Such anti-clerical inspiration has no equivalent in the puppet shows of other regional European traditions. However, like the Bonecos, most present an overlap to varying degrees between Christian legends and the world in which their spectators lived, the distant past and places of tales drawn from the Bible, and the here and now of the immediate environment. In this respect, these performances were profoundly different from earlier forms that closely conformed to the source texts in their presentation of religious subject matter.

NATIVITY SCENES

Whilst the Passion, which popular puppet theatres rarely performed, did not lend itself well to divergences from the canonical story,³⁷ the staging of the Nativity sheds light on this new way to present religious subjects. In the eighteenth century, there was an increase across several European regions in the number of Nativity scenes with immobile figures that, following a custom which had begun in Naples some decades earlier ('presepio'), integrated profane themes. Quaint tableaux of daily life were portrayed around the protagonists of the birth of Jesus, establishing a silent and miniaturised theatrum mundi. During the same period, along the length of the Rhine Valley and in Austria, numerous puppet theatres popped up from the first Sunday of Advent until the end of carnival and performed their 'Krippenspiele' (Nativity shows), which, despite their name and differing from Nativity scenes strictly speaking, recounted vast swathes of sacred history. In Vienna, for example, Barbara Müller, known as Frau Godl (1710–89), created one of these sets at her inn in 1748, which would remain active for more than a century: 36 mechanical tableaux without dialogue (Frau Godl provided the commentary herself) started with the story of the creation of the world and ended with the wedding at Cana. Only two tableaux have profane subjects, presenting a hunting scene and a wine harvest scene, but comic elements are introduced elsewhere: when the Israelites rush to gather the manna in the

³⁷ With the exception of the *Mystère de la Passion* reconstructed by Michel de Ghelderode, which is discussed in Chapter 8, performances of the Passion using puppets in Belgium or northern France generally follow quite closely the version in the Gospels. In his description of one Passion split over seven episodes during Holy Week by the pupi of Catania, Henry Festing Jones mentions different comic routines with Judas: see *Castellinaria and Other Sicilian Diversions* (London: A. C. Fifields, 1911), 261–86. The main text to which significant original developments were added is the version performed by the travelling puppeteer Émile Pitou at the end of the nineteenth century: notably Crasmagne, the comic character invented by Pitou, takes on the role of a Roman soldier, argues with the son of an executioner, and does not understand his captain's orders. A handwritten copy of this play, created between 1914 and 1924, is held at MUCEM in Marseille. Émile Pitou, *La Passion, ou la vie, la mort et la résurrection de N. S. J. C.*, play in 9 acts, 17 tableaux, Fonds Pitou, CS-93P25. See also McCormick and Pratasik, *Popular Puppet Theatre in Europe 1800–1914*, 161–62.

desert, they run into one another and drop their baskets; for the circumcision of Jesus, the temple assistants tasked with lighting the lamps argue and set each other's hair on fire.³⁸

From the end of the eighteenth century onwards, animated Nativity scenes, following on from scenes with immobile figures, increased the number of profane elements. Several of them came close to a puppet show by mixing direct manipulation and mechanical movements. One example that attests to this transformation is the Steyrer Kripperl: it was created in around 1820 from the installation of an older travelling Nativity scene and progressively expanded until it was exhibited at an inn in Steyr from 1895 onwards. Whilst the immobile and silent Holy Family occupies the foreground at the centre of the stage, a whole miniature town of over 100 figures, alone or in groups, is animated around them on three levels of staging. Some of these figures, 15–20 cm in height, are set in motion with the help of simple mechanisms (craftspeople at work, couples dancing at an inn, etc.), others are controlled from above using rods for the sung or dialogued scenes. One of them depicts a lamplighter being pestered by a rascal who blows out the gas burner whenever his back is turned. After the scene is repeated several times, the lamplighter pursues the naughty joker across the whole town and, when he catches him, sets his hat alight to take his revenge. As Beatrix Müller-Kampel notes in her letter of support for the inscription of the Steyrer Kripperl on Austria's list of intangible cultural heritage,³⁹ the link between the staging of the Nativity and the added theatrical action has entirely disappeared from the show.

Without reaching such a degree of profane transformation, the animated Nativity scenes that appeared in the nineteenth century often shifted focus from the celebration of the birth of Jesus to a population carrying out everyday activities. In a comparable way to Pieter Bruegel the Elder's treatment of the mythological subject in *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (around 1558), the biblical tale is relegated to the margins, a simple pretext for the performance of acts that draw the attention: the work of a labourer and a shepherd, a ship's arrival into port in Bruegel's

³⁸ Hans R. Purschke, *Die Puppenspieltraditionen Europas. Deutschsprachige Gebiete* (Frankfurt: Puppen und Masken, 1986), 181.

³⁹ Beatrix Müller-Kampel, 'Das Steyrer Kripperl. Empfehlungsschreiben für die Aufnahme in das österreichische Verzeichnis des immateriellen Kulturerbes' (2016), https://www.unesco.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Kulturerbe_SteyrerKripperl_Gutachten_BMueller-Kampel.pdf.

painting; the painting of a idealised village community in the Nativity scene. What distinguishes the puppeteers' approach is the inclusion of individual figures with whom the audience was invited to identify and an increasing amount of regional colour in the show.

In Verviers, evidence exists of a Nativity scene play by puppets called 'bethléem' from the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁴⁰ It was presented in the form of around 20 raised houses positioned against the walls of a large room. Each represented a tableau in front of which a pedlar invited visitors to gather; she then introduced and briefly commented on it. Children crouching behind the curtains beneath each house sang Christmas songs and set in motion the little mechanisms that made the figurines slide on grooves to perform everyday actions: simulating walking, descending from the mountains, spinning wool on a wheel, sawing a plank of wood, and grinding the grain in a windmill. The profane subjects included the 'pûri bièrdji' (lazy shepherd) who, without getting up, shows a peasant the way to Bethlehem with his foot; the 'mâle Magrite' who refuses to welcome Joseph and Mary into her home and chases them away with a broom, but her husband disciplines her with a stick; and the 'cuzène' (cousin) Garite, simply sitting in her home with her husband in front of a plate of black pudding, a bottle, and two glasses. After having given birth, Mary spins linen as she controls the motion of her sleeping child's crib with her foot. Through their focus on everyday life, these micro-actions connect the spectator's world and that of the Gospels, fostering a sentimental attachment to the Holy Family. Yet, it was the variety of the local figures, the care given to reconstructing Walloon households, and the increasing number of tiny realist details (for example, a turnip placed on a pitcher of milk to protect its contents against flies) that encouraged audiences to see themselves in the performance.

One of the most complete examples of this dramaturgy of the animated Nativity scene was not a show transmitted over the course of several generations, but an individual creation whose text was published in 1851. Customs officer, poet, and painter Antoine Bertro from Sète (southern France) presented *Représentation de la naissance de N. S. Jésus-Christ* (*Performance of the Birth of Our Saviour Jesus Christ*) in the form of

⁴⁰ See Jules Feller, *Le Bethléem verviétois: une survivance d'ancien théâtre religieux de marionnettes*, 3rd ed. (Verviers: Auguste Nicolet, 1931), 67.

a ‘large mechanical theatre’ for his children⁴¹: each short, dialogued comedy sketch depicts a local trade, figure, or costume. The show begins with a woodcutter felling the tree he is sawing, which is succeeded by a hunter wanting to kill a chaffinch to offer it to Jesus, a bear tamer and his bear, a wet nurse, a Bohemian woman, a customs officer, a schoolmaster who repents for having struck his pupils, a matchstick seller, two couples in regional costumes, and finally the Eternal Father who blesses them all.

Due to the diverse range of successive or simultaneous actions presented by pedlars or in brief dialogued moments, performances of these animated Nativity scenes did not leave room for any real dramatic development. On the contrary, representations of the Nativity on smaller stages within the confined frame of a puppet theatre performance did: spatial concentration and the abandoning of the simultaneous action helped established fictional time. The embryonic stages of this process can be seen in *La Crèche (The Crib)* from Lyon’s Théâtre Joly (1831–1903) in which two successive entries are integrated into the story of the birth of Jesus. The first opposes the egotism of the rich and the generosity of the poor in a long dispute between the innkeeper Barabola⁴² and his neighbour Daniel, who reproaches him for not wanting to welcome Joseph and Mary who is about to give birth. Outraged by Barabola’s cynicism, Daniel offers the couple the only room he owns: the stable in Bethlehem. The second entry stages a dialogue between an old couple from Lyon, Père and Mère Coquard, who have come to pay homage to Jesus:

Coquard.

Do you have a *babo*,⁴³ my love, on your pretty little feet?

Mère Coquard.

No! ... But it’s tiresome tiptoeing around.

I can’t see a thing, my sweetie, lift up your lantern,

⁴¹ Antoine Bartro, *Représentation de la naissance de N. S. Jésus-Christ* (Montpellier: Jullien, 1851).

⁴² Parabola in the version published by Gaston Baty, *Le Théâtre Joly* (Paris: Coutan-Lambert, 1937).

⁴³ A small boo-boo in Lyon dialect.

I'm in a bad patch, these tracks are pitiful.⁴⁴

The lover's dialogue gradually gives way to an improvised dispute with the two old people refusing to leave before having praised the audience. The casual language contrasts with the pompous lyricism used for the protagonists in the Nativity scene. Intimate conversations are aired publicly in front of the spectators alongside trivial considerations and bawdy innuendos about the past sprightliness of their frolicking, multiple misunderstandings, and quarrels over importance. The tableau of the Coquard couple creates numerous ruptures with the solemn context of the Nativity scene and, according to those who witnessed it, was the part of the show that the audiences most looked forward to.⁴⁵

Local appropriation was not always part of new narrative developments: the inclusion of emblematic figures and dialogued scenes in regional languages was enough to create the link between the population and the evangelical tales. In Liège, performances of *Li Naissance* (*The Nativity*) featured Tchantchès and Tchantchesse (or Nanesse), popular heroes who featured across the whole repertoire, both epic and comic, of local puppet theatres. These characters were the only ones who spoke in Walloon and appeared under the guises of different traditional figures from the Nativity: Tchantchès successively lent his traits to the innkeeper who, unable to accommodate Joseph and Mary, shows them to the stable, to the guard who introduces the three Magi to Herod's palace, and to a peasant who harvests wheat and misleads the soldiers by telling them he saw the Holy Family during sowing season. Several Tchantchès and Tchantchesse also appear simultaneously, first playing shepherds and peasants who come to pay homage to the baby Jesus, and then the parents whose babies were killed on Herod's orders.⁴⁶ In Amiens, *El Naissanche* (*The Nativity*) further developed the role of the spokesperson of local identity with the comic valet Lafleur. In the version composed by the Picard poet Édouard David (known as Tchot Doère, 1863–1932), Lafleur

⁴⁴ *La Crèche*, a mystery in seven parts. Manuscript copied by Louis Burillon in 1904. Fonds Léopold Dor, Box 86, D144, Musée des Arts de la Marionnette – Musée Gadagne, Lyon.

⁴⁵ For example, see Baty, *Le Théâtre Joly*, 21–22.

⁴⁶ See *La Grande Tragédie de la Nativité ou la Naissance* (Liège: Imprimerie Dubuisson, 1929), as well as the different handwritten and typed versions of *Li Naissance* held by Musée de la Vie Wallonne in Liège.

brings his bed as an offering to the newborn in the stable, welcomes the shepherds and the Magi by preparing a meal for them, and unsuccessfully attempts to stop the Massacre of the Innocents. The play ends with the tragic punishment for King Herod: his own son is assassinated by his soldiers tasked with killing all newborn babies.⁴⁷

Performances of the Nativity with puppets in several regions also added standalone scenes of dramatic action with entirely profane subjects that centred on a local figure alongside the birth of Jesus. In Besançon, the winemaker Barbizier fulfilled this role. Created by the stonemason and puppeteer Joseph Landriot, the character was first mentioned in 1799 in reports by police who were concerned about his caustic propositions towards notable figures in the city.⁴⁸ From the start of the eighteenth century onwards, the traditional characters from the Nativity scene only sang local carols, whilst the addition of theatrical dialogue meant that Barbizier took centre stage in the dramatic action. Barbizier is awoken by his sidekick who shows him the Star of Bethlehem. They leave together to ask an astronomer about this miracle. Then they take with them Barbizier's wife Naitoure, who continually argues with her husband, even in front of the baby Jesus. In the second act, between the adoration of the shepherds and the Magi, Barbizier welcomes different characters with varying degrees of hospitality: after having expressed his gratitude to the nun who cared for him in hospital, Barbizier argues with the lawyer who wants to make him pay a very high price for his services, mocks a widow afflicted with a constant cough who asks Mary to quickly find her a husband, and is cheated by two monks who invite him to have lunch with them, but close the door in his face. He argues with a coppersmith over some badly executed work, then with a small chimney sweep who mocks him, and finally with a coquette who suddenly dies after being struck by lightning. A gallery of portraits of poor peasants and their social environment is thus painted, but the focus clearly lies on the winemaker and his wife: they speak in dialect, while all the others use French.

In Alcoy in the Alicante region of Spain, the principle of a construction 'en tiroirs', a parade of different characters who encounter the protagonist, was used for the *Betlem de Tirisiti* (*Tirisiti's Crib*) for which evidence

⁴⁷ Tshot Doère, *El Naissainche de l'Enfant Jésus* (Abbeville: A. Delonné, 1905).

⁴⁸ See Jean Garneret, *La Crèche et le théâtre populaire* (Besançon: Folklore Comtois, 1974), 85–93.

exists from 1880 onwards, but it probably first appeared in the mid-nineteenth century. Josep Esteve (1866–1959), who set down the form that would become traditional, performed it with his family for 75 years. Introduced and punctuated by the interventions of a narrator, the performance is split into two parts. The first part is performed in Castilian and recounts the traditional tale of Jesus's birth from the arrival in Bethlehem until the flight into Egypt. The second part in Valencian makes the innkeeper Tirisiti, who had been seen earlier refusing hospitality to Joseph and Mary, its protagonist: on his doorstep, he comments in a mocking tone on the entrance on stage of the different inhabitants going to mass. After several twists and turns which notably include Tirisiti being pursued by a bull in the streets, the innkeeper attempts to flee in an aerostatic balloon which explodes and falls to the ground.

Another example of a two-part show is the *Nacimiento de figuras de movimiento* (*Birth of Moving Figures*), which was created in 1815 by the puppeteer Pedro Montenegro (1778–1857) in a converted performance space inside his house and traditionally performed in Cádiz from 8 December to 2 February. The first part portrays a story of fall and redemption: the action begins with a dialogue between St Michael and Lucifer about the fall of the rebel angels, then shows Paradise and the original sin before the birth of the Saviour is recounted up to the episode of the flight into Egypt.⁴⁹ The second part presents an entirely profane act in which the character of the old woman Tía Norica (Auntie Norica) experiences different misadventures. The most frequently performed version, *Sainete de la Tía Norica*, is made up of three scenes: a fight against a bull that has escaped from its enclosure and ends up injuring the old woman, the doctor's visit in her room, and then the burlesque testament that she dictates to her notary in which she claims to bequeath a long series of imaginary assets. The play ends with a comic dispute between the young Batillo (nephew or grandson of Tía Norica), the notary, and the supposedly dying old woman who rises from her bed in a nightshirt. Other episodes are often added on: Tía Norica travels by train in 1856 and by aeroplane in 1914. The two moments of the fight against the bull

⁴⁹ See Désirée Ortega Cerpa, '*Sainete de la Tía Norica*: Edición crítica, introducción y notas' (PhD diss., University of Seville Press, 2001), 21. Available online: http://takey.com/Thesis_10.pdf.

and the testament, pretexts for numerous improvisations often linked to current affairs, constitute the main frame of the dramatic construction.⁵⁰

In these examples, the complete separation between the two parts of the show reveals the extent to which puppeteers and their audiences used Christmas festivities as a pretext to bring together comic reflections on everyday life around snippets of profane comedies and farces. An examination of the repertoire of some traditional puppet shows in Tyrol, especially the most developed of them, the Peterlspiel in Hötting, an area of Innsbruck, confirms this development. First appearing in the mid-nineteenth century and being performed until the 1930s, this show included scenes that adapted the legends of Faust and Don Juan, which, as Margarete Bischoff explains, were created using ‘the remains from older plays that, as a result of being detached from their broader contexts, were misunderstood, reinterpreted, and performed inaccurately’.⁵¹ Bischoff cites two of these scenes that reflect this distortion: the ‘Höllenfurst’ (Prince of Hell) based on the Massacre of the Innocents, and the ‘Ägyptischen Götzenpfaffen’ (idolatrous priests of Egypt) on the flight into Egypt. ‘The roots of Peterlspiel’, she concludes at the end of her analysis, ‘clearly lie in the world of Nativity scenes and plays from Tyrol.’⁵² Interspersed with interventions from Hanswurst or his local substitute Peterl, the Peterlspiel shows preserved fragments of performances from the eighteenth century, following the characteristic recycling and bricolage of oral traditions in societies where this mode of transmission had become rarer. A new dawn for theatrical practices, on a reduced scale but comparable to that described by historians and anthropologists, thus emerges in these popular performances of the Nativity with puppets: the gradual erasure of the ritual frame and its founding narrative opened up space for the development of standalone dramatic action, thereby replaying the passage from a subversion of the sacred to the full affirmation of the profane.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 39–40.

⁵¹ Margarete Bischoff, ‘Alte Puppenspiele in und um Innsbruck – Ein Beitrag zum Höttinger Peterlspiel’, *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 63 (1960): 91.

⁵² Ibid., 101.

GENEVIEVE OF BRABANT AND ANTHONY THE GREAT: THE LIVES OF SAINTS

In addition to drawing subjects from the Old or New Testaments, a significant proportion of the repertoire of popular puppet theatre focused on the lives of saints and exemplary figures. Many of these works that featured local personalities only found a limited audience,⁵³ but others experienced such success that their name sometimes served to refer to the puppet shows themselves. At the end of the nineteenth century, French travelling puppet theatres were often called the ‘baragues Saint-Antoine’ or the ‘Tentations’, as the hermit saint’s fight against the demons was seen as the core of their theatrical programme.⁵⁴ Moreover, there was such interest for these edifying tales that several crossed borders and were performed in many countries across Europe. Undoubtedly the most widespread was the now largely forgotten legend of Genevieve of Brabant: originating in the Palatinate,⁵⁵ it featured in the repertoires of almost all popular puppet theatres in German-speaking countries,⁵⁶ Belgium, France, and Italy.⁵⁷ At the beginning of the twentieth century, adaptations for string-marionettes were still amongst the most-performed plays by travelling Saxon puppeteers,⁵⁸ and several theatres in Palermo and

⁵³ For example, in the Province of Pavia, St Contardo of Este, whose life Giuseppe Sarina (1884–1976) recounted in one of his first plays for puppets in 1898. Giuseppe Sarina, *Vita, miracoli, morte e gloria di S. Contardo protettore di Broni* (Savona: Edizioni Junior, 2007). In German-speaking countries, the life of Dorothea of Caesarea, long performed by live theatre, continued to be staged by puppeteers in the eighteenth century before progressively being abandoned. See Christian Neuhuber, ‘Ein Gottesgeschenk für die Bühne. Dramatisierungen der Dorothea-Legende im deutschen Sprachraum’, in *Johann Georg Gettner und das barocke Theater zwischen Nikolsburg und Krumau*, ed. Margita Havlíčková and Christian Neuhuber (Brno: Masarykova Univerzita, 2014), 169–81.

⁵⁴ Marie-Claude Groshens, *Des marionnettes foraines aux spectacles de variété: Les théâtres Borgniet* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1995), 48.

⁵⁵ See Bruno Golz, *Pfälzgräfin Genovefa in der deutschen Dichtung* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1897), 159–64.

⁵⁶ See Beatrix Müller-Kampel, ‘Genovefa und Siegfried, Sohn Schmerzenreich und Golo der Schyrke, der verleumdete Koch und Hanswurst, ein Moralist. Legende und Exempel im Puppen- und Lagentheater’, *LiThes* 12 (2019): 101–40.

⁵⁷ Andrea Muglia, ‘Genoveffa sul carro di Tespi’, in *Genoveffa di Brabante, Dalla tradizione popolare a Erik Satie*, ed. Alfonso Cipolla (Torino: Edizioni Seb 27, 2004), 61–68.

⁵⁸ Bernstengel and Rebehn, *Volkstheater an Fäden*, 44–45.

Catania presented the legend alongside the lives of St Rosalia and St Agata, the patron saints of these two cities.

The borders between the profane and the sacred are difficult to retrace in the context of these performances, particularly due to the weak religious foundations on which they claimed to draw. Puppeteers sometimes conflated St Anthony the Great, founder of eremitism in the fourth century, with St Anthony of Padua. The entirely legendary figure of Genevieve of Brabant has never been recognised by ecclesiastical authorities: after some uncertainty over a medieval pilgrimage custom that honoured a small church near to Koblenz where her remains rest according to local beliefs,⁵⁹ the debate was settled at the start of the seventeenth century and only popular tradition continued to present Genevieve as a saint. Therefore, the piety shown in these performances only had very distant links with the Catholic Church. These two stories do not exclusively belong to popular puppetry traditions; they were also used in live theatre (professional, amateur), opera, ballet, shows for children, and even aristocratic or modernist puppet performances. The story of Genevieve of Brabant, for example, inspired an opera for puppets performed at the home of prince Estheráz in 1777,⁶⁰ and a very short 'lyrical comedy' composed by Érik Satie in 1899, which was performed after his death by the puppets of the Pajot-Walton's at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in 1926. It was also the subject of many oratorios, operas, and plays for live theatre.⁶¹

Works by authors and composers are but the tip of the iceberg for a story that appears much more expansive and complex still when anonymous creations are included. For example, there are several manuscripts in Breton of a play called *Jenovefa a Vraban* dating from around 1640.⁶² For the German-speaking countries, Bruno Golz's 1897 study provides

⁵⁹ The location is said to be the Fraukirch near Thür, in the Mayen-Koblenz region where the legend was likely composed by a monk at the Laach Abbey between 1325 and 1425. See R. P. Maurice Coens, 'Geneviève de Brabant, une sainte? Le terroir de sa légende', *Bulletin de la Classe des lettres et des sciences morales et politiques* 46 (1960): 345–63; as well as Golz, *Pfälzgräfin Genovefa*, 3.

⁶⁰ The music has been lost, but a libretto entitled *Genovefens vierter Theil* features amongst the works of the composer: Joseph Haydn, *Werke*, ser. 24, vol. 2 (Munich: C. Henle Verlag, 1989).

⁶¹ See *Genoveffa di Brabante, Dalla tradizione popolare a Erik Satie, op. cit.*

⁶² Gwenaël Le Duc, 'La Vie de Geneviève de Brabant: la langue comme écran et révélateur', *La Bretagne linguistique* 1 (1985): 263–75.

an inventory of manuscripts and traces of theatrical performances of this legend: between 1597 and the middle of the eighteenth century, he counts 33 mentions of single or regular performances by itinerant companies and around a dozen handwritten plays held in Jesuit colleges. Extending his survey to troupes of amateur theatre ('Volkstheater') active in the nineteenth century, Golz draws up a list of around 20 villages and small towns in Styria, Tyrol, Bavaria, Upper Bavaria, and Alemannic Switzerland, where the story of Genevieve of Brabant was regularly performed. Reproducing this study in Italy, France, or Belgium would likely yield comparable results. Even for lower-class audiences, the puppeteers performing this legend from the mid-eighteenth century onwards were simply appropriating a familiar subject from colportage literature, engravings, and religious hymns ('Come closer, honourable audience / To hear told / The recognised innocence and patience / Of God's beloved Genevieve...').⁶³ Spectators thus went to performances of *Genevieve of Brabant* not to discover her story, but to see the protagonist live in front of them. It likely did not matter to them whether it was performed by puppeteers or actors—unless, like a young Marcel Proust, it was recounted through the 'impalpable iridescence' and 'supernatural phenomena of many colours' of a magic lantern.⁶⁴

For a significant period of time, performances of *Genevieve of Brabant* by rod- or string-marionettes was just one possibility to relive the misfortunes of the wife of the Palatine Siegfried: unjustly accused of adultery by the majordomo Golo, she is condemned to death, but spared by her executioners. Genevieve is then abandoned with her newborn baby in a forest where a doe miraculously comes to feed the child, and she survives by eating herbs and roots. Six or seven years later, Siegfried is hunting near the cave where his wife and son have taken refuge, when he discovers them in the miserable condition to which they had been reduced (Genevieve is usually depicted in a shirt or covered just by her hair, all her clothes having disappeared due to wear). Siegfried then learns the truth and takes his family back to the palace, where he has Golo executed.

⁶³ Several recordings of this hymn have been collected in oral history databases. See, for example, *Base Interrégionale Patrimoine oral*: <https://patrimoine-oral.org/dyn/portal/index.seam?page=home>.

⁶⁴ Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time, Vol. 1: Swann's Way*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (New York: The Modern Library, 1992), 9.

However, Genevieve soon dies and the show ends either with her solemn funeral or the grand finale of two angels raising her up to heaven.⁶⁵

Nothing specific to puppets is to be found in this story. At most, it could be said that theatres employing rod- and string-marionettes would have no technical difficulties in staging the doe's intervention or presenting the grand finale, but these elements did not prevent live theatre or opera from staging *Genevieve of Brabant*. However, apart from a very free parody set to music by Offenbach (1859), the travails of Siegfried's wife gradually stopped being performed by live theatre in the mid-nineteenth century. The story still featured on the programme of puppet theatres until the First World War, and even during the interwar period in some cases, which shows how much puppets contributed to keeping alive a dramatic repertoire that remained present in the imaginary,⁶⁶ but other forms had ceased offering. In nineteenth-century performance history, the persistence of the repertoire in popular puppet theatre is one of its distinguishing characteristics: stories abandoned by live theatre continued to be performed for several generations.

In contrast to *Genevieve of Brabant*, the origins of *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, as it was staged by rod- and string-marionette puppeteers in the nineteenth century, did not lie in live theatre or colportage literature; nor did it owe anything to the numerous depictions of fantastic Devils in paintings and engravings from the end of the Middle Ages since monsters are almost completely absent from these performances.⁶⁷ On the basis of different transcriptions⁶⁸ and preserved accounts, two

⁶⁵ McCormick and Pratasik, *Popular Puppet Theatre in Europe, 1800–1914*, 170.

⁶⁶ Notably in French-speaking countries through the previously mentioned hymn for which numerous recordings were made in the second half of the twentieth century. See n. 63 above.

⁶⁷ See Didier Plassard, 'Saint Antoine, son cochon et ses monstres', in *Littérature monstre: une tétatologie de l'art et du social (1848–1914)*, ed. Yanna Kor, Didier Plassard, and Corinne Saminadayar-Perrin (Liège: University of Liège Press, 2020), 59–74.

⁶⁸ For example, in Gaston Baty, *Trois p'tits tours et puis s'en vont. Les théâtres forains de marionnettes à fils et leur répertoire* (Paris: Odette Lieutier, 1942); Léopold Delannoy, *Théâtres de marionnettes du Nord de la France* (Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1983); Robert Dascotte, 'La baraque Saint-Antoine, un théâtre de marionnettes ambulants' and Roger Pinon, 'Quelques notes sur "La Tentation de saint Antoine"', in *Enquêtes du Musée de la Vie Wallonne*, vol. 16 (Liège: Musée de la Vie Wallonne, 1986), 10–41 and 42–105; *La Tentation de saint Antoine et La Malade imaginaire* (Reims: Imprimerie de L'Indépendant Rémois, 1920); Groshens, *Des marionnettes foraines aux spectacles de variété*.

sources for *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* can be identified. The first is popular iconography as found on statuary, wood-engravings, decorated crockery, or votive medals, where a pig serves as a companion to the hermit. Though not part of the official tale of Anthony the Great's life, this pig became associated with him—to the extent of making him the patron saint of pork butchers—because only the Hospital Brothers of St Anthony (founded in 1095) had the right to let pigs roam free. As specialists in the treatment of ergotism ('St Anthony's fire'), they fed the pigs' meat to the patients and used the fat to prepare ointments to soothe their suffering. Whilst colportage literature, which drew upon written sources of the saint's life, makes no mention of the animal, the engravings illustrating it depict it at his feet.⁶⁹ In puppet theatre, the pig is tormented by the demons, who either insert a pair of bellows into its buttocks or, more often, attach a firework or a piece of lit tow to its tail. Some puppet companies in the north of France even replaced the puppet with a live piglet to give more prominence to what was considered by all as the climax of the show. This scene may have offered an echo of bygone oral traditions that associated St Anthony's pig with a mortuary cult. According to the ethnologist Claudine Fabre-Vassas, one legend has Anthony descend to Hell to offer fire to humans like a new Prometheus and 'in some variations, the pig brings the spark with the end of its tail on fire'.⁷⁰

The second source that can be identified in puppet shows staging *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* relates to the origin of the text performed. In his 1852 history of puppets in Europe, Charles Magnin wrote:

Only a few years ago, unscrupulous puppets performed in the countryside, notably around Chartres, shall I say it? *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*. In the guise of an explanatory *canticum*, Sedaine's famous song is sung, composed, as we know, for the feast of a rather lewd *Toinette*. There was as many tableaux in this play as couplets in the song.⁷¹

⁶⁹ See, for example, Pedro de Ribadeneyra, *Les Nouvelles Fleurs des vies des saints et fêtes de l'année* (Lyon: Claude Carteron, 1707), 50; and, for the Bibliothèque bleue, *La Vie et les miracles de saint Antoine, abbé, avec la vie de sainte Marie l'Égyptienne* (Troyes: Pierre Garnier, 1738), *passim*.

⁷⁰ Claudine Fabre-Vassas, 'Du cochon pour les morts', *Études rurales* 105–6 (1987): 189.

⁷¹ Magnin, *Histoire des marionnettes en Europe*, 121–22.

This account can easily be corroborated by the corpus of texts available: to varying degrees, all bear the trace of the burlesque potpourri by Michel-Jean Sedaine (1719–97), composed around 1750 and republished numerous times.⁷² Magnin’s perplexity is understandable: Sedaine’s songs are at once licentious and anti-clerical. For example, the pig is dressed in a hood to disguise it as a monk, and Anthony discovers that ‘an infernal ass / defecated in his breadbin’. In a new version of the text published in 1782, Sedaine sang:

The Saint scared of sinning
 In this adventure,
 Hurried into hiding
 Under the covers;
 But climbing on his bedstead,
 He met there
 Pretty pussy, pussy, pussy
 Pretty ass, ass, ass,
 Pretty pussy,
 Pretty ass,
 Pretty concubine:
 It was Proserpine.⁷³

Creating the text for a show about the saint’s miraculous life from this potpourri alone evidently would not have been possible. The main outline was retained, but it was preceded by a comic scene of deliberations in Hell, a classic in the puppeteers’ repertoire,⁷⁴ and followed by an ascent to heaven. The anti-clerical satire was removed, and the erotic couplets were cut or modified to make them more acceptable. When Sedaine has Anthony sing after Proserpine’s visit,

Oh! My God! What a narrow escape!
 A minute later,
 I’d have cuckolded the Devil.⁷⁵

⁷² [Michel-Jean] Sedaine, *La Tentation de saint Antoine ornée de figures et de musique* (London, 1782). The first edition of this text in the collection *Pièces fugitives de M. S**** dates from 1752 at the latest.

⁷³ Sedaine, *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, 7. The song plays on the comic segmentation of the word ‘concubine’, with ‘con’ meaning pussy and ‘cu(l)’ ass.

⁷⁴ For example, it can be found in some versions of *Faust* performed by puppets.

⁷⁵ Sedaine, *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, 9.

the text of the puppet show becomes:

Oh! Great God! What a narrow escape!
 Without my dear Saviour,
 She would have corrupted my heart (*repeated*).⁷⁶

However, it appears that the puppeteers only gradually removed the erotic dimension of the scene between Anthony and Proserpine. In 1858, Victor Fournel recounted:

Proserpine did it differently before in my hometown. I remember there she performed a very excessive seduction scene in which she possessed the energy and spirit of a bacchante; but Anthony, like the chaste Joseph who valiantly fought against that Potiphar, chased her out of his bed and onto the street with a burning log. It was the type of thing that would alarm the prudishness of the censor.⁷⁷

A major success for fairground puppeteers, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* was also used in pantomime, live theatre, and operetta⁷⁸ in the first half of the nineteenth century. Yet its narrative was often entirely rewritten, even parodied, with the hermit saint's chastity becoming a source of laughter for audiences in large theatres, and it was rarely staged from 1850 onwards. Puppet performances of Anthony's story can be distinguished from these other adaptations, both in their simplicity, which could give rise to the suggestion that they were the remnants of an 'ancient mystery',⁷⁹ and, like in the case of *Genevieve of Brabant*, because they continued to feature in the repertoire long after other theatrical forms had abandoned it.

⁷⁶ 'La Tentation de saint Antoine', in Baty, *Trois p'tits tours et puis s'en vont*, 39.

⁷⁷ Victor Fournel, *Ce qu'on voit dans les rues de Paris* (Paris: Adolphe Delahaye, 1858), 120. The author, born in Cheppy in 1829, is here referring to performances in Argonne during the 1830s.

⁷⁸ Jean-Guillaume-Antoine Cuvelier, *Les Tentations, ou tous les diables* (1796); Clara Gazul [Prosper Mérimée], *Une femme est un diable ou la Tentation de saint Antoine* (1825); Adolphe de Leuven and Auguste Pittaud de Forge, *La Tentation de maître Antoine* (1832); Louis-François Clairville and Jules Cordier, *Les Tentations d'Antoinette* (1850); Eugène Déjazet, *La Tentation d'Antoine* (1865).

⁷⁹ Groshens, *Des marionnettes foraines aux spectacles de variété*, 46.

ROBERT THE DEVIL: POPULAR LEGEND AND ROMANTIC OPERA

Based on what can be reconstructed, the development of the performances of *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* attests to the significant vitality of popular puppet theatres in the nineteenth century and the complex relationship it had with written literature, which, up until the Bibliothèque bleue (chapbooks), recounted the hermit's trials according to the story written in the fourth century by Athanasius of Alexandria. With no mention of the pig in this canonical version, puppeteers preferred to draw upon overtly parodic material that was printed clandestinely⁸⁰ and sold from under a coat, colporteurs' double bottom boxes, or the back rooms of bookshops.⁸¹ Sedaine's chosen form of a potpourri of songs likely made it easier to memorise and spread amongst popular audiences. Puppeteers thereafter appropriated it and erased its witticism and libertinism. This process removed the elements that categorised it as 'second literature',⁸² the marks of a parodic rewriting, to make it appear as a 'first' work, like a naïve original that would have miraculously preserved a multi-secular tradition. In other cases, the circulation of a story between the repertoire of puppet theatre and other domains of literary and artistic creation took far more winding routes than the vague appellation of 'adaptation' might suggest.⁸³ A close examination of the preserved texts reveals a variety of dramaturgical choices that show how efficiently puppeteers rewrote the stories they selected for their audiences. Different versions of *Robert the Devil* offer a case in point.

The legend, as it was recorded at the beginning of the thirteenth century in the *Roman de Robert le Diable*, then in the *Miracle de Robert le Diable* (1375) and the *Dit de Robert le Diable* (fifteenth century), belongs

⁸⁰ The first editions of Sedaine's text list London as place of publication.

⁸¹ See Jean-Marie Goulemot, 'Minores et livres du second rayon du XVIII^e siècle', *Littératures classiques* 31 (1997): 135–44.

⁸² Marc Escola and Sophie Rabau, *Littérature seconde ou la Bibliothèque de Circé* (Paris: Kimé, 2015).

⁸³ See Francesca Di Fazio, 'Artisanal inventiveness: the dynamics of rewriting in the plays of northern Italian puppeteers (19th–twentieth century)', *Mimesis Journal* 13, no. 1 (2024): 109–26.

to the genre of conversion narratives⁸⁴: it recounts how the son of a duke of Normandy, vowed to Satan from birth, commits numerous murders, rapes, and pillages. He suddenly decides to redeem himself and leaves on a pilgrimage to Rome, where he submits himself to seven years of hard penitence (becoming mute, feigning madness, only eating what he has fought dogs for). At the end of it, an angel tasks him with fighting against the Saracens and he wins victory for their army, but refuses all rewards and spends the rest of his life as a hermit. Frequently retold throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the story of Robert the Devil was thereafter abandoned by lettered culture, but it continued to feature in colportage literature, illustrating the ‘division’ which was established between different regimes of print culture, both intellectual and popular, following the analysis of Henri-Jean Martin.⁸⁵

Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, the Bibliothèque Bleue of Troyes and other publishers in Lyon and Rouen published multiple brochures that recounted the tale and introduced to it several changes including endings that granted or restored to Robert the title of the duke of Normandy and had him marry the Roman emperor’s daughter.⁸⁶ Popular prints served as a source of inspiration for different shows, which were notably performed in rural areas. In 1942, Jean Variot included in the anthology *Théâtre de tradition populaire*⁸⁷ a *Robert le Diable* based on a text by a travelling theatre company; the inclusion of the marriage between Robert and the Roman emperor’s daughter shows that this text was inspired by the different versions circulated by colportage literature. These brochures may have enabled some puppeteers, like actors, to perform the story of Robert the Devil.

The preserved manuscripts also suggest that another source was quickly taken up: all draw upon Eugène Scribe’s libretto for the opera by Giacomo Meyerbeer created in Paris in 1831, thereby showing

⁸⁴ Élisabeth Gaucher-Rémond, ‘Robert le Diable ou le “criminel repentant”: la légende au miroir des récits de conversion’, in *La Légende de Robert le Diable du Moyen-Âge au XX^e siècle*, ed. Laurence Mathey-Maille and Huguette Legros (Orléans: Paradigme, 2010), 27–41.

⁸⁵ Henri-Jean Martin, ‘Culture écrite et culture orale, culture savante et culture populaire dans la France d’Ancien Régime’, *Journal des savants* 3–4 (1975): 225–82.

⁸⁶ Lise Andries, ‘La Bibliothèque bleue: les réécritures de *Robert le Diable*’, *Littérature* 30 (1978): 51–66.

⁸⁷ Jean Variot, ed., *Théâtre de tradition populaire* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1942).

puppeteers' desire—but also the economic necessity in which they found themselves—to draw inspiration from contemporary artistic production, rather than a bygone tradition. Given the considerable success of *Robert le Diable*, this choice is not surprising. Tens if not hundreds⁸⁸ of performances in opera houses across Europe modified the meaning of the legend and audience expectations. The edifying story evolved into a fantastic tale that introduced the new Romantic sensibility with brio into the domain of lyrical art. The opera's fame thus obliged puppeteers to base their shows on this new model.

In Scribe's libretto, Robert, Duke of Normandy, flees the scandal caused by his dissolute life and goes to Palermo. He is accompanied by his 'friend' Bertram, who leads him to make a series of unfortunate choices. At the end, Bertram is revealed to be a demon who, by adopting a human appearance, previously succeeded in marrying Robert's mother and fathering a child; as Robert's father, he seeks to keep his son with him in Hell for evermore. The duke is thus torn between the path of evil towards which Bertram pushes him and the path of good that his milk sister Alice and Isabelle, the Princess of Sicily he is in love with, endeavour to lead him to. Only the voice of his mother allows him to escape damnation: in the final act, Alice gives him a letter that his mother entrusted to her before dying, which makes him reject the contract that Bertram pressures him to sign, sending the demon to Hell, and paving the way for his marriage to Isabelle.

The accumulation of crimes, the long penitence, and the victory over the Saracens are gone. In Scribe's libretto, Robert is only a pleasure-seeker, maladroit in love as much as in combat, who falls headlong into the traps that Bertram sets for him. The marvellous tales of chivalry are replaced with the influences of dark Romanticism. The third act begins by showing a mountainous landscape with the ruins of a temple and the entrance to a cave leading to Hell, then an abandoned cloister with tombs from which the ghosts of their occupants emerge: nuns who in life got drunk on the pleasures of the flesh, wine, and games. In the middle of the tombs, a statue of St Rosalia holds between her hands a cypress tree branch with magical powers that Robert must take to stop the marriage between Isabelle and the Prince of Granada who won her hand in a tournament.

⁸⁸ To cite some examples, 754 in Paris between 1831 and 1893, 260 in Berlin until 1906, 83 in Milan until 1886, and 57 in Parma until 1883.

Many puppeteers from northern Italy using string-marionettes or glove puppets staged Scribe's libretto not as an opera, but as a drama in prose⁸⁹: they transformed the dialogue in verse and sung arias, removed the choruses, and condensed the grandiose lyrics of the Italian translators in favour of a more direct style, which was immediately accessible to audiences. The role of Raimbaut, the Norman peasant who is in love with Alice, is extended with several dialogues and comic acts, meaning that he occupies, in the economy of theatre, the place traditionally given to the popular hero speaking in dialect. This development is particularly marked amongst glove puppeteers: in the version performed by Angelo Cuccoli in Bologna, the comic duo formed by Faggiolino and Giuppino take on the roles of Raimbaut and Alice. Rewritings of *Roberto il Diavolo* were also presented in a variety of registers and languages absent from Scribe's libretto.

For his staging of the story at the Teatro Nosadella in Bologna in 1850,⁹⁰ the puppeteer Anacleto Casalini adapted the play's title by following the usual codes of eighteenth and nineteenth-century popular theatre that foreground the role of the comic character (who becomes Fighetto here) and the cemetery scene, the highlight of the show: *Roberto il Diavolo duca di Normandia alle tombe delle maghe, con Fighetto trovatore normando, condannato a morte e salvato per prodigioso azione* [*sic*]⁹¹ (*Robert the Devil, Duke of Normandy at the Magicians' Tombs with Fighetto the Norman Minstrel, Condemned to Death and Saved by a Prodigious Act*). In the same city, Angelo Cuccoli gave the following title to the show he created in 1870 for his puppet booth on Piazza Maggiore: *Roberto il Diavolo con Faggiolino suo protettore, e spaventato dalle ombre sepolcrali*⁹² (*Robert the Devil with Faggiolino His Protector,*

⁸⁹ This analysis is based on seven manuscripts by puppeteers: for string-marionettes, Anacleto Casalini (Bologna, 1850), Giovanni Pavero (Genoa, 1894), Giuseppe Concordia (Pecetto Torinese, 1905), and Giuseppe Ariodante Monticelli (Cremona, second half of the nineteenth century); and for glove puppets, Angelo Cuccoli (Bologna, 1870), Aldo Rizzoli (Bologna, start of twentieth century), and Giovanni Bresciani (Mantua, 1925). I thank Francesca Di Fazio for her help in identifying and collecting most of these resources.

⁹⁰ The Teatro Nosadella was a venue with capacity for 300 people, mainly used for string-marionette shows.

⁹¹ Anacleto Casalini, *Roberto il Diavolo duca di Normandia*, Fondo speciale Anacleto Casalini, Biblioteca dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna.

⁹² Angelo Cuccoli, *Roberto il Diavolo*, Fondo Angelo Cuccoli, Biblioteca dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna.

and Terrified by the Sepulchral Shadows). In Genoa in 1894, Raimbaut became Rambaldo, but he was played by the puppet of Barudda,⁹³ whilst Giuseppe Concordia from Piedmont and Giuseppe Ariodante Monticelli from Cremona gave him the characteristics of Famiola,⁹⁴ and Giovanni Bresciani in Mantua those of Fasolino.⁹⁵ Utility triumphs over vraisemblance in these transpositions: Raimbaut's Norman origins do not prevent him from speaking in dialectal Italian, as comic characters usually did, which Bresciani humorously justifies by introducing Raimbaut-Fasolino in the following way: 'he is Bolognese but he comes from Picardie' (I, 1).⁹⁶

On the level of dramatic construction, two recurring techniques are typical of the rewritings for puppet theatre. First, there is a desire to clarify events and behaviours: some episodes, which are simply mentioned in a brief exchange of lines in Scribe's work, are actually performed. For example, Monticelli and Rizzoli added a detailed exposition of Roberto's situation to the first scene: he is the rejected lover of Isabelle and banished by her father after offending him. When Roberto goes off to the forest to attempt to fight the 'vain shadow' of his rival the prince of Grenada, who, at that moment, is participating in a tournament (II, 4–6), Casalini takes care to add an earlier scene in which Bertramo asks a spirit to take on the appearance of the prince so as to explain this doubling (I, 5).⁹⁷ In Pavero's version, Bertramo is given a monologue at the end of the first act, which reveals to the audience he is the father of Roberto, a fact that opera spectators only learn at the very end.⁹⁸

The second technique is intensifying the level of conflict: fight scenes are introduced between antagonists who only have a silent role or are simply mentioned in Scribe's libretto. For example, Rizzoli reworks Act

⁹³ Comic character, created by Luca Bixio (1801–79), used by puppeteers from Genoa.

⁹⁴ Comic character, created around 1811 by the Rizzi family, used by puppeteers from Piedmont.

⁹⁵ Fasolino, Faggiolino, or Fasulein, a comic character used by puppeteers from Bologna, who appeared at the end of the eighteenth or start of the nineteenth century. His creation is attributed to a puppeteer named Cavallazzi.

⁹⁶ Giovanni Bresciani, *Roberto il Diavolo* (1925), Fondo Ferrari, Museo Giordano Ferrari, Parma.

⁹⁷ Casalini, *Roberto il Diavolo duca di Normandia*.

⁹⁸ Giovanni Pavero, *Roberto il Diavolo con Barudda cantastorie*, Biblioteca Luigi Ferrante, Civica Scuola d'Arte Drammatica Paolo Grassi, Milano.

II to add three such moments: between Isabella, the king Ottone, and the Prince of Grenada who the king wants her to marry; between the king and Roberto who comes to beg for his pardon; and between Roberto and the prince who challenges him to a duel. Their duel is also performed, as it is in Pavero's version, whilst Casalini has Roberto confront his rival outside Isabelle's bedroom: when he brings gifts to his fiancée, the prince is placed under a spell produced by the cypress tree branch and falls asleep with the guards. As soon as he wakes up, he has Robert arrested. Robert breaks the branch and renounces coercing Isabella with its magic.

Dramatic tension is especially heightened through modifications to the statue that guards the magic branch. In the opera, this statue, which portrays St Rosalie, patron saint of Palermo, makes the Duke of Normandy fleetingly recall the memory of his mother who had the same name. For the puppeteers, a closer link is created between the saint and the mother, thereby strengthening the transgressive nature of Roberto's act: the statue's features resemble those of his mother (Pavero), or it even actually represents her (Cuccoli, Rizzoli). Any sense of spatial logic is abandoned—Roberto's mother who died in Normandy having a funeral monument in Sicily makes little sense—in favour of a nightmarish dilemma: the son is required to choose between his mother and his father, good and evil, St Michael and Satan as the subtitle of some shows summarises.⁹⁹

All versions of *Roberto il Diavolo* for puppets seek to strengthen the readability and the visibility of the plot. With the background action better sketched out, allusions made explicit, and combats scenes being performed, puppeteers favoured staging conflict between antagonistic forces in their rewritings of the libretto over the lyrical expression of sentiments as the opera had codified it. Yet, they did seize upon the opera's spectacular dimension: will-o'-the-wisps flying around the tombs, ghosts of nuns transforming into voluptuous young women, rumbles of thunder, flames, and fireworks.

⁹⁹ The complete title of the show by Monticelli and Bresciani is: *Roberto il Diavolo, ossia Un terribile patto infernale, e Satana sconfitto dall'Arcangelo san Michele* (Robert the Devil, or A terrible, hellish pact and Satan defeated by the Archangel St Michel). Whilst these two characters do not appear on stage, they are mentioned by Alice: as in Scribe's libretto, she points out the physical resemblance between Beltramo and the demon in the painting at the village church that depicts their fight.

From the stage directions in these manuscripts, it is difficult to judge the place of comedy in the shows. Certainly, the adaptation of *Roberto il Diavolo* for glove puppets lent itself to laughter, and it can be supposed that a terrified Faggiolino wandering between the tombs would lay the groundwork for a comic acting style: trembling, fainting, hasty slips against the playboard. Yet the dramatic dimension of the stage action is not affected by the scenes in which popular heroes appear, and it would be erroneous to consider these productions as parodies; on the contrary, the emphasis on interpersonal conflicts shows that the Italian puppeteers were keen to reproduce the melodramatic power when they drew upon narrative material like Meyerbeer's opera.

Pierre Rousset's rewriting in 1875¹⁰⁰ for the Théâtre Guignol in Passage de l'Argue took a completely different approach. This play is openly presented as a parody, but it also drew upon the opera whose entire plot sequence it follows with the addition of a first scene in which the life of Guignol—Robert le Diable, pleasure-seeker and fighter, is told. Whilst all the other characters maintain the same features outlined in the libretto, Guignol—and, in part, Gnafron in the role of Raimbaut—lends to the protagonist his usual traits: speaking mannerisms from Lyon, swaggering cheek, an ironic distance in all situations. The dramatic charge is constantly defused by the hero's comebacks. When Bertram reveals that he is his father, Guignol calmly responds: 'Oh good! I can be proud of having such a great daddy ... it wouldn't be so surprising if I was born cursed.' When the demon has disappeared, swallowed by Hell, he comments: 'Even so, I'm angry: there are many who have fathers who do not deserve the Devil.'¹⁰¹ The differences between these contemporaneous adaptations of the same source text highlight how much glove puppeteers such as Cuccoli, Rizzoli, and Bresciani continued to target a socially heterogeneous audience, including spectators from modest backgrounds who did not have prior knowledge of the works, whilst Rousset prioritised addressing the bourgeoisie who were familiar with large theatres and opera. To combat the loss of their traditional audiences between the end of the nineteenth and

¹⁰⁰ Pierre Rousset, 'Robert le Diable', in Pierre Rousset, Albert Chanay, Tony Tardy, Louis Jossierand, and Albert Avon, *Parodies de Guignol*, vol. 2 (Lyon: Cumin et Masson, 1911). The date 1875 is found on the Prefecture's stamp on a handwritten copy of the play belonging to Daniel Streble who I thank for having allowed me to consult it.

¹⁰¹ Rousset, 'Robert le Diable', 403.

the start of the twentieth centuries, Guignol puppeteers from Lyon turned towards parodic rewritings of the dramatic and lyrical successes of their time, leading to an extensive production that confirmed both the new sociological composition of venues and the growing rooting of the repertoire in the promotion of regional identity. Under the make-up of Samson,¹⁰² Romeo,¹⁰³ Lohengrin,¹⁰⁴ or even the ‘Maître chanteur du Gourguillon’,¹⁰⁵ Guignol increases the number of versified tirades in an always carefully constructed language in which ways of speaking from Lyon, traces of Franco-Provençal, and burlesque distortions belonging to the comic register intermix.¹⁰⁶ A century later, the Théâtre Toone in Brussels spearheaded by Victor-José Géal (Toone VII) would carry out the same repositioning towards the parodic transposition in regional languages of masterpieces from literature, theatre, and opera to reach new audiences.¹⁰⁷

FAUST AND DON JUAN: REVENGE OF THE FOOLS

With the stories of St Anthony and Robert the Devil, puppeteers vied to create the most ingenuous performance of hellish forces: supernatural apparitions, metamorphoses, rumbles of thunder, smoke, fireworks, and coloured lighting accompanied the hermit’s trials and the duke’s wavering journey, whilst maintaining the pretence of a morally edifying show through the final defeat of the Devil and the triumph of Providence. The legends of Faust and Don Juan allowed the staging of Devil plays in puppet theatre to realise its full potential. Yet, depicting a protagonist

¹⁰² Tony Tardy, ‘Guignol et Dalila’, in *Parodies de Guignol*, vol. 2 (Lyon: Cumin et Masson, 1911).

¹⁰³ Pierre Rousset, ‘Guignol et Juliette’, in *Parodies de Guignol*, vol. 2 (Lyon: Cumin et Masson, 1911).

¹⁰⁴ Tony Tardy, *Lohengrin* (1893), ms. 0.504 (1633), Puppentheatersammlung, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Dresde.

¹⁰⁵ Tony Tardy, *Les Maîtres-chanteurs du Gourguillon* (1897), Fonds Marcel Temporal, Institut International de la Marionnette, Charleville-Mézières.

¹⁰⁶ Jean-Baptiste Martin and Anne-Marie Vurpas, *Le Parler des gones, d’hier à aujourd’hui* (Gleizé: Éditions du Poutan, 2019).

¹⁰⁷ See Andrée Longcheval and Luc Honorez, *Toone et les marionnettes de Bruxelles* (Brussels: Paul Legrain, 1984).

under the grasp of evil sometimes ran the risk of shows being banned due to their immorality.

During the nineteenth century, Faust and Don Juan occupied prime positions in the repertoires of German-speaking puppeteers. The texts of these shows, as they were written down from the 1830s onwards, do not belong to the puppet booth tradition: they were directly inherited from the Italian and English theatre companies that travelled around Central Europe from the end of the sixteenth century onwards. The influences from the Renaissance and baroque stages they brought with them were incorporated into a composite repertoire, the ‘Haupt- und Staatsaktionen’, which was characterised by a mix of tragic grandeur and improvised buffoonery performed by Pickelhering, Harlekin, or Hanswurst.

Haupt- und Staatsaktionen were the result of a long process of translation, adaptation, and redevelopment by travelling companies initially from abroad and then the German lands, before being abandoned by actors in the mid-eighteenth century. This loss of interest was a consequence of the theatrical reforms introduced by Johann Christoph Gottsched and Caroline Neuber, who, as admirers of Aristotle and French Classicism, imposed a separation of genres and even staged the symbolic banishing of buffoons.¹⁰⁸ Another factor was that troupes became sedentary and started performing in newly constructed court theatres where they addressed a more educated audience who expected productions to be of a high literary and moral value. Opening up these venues to paying spectators and the creation of the first public theatres in the final decades of the eighteenth century¹⁰⁹ cemented these changes. Erika Fischer-Lichte has analysed this evolution as a ‘civilizing process’ as defined by Norbert Elias.¹¹⁰ The reigning heterogeneity and undisciplined corporicity of comic characters were replaced by the primacy of reason and bodily control, first conveyed through the performance or imitation of works from French Classicism, then through the birth of a German national

¹⁰⁸ See Karen Jürs-Munby, ‘Hanswurst and Herr Ich: Subjection and Abjection in the Enlightenment Censorship of the Comic Figure’, *New Theatre Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (2007): 124–35.

¹⁰⁹ See Henning Röpper, ‘Aperçu sur le système théâtral allemand’, in *Mises en scène d’Allemagne(s)*, ed. Didier Plassard (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2013), 26–42.

¹¹⁰ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theater im Prozess der Zivilisation* (Tübingen/Basel: Francke Verlag, 2000).

drama, before the proto-Romanticism of Sturm und Drang would introduce new models from the Elizabethan stage and the Golden Age of Spanish theatre.

The manuscripts used for puppet shows were thus remnants of a theatrical practice that had disappeared, vestiges of a popular art form only surviving in the hands of puppeteers.¹¹¹ During the Romantic age, they began to draw the attention of poets and philologists and interest grew following rewritings by, to name but a few, Adalbert von Chamisso (*Faust*, 1804), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (*Faust, ein Fragment*, 1790; *Faust, eine Tragödie*, 1808; *Faust, der Tragödie zweiter Teil*, 1832), Christian Dietrich Grabbe (*Don Juan und Faust*, 1829), and Nikolaus Lenau (*Faust*, 1836; *Don Juan*, 1851).¹¹² Books and periodicals published puppeteers' plays, often accompanied by scholarly commentary, which made them part of the literary history of these myths: after a private first edition of *Doctor Faust, oder der grosse Negromantist* (*Doctor Faust or the Great Necromancer*) based on a text by Johann Georg Geisselbrecht in 1832,¹¹³ the publication by Karl Joseph Simrock of another manuscript by the same Geisselbrecht followed in 1846, then, in 1850, Wilhelm Hamm published a version by Guido Bonneschky.¹¹⁴ In 1847, the publisher Johann Scheible released six versions of *Faust*¹¹⁵ for puppets in a volume of his series *Das Kloster*.

This editorial work continued into the second half of the nineteenth century and the twentieth century, fostering a wealth of literary criticism.

¹¹¹ The last home for this popular form of theatre was the 'Vorstadttheater' (suburban theatre) in Vienna, three performance venues which maintained this type of repertoire until the mid-nineteenth century. Here, the character of Hanswurst, created by the actor Josef Anton Stranitzky (1676–1726), was first developed, and then Johann La Roche (1745–1826) invented Kasperle.

¹¹² The indicated dates are those of the editions of the texts.

¹¹³ *Doctor Faust, oder der grosse Negromantist* (Doctor Faust or the Great Necromancer) (Berlin, 1832), edition published in 24 copies by Gustav Eugen Friedrich von Below.

¹¹⁴ *Doktor Johannes Faust* (Frankfurt am Main: H. L. Brönnner, 1846); *Das Puppenspiel vom Doktor Faust* (Leipzig: Avenarius & Mendelssohn, 1850).

¹¹⁵ The republication of *Doctor Faust, oder der grosse Negromantist* by Geisselbrecht, three texts from Ulm, Cologne, and Strasbourg, and two versions collected in Augsburg, a comedy (*Lustspiel*) and a tragedy (*Trauerspiel*). *Das Kloster* (1845–50) was a periodical that combined essays and documents on folklore and popular literature. The versions of *Faust* for puppets appeared in the fifth volume.

More recently, Gerd Eversberg published a new edition of Geisselbrecht's *Faust* in 2012 based on two handwritten copies dated 1804 and 1805 respectively, which were discovered in the Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv in Weimar.¹¹⁶ The historical role played by Geisselbrecht in the recognition and development of German puppet theatre, the early dates of the texts, and the meticulous philological work carried out by Eversberg, make this edition the most valuable piece of evidence of how the story of Faust was told by puppeteers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, even if Geisselbrecht evidently modified his show over the course of the four decades that he performed it (from 1786 to 1826). His *Doctor Faust* can thus be considered and examined as one state in the history of the show, but a precisely dated state and the oldest for which evidence remains.¹¹⁷

The story of Faust performed by the seventeenth and eighteenth-century itinerant companies, in whose wake Geisselbrecht was writing, does not take its direct source from the *Volksbuch* (1587), the first printed trace of the legend, but the theatrical adaptation by Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (1592). English actors introduced Marlowe's play to the continent from 1608 onwards and a first performance by puppets was recorded in Lüneburg in 1666. In Haupt- und Staatsaktionen versions, the play does not include the plot with Marguerite, the 'Gretchentragödie' added by Goethe, but, like Marlowe's work, centres on the fight between an angel and a demon who argue over Faust's soul. The appearance of Helen of Troy, which Goethe takes up and develops in the second part of his tragedy, is very much present in these older theatre versions, like it was in the *Volksbuch* and Marlowe's play: it is the final trap that Mephistopheles uses to draw Faust into his claws.

The main characteristic of how these travelling companies of actors or puppeteers—and sometimes actors *and* puppeteers as was the case of the troupe led by Geisselbrecht—portrayed the legend of Faust is the significant role attributed to the comic character (lustige Figur), an indispensable component of the Haupt- und Staatsaktionen. Though still called Pickelhering in the version for puppets from Cologne published

¹¹⁶ Eversberg, *Das Marionettenspiel vom Doktor Faust*.

¹¹⁷ An older version, likely from the mid-eighteenth century, was discovered in Tyrol and published in *Chronik des Wiener Goethe-Vereins* 25 (1911), but the start of the play is missing: it only begins with the pact scene.

in *Das Kloster*, he becomes Hanswurst in the majority of cases. In Geisselbrecht's text published by Eversberg, he is replaced by Casper in the fourth act,¹¹⁸ which confirms that these names refer less to an actual character than a dramatic function: here, he serves as a burlesque and trivial counterpoint to Faust's intellectual quest. The dramatic construction of the play alternates between the scholar's story and the buffooneries of the servant, his distorted reflection (Illustration 6.1).

Like Faust, Hanswurst takes his place in the magic circle and sees the Furies surround him, but he enjoys making them disappear and re-appear several times with the alternating formulas 'Perlikke' and 'Perlokko'. After

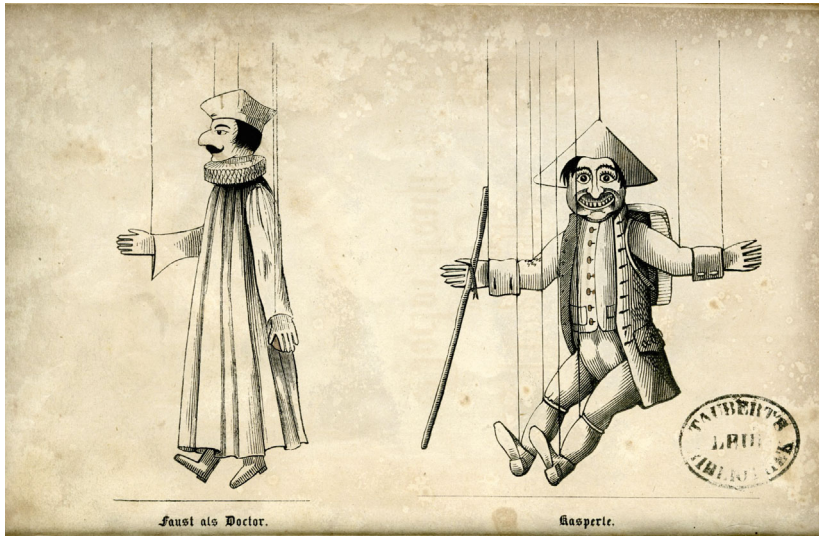


Illustration 6.1 Faust and Kasperle, in *Das Puppenspiel von Doctor Faust*, ed. Wilhelm Hall, Leipzig: Avenarius und Mendelssohn, etching, 1850. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

¹¹⁸ Eversberg, *Das Marionettenspiel vom Doktor Faust*, 78. On this subject, Eversberg cites a letter from Geisselbrecht to Johannes Daniel Falk, dated 21 October 1804: 'Another new thing! Hanswurst has lost his name and is now called Casperl, because that's how Dreher and Schütz baptised him, so I must refer to him as such...' (Ibid., 137).

Faust signs the pact with Mephistopheles, it is Hanswurst's turn to negotiate with him: first, he takes a small sum of money from him by posing several enigmas that the demon is incapable of answering, then he rejects the contract that the demon wants him to sign by stating that he has no soul as he is made of wood, and that he does not know how to read. Ultimately, the servant only pledges a vague allegiance to Mephistopheles, all the while declaring to one side that he does not feel bound to it since there was no witnesses. At the home of the Duke and Duchess of Parma, where he was supposed to join his master, he arrives before him on a flying billy goat, claims to have taught magic to Faust, and promises to make a smokeless fire appear, but only lets out an enormous fart on the duchess's nose. In the final instance of the game of echoes between the two characters, Faust, his last hour having arrived, unsuccessfully attempts to trick Mephistopheles by suggesting he and his servant exchange clothes.

The lustige Figur's trajectory is not simply a distorted reflection of Faust's; it also features on the thematic level by presenting the opposite attitude of his master, for example, in relation to knowledge and books. This contrast is established from the first pages of Geisselbrecht's text: as Faust eagerly grabs hold of the black magic treatise brought by two mysterious students, Hanswurst enters on stage recounting that he has just lost his position because, tasked with transporting the school books for the children of his previous master, he ripped pages out of them to clean up an extraordinary episode of diarrhoea, then put the soiled pages back in their place. Arriving at Faust's home, he tries to decode the black magic treatise, without success since he cannot read.

Their respective usages of speech and dialogue are also antithetical. Faust, a professor at the University of Wittenberg, perfectly masters them: without losing his composure when faced with their terrifying appearance, he questions the demons to select the one who will be able to satisfy his desires the quickest. Hanswurst, in contrast, trips over almost every word whoever his interlocuter is. He mispronounces words ('Professor' becomes 'Brotfressor': bread eater), barely understands anything, and when questioned by Wagner, Faust's disciple (Famulus), does not know how to respond to the simplest query without producing long and convoluted answers.

Wagner

What are you called?

Hanswurst

What am I called? I am called like you.

Wagner

Like me? – I'm called Johann Christoph Wagner.

Hanswurst

That's right, the first is my right name.

Wagner

So, you're called Johann?

Hanswurst

Yes, but people just call me Hans, and a lil'sumfing more.

Wagner

So, what is it then?

Hanswurst

It's what the Jews aren't allowed to eat.

Wagner

Oh! I understand! – Hans Bacon.

Hanswurst

... – no, sumfing short, sumfing round, and that goes with sauerkraut.¹¹⁹

Yet, in spite of his ignorance and disconcerting responses, Hanswurst finds a way out of most situations. He obliges his interlocutors to enter into

¹¹⁹ 'Wurst' means sausage. Johann Georg Geisselbrecht, *Doctor Faust*, in Eversberg, *Das Marionettenspiel vom Doktor Faust*, 48–49.

the twists and turns of his verbal game and admit that they are incapable of guessing the responses to his questions. He even manages to trick the Devil himself. When Faust is taken to Hell, he asks him to say hello to his grandmother who is already there, and his wish is granted: a Fury even brings him news of her.

Whilst Geisselbrecht's play contains, as Eversberg shows, the 'ruins' of older texts in verse—those of the Haupt- und Staatsaktionen from the previous century—incorporated into the prose dialogue, it also integrates burlesque enigmas, likely taken from the jokers of the fairground trestle stages¹²⁰ (How to bemuse with a fart? How to change an old woman into a virgin?), and even short independent narrative developments added to the plot. For example, Hanswurst delivers a monologue in which he recounts his misadventure with a donkey: as well as his own, he plays the roles of the donkey, the bailiff, and the miller who owns the donkey as if staging his own short farce by mimicking all the voices.¹²¹ In this instance of theatre within theatre, it is clear that the lustige Figur occupied a central place in the economy of the performance to the extent of extracting himself from the plot to skilfully offer an actor's number performed by a puppet.

This extension of the buffoon character's role is corroborated by examining how the story of Don Juan was treated during the same period by German-speaking puppeteers. Analysing the available transcriptions¹²² shows that this story was subject to more variations than that of Faust. The diversity of sources used by the travelling theatrical companies, then by puppeteers, explains the differences between the preserved texts. In addition to some original developments, these texts bear the hallmarks of the founding work *El Burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* (*The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest*, 1630) by Tirso de Molina, some traces of its Italian derivations, different scenarios by the Commedia

¹²⁰ For example, Tabarin's burlesque dialogues come to mind.

¹²¹ Geisselbrecht, *Doctor Faust*, 44–45.

¹²² Three versions from Augsburg, Strasbourg, and Ulm were published by Johann Scheible in the third volume of *Das Kloster* (1846). There is also a version from Innsbruck (Erich Schmidt, ed., *Don Juan, Faust. Volksschauspiele aus Tirol. Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen* [Braunschweig: George Westermann, 1897]) and another from Laufen (see n. 125 below). Other versions were published in anthologies such as those compiled by Carl Engel (*Deutsche Puppenkomödien* [Oldenburg: Schulzeschen Buchhandlung, 1874]) and Richard Kralik and Joseph Winter (*Deutsche Puppenspiele* [Vienna: Karl Konegen, 1885]).

dell'arte, and the French versions by Dorimond and Villiers (*Le Festin de pierre ou le Fils criminel* (*The stone feast or the criminal son*), 1659 and 1660).¹²³

The versions performed by puppets were often based on a simplified plot in comparison to the original comedia or its rewritings for live theatre. As Jean Boutan¹²⁴ has observed, female figures plays a very minor role: Elvire, the abandoned wife invented by Molière, never appears, and the seduced peasants and shepherdesses (Tirso's Tisbea; Villiers's Oriane and Belinde) are sometimes absent. Only the noble young woman (Isabela/Amarille/Donna Anna) whom Don Juan attempts to rape is almost always included: it is by coming to her aid that her father (Don Pietro/Don Pedro) is killed. Other shifts within the dramatic configuration include: Don Philippe in the versions by Dorimond and Villiers (da Ponte's Ottavio), lover of Don Pierre's daughter, is not only Don Juan's rival, but he is also sometimes his brother; and the man who is killed as he tries to defend the young woman might be Don Juan's own father.

A lustige Figur—generally Hanswurst—plays a significant role across all these texts, even if nineteenth-century editorial constraints removed the crudest lines and acts. Such moments are rarely present aside from in a manuscript by the boatmen of Laufen¹²⁵ dated 1811, transcribed to the letter, including its erratic spelling, by Richard Maria Werner in 1891. In it, for example, Donn Joann's servant buries Donn Philipp's body in the latrines so that his assassin can send him some 'dear sighs'¹²⁶ when he needs to use the facilities; then he asks an innkeeper to house him close

¹²³ Neither Molière's *Dom Juan ou le Festin de pierre* (1665) nor Mozart and Lorenzo da Ponte's *Don Giovanni* (1787) influenced these early versions for puppets: it is only in those from the second half of the nineteenth century that traces of these works can be found.

¹²⁴ Jean Boutan, 'De Don Juan à Kasperl: le devenir populaire d'un mythe européen dans le théâtre de marionnettes en Europe centrale', *Revue de littérature comparée* 385 (2023): 3–22.

¹²⁵ The town of Laufen in Bavaria, situated around twenty kilometres upstream from Salzburg on the Salzach river, played an important role in the rock salt trade. From the seventeenth century onwards, boatmen from the town established travelling troupes of actors and puppeteers. The copy published by Richard Maria Werner ('Der Donn Joann', *Theatergeschichtliche Forschungen* 3 [1891]) includes the words 'Durch mich abgeschrieben (Transcribed by myself) Franz Kastner, 1811'; it draws on a text that likely originates from the 1760s. See Christine Kaiser, *Don Juan-Spiele der Wanderbühne – Edition, Kommentar und Studie* (Graz: Karl-Franzens-Universität, 2005).

¹²⁶ 'Der Donn Joann', 120.

to a pile of manure so that the farts he lets out from the windowsill are taken for cock-a-doodle-does.¹²⁷ In all versions performed by puppets, these types of jokes likely peppered their shows.

The mirroring effect between the master and his valet is also present in these texts: in *Donn Joann*, the servant enquires whether there is any ‘Fleisch’ (meat) at the inn and after having reviewed the menu, he explains that he was in fact asking about the establishment’s female staff. The comic scenes of the lustige Figur can also take the form of the reversed reflection of Don Juan’s actions: in Augsburg’s version, Hanswurst has to endure the advances of a female innkeeper who insistently suggests that she marries him, just like his master does with all the women he encounters.¹²⁸ More generally, German and Austrian puppeteers gave the servant ‘a leading role that was even more important than Don Juan’s’¹²⁹: in almost all the exchanges with other characters, he serves as his master’s spokesperson, confounding much of what Don Juan and his interlocutors say through his gaffs or his obliviousness, like a filter distorting the dialogue.

The specificities of these texts can also be seen in the treatment of the protagonist: a hardened criminal and persistently offending murderer who has nothing to do with the seducer whose legend was constructed by Molière’s work and the opera by Mozart and Da Ponte. The focus on his attempts at rape, the sole or main mode of interaction with women, follows the literal meaning of Tirso’s comedia. Don Juan is a ‘burlador’, an abuser who, in most cases, no longer even promises marriage to get what he wants. In the Strasbourg version published by Scheible, when he meets two women, a lost princess and a shepherdess, he tries to rape the former, but when she calls for help, he kills her.¹³⁰ In another version published in Carl Engel’s anthology *Deutsche Puppenkomödien*, he meets Donna Amarillis, Don Pietro’s daughter whom he had tried to abuse earlier, and he attacks her again: he then kills her husband Don Philippo, who is alerted by her cries, just as he had done with Don Pietro in the

¹²⁷ Ibid., 123–24.

¹²⁸ ‘Don Juan und Don Pietro, oder das Steinerne-Todten-Gastmahl’, in *Das Kloster*, vol. 3 (Stuttgart: Johann Scheible, 1846), 716.

¹²⁹ Boutan, ‘De Don Juan à Kasperl’.

¹³⁰ ‘Don Juan, oder der steinerne Gast’, in *Das Kloster*, vol. 3, 751–52.

first act.¹³¹ He may also stab a hermit he meets in a wood, an innkeeper who presents him with his bill, and even his own father in the retellings in which he comes to defend the young woman. In a very abridged version held in Ulm, the instances of seducing and raping women disappear entirely: Don Juan kills his father because he refuses to give him money, his sister because she wants to denounce his crimes, and a hermit who will not lend him his clothes so he can escape his pursuers. Then the ghost of his father appears, extends a hand that hits him, and the demon takes him away. As Hans Wurst remarks, Don Juan should have employed a gravedigger, not a servant.¹³²

Increasing the number of murders, confining them to the family sphere (when the rival is his brother or the victim of the duel is his father), and the focus on violence inflicted on his relatives (the father is insulted and sometimes killed, a cousin who refuses to lend him money is beaten, locked up, and robbed)¹³³ represent considerable shifts in the character of Don Juan. In the portrayals by puppeteers in German-speaking countries between the end of the eighteenth and start of the nineteenth centuries, he is only a rapist and an assassin entirely motivated by his urges, a danger to all who encounter him, and even guilty of the crime that courts of the time most severely punished: parricide.

As the powerless witness to his master's abuses, the characterisation of Hanswurst, in contrast, becomes more complex. Whilst preserving the usual aspects of the comic valet (cowardice, gluttony, broken speech), he assumes the role of a representative spectator: a figure with whom the audience is supposed to identify by sharing the same horror and the same powerlessness when faced with the accumulating number of crimes. The growing place attributed to Hanswurst within the performance, including delivering several monologues, thus represents a significant step in the evolution of puppet theatre that would lead it to gradually become 'the place where the little people are addressed, by representing them: a theatre by the people, for the people, and with the people, in which the aristocrat Don Juan would soon become obsolete'.¹³⁴

¹³¹ 'Don Juan, oder der steinerne Gast', in *Deutsche Puppenkomödien*, ed. Carl Engel (Oldenburg: Schulzeschen Buchhandlung, 1874), 52–53.

¹³² 'Don Juan', in *Das Kloster*, vol. 3, 762.

¹³³ 'Don Juan, oder der steinerne Gast', in *Deutsche Puppenkomödien*, 42–43.

¹³⁴ Boutan, 'De Don Juan à Kasperl', 22.

HISTORICAL SCENES AND MILITARY DRAMAS

Puppet shows took particular care to represent the ‘little people’, and this interest could go well beyond simply employing a popular character as a comic counterpoint to the main action. Shows in almost every urban centre of northern Italy added a local hero or substituted the masks of Arlecchino, Brighella, and Pantalone for the figures of Gerolamo then Gianduja (Turin), Meneghino (Milan), Gioppino (Bergamo), or Sandrone and Faggiolino (Bologna). These ‘masks without masks’ as Remo Melloni refers to them¹³⁵ are given roles that extend far beyond the classic functions of the ‘zanni’ or the confidant and take responsibility for a social, linguistic, and theatrical landscape in which the audience was invited to recognise themselves and project themselves onto.¹³⁶ Yet the inclusion of other popular characters diversified the roles they were attributed and created a portrait of a collectivity united by belonging to the same social condition or the same environment.

Historical dramas, which appeared frequently in the repertoires of Italian puppeteers using string-marionettes and glove puppets during the whole of the nineteenth century, offered particularly suitable ground for these representations in their staging of major events that affected an entire population. *Attila a Padova, ovvero il trionfo di Ezio proconsole romano*¹³⁷ (Attila in Padua, or the triumph of the Roman proconsul Aetius), an ‘action in three acts with a large battle’ notably performed by the puppeteer Ugo Ponti (1850–1919) offers a case in point. The text of a copy dated 1874 shows the first act, set in a poor house in the countryside, started with a long discussion between the peasant Famiola¹³⁸ and his wife Cristina about fatigue from working the land, the pressures

¹³⁵ Remo Melloni, ‘Il teatro delle marionette e dei burattini durante l’invasione napoleonica’, in Giuseppe Sarina, *Napoleone Buonaparte alla battaglia di Marengo* (Porretta Terme: I Quaderni del Battello Ebbro, 2000), 55.

¹³⁶ On the linguistic diversity of popular puppet theatres in Italy, see Giuseppe Polimeni, “Dialecto cavernoso” e “celestiale Italiano”: la varietà linguistica del teatro di marionette tra Piemonte, Lombardia ed Emilia alla fine dell’Ottocento’, *Italica* 92, no. 2 (2015): 375–96.

¹³⁷ Manuscript held in the Fondo Zaffardi at the Civica Scuola d’Arte Drammatica Paolo Grassi, Milan. A show flyer stuck to the inside of the notebook announces a performance by Ugo Ponti’s puppets, likely in the province of Alessandria. The copy of the text is signed by the puppeteer Antonio Aimino.

¹³⁸ Famiola is a comic character (‘maschera’) from the city of Pavia.

and the hypocrisies of life in society, and the vices of city dwellers. Despite the play's setting of 452 when the Huns invaded Italy, nineteenth-century audiences would have felt directly affected by all these subjects. There is a striking contrast between this play for puppets and Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Attila* (1846) based on Temistocle Solera's libretto which adapted Zacharias Werner's tragedy (*Attila, König der Hunnen*, 1807): in the former, popular characters are almost always on stage as actors in and witnesses to the events presented; in the latter, the young Breton Uldino, Attila's slave, hardly steps outside the usual role of confidant.

The depiction of a shared destiny unifying historical figures and ordinary people is even more marked in a manuscript of *La peste di 1630 a Borgonovo o l'eroe della carità*¹³⁹ (*The Plague of 1630 in Borgonovo or the Hero of Charity*) by Tommaso Rame dated 1910: there is no regional 'mask' since the dramatic configuration brings together only local personalities (count and countess, podesta, doctor), the ecclesiastical authorities (chancellor, rector, priest), a dozen citizens, women, and several Camillians, members of a religious order caring for the plague sufferers. The action is limited to the setting of the town of Borgonovo Val Tidone and the reactions of various types of characters to the devastating effects of the Great Plague of Milan. The everyday heroism of the carers is foregrounded with anonymous Camillians transporting sick people regularly passing across the stage. The play ends with the death of a member of the order, the priest Giovanni Battista Marapodio, as his hagiographers report¹⁴⁰: he is found in his church, a victim of the plague, kneeling in a state of bliss after having administered his own last rites. Written about the places where the event took place as a homage to the local population, Tommaso Rame's text shows that itinerant companies of puppeteers knew how to appropriate the memory of the local populations that they addressed to connect with them more efficiently and on a deeper level. It also attests to a fidelity to the documentary sources used: the author took care to identify people by their names and portray the twenty-five individual characters on stage in his drama.

¹³⁹ *La peste di 1630 a Borgonovo o l'eroe della carità*, Archivio documentale Compagnia Teatrale Fo Rame, ID 008,727. The manuscript is dated 20 May 1910, Borgonovo, and signed 'Tommaso Rame marionettista'.

¹⁴⁰ Giovanni Battista Marapodio (1590–1630) was named 'Servant of God', the first step towards canonisation.

Puppet theatre is also a popular form of performance in the sense that its interpretations of the events portrayed follow the perspective of the working classes, which is particularly evident in depictions of more recent events, such as in another play for string-marionettes from Ugo Ponti's repertoire: *Il terribile terremoto di Monte Leone* (*The Terrible Earthquake in Monte Leone*). Ponti wrote this 'historical spectacular in five acts' mere weeks after the 1905 Calabria earthquake.¹⁴¹ The text is based on a melodramatic plot in which a usurer attempts to cheat a debtor into giving him the hand of his daughter. The debtor is driven to ruin and his house is seized, but the family's eviction saves their lives: the earthquake destroys all the houses in the town and takes an innumerable number of victims, including the usurer who confesses to his scheming on his deathbed and bequeaths all his assets to the family he ruined. Other classic techniques are employed, such as a hermit announcing the catastrophe and the inclusion of a servant for the family, Gianduja. Act IV presents the earthquake on stage with the collapsing of houses, the search for bodies, and the suffering of loved ones. It ends with a procession of injured people carried on stretchers and rescue workers armed with shovels and pickaxes. Continuing in this vein of documentary realism, Act V gives voice to survivors through recounting several detailed accounts from newspapers and anecdotes: the announcement of the visit from a minister threatens to stir up the crowd, deprived of resources and hungry having lost everything; cutting remarks and complaints are heard about the different treatment given to well-off families housed in railway wagons and poor people left without shelter. Only the announcement of a visit from King Vittorio Emanuele III inspires the general surge of hope on which the play ends. With a derided father restored to his rightful place, the punishment and remorse of the criminal, the representation of the suffering and distress of the people, an expression of anger against the egotism of property owners and the negligence of leaders, and an appeal to royal mercy, Ugo Ponti's show combines the narrative structure of melodrama and journalistic rhetoric, making puppet theatre an echo chamber of popular emotions, a mass media on a local scale.

The development of puppetry within a theatre of the people can particularly be seen in a subgenre of historical drama: military plays.

¹⁴¹ The earthquake occurred on 8 September 1905. The handwritten copy (Fondo Zaffardi, Civica Scuola d'Arte Drammatica Paolo Grassi, Milan) is dated 2 November the same year.

These theatrical evocations of great battles from ancient and more recent times, which began emerging in the German lands in the second half of the eighteenth century,¹⁴² realised their full potential in the following century. They were notably performed in equestrian shows at large urban circuses,¹⁴³ whilst dioramas, panoramas, exhibitions of wax figures, and semi-automata depicted them in memorable tableaux. Despite the reduced dimensions of their stages, puppet theatres were not to be outdone: around 1734, Denis Carolet wrote *La Prise du fort de Kehl* (*The Siege of the Kehl Fortress*) for the Saint-Germain fair, but the play was banned by police due to its criticism of war (Polichinelle, frightened by cannon fire, wants to return to Paris and is almost hanged as a deserter). Some months later, Carolet successfully obtained permission to have another play, *La Prise de Philisbourg* (*The Siege of Philippsburg*), performed at the Saint-Germain fair. In it, military events are given the burlesque treatment without any battles being staged. These texts attest to a desire amongst puppeteers to closely follow current events: Carolet had his work performed only a few days after the surrender of Philippsburg, an episode in the War of the Polish Succession between France and Austria.

From the early nineteenth century onwards, some puppet shows did begin performing military operations. In 1834 in Cologne, a poster for a ‘privilegirtes Puppentheater’ announced the performance of a show entitled *Die Belagerung von Belgrad unter dem Kaiser Joseph II durch den General-Feldmarshall Laudon* (*The Siege of Belgrade by Field Marshal Laudon in the Reign of Emperor Joseph II*), and its fourth act ‘would be the highlight with its creation of the most complete illusion produced by musket fire, exploding bombs, and collapsing buildings’.¹⁴⁴ The lack of documentary evidence and approximate terms in use during this period

¹⁴² See Anne Feuchter-Feler, ‘Le Drame militaire en Allemagne au XVIIIe siècle: esthétique et cité’ (PhD diss., University of Metz, 2002).

¹⁴³ For example, performances of *La Bataille d’Aboukir ou les Arabes du désert*, a military action by Cuvelier and Augustin (1808), and *La Bataille de Bouvines*, a spectacular mimodrama by René Périn and Ferdinand Laloue (1821), were given at the Cirque Olympique in Paris.

¹⁴⁴ Gustav Küpper, *Aktualität im Puppenspiel. Eine Stoff- und Motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Emsdetten: Lechte, 1966), ill. III. I thank Yanna Kor for having brought this work to my attention.

means that it is impossible to determine whether it was a theatrical performance involving dialogued scenes or a show with mechanical figures accompanied by music, sound effects, and pyrotechnics as was often presented at fairs.¹⁴⁵

The shows with military subject matter, which flourished in the second half of the nineteenth century in several regional traditions, were indeed based on performing a theatrical text. The growing militarisation of society provoked by wars, the emergence of nation-states, and the construction of colonial empires led to comic sketches about forced enrolment, the random draft of conscripts, and learning discipline or how to handle arms.¹⁴⁶ More complex compositions also appeared offering an in-depth representation of popular characters confronted with war. In a play from the Lyon tradition Translated title: (*The conscripts of 1809*), *Les Conscrits de 1809*,¹⁴⁷ Guignol decides to join the army in the place of a labourer friend who has been selected in the draft so that he can marry his fiancée. Despite it being a comedy, the mention of the Napoleonic Wars brings back painful memories and Guignol's deed is seen as a voluntary sacrifice:

Mère Simonne

Ah! This bag brings back so many memories... poignant ones. Mending it makes me feel like I'm still in that damned Egypt where so many brave men remained.

Guignol

Did they really die?

¹⁴⁵ Another poster published in *ibid.* (ill. V), dated the 1860s, advertises 'françaisches Automaten-Cabinet' presenting, alongside the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, a mechanical tableau in which Napoleon himself loads a canon during the Battle of Montereau (1814), and another entitled 'Der sterbende Grenadier auf dem Schlachtfelde zu Waterloo' (The Dying Grenadier on the Battlefield of Waterloo).

¹⁴⁶ For example, *Guignol soldat malgré lui* (also called *Le Conscrit* or *L'Enrôlement forcé*), manuscript by Victor-Napoléon Vuillermé-Dunand in 1853 (Fonds Léopold Dor, Musée Gadagne, Lyon); 'Jan Klaassen wordt als soldaat angeworven' (Tijl Uilenspiegel, *Jan Klaassen's leven en heldendaden* [Kassel: Adolph Jacobi, 1880]); and 'Kasperl als Soldat' (Fidel Fidelius [Christian Friedrich August Kolb], *Kasperl. Puppenspiele für Jung und Alt* [Stuttgart & Leipzig: Otto Risch, 1874]).

¹⁴⁷ 'Les Conscrits de 1809', *Théâtre lyonnais de Guignol*, 2nd ser. (Lyon: N. Scheuring, 1869).

Mère Simonne

Thousands and thousands, my little Guignol ... I can still see the poor Sergeant Mitouflard, being swallowed by a crocodile ... that dreadful beast even devoured a toe from my left foot and put a hole in my stockings ... He munched Mitouflard whole, shako and boots too ... that gave the monster indigestion! He brought back up the shako and boots; but (*she sighs*) it did not return the poor Mitouflard.¹⁴⁸

At the turn of the nineteenth century, several Guignol shows used the colonial wars as a backdrop, but their authors distanced themselves from historical events to construct fantasy plots in an overtly parodic register. At the end of an unlikely series of adventures full of exotic and colonial clichés, the protagonist becomes, for example, a military hero, the emperor of the Sahara, or a sultan.¹⁴⁹ In contrast, popular theatres in northern France favoured more realist and often more dramatic representations of combat whether the subject was a historical war,¹⁵⁰ the contemporaneous Boer War,¹⁵¹ or the Algerian conquest¹⁵²: they featured killing, murders, hostage taking, espionage, and betrayals. Even the disastrous Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 found a place on the small stages of Lille, Roubaix, and Amiens, whereas any mention of it in live theatre was generally censored. In *L’Bataille ed Querriu* (*The Battle of Querriu*) which began being performed at the start of the 1880s, Édouard David throws Lafleur and his friend Tchot Blaise into the Battle of Hallue (December 1870). They admirably carry out their duties: their

¹⁴⁸ ‘Les Conscrits de 1809’, 290.

¹⁴⁹ Tony Tardy, *Les Aventures de Guignol et Gnafron à Tananarive* (1896); Pierre Rousset, *Guignol à Madagascar* (1898); Tony Tardy, *Guignol à Fachoda* (1899); Tony Tardy, *Guignol premier empereur du Sahara* (1904); Tony Tardy, *Guignol au Maroc* (1908). All these manuscripts are held in the Fonds Léopold Dor, Musée des Arts de la Marionnette – Musée Gadagne, Lyon.

¹⁵⁰ For example, Maurice Richard’s play *Pour l’argent* (Théâtre Louis Richard, Roubaix, 1907), which is set during the siege of Lille in 1792. All the titles by Louis or Maurice Richard cited here are taken from a handwritten notebook held at the Médiathèque de Roubaix (ms. 251) in which the summaries of 119 plays were compiled.

¹⁵¹ Maurice Richard, *La Bataille de Kimberley, épisode de la guerre Anglo-Boers; Héroïsme d’enfant; Paul Pother* (Théâtre Louis Richard, Roubaix, 1906). The Siege of Kimberley took place in 1899–1900. The Fonds Léopold Dor, Musée Gadagne, Lyon, holds the music directions for a *Guignol chez les Boers*, but the text has been lost.

¹⁵² Maurice Richard, *Le Régiment des zouaves* and *La Sentinelle perdue* (Théâtre Louis Richard, 1905).

colonel dies, Lafleur is injured, but they manage to free Lafleur's wife Catherine who has been taken hostage by the Prussians, and, in the grand finale, General Faidherbe honours Lafleur for his bravery. In opposition to historical reality, puppeteers always made sure to end their shows with a military victory, or at least a moral one, for the French. *Lydéric et Rinaud*, a play by Maurice Richard performed in Roubaix in 1906, ends in this way with 'a handful of dying men who still had the courage to mock the triumphant enemy in spite of the circumstances'.¹⁵³

In northern Italy, military plays performed by puppet theatres sometimes took the Napoleonic Wars as their subject—for example, *Napoleone Bonaparte alla battaglia di Marengo* (1903)¹⁵⁴ (*Napoleone Bonaparte alla battaglia di Marengo*) by the glove puppeteer Giuseppe Sarina. However, the most popular theme was the Risorgimento, the fight against the Austrian occupation and for national unity, a tense navigation between mobilising local identities (by using regional 'masks' speaking in dialect) and the exaltation of patriotic sentiment. With no existing theatrical hypotext to adapt for the puppet booth, the dramas addressing these subjects were original compositions by the puppeteers. Their action alternates between historical moments with military chiefs (advice and decisions on the movement of troops, progress reports for battles, speeches, and proclamations), invented scenes that represent the war from the perspective of a handful of fighters, and matters of espionage and betrayal.

A variety of sources were used to create these reconstructions: for events in the past, such as the Napoleonic Wars, puppeteers drew on popular novels, as well as, in all likelihood, handwritten accounts and tales and anecdotes transmitted orally, as Pietro Porta suggests.¹⁵⁵ In contrast, for the Risorgimento wars, documentary sources taken from the press (liaison bulletins, proclamations) could be used given the temporal proximity to the events. Alfonso Cipolla has identified the faithful transcription of official proclamations made by Vittorio Emanuele II on 30

¹⁵³ Maurice Richard, *Lydéric et Rinaud*, Médiathèque de Roubaix, ms. 251, 49. See Yanna Kor, 'Representations of War on the Regional Puppet Stage: A Case Study of the Military Repertoire of L'Théât' Louis (Roubaix, France)', *European Journal for Theatre and Performance* 7 (2024).

¹⁵⁴ Sarina, *Napoleone Buonaparte alla battaglia di Marengo*.

¹⁵⁵ Pietro Porta, 'Burattini e marionette a Marengo. Il copione del giovane Sarina', in Sarina, *Napoleone Buonaparte alla battaglia di Marengo*, 9–33.

and 31 May 1859, the day after the Franco-Piedmontese troupe's victory over the Austrian army, in the manuscript of *La battaglia di Palestro* by the Rame family. On this basis, the play merits a place alongside works like Georg Büchner's *Dantons Tod* (*Danton's death*, 1835) and Romain Rolland's *Le Temps viendra* (*The time will come*, 1903) as dramatic texts that incorporate historical documents to form the prehistory of documentary theatre as it would emerge, spearheaded by Erwin Piscator, during the interwar period.

La battaglia di Palestro, like *La battaglia di Solferino e San Martino* by the same Rame family, was very likely performed the same year in which the events happened. Both plays similarly respond to the public's curiosity for seeing 'their enemies and their heroes', thus becoming part of 'the taste of an age that pushed the entire publishing industry, popular or not, to print battle scenes'.¹⁵⁶ By bringing the founding events of a national history in the process of being written to the stage, puppet theatre, like popular prints, photography, and political cartoons, contributed to a new visual culture based on the growing place of images in everyday life: to recount increasingly signified to show. It is thus telling that some puppeteers' manuscripts are accompanied by an illustration (often a magazine cover) representing the event recounted¹⁵⁷: affixed to the cover of a notebook or inside before the text begins, it simultaneously provided an immediate source of inspiration for writing and the backdrop to the performance, the mass of information and emotions that the artists wished to re-create on stage.

POPULAR NEWS STORIES AND SERIALITY

In the regions where puppeteers from the popular tradition were more numerous and more deeply rooted, developing a regular theatrical activity required a frequent and sometimes even daily updating of their repertoire. Two guiding principles can be identified in the practices of artists who were confronted with the vital need of gaining a loyal audience: some diversified the sources of inspiration for their shows as much as

¹⁵⁶ Alfonso Cipolla, 'La seconda guerra d'indipendenza e i copioni dei Rame', in Famiglia Rame, *La battaglia di Palestro, La battaglia di Solferino e San Martino* (Porretta Terme: I Quaderni del Battello Ebbro, 1999).

¹⁵⁷ For example, this is the case for *Terribile terremoto di Monte Leone* by Ugo Ponti, mentioned above.

possible, adding plays that staged recent news stories to the usual collection of traditional tales, successful productions from live theatre, and adaptations of novels¹⁵⁸; others transposed the concept of the serial made popular by newspapers onto the stage by dividing long narrative cycles into dozens of weekly or even daily episodes. In both cases, puppeteers used the mainstream press as a model whilst implementing an original mode of production based on the construction of a series of stock scenes, recurring situations, and similar roles in each performance. Alongside the importance of the religious repertoire, the continuing presence of works abandoned by actors, and the development of subgenres such as the military drama, these two strategies of conquering and consolidating audiences, taking subjects from news stories and adopting an episodic structure, are amongst the dramaturgical specificities of popular puppet shows within the theatrical system of their time.

In Germany and northern Italy in particular, the place occupied by news stories in the repertoire of string-marionettes and glove puppets deserves to be highlighted, since it has often gone unobserved with the exception of Gustav Küpper's study for German-speaking areas.¹⁵⁹ Puppeteers brought to the stage a wide variety of stories from big political and legal affairs to bloody crimes: to cite but a few subjects, Küpper identifies the trial of Alfred Dreyfus, the execution of Emperor Maximilian I of Mexico, the Courrières mine disaster, and the assassination of the Duchesse de Praslin by her husband. In Italy, the story of the Calabrian bandit Giuseppe Musolino,¹⁶⁰ the first draisienné race in 1819,¹⁶¹ the execution of the priest Ugo Bassi (a comrade of Garibaldi),¹⁶² and the discovery of the nun Barbara Ubryk imprisoned in a Polish convent¹⁶³ were some of the events performed by puppet theatres, which confirms

¹⁵⁸ See McCormick and Pratasik, *Popular Puppet Theatre in Europe, 1800–1914*, 192–94.

¹⁵⁹ Küpper, *Aktualität im Puppenspiel*.

¹⁶⁰ *Vita, gesta, arresti del bandito calabrese Giuseppe Musolino*, manuscript by L. Marchi-ammì from the collection of the string-marionette puppeteer Cesare Vittorio Aspromonte Monticelli, around 1900, held at the Casa delle marionette, Ravenna.

¹⁶¹ McCormick, Cipolla, and Napoli, *The Italian Puppet Theatre*, 148.

¹⁶² *Fucilazione del Padre Barnabita Ugo Bassi da Cento...* (Ferrara: Comune di Ferrara, 1997).

¹⁶³ *La monaca di Cracovia*, Fondo Zaffardi de la Civica Scuola d'Arte Drammatica Paolo Grassi, Milan.

their role in transforming news into images: John McCormick compares them to the newsreels that preceded the projection of films in cinemas in the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁶⁴

However, this ability to capture the present or immediate past should not be understood as simply staging the news: whilst puppet theatres offered an almost immediate sounding board for these affairs and events, how they were recounted went beyond a simple chronicle of current affairs in a bid to become part of a longer temporality. When the Saxon puppeteer Friedrich Beier received a copy of *Der Mord am Mitternacht* (*Murder at Midnight*, 1884) as a gift in 1930, he decided to stage it himself. His version of the play recounting the murder of the Duchesse de Praslin by her husband in 1847 displaces the action to 1919, but without modifying the references to France's monarchical institutions under Louis-Philippe.¹⁶⁵ Another example is the story of the murderer Grete Beier, executed in July 1908, recounted initially in *Grete Beier, die Bürgermeisterstochter* (*Grete Beier, the Mayor's Daughter*), Benno Daum's play for puppets whose manuscript is dated September 1908; this same story also served as the subject for another play *Grete Beier*, for which a copy was made by Auerswald in 1925.¹⁶⁶

Criminal cases, as with the ballads of street singers, prints, and popular novels, were long a favoured subject in puppet theatre: puppeteers knew how to draw upon the emotions that these crimes provoked to perpetuate their memory for several generations. At the end of the 1730s, Henry Collyer was still using his 'Liliputian Popets' to perform the anonymous tragedy *Arden of Faversham* written in 1592, which stages a news story from 1550: the murder of a bourgeois man at the request of his wife and her lover.¹⁶⁷ The story of Giorgio Orsolano, a sausage maker hung in 1835 for having raped and killed three little girls, was superimposed onto that of Biagio Carnico, a Venetian pork butcher from the sixteenth century accused of making his victims disappear by cooking and selling their flesh. Orsolano thereafter became a legendary figure, a cannibalistic butcher nicknamed the 'hyena of San Giorgio', and the subject of several

¹⁶⁴ McCormick, Cipolla, and Napoli, *The Italian Puppet Theatre*, 147.

¹⁶⁵ Küpper, *Aktualität im Puppenspiel*, 18.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁶⁷ See Henry Collyer, *A Short Account of Lord Cheyne, Lord Shorland, and Mr. Thomas Arden* (Canterbury: printed by the author, 1739). I thank Cécile Decaix for having pointed me to this text.

glove puppet shows: Gualberto Niemen (1905–2003), who saw *La iena di San Giorgio* played by the burattinaio Giacomo Canardi during the First World War, reconstructed the texts from memory in the 1930s and made the show one of the pillars of his repertoire until the start of the 1960s.¹⁶⁸

The subjects borrowed from news stories are thus transformed or enhanced by various additions that harden the oppositions between good and bad, innocent and guilty, victims and torturers according to a simplifying reading whose main function is to garner support from the majority of spectators. It also produces the effect of separating the events from current times and elevating them to the position of exemplary stories. Revealed by newspapers in 1869, the story of Barbara Ubryk, who was locked in the dark midden of a minuscule underground cell at her convent in Kraków for 21 years, was used by Saxon puppeteers who supplemented it with lines, situations, and character names from other plays in their repertoires, even from Friedrich Schiller's *Die Räuber* (*The Robbers*, 1781). A sentimental plot and an attempt to steal inheritance were added to paint a dark picture of the ecclesiastical authorities, making the play a weapon in the 'Kulturkampf', the campaign waged by Otto von Bismarck in the 1870s to submit the Catholic Church to state power.¹⁶⁹

In the manuscript of an anonymous puppeteer from Piedmont, the story is afforded a less anti-clerical treatment, but it is just as fanciful: Barbara Ubryk, the imprisoned nun, is subject to the Mother Abbess's hateful wrath because she is the daughter of the man who seduced and abandoned her, which led her to take the veil. Assisted by his servant Gianduja, Gustavo, who is in love with Barbara, tries to take her away, but fails. The prior of the convent cedes to his lover the Mother Abbess's pressure and condemns the young woman to life imprisonment underground where only the help of another nun keeps her alive. Gustavo, who believes Barbara is dead, leaves to fight alongside Garibaldi. Returning to Kraków 21 years later, he learns from Gianduja that Barbara is still alive, and the

¹⁶⁸ See the text reconstructed by Gualberto Niemen, *La iena di San Giorgio. Storia di una vecchia leggenda, due atti per teatro dei burattini* (Porretta Terme: I Quaderni del Battello Ebbro, 1999); as well as Francesca Di Fazio, 'La Iena di San Giorgio. Da leggenda popolare a mito burattinesco', *DNA, Rivista di studi camporesiani* 3, no. 1 (2022): 67–83.

¹⁶⁹ Küpper, *Aktualität im Puppenspiel*, 18–21.

prior, having drunk too much, reveals where she is imprisoned. Accompanied by the bishop, representatives of the law, and soldiers, Gustavo and Gianduja discover Barbara, who is nothing but skin and bones, covered in foul matter, almost mad and blind in her cell. The Mother Abbess poisons the prior for having revealed their secret, is arrested, and gets her comeuppance along with her religious accomplices. The last words are delivered by the bishop, who orders the closure and destruction of the convent, denounces the inhumanity of the guilty parties, and strongly affirms that they had perverted the teachings of the Church. Vengeance, thwarted romance, an escape attempt, an unfair trial, an assassination by poisoning, and a lover's reunion after all the trials and tribulations: these ingredients allowed the puppeteer to enhance the news story by adding in stock scenes from other plays in his repertoire. The presence of Gianduja and his jokes in dialect embedded the usual link of proximity to the audience.¹⁷⁰

The return of familiar figures and tried-and-tested techniques is also found in different regional traditions in Belgium and Italy which developed episodic theatrical cycles. The spinner Antoine Genty (1804–65), founder of a 'poechenellekelder' (puppet cellar) in Brussels in 1830, began performing adaptations of medieval legends (*Les Quatre Fils Aymon*, *Orson et Valentin*) and plays with religious subject matter. When the practice of publishing serialised fiction in the 'rez-de-chaussée'¹⁷¹ of newspapers became widespread, likely during the 1840s,¹⁷² Antoine Genty, known as Toone l'Ancien, started performing a new episode of the same story each day. Puppet shows thus contributed to making successful novels known amongst popular audiences, the majority of whom, like the artists themselves, could not read or write. As Andrée Longcheval and Luc Honorez, historians of the Théâtre Toone, explain:

¹⁷⁰ See *La monaca di Cracovia*.

¹⁷¹ The name, meaning ground floor, given to the bottom of a page in a newspaper, separated from the rest of the content by a dinkus and reserved either for theatrical instalments (programmes, critiques) or novel serialisations.

¹⁷² For example, Alexandre Dumas began publishing *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, one of the big successes at the Théâtre Toone, in *Le Siècle* in 1844.

... with the trend for serial novelists in the major newspapers, illiterate exhibitioners recounted various episodes and, in turn, transmitted to a popular audience cloak and dagger novels by Dumas, Féval, and Zévaco.¹⁷³

Improvised using these serialisations whose pace of publication they followed out of necessity, the shows of puppeteers in Brussels, at the Théâtre Toone and its competitors, did not leave any written trace. The oldest preserved texts date from the end of the nineteenth or start of the twentieth centuries, the period in which artists began acquiring a basic level of education. The manuscripts held in the theatre's archives attest to the fact that the repertoire during the time of Jean-Antoine Schoonenburg, known as Jan de Crol (1852–1926), one of the holders of the title of Toone III,¹⁷⁴ was still largely based on the practice of episodic shows and included a significant degree of improvisation: each scene is described in a few short lines, listing the scenery and names of the characters present on stage. In some cases, the allocation of speaking parts and the main idea of what is to be said are indicated, but these annotations are always very succinct.

The publication of popular novels meant that puppeteers no longer needed to follow the frequency of newspapers, and thereafter their sources became more varied. Some shows barely covered more than four to six sessions, such as *Le Capitaine Satan*, *Le Capitaine Fine-Lame*, and *Cyrano de Bergerac*, three adaptations of popular cloak-and-dagger novels brought together in one handwritten notebook.¹⁷⁵ Yet when Toone III performed Alexandre Dumas's trilogy *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, *Vingt ans après* and *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne* (*The three musketeers*, *Twenty years after*, *The vicomte of Bragelonne*), the programme was delivered over the course of two months with the same audience of loyal followers returning each night. One of the longest runs was that of the *Pardaillan*, based on

¹⁷³ Longcheval and Honorez, *Toone et les marionnettes de Bruxelles*, 19.

¹⁷⁴ There were two Toone III, the second was Georges Hembrauf known as Toone de Locrel (1866–98).

¹⁷⁵ *Le Capitaine Fine-Lame*, *Le Capitaine Satan*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Handwritten notebook, VI.13.7. Archives du Théâtre Toone, Brussels. This notebook belonged to Toone VI (Pierre Welleman, 1892–1974), but the quality of the ink and paper suggests that it was written before 1914. The novels are by Louis Gallet (*Le Capitaine Satan* [Paris: La Librairie illustrée, 1876]), François Oswald (*Le Capitaine Fine-Lame* [Paris: Kolb, 1893]), and Jules Lermina (*Amours et aventures de Cyrano de Bergerac* [Paris: L. Boulanger, 1894]).

Michel Zévaco's series of novels, performed during the interwar period by Toone VI in 72 episodes, each composed of 12 tableaux. This performance is all the more remarkable given that, as per the theatre's tradition, the holder of the title Toone lent his voice to all the characters.

A significant homogeneity emerges from these productions: the action is often set in the same historical period (from the end of the sixteenth to the start of the eighteenth centuries) and is largely inspired by adventure cloak-and-dagger novels, with scenes of scheming, kidnapping, poisoning, escapes, and duels repeated in each episode. On an invitation card written by Toone de Locrel¹⁷⁶ at the end of the nineteenth century, spectators were invited to a gala performance in which 'there will be a great drama in 5 acts and 27 tableaux with two duels and a kidnapping, 3 assassinations and 7 visual changes of scenery'.¹⁷⁷ These details show how much the theatrical action was constructed on the expected appearance of these fictional twists and turns, split across different body movements, the perfect execution of which guaranteed the show's success. As with all rod- and string-marionettes, the manipulation of solid wood figures, sometimes with copper or tin-plate armoury, involved a physical effort that transformed their movements into a choreographed swaying: the duels were thus simultaneously moments of significant dramatic intensity and a demonstration of puppetry skill. Woltje, a smaller puppet than the others depicting a young boy in red wool stockings, golf trousers, jacket, and checked hat, embodied the little people from Brussels. However, his interventions are rarely indicated in the manuscripts, either because he was assigned one of the other characters' roles or because his words, announcements, and addresses to the audience framed the performance.

The same principle of episodic shows that reused a small range of stock scenes for each performance is found in another repertoire in Liège based on the adventures of Charlemagne and his knights, for which puppeteers drew on popular publications, notably from the Bibliothèque bleue, recounting medieval cycles: *La Chanson de Roland*, *Huon de Bordeaux*, *Ogier le Danois* (sometimes changed to *Ogier l'Ardennois*),¹⁷⁸ *Les Quatre Fils Aymon*, and *Orson et Valentin*. Though postdating the

¹⁷⁶ See n. 174 above.

¹⁷⁷ Cited in Longcheval and Honorez, *Toone et les marionnettes de Bruxelles*, 25.

¹⁷⁸ *Ogier l'Ardennois, comédie en un acte pour théâtre de marionnettes* (Liège: Maison Joseph Halleux, 1937).

tradition in Brussels, which goes back to the end of the 1850s,¹⁷⁹ rod-and-string-marionette theatres had a considerable presence in Liège at the end of the nineteenth century. Initially an additional source of income for families of workers, the job of puppeteer gradually turned professional as salaries increased, working time was reduced, and basic necessities became cheaper, loosening the noose of poverty for the lower classes¹⁸⁰: with less limited means and more free time, the number of spectators increased, which allowed some artists to make a living from this trade. During the same period, audiences also became more diverse, including more well-off and educated spectators who were keen to discover a form of cultural heritage that had started being considered as an essential part of Walloon identity.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the adventures of Charlemagne's Paladins in the hands of puppeteers in Liège were most often divided into a series of around 30 performances.¹⁸¹ Like in Brussels, some artists copied a summary of each scene into notebooks, but for many, it was enough to annotate the printed brochures they collected, marking with a pencil line the start of each speaking part and adding some brief indications in the margin to serve as stage directions. The popular character Tchantchè's lines in Walloon are not noted due to a lack of space on the printed page (their placement is only indicated with a 'T'), but also because they were largely improvised. In contrast, his role in the dramatic action is more clearly defined than that of Woltje for Toone: he generally serves as an equerry or valet to the protagonist he accompanies. In the years following the First World War, during which the number of puppet theatres in Liège reduced from around 60 to five, the habit of performing series was abandoned. Whilst the role given to Tchantchè tended to be expanded, multiplying the comic responses within the epic material, the adult audiences gradually diminished and were replaced with children. Several texts were thereafter published, either in the 'Bibliothèque Tchantchè' by the Imprimerie Dubuisson or by the local history museum Musée de la Vie wallonne established in 1913, which released abridged versions for young readers.

¹⁷⁹ Gross, *Speaking in Other Voices*, 47–48.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 51–52.

¹⁸¹ François Pinet, *Les 100 Ans de marionnettistes de la famille Pinet* (Liège: Édica/Théâtre des Marionnettes Liégeoises, 1969), 66.

In both cities, theatrical serialisations performed by popular puppet shows plunged spectators into an idealised past that constituted a cornerstone for the construction of collective identities: in Brussels, the separation of the Catholic, loyalist Southern Netherlands and the United Provinces, which gained independence from the Spanish Crown in 1609; in Liège, the memory of the imperial court of Aix-la-Chapelle during Charlemagne's reign. The stage depicted an ideal world, larger than that of everyday life, in which courage and loyalty were always rewarded, and treason and lies were mercilessly punished. Honour, in particular, was the cardinal virtue that determined the division between good and bad characters, legitimate vengeance, and unforgiveable betrayals.

A comparable system of values underpins the stories told through episodic shows in south Italy, which some historians believe may have served as a model for puppeteers in Liège despite the fact that this tradition was not much older. The 'Opera dei pupi', as rod-marionette theatres are referred to in Sicily and the south of the peninsula, gradually developed from the 1830s onwards following the introduction of changes to the way in which puppets were made. By replacing strings with metal rods, puppeteers were able to execute duel and battle scenes from the Carolingian epics, with their heavy knights in armour, and thereafter they abandoned the comic plays ('vastasate') to which their shows had previously been restricted.¹⁸² This new epic-chivalric repertoire was initially employed by the 'cuntisti' (street storytellers) who carried a wooden sword and recited the adventures of Rinaldo or Orlando by improvising with traditional metric patterns. It gradually became fixed during the second half of the nineteenth century following popular editions by Giusto Lo Dico and later Giuseppe Leggio, who, in the *Storia dei Paladini di Francia*,¹⁸³ brought together this enormous corpus of narrative matter based on the poems by Matteo Maria Boiardo (*Orlando innamorato*, 1483) and Ludovico Ariosto (*Orlando furioso*, 1532): these

¹⁸² Antonio Pasqualino, *L'Opera dei pupi* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2017), 25–26. According to Pasqualino, the first theatre of this type in Palermo was opened by Gaetano Greco in 1826. Valentina Venturini's research, however, has shown that Gaetano Greco was born 1813 and established his theatre in 1833; see Valentina Venturini, 'Sull'origine (palermitana) dell'Opera dei pupi', *Teatro e storia* 2 (2010): 343–65. In Catania, the tradition goes back to the birth of Opera dei pupi by Don Gaetano Crimo in 1835.

¹⁸³ Giusto Lo Dico, *Storia dei Paladini di Francia*, vols. 1–4 (Palermo: Gaudiano, 1858–60). A new edition, expanded with numerous additions by Giuseppe Leggio, was published in 1895 and 1902, in thirteen volumes.

sources were constantly drawn upon by the ‘opranti’ (puppeteers), but they did not hesitate to up the ante by inventing new twists and turns or new characters.

Puppets in sculpted wood, originally with cardboard armour and adorned with lace stripes,¹⁸⁴ were progressively replaced by figures with armour in shining metal and helmets topped with spectacular feathers that could engage in sword fighting due to the metal rod that guided their arms. In Palermo, where the ‘opranti’ who animated them also gave them their voices, these puppets were 80 cm high; in Catania, they measured 110–130 cm and weighed up to 30 kg, which made it necessary to divide the tasks between those who operated them (‘manianti’) and those that made them speak (‘parraturi’ and ‘parratrice’). Other pupi theatres popped up in southern Italy, notably in Naples and even Rome, where the German historian Ferdinand Gregorovius saw *Angelica e Medoro* and *Orlando furioso e li Paladini* (*Orlando furioso and the Paladins*) in 1853 – Pulcinella played the role of Orlando’s equerry.¹⁸⁵

As with the puppet shows in Belgium and northern France, honour played the same central role in both the stories of bandits and ‘camorristi’ in the repertoire performed by Napolitan puppeteers and the cycle of the Paladins of France presented in Palermo and Catania. However, in Italy, this sense of honour was intensified by the fact that the audiences for these serials inspired by chivalric epics across all age groups were exclusively masculine. For performances open to women, which presented a whole drama and were performed on feast days, a different repertoire was proposed: the opranti performed plays with a religious subject, like the lives of saints, or even inspired by Shakespeare’s tragedies. The themes of honour and vengeance were not forgotten, nor were the usual battle scenes from the Opera dei pupi, as can be seen in the example of *Giulietta e Romeo* performed by Giovanni Pernice in Palermo between 1912 and 1922, then revived by Giacomo Cuticchio from 1939 to 1960.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Donata Amico, *Teatrar narrando: l’Opera dei pupi catanese. Le ‘serate’ di Raffaele Trombetta (1882–1928)* (Azzano San Paolo: Edizioni Junior, 2008), 21.

¹⁸⁵ Ferdinand Gregorovius, *Wanderjahre in Italien* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1890), 211–21.

¹⁸⁶ *Giulietta e Romeo*, manuscript by Giovanni Pernice, 1912, Fondo Giacomo Cuticchio, Biblioteca della Fondazione Sicilia, Palermo. I thank Anna Leone for having drawn my attention to this text.

The play opens with a scene in which Romeo tells his father, the old Timoleone Montecchi, that he saw a young woman at church. His father guesses that it is Giulietta and takes Romeo to the family crypt to show him his mother's tomb. There, he recounts how he was abducted by two masked men who wanted to make him stab a tied-up, naked woman whose face was hidden by a veil. After he refused, one of the men killed their prisoner, who was revealed to be Timoleone's wife and Romeo's mother. Timoleone finishes his tale by telling his son that Giulietta is the daughter of the assassin and asks him to swear with a foot on her tomb that he will avenge his mother's death. Romeo then besieges Verona and threatens to destroy the city led by King Capelio Capuleta. In the battle fought between the Montecchi and the Capuleti under the ramparts, Romeo kills Paride, but upon learning that he was Giulietta's brother, he leaves the battlefield in tears. Dressed as a Guelph,¹⁸⁷ he goes to Capelio's home and, without being recognised, expresses his desire to marry Giulietta, but the king declares that he wants the murderer of Paride dead. With the help of Padre Lorenzo, Romeo enters Giulietta's bedroom and attempts to convince her to leave with him, but she refuses, stating that honour is stronger than love. The Capuleti arrive and Romeo must flee. He returns by throwing a rope ladder up to Giulietta, who once more refuses to follow him, and he must flee yet again. Padre Lorenzo convinces Giulietta to agree to marry Romeo and, to join him, she consents to using a potion to simulate suicide and make her appear dead. After having engaged in a final battle in which he kills Tebaldo, Romeo goes to Giulietta's tomb and poisons himself. When Giulietta wakes up and discovers him dead, she stabs herself. The lovers are reunited in Heaven with Giulietta's soul being represented by a white butterfly that flutters amongst the angels. In a final, optional scene, the king discovers the two bodies and kills himself.

This rewriting diverges from Shakespeare's tragedy through the addition of a vengeance plot and the transformation of the quarrels between the Capuleti and Montecchi clans into a war of opposing armies on the ramparts of Verona. Moreover, it is constructed using two stock scenes that form the narrative structure characteristic of the *Opera dei pupi*: scenes featuring advice or deliberation (seven in total) and battle scenes

¹⁸⁷ The opposition between the Montecchi and the Capuleti has often been interpreted as a fictional transposition of that between the Guelphs (partisans of the Oope) and Ghibellines (partisans of the Holy Roman Empire) in medieval Italy.

(two in total). As Antonio Pasqualino observes,¹⁸⁸ different versions of these two stock scenes are found in each episode of theatrical serialisations in both Palermo and Catania. Reusing very ancient codes of festivities like the spring processions linked to agricultural rituals and sword dancing,¹⁸⁹ these regularly returning stock scenes provide a rhythm to the performances, throwing into sharp relief the dramatic power of the intervening scenes: solemn promise, romantic dialogue, suicide, eavesdropping on a conversation, surprise attack, glorification, and damnation. Other recurring features include the comic characters *Virticchiu* and *Nofriu*, inherited from the old *vastasate* and the *Perdomani* ('for tomorrow'), the character responsible for announcing to the audience the outline of the following day's performance.

A closer analysis of the composition of the *Opera dei pupi* shows how they are structured on different codified segments, yet the manuscripts bear no trace of this construction as the *opranti* emerged from an oral tradition and underwent a very hierarchical form of apprenticeship.¹⁹⁰ Whilst the dialogues and the details of stage actions are partially left to be improvised, improvisation itself is organised according to a tripartite system: repetition (shouting 'evviva' upon the arrival of each knight in the council scenes); gradation (entrances on stage, including in order of increasing importance for the battles); and, finally, variations based on characterisation. The organisation of combat, for example, follows a strict order: the Christian knights always enter stage right, and their enemies stage left; they confront each other in duels involving increasingly prestigious heroes and the deaths are always ever more spectacular: severed heads, torsos cut off at the waist, faces split in two, whole bodies in separate pieces. Preceded by solemn apostrophes between the fighting and accompanied by kicks in the wings, confrontations between fighters follow a series of precisely choreographed gestural routines (movements of the body and the armed arm, rotation of the head, shield play). The pitch of the characters' voices was also governed by conventions: low voices for old people and characters with authority, baritone for mature men, tenor

¹⁸⁸ Antonio Pasqualino, ed., *Dal testo alla rappresentazione. Le prime imprese di Carlo Magno* (Palermo: Laboratorio Antropologico Universitario, 1986), 20–27.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁹⁰ The *opranti* first learnt to control the Saracens in the third, then second, and finally first row, before moving onto the Christians and following the same gradation.

for young men, and falsetto for women,¹⁹¹ comic roles, and traitors like Gano di Maganza (Ganelon). Variations in tone and rhythm also served to characterise the roles and, for the heroes, a particular vibrato is used to emphasise the most dramatic or most touching situations.¹⁹²

The meticulous codification of gestures and voices, as well as how the decoration of armour and shields were determined, makes Opera dei pupi one of the most complex theatrical traditions in Western Europe. Performances of the epic-chivalric cycles in Palermo and Catania¹⁹³ belong more to a ritualistic celebration than to a serial tradition with unexpected plot twists: since spectators already knew the stories recounted, they came to see their depiction on stage. For those who may have forgotten, the details of each episode were announced the night before by the voice of the Perdomani in Palermo or by Raffaele Trombetta (1858–1923) in Catania, in a simple ‘invito’ (invitation) addressed to the audience before the curtain was lifted for the third act.¹⁹⁴ These details were also displayed on the façade of the theatre using ‘cartello’, a painting on canvas where, like in panels of comics, the main moments of that day’s episode were presented. A small poster reproducing the text of the invito, the ‘ricordino’ (souvenir), could also accompany it.¹⁹⁵ The identification between Sicilians and the heroes whose adventures they followed each night during consecutive months remained proverbial. In *Words Are Stone*, an account of his travels to the island in the mid-1950s, Carlo Levi recounts that a cabman from Catania ‘woke up one morning in a mood of black depression and told his family he would not be taking his cab out on to the square that day because it was a day of mourning: in the evening,

¹⁹¹ Nevertheless, in Catania, the female roles were voiced by the parratrice. In Palermo, Anna Cuticchio (born in 1945) was director of the Teatro Bradamante from 1976 to 1995 where she wrote, staged, and performed all the voices of the characters. See Leone, ‘Il repertorio non cavalleresco della famiglia Cuticchio e le serate speciali’.

¹⁹² Pasqualino, *Dal testo alla rappresentazione*, 35.

¹⁹³ The narrative structure in the Neapolitan tradition of Opera dei pupi is very different: each episode of ‘camorristi’ stories simultaneously develops several non-related plots. See, for example, the description on the PuppetPlays database of an episode from *Tore’e Crescenzio e Peppe Averzano* by Ciro Verbale: <https://puppetplays.eu/oeuvres/73463/1a-parte-della-nuova-storia-di-tore-e-crescenzio>.

¹⁹⁴ Amico, *Teatrar narrando*, 29.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 29–30. See also Alessandro Napoli, *Il racconto e i colori. ‘Storie’ e ‘cartelli’ dell’opera dei pupi catanese* (Palermo: Sellerio editore, 2002).

at the Garibaldi Theater, Rinaldo would die'.¹⁹⁶ Numerous anecdotes reported by the opranti also mention outbursts of hostility towards the traitor Gano di Maganza at whom spectators 'threw shoes and other objects'¹⁹⁷ when they did not simply shoot at him with a firearm.

Like in Belgium, the historical rooting of the majority of works in the repertoire related to a foundational period of collective identity, even though Sicily was never part of the Carolingian empire: the battles were always the Christian knights against the Saracens or their allies in a fantastical geography where Paris, Berlin, and even Moscow regularly feature, but these tales revived the memory of former domination by Arabs (831–1071) and then Normans (1071–1282) on the island. However, these echoes of a bygone past are not enough to explain the extraordinary fervour with which lower-class spectators in Sicily and south Italy passionately followed for more than a century the exploits of the Paladins of France, which were so distant from their everyday preoccupations. To understand this enthusiasm, it is necessary, as Anna Leone's analysis has shown, to see the connection at play between the system of values promoted by Opera dei pupi and that of spectators.¹⁹⁸ As Donata Amico suggests, the cultural stratification on which this repertoire is constructed through recycling different motifs (lost children who are later found, overcoming poor origins, romantic passion, vengeance) from melodrama and popular novels must also be considered.¹⁹⁹ First and likely, above all, audiences, wherever they were from or whatever social class they belonged to, did not go to the theatre to contemplate a reflection of their lives presented on stage, or to escape to an imaginary elsewhere, but for the subtle overlap that created an oscillation between these two worlds. The career of Giuseppe known as 'Peppino' Sarina offers some proof. The puppeteer from Piedmont travelled around the working-class neighbourhoods and villages of the Po plain with his shows until 1958. Without any connection to local history, the cornerstone of his repertoire was also the cycle of the Paladins of France which he broke down into 150 daily episodes using not shiny pupi, but simple, great, and beautiful glove puppets.

¹⁹⁶ Carlo Levi, *Words Are Stone: Impressions of Sicily*, trans. Angus Davidson (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1958), 111.

¹⁹⁷ Anna Leone, *Pupi et guarattelle, les marionnettes de Naples et de Palerme. Une korémachie italienne* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2022), 136.

¹⁹⁸ Leone, *Pupi et guarattelle*, 120–37.

¹⁹⁹ Amico, *Teatrar narrando*, 10.

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The Theatre for Families and Children

THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW AUDIENCE

Some indications of the particular attraction that puppet shows hold for children have appeared across the preceding chapters. As European societies began paying more attention to this stage of life in the eighteenth century,¹ children's fascination for puppet theatre appeared increasingly evident. Awareness of this special relationship progressively led to new social practices in both the private and public spheres: children played with puppets and puppeteers created shows for children.

This relationship was encouraged within families: in 1753, Goethe's grandmother gave four-year-old Johann Wolfgang and his three-year-old sister Cornelia a rod- and string-marionette theatre. As Goethe recounted in his autobiography *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (*Poetry and Truth*, 1831), the children were initially only spectators, but they started staging their own shows after a few years. Convinced of the art's positive influence on children's emotional and intellectual development, Goethe in turn offered a puppet booth and a set of puppets to his son August, born in 1789. In *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, 1796), Goethe drew inspiration from his own discovery of puppets to provide a starting point for the protagonist's theatrical vocation. The novel offers some insight into the repertoire used for these homemade

¹ See Philippe Ariès, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Plon, 1960).

shows: the story of David and Goliath interspersed with musical interludes and a ballet to lighten the tone, a farce with Hanswurst, and librettos from Italian operas. Reproducing shows from large theatres in miniature and imitating popular fairground entertainment made up the twofold dramaturgical system that governed these theatre games, which attests to the underlying bipolarisation in the puppetry arts during the Age of Enlightenment.

On the eve of the French Revolution, the first signs of theatrical activity that went beyond these contrasting models emerged with the programming of shows for both adults and children in response to new audience demands. Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun recounts in her memoirs how she saw the Fantoccini Italiens several times with her daughter at a venue on the Boulevard du Temple in Paris.² The most famous theatre established for this new audience was the Ombres Chinoises, which Dominique-Séraphin François, known as Séraphin (1747–1800), opened in 1781 and, having performed for the royal family, was able to name ‘Spectacle des Enfants de France’. Leaving Versailles, where he had previously been based, for Paris in 1784, he set up his theatre in the galleries of the Palais-Royal recently opened to the public. The advertisements that he distributed in the form of flyers demonstrate his desire to attract a family audience, but also the difficulties he encountered in having that idea accepted:

The Reader

It seems that your show would only entertain children.

Séraphin

Tune: aria from *Calpigi*

I must correct you there,
Everyone has fun here;
I offer different subjects,
So young and old are happy.³

Also present at the galleries of the Palais-Royal in 1784 was the Théâtre des Petits Comédiens of HSH the Comte de Beaujolais, which performed

² *The Memoirs of Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun*, trans. Siân Evans (London: Camden Press, 1989), 21.

³ Cited in *Feu le Théâtre de Séraphin. Depuis son origine jusqu'à sa disparition, 1776–1870* (Paris: Rouquette, 1872), 11.

a repertoire mainly composed of comedies with ariettas, opéras bouffons, and vaudevilles using rod- and string-marionettes. The following year, the puppets were replaced with children who mimed the roles as hidden singers lent them their voices. In his *Tableau du nouveau Palais-Royal*,⁴ François-Marie Mayeur de Saint-Paul observes that the ticket prices for the shows of both Séraphin and the Théâtre Beaujolais excluded a popular audience. He also mentions that several other theatres in the same location often welcomed children, thus confirming a growing interest amongst theatre entrepreneurs to appeal to young spectators.

There are several ambiguities surrounding these ventures. The first ambiguity is that the new attention granted to childhood meant that children were not only spectators but, above all and especially, a subject of the show, sometimes brought on stage to compete with the puppets. At the end of the eighteenth century, a trend for troupes of children re-emerged in Paris and in German-speaking countries.⁵ This practice had been present in England during the reign of Elizabeth I, but, aside from rare exceptions, it disappeared during the intervening period, with theatrical activities for young people only occurring within educational institutions or families.⁶ Sometimes presented as an acting school, troupes of children, which would be definitively banned in France in 1848, were often compared to puppet theatres, even being referred to as ‘living puppets’, and their activities tended to be mixed up or in competition with them.

The slippages of meaning in terms of how the Théâtre Beaujolais used the appellation ‘Petits Comédiens’ (little actors) reflects this confusion. First, it referred to the small size of the rod- and string-marionettes used on stage before designating the young boys and girls who started to perform silently alongside them, before ending up replacing them. This substitution has several precedents: Alexandre Bertrand had already attempted to combine children and puppets in 1690 in a performance

⁴ François-Marie Mayeur de Saint-Paul, *Tableau du nouveau Palais-Royal*, vol. 1 (London/Paris: Maradan, 1788), Chapters XIV and XV.

⁵ See Manfred Knedlik, ‘Kindertheater im 18. Jahrhundert. Felix Berner und seine “junge Schauspieler-Gesellschaft” in Regensburg und Amberg’, in *Verhandlungen des Historischen Vereins für Oberpfalz und Regensburg* (Regensburg: University of Regensburg, 2004), 195–202.

⁶ See the two volumes compiled by Marie-Emmanuelle Plagnol-Diéval, *L’Enfant révélé, Anthologie des théâtres d’éducation du 18^e siècle* (Paris: Garnier, 2022).

at the Saint-Germain fair, but he came up against the privilege of the Comédie-Française, who had his hut destroyed and his troupe disbanded.⁷ After having managed a theatre of ‘bamboches’ at the Saint-Germain fair whose sculpted heads reproduced the features of the actors at the Comédie-Italienne, Nicolas-Médard Audinot (1732–1801) established the Théâtre de l’Ambigu-Comique in 1769 with a set of puppets before gradually integrating children who would eventually replace them entirely.

The second ambiguity is that the children who replaced puppets thereafter performed mainly for adults. These adult audiences, particularly at Audinot’s shows, were sometimes alarmed by seeing children act in romantic plots—as Restif de la Bretonne wrote, allusive statements that ‘dismay and outrage the honest man, were put into the mouth of children’.⁸ During the 1770s and 1780s, a series of equivalences was established between puppets, child actors (even child characters),⁹ and children disguised as adults, without the child as spectator really being taken into consideration. Moreover, often when contemporary accounts mention the audiences for these shows, they highlight the presence of governesses and maids rather than the children they were responsible for accompanying.

Though part of the wider context of opening up theatre to children, Séraphin’s decision to explicitly address a multi-generational audience marks a rupture with the practices of the time: his *Ombres chinoises* was defined as a show *for* children and not *about* children, unlike what some other theatre entrepreneurs were still doing. In addition, conscious of the difficulties long or complex works would pose for young spectators, he favoured short sketches, interspersed with musical interludes, and a variety of theatrical forms. The shadow theatre plays, which he described as ‘in silhouette’, were only one part of the two-hour programme, which, in addition to short comedies for rod- or string-marionettes, included

⁷ See Charles Richomme, ‘Les enfants-acteurs’, in *Album Castelli* (Paris: Louis Janet, 1837), 8–9.

⁸ Nicolas-Edme Restif de la Bretonne, *La Mimographe, ou Idées d’une honnête-femme pour la réformation du théâtre national* (Amsterdam/The Hague: Changuion/Gosse & Pinet, 1770), 435.

⁹ For example, in the comedy *Il n’y a plus d’enfants* by Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Nougaret, performed for Louis XV at Choisy-le-Roi on 8 April 1772 by the Enfants de l’Ambigu-Comique.

‘character dances’, short numbers exhibiting figures of animals or transformations, Chinese fireworks (portraits of famous people surrounded by fireworks), and even ‘pyrotechnics and hydraulics’.

An article that appeared in the press in 1791 describes one of these acts:

M. Séraphin’s theatre has different elements that are admired by connoisseurs, particularly an enormous colossus that *appears* on the orders of a magician. This magician, himself frightened by this hideous colossus, successively cuts off its two arms, its two legs, its two thighs, and finally its head, all *seven limbs*. Only the torso that produced them remains; then the magician, shaking his head, cries *brrrrrrrrr! Disappear, you scare me.*¹⁰

‘Appear’ and ‘disappear’ were the magic words chanted by the interpreter who accompanied the show, as another newspaper article corroborates:

Three donkeys loaded with sponges, are swimming across a river. Look at them closely; they are going to drown; they sink, they come back above the surface; they continue swimming; they can no longer do it!
--- DISAPPEAR.

A sleepwalker, running here and there. --- Listen closely. --- Listen closely.
--- My wife! --- My friends! --- Help! --- They want to hang me. --- Here are the gallows. --- Here is the executioner. --- Lord, have mercy! --- What do you want from me? I do not know you. --- I do not know you either.
--- All seems suspicious. --- Lord! Have pity! Have pity! DISAPPEAR.¹¹

Even the ‘in silhouette’ plays, in which the interpreter’s narration gave way to a dialogue between the characters, the requirement for spectators to focus their attention on the screen demonstrates an awareness of the importance that the visual dimension assumed in these shows. The first signs of this evolution had only started appearing: the few plays that have been preserved and were performed at the Théâtre de Séraphin,¹² in

¹⁰ A. J. Gorsas, ‘Ombres chinoises de M. Séraphin’, *Le Courrier des LXXXIII départements* 25 (1791).

¹¹ ‘Les Ombres chinoises’, *Le Thé, ou le Contrôleur-Général*, 31 August 1797, 551.

¹² A selection of these plays is included as an appendix in the second edition of *Feu le Théâtre de Séraphin* (see n. 13 below). In the nineteenth century, several volumes were published that compiled plagiarised texts or texts inspired by those of Séraphin, but all were counterfeit: *Le Séraphin de l’enfance* (Metz: Dembour et Gangel, 1843);

essence, employed the usual techniques of the comic genre. For example, *Arlequin corsaire* by Dorvigny is based on the ‘à tiroirs’ construction of successive burlesque-style entries and its dialogue is full of misunderstandings, and in *Le Pont cassé* by Charles-Jacob Guillemain,¹³ a Gascon character speaks with an accent and in a ‘provincial’ manner.

Whilst far from being the most famous play performed at the Théâtre de Séraphin,¹⁴ *Le Pont cassé* (*The Broken Bridge*) appears to have an original construction in which the image, more than the dialogue, drives the conflict and its resolution. In this most simple of fables, a Traveller, who is prevented from crossing a bridge that has collapsed, asks the Petit Gas (little lad) on the opposite riverbank different questions and is mocked; a passing boat transports the Traveller across the river and then he beats the cheeky boy. The white space created by the broken deck of the bridge presents the first visual disruption; the Petit Gas’s provocations culminate in him showing his buttocks to the Traveller; the boat connecting the two banks turns the situation around like an Aristotelian catastrophe, whilst the corporal punishment of the Petit Gas forms the dénouement. The comebacks in the dialogue and the famous song ‘Les canards l’ont bien passée...’ contribute to the comedy of this sketch, yet the narrative itself develops through imagery as it would later in comic strips and the first cartoons.¹⁵

A. des Tilleuls, *Les Marionnettes de Séraphin* (Paris: Bernardin-Béchet, 1874). A more interesting account is provided in the two small volumes written by Louis-Victor Flamand-Grétry, *Théâtre de Séraphin ou des ombres chinoises* (Paris: J.-L. Courtat, 1806), which, in addition to inserting a fictional dialogue between a mother and her two children, gives precise details about several plays at the Théâtre de Séraphin. I thank Sophie Courtade for having brought this work to my attention.

¹³ ‘Le Pont cassé’, in *Feu le Théâtre de Séraphin* (Lyon: N. Scheuring, 1875), 33–43. On the attribution of this play, see Arthur Pougin, ‘Un théâtre enfantin: les ombres chinoises de Séraphin’, *Revue Universelle Illustrée* 1 (1890): 20. It was attributed to Dorvigny in the first edition of *Feu le Théâtre de Séraphin* (1872), 26; this attribution is corrected in the 1875 edition, 24. Charles Magnin, *Histoire des marionnettes en Europe, depuis l’Antiquité jusqu’à nos jours* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1852), 178, notes the existence of the play in the repertoire of the Théâtre des Récréations de la Chine presented by Ambroise at the Saint-Germain Fair in 1775 and 1777, as well as in London in 1776.

¹⁴ A total of 95 plays for shadows and 65 for puppets according to the catalogue drawn up in *Feu le Théâtre de Séraphin*, 23–30.

¹⁵ Georges Fath’s book *Le Paris des enfants – Petit voyage à travers la grande ville* (Paris: Hachette, 1869) describes in detail a show at the Théâtre de Séraphin as it was presented at the end of the Second Empire: it reveals that *La Chasse aux canards* (apart

THE SUPERNATURAL WORLD OF THE FÉERIE

Using imagery to tell stories was not the only method that puppet theatre employed to reach the new audiences of children and families that started to form at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Other numbers, in particular magic visual effects (Chinese fire-works, pyrotechnics, and hydraulics) and transformations, contributed significantly to creating a sense of wonder amongst the young spectators at the Théâtre de Séraphin, its imitators, and its successors. However, these effects did not only appear in puppet shows: they were the common language of the performing arts in the context of a major expansion of the theatrical offering, the sociological diversification of audiences, and the growing taste for the spectacular.¹⁶ For this reason, it is very difficult to draw distinctions between how the supernatural was treated in the respective repertoires of live theatre and puppet theatre during this period. Attempting to identify indications within puppet theatre of a shift towards younger audiences presents further difficulties. The adaptation of fairy tales, which might today be interpreted as a repertoire specifically targeting children, was in reality part of a much broader context: the féerie genre was developed by a significant number of Parisian theatres from the end of the *ancien régime* until the end of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 and even for some years after.

Charles Perrault's fairy tales, for example, served as inspiration for theatrical productions from 1697 onwards after the Italian actors at the Hôtel de Bourgogne performed *Les Fées ou Les Contes de ma mère l'Oye* (*Mother Goose Tales*) by Claude-Ignace Brugière de Barante and Charles Rivière du Fresny. Adaptations became more widespread in the second half of the eighteenth century, both at the Comédie-Italienne (Louis Anseume, *Cendrillon* [*Cinderella*], 1762) and in educational or society theatres (Carmontelle, *Le Petit Poucet* [*Hop-o'-My-Thumb*], 1768–69), then at the Théâtre de l'Ambigu-Comique which specialised in this genre

from the conflict between the two hunters on the way to cook the duck) and *Le Pont cassé* were combined into one single play.

¹⁶ See Isabelle Moindrot, ed., *Le Spectaculaire dans les arts de la scène, du Romantisme à la Belle Époque* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2006).

(Arnould, *La Belle au bois dormant* [*Sleeping Beauty*], 1770; Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Nougaret, *Le Chat botté* [*Puss in Boots*], 1770).¹⁷ When the Théâtre de Séraphin presented *Cendrillon* and *Le Petit Poucet* by Maillé de Marencourt in 1785, the puppetry arts became part of a general trend within the theatrical landscape that, fuelled by the publication of the 41 volumes of *Cabinet des fées* (1785–89) by Charles-Joseph Mayer, grew exponentially. *Le Petit Poucet, ou l'Orphelin de la forêt* (1798) by Guillaume Cuvelier and Augustin Hapdé was performed 321 times at the Théâtre des Jeunes Artistes until 1805.¹⁸ For much of the nineteenth century, this enthusiasm for fairy tales continued in live theatre, as well as pantomime and ballet. Eugène Scribe and Mélesville, for example, had *Le Chat botté* performed at the Théâtre du Vaudeville in 1820; Louis-Émile Van der Burch and Laurencin, *Peau d'âne* (*Donkey Skin*) at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin in 1838; Eugène Leterrier and Albert Vanloo, *Le Petit Poucet* at the Théâtre de l'Athénée in 1868. Tales by Madame d'Aulnoy (1697–98) and from Antoine Galland's (1704–17) version of the *One Thousand and One Nights* offered further inspiration.

However, the titles of these shows should not mislead: very often, the fairy tale only provided the initial narrative outline which was entirely reinterpreted by the actors or supplemented by numerous original episodes.¹⁹ Moreover, as Roxane Martin's research has shown, many *féeries* performed in Parisian theatres were made up of original works in which witches, wizards, fairies, and spirits fight against each other, either as the opponents or helpers of couples in love who, armed with talismans and other magical objects, attempt to escape the tyranny of a

¹⁷ See Angélique Chevalley, *Le Théâtre des fées* (Lausanne: Archipel Essais, 2023); as well as 'Le conte, la scène', *Féeries* 4 (2007).

¹⁸ See Roxane Martin, *La Féerie romantique sur les scènes parisiennes (1791–1864)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2007).

¹⁹ In *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* by Frédéric Dupetit-Méré and Nicolas Brazier (Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin, 1818), for example, the wolf is a young lord who, using a talisman that a fairy gave to him at birth, lives as a pleasure-seeker and abuses all the young girls on his estate. All the traditional elements from the fairy tale are reproduced, even the disguise of the 'wolf' as 'mother-grand' in a final attempt to take advantage of the young Simplette before her marriage to the gardener Julien. This transposition, however, does not dispense with the supernatural; in contrast, it increases the appearances of magical beings and spells. See Frédéric and Brazier, *Le Petit Chaperon rouge, mélodrame féerie en trois actes, en prose et à grand spectacle* (Paris: Barba, 1818).

guardian or the threat of a ill-matched marriage.²⁰ In its underlying narrative structure, the romantic *féerie* presented a new facet of comedy²¹: entirely unshackled from the constraints of classical rules, spectacular metamorphoses and visible changes of scenery appear successively in a game of one-upmanship of visual effects for a popular or family audience depending on the theatre.

Though the reduced dimensions of puppet theatres made it difficult to compete with the sensational highlights of *Le Pied de mouton* (*The Sheep's Foot*) by César Rivié and Alphonse Martainville²² (Théâtre de la Gaîté, 1806) or *Les Pilules du diable* (*The Devil's Pills*) by Ferdinand Laloue, Anicet Bourgeois, and Clément-Philippe Laurent (Cirque-Olympique, 1839), the two leading works of this theatrical genre, several puppeteers introduced *féeries* into their programmes during the July Monarchy and the Second Empire with the explicit aim of addressing primarily the children of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. The Théâtre de Séraphin was part of this trend. Its performances with rod- and string-marionettes²³ included Théophile Marion Dumersan's *La Biche blanche* (*The White Doe*, 1833), Lamiral's *La Boule d'or* (*The Golden Ball*, 1837), Édouard Plouvier's *Sinbad le marin* (*Sinbad the Sailor*, 1847) and *La Fée des lauriers-roses* (*The Fairy of the Oleander*, 1859), Gustave Deyeux's *Ali-Baba ou les quarante voleurs* (*Ali Baba or the Forty Thieves*, 1848), and Amédée Noisette's *Le Nain jaune* (*The Yellow Dwarf*, 1860). Like her husband Paul Royer, author of a version of *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* (*Little Red Riding Hood*) and director of the Théâtre de Séraphin from 1847 to 1859, Pauline Séraphin (1818–1905), the great-niece of the

²⁰ Martin, *La Féerie romantique sur les scènes parisiennes, passim*.

²¹ See Chevalley, *Le Théâtre des fées*, 34–35.

²² Nevertheless, there were several attempts to do so at the end of the nineteenth century: a puppet theatre located in Passage Jouffroy in Paris gave 200 performances of *Le Pied de mouton* in 1873 (*Le Gaulois*, 15 December 1873); the Théâtre Pitou, a fairground string-marionette theatre famous for its reproductions of large-scale theatrical stagings (*Le Tour du monde en 80 jours*, *La Tour de Nesle*), performed *Le Pied de mouton* and *Les Pilules du diable*. See Yanna Kor, 'Le répertoire du théâtre de marionnettes forain en France du XIX^e siècle: le cas du théâtre Chok-Pitou', paper presented at the international seminar *PuppetPlays*, 29–30 October 2020. Available online: <https://nakala.fr/10.34847/nkl.5ffc1984>.

²³ Most of the *féeries* performed at the Théâtre de Séraphin were with puppets: the shadow plays were usually comedies or vaudevilles. See the table in *Feu le Théâtre de Séraphin*, 23–30.

theatre's founder, wrote *féeries* such as *Le Pêcheur de Bagdad* (*Fisherman of Baghdad*, 1844), *La Perruque de Cassandre* (*Cassandre's Wig*, 1846), and *La Grenade miraculeuse ou le Talisman aux Enfers* (*The Miraculous Pomegranate or the Talisman in the Underworld*, 1860).

Integrated into programmes which still featured the 'in silhouette' scenes and pyrotechnics that made the Théâtre de Séraphin's name, these *féeries* for young spectators generally only had two or three acts and were mainly rewritings of fairy tales. Saillans's *La Caverne de la Forêt-Noire* (*The Cave in the Black Forest*, 1825) adapts the story of the Forty Thieves. Alibaba's son Antonio, and not the slave Morgiane, kills the gang's leader, and an original justification is offered for the slaughter of the thieves: Antonio is only the adoptive son of Alibaba who took him in after his parents were murdered by the bandits.²⁴ Charles Foliguet's *Le Prince Fatal et le prince Fortuné* (*Prince Fatal and Prince Fortune*) only lightly draws upon Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's tale of the same name about the different destinies of twin brothers and invents completely new adventures for them.²⁵

Original plots borrow characters from traditional tales: the mythological bird the Roc from *Sinbad the Sailor* appears in Pauline Séraphin's *La Perruque de Cassandre* and steals the titular wig from old Cassandre, who was about to eat one of its eggs. Cassandre favours the baker Pierrot, who is under the protection of the fairy Carabosse, as husband for his daughter Colombine over Arlequin, the inventor of an ointment to cure baldness and protected by the fairy Blanchette, who is rejected. After some misadventures, Arlequin and Pierrot arrive on the Île des Bêtes, where the Lion is sad after having lost his mane and wishes to keep the wig that the Roc gave him. To convince the Lion to try his ointment, Arlequin coats Pierrot's head with it: his head thereafter is covered with hair 'that hides his face and falls almost to the ground'.²⁶ The Lion enthusiastically decides to give his name to the ointment and returns the wig to Cassandre, who grants Colombine's hand to Arlequin. The Roc's theft, an animal court reminiscent of a *La Fontaine* fable, voyages through the

²⁴ Saillans, 'La Caverne de la Forêt-Noire', in *Feu le Théâtre de Séraphin*, 277–334. The manuscript, which was targeted by the censor, is held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (MS-DOUAY-519) and includes the following note from the inspector of theatres: 'I read this play. The subject is appropriately selected for a show for children.'

²⁵ See the summary of the play in Fath, *Le Paris des enfants*, 196–205.

²⁶ Pauline Séraphin, 'La Perruque de Cassandre', in *Feu le Théâtre de Séraphin*, 167.

air, a boat splitting in two by the quarrel of two rivals, and burlesque transformations (Pierrot is swallowed by a crocodile and emerges with an excessively long body) are the main visual effects of this *féerie*, which plays with a syncretism between the universes of fairy tales and Italian comedy, an inheritance from the eighteenth century.

The Spectacle des Marionnettes on Boulevard du Temple, the Théâtre Miniature (Illustration 7.1), the Spectacle des Fantoccini, and the Théâtre des Marionnettes Lyriques were the main Parisian venues that presented *féeries* for children during the Second Empire or in the first years of the Third Republic.²⁷ Directors supplemented their programmes with one-act comic plays or interludes that featured Polichinelle, Mère Michel, and even Pierrot, characters who had become entirely associated with childhood through toys,²⁸ songs, and books for children. Optical illusions—diaphoramas, chromatopes, historical polyoramas, and other comical phantasmagoria—were also presented and bombastically announced in the press, guaranteeing families entertainment for the expected duration of a theatre show.²⁹

As on large stages, the comedic dimension of the *féeries* performed by puppets was more visual (animation of enchanted objects) than verbal (word play), but it also emerged in the short circuits between the dialogue and stage action. In the *féeries* of the Second Empire, as Roxane Martin observes, ‘pronouncing the word was enough to make whatever was mentioned appear with liberal use of puns’.³⁰ The same applied to the Fantoccini shows. For example, *Le Balai de la sorcière* (*The Witch’s Broom*, 1852) broadly draws upon this technique: Pierrot is about to plunge his glass in a barrel to drink a ‘canon’³¹ of wine, but ‘at that moment, the barrel transforms into a cannon which fires on Pierrot who

²⁷ The texts of their plays are held at the Archives de la Censure (Archives Nationales, Censure des répertoires des ‘petits’ théâtres parisiens, classification F/18/1017 to F/18/1344/7).

²⁸ See Michel Manson, ‘Comment Polichinelle est devenu un jouet’, *L’Émoi de l’Histoire* 25–26 (2002): 44–68.

²⁹ See Christian Biet, ‘Séance, performance, assemblée et représentation: les jeux de regards au théâtre (XVII^e–XXI^e siècle)’, *Littératures classiques* 82 (2013): 79–97.

³⁰ Martin, *La Féerie romantique sur les scènes parisiennes*, 455.

³¹ According to the *Dictionnaire Littré*, a ‘Type of measurement for liquids. The canon ... equated to 1/16th of a pint. At present, it is said to be 1/16th of a litre’.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Illustration 7.1 Frédéric Lix, *Cendrillon* at the Théâtre Miniature, print, 1873. Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra

finds himself skewered by the broom'.³² Making use of miniaturisation for stage effects, the comic transformations sometimes come one after another at cartoon-like speed:

The theatre presents a railway. The convoy is about to leave. Underneath, a steamboat is about to leave as well. Cassandre is on the train, Arlequin and Isabelle are on the boat.

Pierrot (*arriving on stage*)

Oh! What a farce. He took the train whilst his daughter is on the steamboat. Well done, old egotist, that'll teach you to leave without me. (*Shouting to Cassandre*) Monsieur, Monsieur, Arlequin and your daughter are going off on the steamboat.

³² *Le Balai de la sorcière*, manuscript submitted to the censor. Archives nationales, F/18/1328.

Cassandre

How unfortunate... what have I done! Drivers stop! Take pity on a poor father who has lost his daughter. (*Addressing Pierrot*) I will see her again, when I jump [*'sauter'* in French, also meaning to be the victim of an explosion]. (*At that moment, the Génie appears and raises the wagon in the air. A vulture seizes Cassandre by his body and carries him through the air. An explosion, loud music until the end of the act.*)³³

The address to the young audience is clear in the emphasis placed upon moral lessons in these productions. 'True happiness is only found in being good' declares the Bon Génie in *Balai de la sorcière*, who, despite protecting the young couple's romance, disapproves of Isabelle having disobeyed her father and fled from her home to follow Arlequin. *La Petite Peau d'âne* by Charles Foliguet, a féerie staged at the Théâtre des Marionnettes Lyriques in 1864, revolves entirely around the pride of Princess Zélia, daughter of King Tristapatte, and her punishment. Even though her father owes his wealth to a donkey that, inspired by a Brothers Grimm tale,³⁴ defaecates gold coins and produces pearls and diamonds, Zélia continues to spurn the love of the young Prince Blaguazor in spite of all his qualities, immense riches, and submitting to her every whim. To punish Zélia for her pride, the fairy Minette has the donkey die from indigestion and burns down her father's palace. For the period of one year, the young woman, having donned the donkey's skin, is condemned to living alone, hidden from all in poverty and selling the milk produced by a herd of donkeys. On the eve of the end of her penitence, the fairy Minette puts Zélia to the test by adopting the appearance of an extremely wealthy prince who wants to marry her. The young woman turns him down, proving that she has understood the lesson and became modest and reasonable. Thereafter, she regains her normal appearance and accepts to marry Blaguazor, whilst her father finds a castle even more magnificent than the first.

Beyond the Parisian stages, the supernatural occupied an important place in the repertoires of several puppet theatres. The Guignol tradition in Lyon, in particular, imitated or adapted some famous féeries: *Le*

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, 'Tischchen deck dich, Goldesel und Knüppel aus dem Sack', in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung, 1812).

Royaume des poissons (*The Kingdom of Fish*),³⁵ for example, draws its inspiration from the ninth tableau of *La Biche au bois ou le Royaume des fées* (*The Doe of the Wood or the Kingdom of Fairies*) by the Cogniard brothers (Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin, 1845).³⁶ Fairy tales (*Aladdin*, *Cinderella*) were also drawn upon, as well as other more original sources, such as an ‘old German legend’ for *La Tête de cochon ou la Fée aux fleurs* (*The Pig’s Head or the Flower Fairy*).³⁷ However, these plays were not targeted at children: during the Second Empire, Guignol shows were mainly performed in cafés in the evening. Moreover, frequently plays presented as ‘féeries’ fell more within the fantasy genre, with the appearances of ghosts and demons, as in the case of *Le Fils de Satan* (*Son of Satan*)³⁸ and *Le Manteau du diable* (*The Devil’s Cloak*).³⁹ Only at the end of the nineteenth century, when faced with increasing competition from café-concerts⁴⁰ and then cinema, did the Guignol puppeteers look to target a family audience. Yet they then abandoned the register of the supernatural to focus on comedy, either by reviving chaste versions of the traditional repertoire (the erotic misunderstandings⁴¹ and the famous pleasantries over chamber pots, inherited from Laurent Mourguet, became rarer), or in creating parodies of successes in large theatres. As for the Parisian puppeteers who set up booths on the paths of the

³⁵ *Le Royaume des poissons*, féerie in seven tableaux. Anonymous and non-dated manuscript, Durafour acquisition, Box 59, Fonds Léopold Dor, Musée des Arts de la Marionnette – Musées Gadagne, Lyon.

³⁶ I thank Roxane Martin for having pointed me to this source.

³⁷ ‘La Tête de cochon ou la Fée aux fleurs’, in *Théâtre lyonnais de Guignol*, ed. [Jean-Baptiste Onofrio] (Lyon: N. Scheuring, 1865). See Chapter 8.

³⁸ *Le Fils de Satan*, féerie play in 8 tableaux. Manuscript, Durafour acquisition, Box 84, Fonds Léopold Dor, Musée des Arts de la Marionnette – Musées Gadagne, Lyon.

³⁹ *Le Manteau du diable*, transcription, Fonds Temporal, Institut International de la Marionnette.

⁴⁰ As the puppeteer Pierre Rousset observed in 1892: ‘We’re facing stiff competition from café-concerts... and so we have to speak for children ... we need to have a “family” repertoire.’ Cited in ‘Au théâtre de Guignol’, *Le Progrès illustré*, Lyon, 18 December 1892.

⁴¹ See, for example, *La Grange*, a play performed in 1866 in a café on Rue Popincourt in Paris where the Guignol puppeteers from Lyon, Victor-Napoléon Vuillerme-Dunand and Laurent Jossierand, performed plays from their repertoire for a season. Manuscript held at the Archives de la Censure, Archives Nationales, F/18/1216.

Champs-Élysées or in public gardens or parks and specifically addressed children, they rarely ventured into the domain of the *féerie*.

During the same period, large travelling companies, who performed at fairs with ever-more ambitious string-marionette shows, also drew upon the supernatural repertoire. The puppeteer dynasty that started during the Napoleonic Wars, the Pajot-Waltons, whose scenery materials filled ‘an eight-wagon caravan’, performed *La Belle et la Bête*, *Riquet à la houppe*, *Peau d’âne*, *Les Bibelots du diable*, and *La Poudre de perlimpinpin* from 1894 to 1905, ‘with ballets and grand finales like at the Théâtre de la Gaîté or the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin’.⁴² The repertoire of the Théâtre des Lilliputiens (1896–1935), which toured a large part of north-west France, featured *Le Petit Chaperon rouge*, *Le Chat botté*, and *Le Petit Poucet*. These adaptations of Perrault’s fairy tales bear the traces of the influence of the romantic *féeries*: sung couplets are interspersed with the dramatic action, the brutality is toned down (Hop-o’-My-Thumb only cuts the Orge’s throat as his seven daughters do not appear in the play), characters are added, and others are modified. In *Le Petit Chaperon rouge*, for example, the hunter who defeats the wolf is replaced by a prince and the young Rosette’s outfit, the famous red hood, is a magical talisman that protects her when she finds herself in the wolf’s stomach.⁴³

Whilst some puppet theatres in France drew their models or inspiration from extravagant *féeries* to win over audiences of children and families, itinerant companies in the British Isles looked to the Victorian pantomimes. The dramaturgical liberties and staging exuberance of these performances were at least equal to the Parisian productions, and the subjects of fairy tales were also used as the starting point for their plots. In the second half of the nineteenth century, these shows increasingly sought to appeal to children and their parents, with performances concentrated around the Christmas period and their miniaturised reproduction in the form of a toy theatre to be performed at home. During a stay in Dublin between 1868 and 1872, the puppeteer Lambert d’Arc (1824–93), for example, performed *Blue Beard*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Cinderella*,

⁴² Gaston Baty, ‘Cent trente ans ou la vie ... des Pajot-Walton’s joueurs de marionnettes’, *Comoedia*, 22 March 1935.

⁴³ ‘Le Petit Poucet’, in Marie-Claude Groshens, *Des marionnettes foraines aux spectacles de variété: Les théâtres Borgniet* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1995), 63.

Forty Thieves, and *Aladdin*.⁴⁴ As was customary on the large stages, harlequinades with Harlequin, Colombine, Pantaloon, and Clown were added to these pantomimes, the proximity of masks from the *Commedia dell'arte* reinforced the fictional dimension of the universe of tales.

Thomas Holden (1847–1931), director of an itinerant company that embarked upon long international tours, garnered admiration for his ‘*théâtre de fantoches*’ with the richness of stage effects, the precision and technical complexity of the movements carried out by string-marionettes. His shows brought together a Christmas pantomime, such as *Beauty and the Beast*, *Cinderella*, or *Bluebeard*, variety numbers (acrobats, musicians), and a harlequinade, before ending with a Grand Transformation Scene during which the scenery visibly changed several times using different gauze curtains. A newspaper article from 1869 describes one of these transformation scenes:

Refulgent Temples of bright waters is a marvel of the day, and represents Neptune’s homage to Great Britain. Britannia, the Pride of the Ocean. Neptune King of the Ocean. Amphitrite, his Wife, and Queen. Sea Horses. God and Goddesses. Apotheosis of Earth, Air, Fire and Water ... In this scene will be brought forward wonderful mechanical effects. Five cwt. of glass in motion to represent water, and no less than 100 wax figures, the whole put in motion by eight cwt. of machinery.⁴⁵

Though the texts of Thomas Holden’s Christmas pantomimes have not been preserved, some documents, such as the programme of the performances given in Paris in 1879, confirm the great liberties taken with the tales that inspired them: the ten tableaux advertised⁴⁶ for the ‘pantomime-farce’ *La Belle et la Bête* (*Beauty and the Beast*) take the stage action from the depths of the sea to the ‘Apothéose’⁴⁷ at the foot of Niagara Falls:

⁴⁴ John McCormick, *The Victorian Marionette Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004), 127.

⁴⁵ Cited in John McCormick, *The Holdens: Monarchs of the Marionette Theatre* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 2018), 119.

⁴⁶ The number of tableaux was usually 18, but the show was shortened for the performances in Paris.

⁴⁷ Name used for the ‘Grand Transformation Scene’ during international tours.

Scenes and principal events

Aquarium under the sea. The Queen of the Fairies. The corps de ballet. Snowstorm. The Pump family. The amorous bear. Arlequin and Colombine enter. Pierrot and Pantalon. Regent Street in London. The bedroom. Crystal Palace in London. The stubborn donkey. The restaurant.

Apothéose

Niagara Falls. Golden rain. The palace of roses. The fairies appear. The descent of the vault. The Good Genie appears. Large waterfall. Magnificent effect produced by natural water, and electric lighting in over a thousand colours.⁴⁸

In Thomas Holden's shows, the magic was no longer confined to telling tales of fairies and supernatural beings; it also incorporated the magic of modernity, the two miracles of the stage machinery and what would soon be called 'Fée électricité'. According to newspapers from the time, the 'Apothéose' ends with the puppeteer's name emerging from behind the gauze curtain created with dozens of electric lightbulbs.⁴⁹

THE NEUTRALISED FARCE

More so than in the *féerie* register in which string-marionette puppeteers copied the productions of large theatres and rivalled their ingenuity, the strengthening of links between puppet theatre and childhood in the second half of the nineteenth century can be measured in the evolving repertoire of glove puppets and more precisely in the gradual taming of comedies and farces. Through entertainment aimed at young audiences, Polichinelle, Kasperl, and even Punch started to be embraced by the urban middle and upper classes. Broadening the appeal of these characters took various forms (publishing children's books, selling toys and miniature theatres, performances in public gardens and on promenades) and had significant consequences for the plays performed.

In Britain, Punchmen faced growing difficulties working in public spaces⁵⁰ and found refuge in private homes performing for families. They

⁴⁸ Programme reproduced in Paul Ginisty, *Thomas Holden et ses fantoches* (Paris: Le Programme satirique, 1879), 2.

⁴⁹ McCormick, *The Holdens: Monarchs of the Marionette Theatre*, 121.

⁵⁰ Rosalind Crone, 'Mr. and Mrs. Punch in Nineteenth-Century England', *The Historical Journal* 49, no. 4 (2006): 1055–82.

had to tone down their repertoire to make it more acceptable for the parents of the young spectators. The puppeteer interviewed by Henry Mayhew in 1850 described these adjustments as ‘sentimental’ and added that they removed much of what made the *Punch and Judy Show* so efficient:

‘To these sentimental folks I’m obliged to preform werry steady and werry slow; they won’t have no ghost, no coffin and no Devil; and that’s I call spiling the performance entirely. Ha ha’, he added, with a deep sigh, ‘it’s the march of the intellect that’s a doing all this; it is, sir.’⁵¹

What the puppeteer terms ‘the march of the intellect’ refers to the progress of rationalism and the desire amongst the educated layers of society to see superstitious beliefs, considered the prerogative of the popular class, disappear from all but the supernatural world of extravaganzas, pantomimes, and harlequinades. From around the 1820s–1830s onwards, rejecting superstition had become a mark of social ascension and respectability.⁵² Perhaps reflecting this trend, John Payne Collier’s edition of the *Punch and Judy Show* (1828)⁵³ does not include the ghost or the act with the coffin,⁵⁴ and the publisher of the *Wonderful Drama of Punch and Judy* (1856) highlights in the introduction to the text that he decided to reintroduce the appearance of Judy’s ghost, which is ‘too often omitted by sycophantic Showmen in deference to the squeamishness of the age’.⁵⁵

More generally, the publication of books inspired by puppet shows played an important role in neutralising the farce. Whilst the commercial success of Collier’s edition, aided by George Cruikshank’s engravings, gradually fixed the canon of the *Punch and Judy Show*, the limited

⁵¹ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, vol. 3 (London: Griffin, Bohn & Company, 1861), 54. Mayhew very carefully transcribed the unique speech of his interlocuters.

⁵² See Thomas Waters, ‘Magic and the British Middle Classes, 1750–1900’, *Journal of British Studies* 54, no. 3 (2015): 632–53.

⁵³ John Payne Collier, *Punch and Judy* (London: S. Prowett, 1828).

⁵⁴ Judy’s ghost does appear to torment her murderer in the transcription provided by Mayhew, as does the coffin scene in which Punch and Clown unsuccessfully attempt to force the executioner’s corpse into a coffin that is too small for him.

⁵⁵ Papernose Woodensconce Esq., *The Wonderful Drama of Punch and Judy* (London: James Blackwood, 1856), vii.

distribution of transcriptions of the French Polichinelle, as performed in open-air puppet booths, led to numerous publications reinterpreting his adventures and only retaining the main character traits of the protagonist. Other differences between these publications from Britain and France can be observed. For the amusement of all, Collier presented the texts of puppeteers who, by their own admission, shunned the presence of children because they were troublemakers with no money, which annoyed the spectators who were more likely to leave a few coins in the hat when it was held out to them.⁵⁶ In France, in contrast, with the exception of the ‘drama of the French Polichinelle written as dictated in the Champs-Élysées [gardens]’, published in an anonymous volume in 1838,⁵⁷ the few traces that remain of plays for Polichinelle performed by glove puppeteers were integrated into works for children with a clearly stated pedagogical ambition.

From 1817 onwards, children’s literature bestowed this educational dimension upon the puppeteer with the publication of *Polichinelle instituteur* (*Polichinelle Schoolmaster*) by Sophie de Renneville (1772–1822). This tale portrays children between the ages of three and eight being taken by their maid to see a string-marionette Polichinelle, who rewards them with sweets, sugar almonds, and cakes for good behaviour, or, conversely, gives them a public telling-off if they were badly behaved. A small girl who offers some buttered bread to a poor man is praised by the puppet and its audience; all the toys that a bad-tempered young boy has broken are hung up in front of everyone, including how much they cost and when they were bought. In this heavily moralising work, it would be futile to seek even a far-off echo of the theatre performances of the time: deprived of all comic flair, Polichinelle is nothing but a distributor of gifts or punishments, a judge rather than an educator.

The association between the puppet, childhood, and education quickly became widespread in the still-emerging landscape of publications for families. Sometimes the content of the play was not modified: the Bibliothèque nationale de France holds a copy of Jules Rémond’s *Polichinelle*

⁵⁶ The Punchman interviewed by Mayhew outlines in detail his strategies for avoiding the times of the day and places where children gathered.

⁵⁷ ‘Drame du Polichinelle français, écrit sous sa dictée aux Champs-Élysées’, in *Les Grottesques, fragments de la vie nomade, recueillis par un archéologue, petit-fils de Turlupin* (Paris: P. Baudouin, 1838), 19–30.

(1838)⁵⁸ into which an eight-page notebook was stitched as an introduction to the text, with the letters of an ABC book to help children learn to read and some moral maxims. These maxims are immediately contradicted by the farce in which Polichinelle, as usual, kills the baby, his mother (Mère Gigogne), the apothecary Bouillon-Pointu, the commissaire Gripart, the executioner, and the Devil. Sometimes, whilst the transcription of the Polichinelle show does not conceal any of the character's maliciousness, the frame-story attempts to overshadow it with a moralising narrative in which a mother praises her child for their kind actions or warns them against careless behaviour. In *Les Mémoires de Polichinelle*,⁵⁹ Eugénie Foa (1796–1852) presents a young boy who, after having stopped by a puppet booth to watch a 'Polichinelle drama', is moved upon learning that the puppeteer has no money to travel to his dying father. The child gives the poor man the money that he intended to use to buy a luxury puppet and receives, as a thank you, the old Polichinelle puppet used for the show.

In *Le Compagnon du foyer (The Home's companion)* (1858), Laure Surville (1800–71), the younger sister of Honoré de Balzac, introduces the text of a 'Polichinelle show' with a long account of the history of the character borrowed from Charles Magnin. Whilst the text refers to string-marionettes, imitations of those from the Théâtre de Séraphin, the play's moral lesson is still emphasised. *Les Soucis de la gourmandise (The Problems of Gluttony)*, the comedy in three acts integrated into the story, portrays an insatiable and gluttonous Polichinelle and recounts his quarrels with the Devil, who capitalises on this weakness to play tricks on him. First, the Devil leads Polichinelle to argue with his wife because he eats all the food for dinner, leaving nothing for her and their children. The couple fight and when the commissaire arrives to separate them, Polichinelle knocks him out. In Act II, Polichinelle disguises himself as an inhabitant of the Auvergne to escape the police and attends a dance lesson at the home of Vestris. The Devil, who takes the place of the famous dancer, teaches Polichinelle some dance steps and then after offering him food and drink, he takes the opportunity to call the constabulary. Polichinelle, however, successfully flees by executing a 'pas

⁵⁸ *Polichinelle, farce en trois actes pour amuser les grands et les petits enfants, publiée par Jules Rémond* (Paris: Delarue, [1838]). Bibliothèque nationale de France, classification X-35433.

⁵⁹ Eugénie Foa, *Mémoires d'un polichinelle* (Paris: Ébrard, 1840).

du guet' (a jump out of the window), which he has just learnt from Vestris. In the final act, Polichinelle enrolls in the army after drinking with some recruiters. The Devil takes on the appearance of the captain, assigns Polichinelle to sentinel duty to protect the barracks against a riot, and then sets off fireworks that terrorise him and force him to leave his post. Just as he is about to be shot as a deserter unless he agrees to sell his soul to the Devil, Madame Polichinelle appears with the resurrected commissaire and together they free Polichinelle who, as a husband and father, could not legally enlist. As Polichinelle gets ready to celebrate his release with the type of feast he is accustomed to, the puppeteer leaves the booth and addresses the children to draw the moral from the story:

M. Gérard

How useful this example of Polichinelle is! There are no little faults; all of them have bad consequences. (*Louder*) And gluttony is a deadly sin!⁶⁰

Though Laure Surville employs the traditional characters from the Polichinelle farces (his wife, the Devil, the commissaire), she transforms the relationships between them by reducing the level of violence: Madame Polichinelle resists her husband and saves him from the firing squad; the commissaire was unconscious and does not remember what has happened to him; and the Devil only unsuccessfully laid traps for Polichinelle with the help of different disguises. Nobody dies and the fight with clubs, an obligatory number in farce, plays no role in the dénouement.

Over time, the educational ambition of these plays increased. Moral lessons are very much stressed in the anonymous play for shadow theatre *Les Aventures de Ninette* (1833) in which the vagaries of a little girl contrast with the obedient and measured behaviour of her brother.⁶¹ In the collection *La Comédie en plein vent* published by a 'Pierre' in 1861,⁶² the presentation of the 'dialogues for outdoor shows' places further emphasis on the educational content: each is preceded by an epigraph

⁶⁰ Laure Surville, *Le Compagnon du foyer* (Paris: Magnin, Blanchard et Cie, 1858), 305.

⁶¹ *Les Aventures de Ninette, comédie en quatre tableaux, représentée pour la première fois sur le Théâtre des Ombres Chinoises le premier janvier* (Paris: Imprimerie A. Pihan-Delaforest, 1833).

⁶² Pierre, *La Comédie en plein vent, Théâtre de Gringalet, Polichinelle, Bambochinnet*, etc. (Paris: B. Renault et Cie, 1861).

in the form of a short maxim that summarises the lesson to draw from it. *Le Bâton ou le Droit de Polichinelle* (*The Club or Polichinelle's Right*), for example, shows that 'the representative of the law is the defender and not the oppressor of the weak'. Polichinelle whacks a child and an old woman with a club, and forces them to carry his bag and then him on their shoulders until they fall over. The gendarme arrives and arrests Polichinelle, who claims he has the right to have fun. A 'man of the people' then appears to justify the gendarme's intervention:

The Gendarme

I am arresting you! ... because you were the aggressor. Do you understand that?

Polichinelle

I don't understand! ... Help!

Man of the People

I understand! Come on, Polichinelle ... Don't be so stupid as to defend yourself! The police defend us and you beat our women and children.

Polichinelle

All is lost! The people defend justice and the law.
(*The Gendarme takes him away.*)⁶³

These works⁶⁴ are generally meant to be read: if they were to serve as the basis of theatrical performances, it would have been within the family circle. Therefore, their publication is not evidence of an evolution in the repertoire performed by professional puppeteers, but rather of the growing incompatibility between the educational concepts of the middle and upper classes of society, which required all productions for children to deliver an unambiguous moral lesson, and the reality of the shows performed in the streets.

⁶³ Pierre, 'Le bâton, ou le droit de Polichinelle', in *La Comédie en plein vent*, 53–54.

⁶⁴ See also Johann Peter Lyser's German-language *Polichinell* (1837) in Chapter 3.

This insistent request for moral improvement is reflected in the ‘humble plea to Messieurs the Censors’ published in *Le Figaro* in 1864. The writer from the newspaper expresses his desire that farces performed in puppet booths be as closely monitored as the repertoires of theatres.⁶⁵ He contrasts the ridicule and unbridled violence found in ‘that eternal and cynical story of Polichinelle’ with the constraints placed upon live theatre. Appealing directly to ‘the sworn guardians of public morals’, he advises that they ‘be wary of this school of libertine advice and brutality that is flaunted in front of naïve, violent, and unsuspecting children’.⁶⁶ By the end of the nineteenth century, audiences’ growing reluctance for the now less-tolerated farces from the popular tradition led to the character Polichinelle gradually being abandoned. He only made brief appearances in puppet booths, generally in the prologue to the show. Thereafter, Guignol took his place, performing a repertoire specifically targeted at children, which was very different from that of the Lyon tradition.⁶⁷ Yet these transformations were not judged sufficient, even more so as some traces of the old Polichinelle shows could initially be identified under this new costume: in Paris, Guignol was often accompanied by Mère Michel, Arlequin, and Pierrot. He escapes hanging by attaching the judge and Mère Michel to the gallows himself⁶⁸—or still ends up being hung anyway.⁶⁹

In the introduction to a collection of plays to be performed in schools, Madame A. Girardot warns against drawing inspiration from popular Guignol shows. She describes ‘this hoodlum’ as an ‘unpleasant example’ and bemoans the fact that the ‘little ones know him from public squares’. Recognising that she ‘would be reproached from a theatrical perspective

⁶⁵ This could not actually happen since street puppeteers were considered as entertainers: the police only monitored them so that they did not create disorder on public roads. The prerequisite demanded by Magnard only concerned theatre establishments.

⁶⁶ Frédéric Magnard, ‘Humble supplique à MM. Les Censeurs’, *Figaro*, 13 March 1864.

⁶⁷ See, for example, in Fath, *Le Paris des enfants*, 62–69, the summary of a Paris Guignol show in which the name Guignol refers to both a character similar to Polichinelle and his son; one of the scenes is nevertheless inspired by Mourguet’s *La Leçon de musique*, a classic play in the Lyon Guignol tradition.

⁶⁸ Fernand Beissier, ‘Guignol et la cabaretière’, in *Théâtre de Guignol* (Paris: Librairie Théâtrale, 1894).

⁶⁹ Aristide Fabre, ‘Guignol pâtissier’, in *Mon journal, Recueil hebdomadaire illustré pour les enfants* (Paris: Hachette, 1903).

that it is difficult to have fun with actors who are always virtuous', she accepts that exceptions sometimes need to be made and suggests that 'if, for example, we put a child on stage who is naughty, it is necessary to have alongside them a child in the spotlight who does good so that the young spectators would naturally lean towards them'.⁷⁰ Reducing violence and highlighting a moral lesson to 'form the child's conscience' were not the only consequences of the transition from glove puppets to a show for children. The characterisation was even fundamentally modified. To help young spectators identify more easily with the situations portrayed, the protagonists were made to appear younger: sometimes gradually by reducing the range of their misdeeds and focusing them on childish idiosyncrasies (greed, laziness, cheekiness), sometimes significantly by depicting them as children. In the Kasperl tradition, this change was produced through the introduction of his grandmother, who gradually became the main female character that the hero encounters from the beginning of the twentieth century.⁷¹ As Gina Weinkauff⁷² has analysed, the appetite for pleasure and immorality associated with the lustige Figur, traditionally a heavy beer drinker and womaniser, was transformed into the mischief of a disobedient boy with a big heart who makes sure that the bad characters are always punished.

The metamorphosis of Kasperl's character would continue throughout the twentieth century, and was significantly influenced by the toy industry and publishing houses with some dedicated collections.⁷³ The publisher Eduard Bloch, for example, released several plays for Kasperl during the

⁷⁰ Madame Girardot, 'Pourquoi nous avons choisi nos sujets?', in *Théâtre et marionnettes pour les petits* (Paris: Fernand Nathan, 1907), 6.

⁷¹ The four illustrated books by Beate Bonus (texts) and Carlo Böcklin (illustrations), published in the collection *Kasperl-Bilderbücher* (Halle: Gebauer & Schwetschke, 1911), popularised the character of Kasperl's grandmother. They were sold with a set of puppets allowing the plays to be performed at home.

⁷² Gina Weinkauff, "Obwohl nicht kasperlemässig im Sinne des niederdeutschen Kasperlespiels" – Der Anteil von Carlo Böcklin und Beate Bonus an der Entwicklung des künstlerischen Handpuppenspiels in Deutschland', in *Die Spiele der Puppe – Beiträge zur Kunst- und Sozialgeschichte des Figurentheaters im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Manfred Wegner (Cologne: Prometh-Verlag, 1989), 80–90.

⁷³ In the first decades of the twentieth century, collections such as 'Kasperlstücke von Dr. Paul' (Leipzig: Arwed Strauch) and 'Eduard Blochs Kasperl-Theater' (Berlin: Theaterverlag Eduard Bloch) offered for an additional fee the puppets required to perform the plays that they published.

interwar period in which the traditional episodes from the glove puppet shows were rewritten in a much less brutal mode: in *Kasperl als Galgenvogel* (*Kasperl as Gallows Bird*) by Marie Ille-Beeg (1855–1927), Kasperl does not escape by hanging the executioner in his place, but thanks to his wife Gretel, who cuts the rope with a pair of scissors; in *Kasperl, Tod und Teufel* (*Kasperl, Death, and the Devil*), also by Marie Ille-Beeg, a young Death and a young Devil must complete their apprenticeship by sending their first soul to Hell. The chosen soul is Kasperl who escapes by locking them both in the inn where they intended to trap him.

The development of the character accelerated after the Second World War to the point that the puppet's appearance was changed and given more childlike features. Neither the pot-bellied and bearded Kasperl with a rubicund face, portrayed by Josef Leonhard Schmid (1822–1912), nor the long aquiline nose and wicked expression of Kasperl, as sculpted by Theo Eggink for Max Jacob's Hohensteiner Kasperlspiel in the 1920s, are recognisable under the fresh-faced and smiling boy who appeared on television in the 1960s, adorned the covers of so many illustrated children's books, and whose shows were henceforth advertised to children aged between three and seven. In theatre, this development led Kasperl to be portrayed first as a crafty boy able to ingeniously get out of any sticky situation, then, more simply, as an older brother figure to the young spectators. In *Grossmutter hat Geburtstag*⁷⁴ (*It's Grandmother's Birthday*) by Friedrich Arndt (1905–85), for example, the character hosts a birthday party, and the audience is invited to join in with shouts of joy and songs. In these productions, all the rough edges are smoothed out and all the conflicts are diffused; puppet theatre is reduced to a simple animation show for the youngest children or used to serve the aims of educational initiatives. The once-rebellious figure of Kasperl is entirely neutralised and now guides children in campaigns that promote road safety ('Verkehrskasper',⁷⁵ beginning in the 1950s), teach hygiene ('Gesundheitskasper'), and, more recently, raise awareness about ecology ('Umweltkasper').

⁷⁴ Friedrich Arndt, *Grossmutter hat Geburtstag* (Graz: Verlag Spiel und Fest).

⁷⁵ See Josef Steck, *Aufgepasst! Der Kasperl lehrt, wie man nicht verkehrt verkehrt. Neun Verkehrspuppenspiele für die Grundschule* (Munich: Heinrich Vogel, 1968).

THE PUPPET FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES

From the nineteenth century onwards, a repertoire for puppets for educational rather than moralising or entertainment purposes began being written and published specifically for children. In France, Laure Bernard (1799–18??) published a collection entitled *Théâtre de marionnettes—Ouvrage à l’usage de la jeunesse* (*Puppet Theatre—A Work to Be Used by Young People*),⁷⁶ which brought together theatre pieces she had written for her own daughters a dozen years earlier. The book was released in the ‘Bibliothèque universelle d’éducation’ (universal education library), a ‘collection of good books for educating and amusing children and young people’ under the auspices of François Guizot, Minister of Public Education. It was therefore published with school libraries and the work of teachers in mind.

When reading these texts, present-day readers would no doubt be struck by their proximity to the general theatrical repertoire. In the preface, Laure Bernard highlights how young children respond with wonder to performances given by her string- and rod-marionettes in a miniature scenery resembling a dollhouse.⁷⁷ The length of the texts, the number of characters, and the complexity of the plots are unlikely to be considered suitable for a young audience nowadays. ‘History, féerie, comedy, melodrama, even tragedy, all can be performed [in puppet theatre] and accessed by a young audience’,⁷⁸ the author wrote. Her collection includes a theatrical adaptation of the biblical episode of the fight between David and Goliath, a féerie (*Le Jam-e-Jam Numai ou miroir magique*), comedies (*Une méprise*, *Le Dormeur éveillé*), and even an adaptation of *King Lear*. The plot of Shakespeare’s tragedy is slightly moralised: Cordelia no longer has two suitors, but one, the King of France, who she marries; the sons of Gloucester are both legitimate and only the rights of the firstborn favours Edgard over his brother Oswald

⁷⁶ Laure Bernard, *Théâtre de marionnettes – Ouvrage à l’usage de la jeunesse* (Paris: Didier, 1837).

⁷⁷ ‘We no longer went out ... without returning with our arms full of actors with head rods, boxes of model animals, sheep pens, little wooden furniture, golden armchairs and sofas; everywhere we discovered, with a marvellous wisdom, things that could serve to decorate the precious theatre’: Bernard, *Théâtre de marionnettes*, iv.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, xiv.

(Edmund in Shakespeare's text). The level of cruelty is also largely diminished (Gloucester no longer has his eyes gouged out), Edgard does not disguise himself as 'Poor Tom', and the scene on the Cliffs of Dover is omitted. Most importantly, the bad characters are punished at the end (Gonerille is killed on Régane's orders, Oswald is hanged, Régane and his wife are massacred by their own men). The play ends with Lear being restored to the throne like in Nahum Tate's version.⁷⁹ Despite being simplified, significantly abridged, and orientated towards a happy ending, Laure Bernard's adaptation is no less challenging for young spectators due to its length (five acts, around 100 pages) and two plots. The author follows dramaturgical models from a highly literary form of theatre, as shown in her adaptation of the story of David and Goliath, which includes a mention of Goethe's childhood, or the plot of *Le Dormeur éveillé* (*The Awoken Sleeper*), which draws on *One Thousand and One Nights*.

Laure Bernard's wish to write an educational theatre for a young audience emerges in how this repertoire offers an introduction to literature and in the central role given to the relationships between parents and children in all her plays. Other more discreet intentions are revealed through a close reading of the plays: the féerie *Le Jam-e-Jam Numai*, in particular, pits the familiar figures of a genie and a fairy against each other, but an unusual axiology blurs the expected borders between the good and bad characters. Whilst the genie appears as a loving and protective figure, his daughter Dragonne is temperamental, jealous of Princess Églantine, and capable of cruelty; the fairy Écrevisse, who behaves suspiciously from the start of the play, punishes Dragonne by changing her into a lion and brings about the happy ending; Églantine's magic mouse dies after inadvertently being run over by the knight Belle-Épine, who had offered the animal to her; and even Prince Papillon and Queen Abeille, who seem incompatible, end up marrying each other. The dramatic action features characters who are in conflict with each other, but cannot be divided into two antithetical groups, as was customary in the féeries. The young spectators gradually discover these characters' respective qualities and faults, shoring up their wickedness or their capacity to overcome their differences and live together.

⁷⁹ Nahum Tate, *The History of King Lear* (1681). This version, in which the Fool and the King of France are absent and Cordelia marries Edgar at the end, was performed in England until 1845 instead of Shakespeare's play.

In Italy, several volumes of plays for puppets for educational purposes were published between the end of the nineteenth century and the 1930s by teachers or women who wrote pedagogical manuals: these ‘operaie della penna’ (pen workers) as Loredana Megazzini refers to them in her doctoral thesis, generally came from the middle bourgeoisie and were responsible for educating female pupils on pedagogical pathways that were distinct from boy’s.⁸⁰ Anna Vertua Gentile (1845–1926), one of the most famous authors of educational manuals for girls, published two collections: one for string-marionettes (*Nuovo teatrino per le marionette*, 1892) and one for glove puppets (*Burattini interessanti*, 1923). Other works include Rina Breda Paltrinieri’s *Il teatro dei piccoli* (1925), Gina Pagani’s *I burattini* (1927), and the *Commedioline per burattini* (1930), which brings together short plays by Berta Barbensi, Amalia Ciardini, and Temistocle Coccanari. Many of these plays were meant to be performed by the children themselves, so they are preceded by instructions on how to build the booth and control the puppets. Their main aims were to entertain young children through original stories and characters with whom they could identify and from whom they could learn how to behave in life. For Anna Vertua Gentile, a particular emphasis is placed on kindness: the bad characters repent, ask their victims for forgiveness, are stripped of their assets, and are exiled as a punishment. If a couple gets married, like in *Martino e il mago*⁸¹ (*Martin and the Magician*), it is to buy a house where all their friends can live with them like a group of eternal children. Finally, superstitions are mocked: fairies, water nymphs, and other witches are revealed to be human women marked by tribulations, or protecting themselves from danger; a ‘folletto’ (elf) is only a little Black servant who arrived clandestinely from Egypt with his mistress; a ghostly apparition in the mountain is the survivor of a massacre committed during the war; a speaking statue is only the voice of the person hiding behind it.

An almost feminist undercurrent begins to emerge in these works. In *La bella della fonte* (*The Beauty of the Spring*), as the miller Poldo is perorating about the blind obedience that women owe to their husbands, he is surprised by his mother who slaps him as if he were a child.⁸²

⁸⁰ Loredana Megazzini, ‘Operaie della penna: donne e produzione educativo-letteraria fra Otto e Novecento’ (PhD diss., University of Bologna, 2017), 14.

⁸¹ Anna Vertua Gentile, ‘Martino e il mago’, in *Nuovo teatrino per le marionette* (Milano: Galli, 1892), 1–40.

⁸² Anna Vertua Gentile, ‘La bella della fonte’, in *Nuovo teatrino per le marionette*, 169.

Poldo (*swaggering*).

See I know how to educate girls! ... With women, not too much gentleness is required. You give the orders and ... go! The only thing that a woman must know is obedience. The husband says: prepare dinner! And the wife, quickly, quickly to the oven! ... The husband says: wash my feet! And the wife gets down to wash, lather, dry! ... The husband says: go throw yourself in the fire! And the wife ...

Scene III

Madda and characters as before.

Madda (*suddenly enters*).

And the wife bam! She knocks him down with a slap like that! (*she slaps Poldo*).

Later on in the play, the inhabitants of the village believe a supernatural creature is living in the ruins of an abbey, but they discover that she is a young woman seeking refuge from her uncle who wants to force her into a convent. The whole community defends her and causes her persecutor to flee. Despite writing numerous etiquette manuals for girls and young women, such as *L'arte di farsi amare dal marito: consigli alle giovani spose* (*The Art of Making Your Husband Love You: Advice for Young Wives*, 1889), Anna Vertua Gentile played an important role amongst her generation in demanding gender equality and promoting how qualities she defined as 'feminine' (common sense, measure, care) were vital for the society.⁸³ The puppet show repertoire that she compiled for children to perform at home was her favoured instrument in this fight.

Berta Barbensi, known as Rita Blé (1850–1911), does not end any of her plays with the expected marriage. In *I sapientoni* (*The Know-It-Alls*), Plutino, the simple servant of Professor Lanternoni, prepares for death because he believes he inadvertently drank the contents of a jar that contained the body of a small monkey conserved in alcohol to be used in his master's experiments; upon discovering that it was only cherries in

⁸³ See Gabriella Artemise, 'Action éducative et 'bonnes manières' au XIX^e siècle. La pensée éducative d'Anna Vertua Gentile (1845–1926)', *Cahiers de narratologie* 40 (2021).

eau-de-vie, he explodes with joy and asks for the hand of the maid Allegrèta who mocks him: ‘Go, horse, wait for the grass to grow!’⁸⁴ In *Una fricassea fatale* (*A Fatal Muddle*), Zerbinetta proposes to Stenterello, but he, visibly immature, decides to stay single and she calls him a ‘Judas’.⁸⁵ In stark opposition to the virile and masculinist models that Mussolini’s ideology would enforce some years later, the plays by these ‘pen workers’ employ inoffensive plots to remodel the dominant representation of relationships between men and women.

MOBILISATION OF CONSCIENCES

Far from remaining a space protected from military conflicts and ideological battles, the puppet theatre repertoire for children was a conduit for indoctrinating young spectators in the first half of the twentieth century. During the First World War, private theatres in France and Germany developed initiatives to bring the confrontation between warring countries to the puppet booth. In August 1914, the puppeteer Gaston Cony rebaptised his small puppet theatre in Paris’s Buttes-Chaumont park ‘Guignol de la Guerre’ (Guignol of the War). Thereafter, he composed several dozen plays in which Guignol, alongside his son Nicolas, becomes a soldier, fights in the trenches, is injured and receives honours, triumphs over the Germans, and kills or punishes their leaders.

This repertoire, part of which was published in the author’s periodical *Artistique-revue* distributed nationwide, was also performed by enlisted soldiers in barracks and hospitals.⁸⁶ However, it was initially intended for the audience of children who came to watch the performances in the Buttes-Chaumont Park, thus contributing to the ‘brainwashing’ in schools and publications for young people.⁸⁷ In Gaston Cony’s work, the war is not only presented through military events; it is also a cultural war that pits not the countries of the Triple Entente against the Central

⁸⁴ Berta Barbensi, ‘I sapientoni’, in *Commediolo per burattini*, ed. B. Barbensi, Amalia Ciardini, and Temistocle Coccanari (Bologna: Licinio Cappelli, 1930), 24.

⁸⁵ Berta Barbensi, ‘Una fricassea fatale’, in *Commediolo per burattini*, ed. B. Barbensi, Amalia Ciardini, and Temistocle Coccanari (Bologna: Licinio Cappelli, 1930), 31.

⁸⁶ See *Guignol 14–18: mobiliser, survivre* (Milan/Lyon: Silvana editoriale/Musées Gadagne, 2015).

⁸⁷ Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre des enfants 1914–1918: essai d’histoire culturelle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1993).

Powers, but France against Germany exclusively. In *Guignol contre les jouets boches* (*Guignol against the Boche Toys*),⁸⁸ for example, Guignol whacks a Father Christmas with a club after he places toys under the tree for a child; he is unmasked as a German giving out toys marked 'Made in Germany'. The real Father Christmas, in turn, arrives, praises Guignol for his vigilance and replaces the German toys for French toys. At the end of *Ainsi font, font, font*,⁸⁹ just as victory for the allies has been secured, Guignol rains blows on a musician who has come to play a work by Richard Wagner.

The plays written and performed by Gaston Cony almost entirely abandon the comic register and instead glorify the heroism of the 'Poilus' (ordinary infantry men), the discipline of the soldiers, and their sense of duty. Yet, they also represented the everyday life of war as much as was possible for an audience of young children. In *Guignol blessé* (*Guignol Injured*), for example, Guignol and another soldier keep watch in a trench under shell fire. Injured by the explosions, they wake up in the following act in a hospital where they are being cared for. Both, like Guignol's son Nicolas, are awarded the Croix de guerre. In the third and final act, Guignol and Madelon walk in their garden before Guignol leaves once again for the front.⁹⁰ Beyond the ordinary soldiers that Guignol fights, the enemy powers are also represented in some of Cony's puppet plays as effigies of army chiefs and political leaders. In *Guignol vengeur* (*Avenger Guignol*),⁹¹ the hero finds Kaiser Wilhelm II at Amerongen Castle in the Netherlands where he has taken refuge after abdicating in November 1918, kills him, and cuts off his head whilst singing 'La Marseillaise'. In *Guignol, fantoches & Cie*,⁹² he has all the German military chiefs accused of war crimes parade in front of him: Guignol, fantocci & Co he reads out their names and beats them one after the other.

On the other side of the front, German-language authors and puppeteers similarly used the theatre of Kasperl as an instrument of

⁸⁸ Gaston Cony, 'Guignol contre les jouets boches', *Artistique-revue* 11 (1919).

⁸⁹ Gaston Cony, 'Ainsi font, font, font', *Artistique-revue* 3 (1918). "Ainsi font, font, font, les petites marionnettes" is a famous nursery rhyme.

⁹⁰ Gaston Cony and Luc Mégret, 'Guignol blessé', *Artistique-revue* 9 (1918).

⁹¹ Gaston Cony and P. Achille, 'Guignol vengeur', *Artistique-revue* 15 (1919).

⁹² Gaston Cony and Luc Mégret, 'Guignol, fantoches & Cie', *Artistique-revue* 29 (1919).

warmongering propaganda.⁹³ However, they often chose to depict the Allies not as ordinary soldiers or well-known characters, but as emblematic figures from the satirical press or inspired by it: for the Münchner Künstler-Kriegs-Puppenspiele (War Puppets of Munich Artists), the doll-maker Else Hecht (1888–1975) represented the English through the traits of Money, a Scotsman in a kilt with bagpipes and a bag of money, and the Russian as Wodki, a dishevelled drunk with a fur cap and a bottle of vodka. Adolf Völckers⁹⁴ refers to the Frenchman as Absinth, the Briton Beefsteak, and the Russian Wutki. In *Kasperl nach, von, über, unter, an, und in England*⁹⁵ (*Kasperl to, from, on, under, at and in England*), a play published under the name of Johannes Wurst, the Englishman is John Bull and the Italian Arlekino. In contrast to the repertoire composed by Gaston Cony, these plays, like those of Paul Wriede (1866–1926),⁹⁶ Felix Renker (1867–1935),⁹⁷ and Ernst Heinrich Bethge⁹⁸ (1878–1944), are not addressed primarily or even directly to children, but they play on the character's ambiguity: a true child-soldier at once capable of bearing arms and being protected by his grandmother. In Bethge's *Kaspar als Rekrut* (*Kaspar as Recruit*), for example, when the non-commissioned officer responsible for Kaspar's military training loses his temper with the protagonist and gives him a slap, his grandmother immediately comes to his defence.⁹⁹ In another of Bethge's plays, *Kaspar in Zivil* (*Kaspar as*

⁹³ See Evelyn Zechner, 'Vom wachsamen Michel, der dicken Berta und dem wehrhaften Kasper – Der nationale Habitus in Puppenspielen aus der Zeit des Ersten Weltkriegs', *LiTheS* 4 (2010). See also Didier Plassard, 'Puppetry of a Total War: French and German Puppet Plays in World War I', in *Representing Alterity through Puppet and Performing Objects*, ed. John Bell, Matthew Isaac Cohen, and Jungming Song (Storrs, CT: Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry/University of Connecticut, 2023).

⁹⁴ Adolf Völckers, *Kasperl im Krieg* (Munich: Höfling, 1914).

⁹⁵ Johannes Wurst, 'Kasperl nach, von, über, unter, an und in England', in *Kasperls Kriegsdienst*, ed. Robert Michel (Graz and Leipzig: Leuschner & Lubensky's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1917).

⁹⁶ See, for example, Paul Wriede, 'Kasper in Frankreich', 'Kasper in Russland', and 'Kasper bei den Italienern', in *Kasper Puttschenelle*, ed. Johannes Rabe (Hamburg: Quickborn-Verlag, 1924), 208–21.

⁹⁷ Felix Renker, *Kasperle im Weltkriege* (Mühlhausen in Thürigen: Danner, [1918]).

⁹⁸ Ernst H. Bethge, *Seid ihr alle da? Kasperle feldgrau* (Leipzig: Strauch, [1918]).

⁹⁹ Ernst H. Bethge, 'Kaspar als Rekrut', in *Seid ihr alle da?*, 9.

Civilian), he declares to the non-commissioned officer that he will never marry and he wants to live with no woman but his grandmother.¹⁰⁰

After 1918, the use of puppet theatre to serve political or ideological goals saw a shift towards pedagogy. Gaston Cony, who only changed his theatre's name from 'Guignol de la guerre' to 'Guignol de Paris' in June 1925, created an 'educator Guignol' for schools, which was financially supported by the municipality: *Louis XI chez Guignol*,¹⁰¹ for example, is a history lesson in which the ghosts of Louis XI and Charles the Bold appear to reproach themselves for their respective misdeeds. Guignol concludes the show by praising the king, who was able to reconstruct the unity of the kingdom and support useful inventions like the postal service and the printing press.

In the 1920s in Germany and Austria, the youth movements linked to different left-wing parties developed large-scale activities that used glove puppet theatre, which they considered a particularly efficient tool for education and forming class consciousness. The plays of this 'roter Kasperl' (red Kasperl) were performed by adults, but they could also be presented by children, particularly at school fetes and summer camps. Several educators and partisans of pedagogical reforms contributed to writing this repertoire, with some of them, such as Ernst Heinrich Bethge, later extending the propaganda work they undertook during the war in a new direction.¹⁰² Kasperl's characteristic traits are often modified to make him the emblematic representation of the working class without losing any of the personality of a boy in need of education: he is an apprentice exploited by his bosses in *Kasperl als Lehrbub* (*Kasperl as Apprentice*) by Felix Fechenbach (1894–1933),¹⁰³ and even a pioneer, a member of the youth associations in the anonymous play *Kasperl im Ferienlager* (*Kasperl at Summer Camp*).¹⁰⁴ In the introduction to his play *Die entartete Prinzess* (*The Decadent Princess*), the composer Jörg

¹⁰⁰ Ernst H. Bethge, 'Kaspar in Zivil', in *Seid ihr alle da?*, 44–45.

¹⁰¹ Gaston Cony, 'Louis XI chez Guignol', *Artistique-revue* 18 (1919).

¹⁰² See Gina Weinkauff, *Ernst Heinrich Bethges Ästhetik der Akklamation. Wandlungen eines Laienspielauteurs in Kaiserreich, Weimarer Republik und NS-Deutschland* (Frankfurt: Nold, 1992).

¹⁰³ Felix Fechenbach, *Kasperl als Lehrling* (Dresden: Kaden & Company, 1926). Text republished in Gina Weinkauff, ed., *Rote Kasper-Texte. Stücke aus de 20er Jahren für das Figurentheater der Arbeiterkinder* (Frankfurt: Puppen und Masken, 1986).

¹⁰⁴ 'Kasperl im Ferienlager', in Weinkauff, *Rote Kasper-Texte*, 31–35.

Mager (1880–1939) portrays Kasperl as a worker who places his trust in the reactionary forces and then, when he realises they are capitalising on his naivety to exploit him, he decides to fight for truth and justice. However, *Die entartete Prinzess*, a rewriting of Upton Sinclair's 1918 novel *Jimmie Higgins Goes to War*, does not actually reflect this evolution: from the start of the dramatic action, the unemployed worker demonstrates significant clarity on the violence of social relations, and at the end, he marries Princess Espera, who rises up against the poverty of the workers. Princess Espera gains the greatest level of class consciousness through contact with Kasperl: after offering Christian charity to the poor, she ends up renouncing her title as princess and, through marriage, shares the workers' social status.¹⁰⁵

As Gina Weinkauff's research¹⁰⁶ has shown, there is significant variation across the roter Kasperl plays. They are often based on a twofold action in which the hero receives some form of instruction—it might simply be brushing his teeth regularly¹⁰⁷—and, at the same time, becomes aware of the need for collective action. *Kasperl sucht den Weihnachtsmann*¹⁰⁸ (*Kasperl Searches for Father Christmas*) by Anton Tesarek (1896–1977), the founder of the Austrian Rote Falken (Red Falcon) youth movement precisely follows this model whilst including traditional characters from the repertoire for children (prince and princess, king and queen, magician). Moved by the poverty of a peasant couple, Kasperl leaves in search of Father Christmas to ask him to help them. After various encounters that lead him to a castle, a forest, and then the seaside, a crocodile coaxed with a lump of sugar reveals that Father Christmas does not exist. In spite of this revelation, Kasperl returns with his arms full of presents for the two peasants: a tree, candles, cakes, and a scarf, all offered by the workers. Some tea has even been sent by comrades in China. Kasperl not only understands that Father Christmas is fictional,

¹⁰⁵ Kaspar Hauser [Jörg Mager], 'Einleitung', in *Die entartete Prinzess* (Berlin: A. Hoffmann's Verlag, 1922).

¹⁰⁶ Gina Weinkauff, *Der rote Kasper. Das Figurentheater in der pädagogisch-kulturellen Praxis der deutschen und österreichischen Arbeiterbewegung von 1918–1933* (Bochum: Puppenspielkundliche Quellen und Forschungen 8, 1982).

¹⁰⁷ See Felix Fechenbach, 'Wie Kasperl ins Zeltlager kommt', in Weinkauff, *Rote Kasper-Texte*, 25–28.

¹⁰⁸ Anton Tesarek, *Kasperl sucht den Weihnachtsmann* (Vienna: Jungbrunnen, 1927). Text republished in Weinkauff, *Rote Kasper-Texte*, 171–98.

but he also discovers the solidarity of ‘the people who say “friendship”’, meaning the members of the youth organisations for whom this word serves at once as a sign of recognition and salutation.

The ‘roter Kasperl’ repertoire also directly addresses political and social questions. Written in 1930, the play *Kasperl streikt* (*Kasperl on Strike*) by Hermann Homann (1895–1985) comically summarises trade union battles: when he discovers that his wife can only give him dry bread for breakfast, Kasperl asks for a raise from his boss, the shopkeeper Sebastian Dusselig who employs him as a grocer-boy. Dusselig refuses and, when Kasperl goes on strike, takes on another employee to replace him. However, this ‘young man’ is Kasperl’s friend August who pretends to not understand Dusselig’s orders. In a further act of sabotage, Kasperl switches the names of the recipients of the different orders taken by his boss. When the furious clients send back the produce that has been mistakenly delivered to them, the shopkeeper finally agrees to give Kasperl the raise he asked for. As Jonny Ebstein observes,¹⁰⁹ *Kasperl streikt* is distinct for two reasons: first, it offers an accurate depiction of the living conditions of workers (cramped housing, poor salary, undernourishment); and, second, it significantly extends the usual interaction with the audience. The young spectators were asked questions, taken as witnesses, and invited to become Kasperl’s accomplices in his battle against Dusselig.

PUPPET SHOWS FOR CHILDREN UNDER TOTALITARIAN REGIMES

Following the example of the ‘roter Kasperl’, several totalitarian regimes used puppet theatre for children in the 1930s as an ideological battleground. These examples demonstrate a significant diversity in terms of the contexts of production, the artistic means employed, and their dramaturgical choices. In the social democratic and communist youth movements in Austria and Germany, puppets were used in educational projects and to encourage a sense of class belonging. Aside from the latter intention, the practices of the ‘roter Kasperl’ were very similar to those that many youth movements unaffiliated with political parties (for example,

¹⁰⁹ Jonny Ebstein, ‘Le mouvement des jeunes en Allemagne et l’agit-prop’, in *Le Théâtre d’agit-prop de 1917 à 1932*, vol. 3 (Lausanne: La Cité – L’Age d’homme, 1978), 95.

scouting) developed during the interwar period. In France, on the initiative of Léon Chanceler, and in Belgium, the activities of the Comédiens Routiers included creating and preparing puppet shows, which were celebrated for their pedagogical virtues.¹¹⁰ In contrast, using puppets in totalitarian regimes primarily aimed to justify political violence as a means to eliminate all forms of opposition and otherness within the ‘unified’ social body. Employing puppet theatre for ideological indoctrination followed very different paths according to the national contexts, and it was not always closely linked to shows for children.

The Italian fascists had no qualms about enlisting the character of Pinocchio in their stories for children to portray a squadrista participating in ‘punitive expeditions’ against political opponents.¹¹¹ Yet in Mussolini’s Italy, the use of puppets seems not to have been specifically encouraged within its youth organisations: ‘figli della lupa’ (six to eight years old), ‘balilla’ (boys aged 8 to 14), and ‘piccole Italiane’ (girls aged 8 to 14). The strong connections between this art form and the regional languages and cultures that the regime fought against may have been a factor, but in general, almost all activities within these organisations related to physical education or military preparation. Sometimes traditional puppeteers themselves integrated a direct link with international current affairs into their shows and thus indirectly contributed to perpetuating the political fervour.¹¹² The use of the puppet in fascist propaganda for children was essentially limited to shows created on the initiative of politically engaged artists with the consent of the authorities, but without receiving institutional support. The writer, artist, and puppeteer Yambo (pseudonym of Enrico Novelli, 1874–1943) falls into this category: in Verona in 1931,

¹¹⁰ In France and Belgium, the Comédiens Routiers emerged from the scouting movement, and they performed puppet shows. See *Art dramatique* 19–20 (1934), Bulletin des Comédiens Routiers, Centre d’Études et de Représentations Dramatiques. In June 1942, the journal of the Éclaireurs de France *Le Routier* published a special issue entitled *Les Marionnettes scoutes*, which brought together documents and accounts.

¹¹¹ See, for example, Giuseppe Petrai, *Avventure e spedizioni punitive di Pinocchio fascista* (1923), in *Pinocchio in camicia nera – Quattro pinocchiate fasciste*, ed. Luciano Curreri (Cuneo: Nerosubianco, 2008).

¹¹² In the 1940s, the burattinaio Nino Pozzo from Verona, for example, included in his repertoire *Fasolino soldato al fronte russo*, *Fasolino soldato al fronte inglese*, and *Fasolino soldato in Francia*. See Francesca Ceconi, ‘Nino Pozzo e il teatro di figura a Verona tra Ottocento e Novecento’ (PhD diss., University of Verona, 2022), 208–19.

he had his string-marionettes perform one of the adventures of Ciuffettino, the character he created in a series of short, illustrated children's books. Francesca Cecconi summarises the action in an episode entitled *Ciuffettino balilla*:

Ciuffettino's country is dominated by a Red Dragon who destroys the city. His name is Bolshevism and he paints everything from tricolour flags to schools in red. The workers no longer want to work and, in the red factories, working hours are reduced to from 11.30 to 12.00. Ciuffettino's schoolteacher encourages his pupils to fight against the Red Dragon alongside the only man who can succeed. Benito Mussolini enters on stage and asks Ciuffettino if he wants to join the fascist party and wear the black shirt in the fight between the Blacks and the Reds.¹¹³

The situation was very different in Spain, where the use of glove puppet theatre as a means of indoctrinating young people under Franco's dictatorship assumed an official and systematic role within the activities organised by the Frente de Juventudes (Youth Front, 1940–60). Initially, this adoption sought to obscure how artists and writers from the republican camp had significantly invested in puppet theatre during the previous decade, first as part of the Misiones pedagógicas (1931–36) created to bolster popular education and modernise rural areas, for which the poet Rafael Dieste took charge of a 'Retablo de fantoches', and later during the Civil War, through the plays of the 'teatro de urgencia', particularly those of the company La Tarumba directed by Miguel Prieto.

These two instances of employing puppets for political means contrast sharply. The militant shows of the Misiones pedagógicas and 'teatro de urgencia' staged the works of politically engaged professional artists and addressed all generations in villages, working-class areas, and combat zones. Those produced as part of the Frente de Juventudes' activities were written, staged, and performed by the children and teenagers themselves (the 'flechas' brought together children aged 11 to 15), sometimes supported by their elders, in a country entirely ruled by Franco's dictatorship. At the end of the 1940s and during the 1950s, significant means were allocated to encouraging and supporting these theatrical productions

¹¹³ Cecconi, 'Nino Pozzo e il teatro di figura', 211.

with the training of instructors and the availability of hundreds of mass-produced puppet sets.¹¹⁴ The creation of this entirely original repertoire was tightly controlled: in the theatrical action, the young authors were tasked with illustrating the watch words regularly communicated by the Frente de juventudes.

Over time, local, regional, and national competitions were set up by different ‘centurias’ (centuries) of the Frente de Juventudes to create these ‘consignas escenificadas’¹¹⁵ (staged watch words). The performances were not only given for groups of ‘flechas’; they were also performed publicly, as Pedro Ortega Aparicio recounted:

... the street performances of puppets organised by the young people from the FJ served as entertainment for children and pedagogical activities for pupils. In the 1950s, the sight of these puppet shows being performed in the middle of the street and hundreds of children and their families congregated around a small portable theatre was common.¹¹⁶

Given how it was produced, the repertoire of these Francoist glove puppets shows was basic and repetitive: a young hero representing the ‘flechas’ battles against opposing ideologies and triumphs over them. The tone was set in 1939 when members of the Sindicato Español Universitario, a Falangist student organisation, staged *Periquito contra el monstruo de la democracia* (*Periquito against the Monster of Democracy*) and *El castillo embrujado* (*The Haunted Castle*), two plays by Alejandro Martínez Blas and Agustín Embuena, in Madrid. In the 1940s, Periquito was replaced by the ‘flecha’ Juanín, who would become the obligatory protagonist of the repertoire written by young authors from the Frente de Juventudes, and the list of enemies became more diverse: in addition to the ‘monster of democracy’, it included communism, socialism, Freemasonry, and atheism, sometimes portrayed allegorically as ogres, sorcerers, devils, and dragons, sometimes explicitly identified as in *Los pueblos sin los*

¹¹⁴ See Adolfo Ayuso, ‘Les marionnettes du général Franco’, in *Marionnettes et pouvoir – Censures, propagandes, résistances*, ed. Raphaële Fleury and Julie Sermon (Montpellier: Deuxième époque, 2019), 61–91.

¹¹⁵ Delegación Nacional del Frente de Juventudes, *Consignas escenificadas* (Alicante: Servicio provincial de cultura y arte, 1942).

¹¹⁶ Pedro Ortega Aparicio, ‘El Frente de Juventudes en una provincia castellana: Palencia (1940–1961)’ (PhD diss., University of Valladolid, 2007), 480.

partidos viven felices y unidos (*People without Political Parties Live Happy and United*) by the amateur author Rodolfo Sierra Mañueco (1920–2014). In this play for children written in 1956, the enemies of Juanín and his benevolent king are simply called the Socialist and the Communist.¹¹⁷

In Nazi Germany, youth organisations were also organised by age group (Deutsches Jungvolk and Jungmädelsbund for those aged 10–14; Hitlerjugend and Bund deutscher Mädel for those aged 14–18), and it became obligatory for all young people to join their ranks in 1936. Their activities mainly focused on physical training, outdoor living, and military preparations, or home economics and motherhood for young women. Artistic occupations (singing, storytelling, theatre, glove puppets, string-marionettes) featured sparingly in the programme for the girls, for example during the evenings, and seem to have only played a minor role in these youth organisations. In contrast, the organisation Kraft durch Freude (Strength through Joy), with which the Nazi regime had replaced the trade unions of the Weimar Republic, hugely financed leisure activities for the population and, amongst them, puppet theatre performances given by companies who had received approval from the Reichskulturkammer (Reich Chamber of Culture). This approval did not mean that these companies were any less closely monitored. In February 1939, the puppeteer Hermann Rulff, for example, received a letter on headed paper from the central office of Kraft durch Freude ordering him to add a contemporary dimension to *Faust* by portraying the protagonist as a ‘combative politician’,¹¹⁸ entirely detached from imagery of the medieval world.

In 1938, several organisations (particularly Hitlerjugend, Bund deutscher Mädel, and Kraft durch Freude) joined forces to establish the Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel (Reich Institute for Puppet Theatre), whose main mission was to coordinate the profession and offer initial or continuous training to puppeteers for the purposes of serving Nazi ideology. This institute trained a first group of amateur puppeteers over

¹¹⁷ Rodolfo Sierra Mañueco, ‘Los pueblos sin los partidos viven felices y unidos’, in Delegación Nacional del Frente de Juventudes, *Teatro de títeres* (Madrid, 1956).

¹¹⁸ Cited by Gerd Bolhmeier, “Der Kasper ist kein Clown” – Zur Organisation eines Unterhaltungsmediums im Nationalsozialismus”, in *Die Spiele der Puppe*, ed. Manfred Wegner (Cologne: Prometh-Verlag, 1989), 182.

the course of three weeks,¹¹⁹ had thousands of glove puppet heads moulded in Labolit (a synthetic material), and published several texts from the repertoire and a brochure presenting their programme.¹²⁰ The beginning of the Second World War significantly reduced the ambitions of the Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel and then halted its activities. The involvement of puppeteers to support the Nazi regime was largely redirected towards army theatres.¹²¹

The repertoire published by the Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel is divided into two series. The first, ‘Politische Zwischenspiele’ (political interludes), drew its subject matter from the events of 1939–41 and mocked Neville Chamberlain by calling him ‘Mr. Regenschirm’ (Mr Umbrella), and Winston Churchill ‘Mr. Lügenmaul’ (Mr Filthy Liar). The second, ‘Das deutsche Puppenspiel’ (German puppet shows), specifically addressed children, in particular through rewriting traditional tales from a racist and antisemitic perspective to conform to the regime’s ideology. The puppeteer Max Jacob (1888–1967), the internationally renowned director of the Hohensteiner Puppenspiele, published in this collection *Die neuen Kleider des Kaisers* (*The Emperor’s New Clothes*), an adaptation of the tale *Kejserens nye Klæder* by Hans Christian Andersen. The two swindlers from Andersen’s tale who convince the emperor that they will make him a coat that is invisible to idiots and incompetents are replaced with a simple tailor. The tailor demands a large quantity of gold as payment for his work, speaks to everyone with obsequiousness, and ‘seems to belong to a foreign race’¹²² as the field marshal of the court remarks; without it being explicitly stated, the tailor embodies all the characteristics of how Jews were depicted in Nazi propaganda. He meets his match in Kasper, the court fool, who, aligning himself with ‘solid common sense’, takes back the gold promised to the tailor, hits him with

¹¹⁹ Alexander Wessely, “‘Wie überall kommt es auch beim Puppenspiel auf die Haltung und Gesinnung an (...)’ – Zur Frage eines Zusammenhanges zwischen Handpuppenspiel und Propaganda im Dritten Reich – Eine Annäherung” (PhD diss., University of Vienna, 2009), 330.

¹²⁰ Amt ‘Feierabend’ der NSG ‘Kraft durch Freude’, ed., *Das deutsche Puppenspiel – Einsatz, Erfolg und Zielsetzung* (Berlin: Verlag der Deutschen Arbeitsfront).

¹²¹ See Dorothea Kolland, ed., *FrontPuppenTheater. Puppenspieler im Kriegsgeschehen* (Berlin: Elefant-Press, 1997).

¹²² Max Jacob, *Die neuen Kleider des Kaisers* (Leipzig: Arwed StrauchVerlag/Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel), 13.

his bag, and has him violently expelled from the castle. At the end, the emperor, convinced of his own weakness of mind, hands power to Kasper, recalling how Paul von Hindenburg, as President of the Reich, confided his to Hitler.

In the same collection, Hermann Schultze, who was responsible for the Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel's repertoire, published an adaptation of the tale *Der Jude im Dorn*¹²³ (*The Jew among Thorns*) that significantly modified the characteristics of the titular character. In the Brothers Grimm version, the Jew becomes trapped after entering a thorny hedge to retrieve a bird shot by a servant. The servant possesses a magical violin that makes the Jew dance in the middle of the thorns until he gives him 100 florins. The Jew goes to a judge to complain that he has had money extorted and asks for the servant to be hanged, only to find himself condemned: the 100 florins had previously belonged to a Christian whom the Jew had cheated. In Hermann Schultze's version, the bird that falls into the bush has an extraordinary feather that the Jew Levi Blauspan wants to bring to the king's daughter in order to marry her—this is the test that is supposed to help her decide between her suitors. This marriage would allow the Jew to have complete influence over the royal court: capitalising on the debts accumulated by the minsters and the king's councillors, he submits them to his every demand. Far from being cruelly injured by the thorn bush, Levi Blauspan is obeyed and feared by all who encounter him apart from the princess and, of course, Kasper, who assumes the role of the servant in the original tale. In the end, the Jew is hanged, and, like the emperor in Max Jacob's *Die neuen Kleider des Kaisers*, the king confides the kingdom's government to Kasper.

The subtitle of Schultze's play, 'ein Märchen-Kasperspiel mit politischer Bedeutung' (a play for Kasper in the form of a tale with a political meaning), sums up his authorial intentions. Schultze transforms the anti-Judaism opposing Jews and Christians in the Brothers Grimm tale into the modern antisemitism of Nazi propaganda: Levi Blauspan accumulates wealth, which allows him to exercise an occult power, and he aspires to take control of the whole country. There are multiple signs of his alterity: his physical appearance is unpleasant for the other characters; the German he speaks is heavily imprecise and a very marked accent distorts it; and he addresses his interlocutors in the third person as if refusing to speak to

¹²³ Hermann Schultze, *Der Jude im Dorn* (Leipzig: Arwed Strauch Verlag/Reichsinstitut für Puppenspiel).

them directly. In contrast, Kasper is ever lively and joyous; he sings and jokes. All is set up so that the spectators, young and old, identify with Kasper and, through him, the Nazi Party, which has come to give a ‘bit of a hand’ to re-establish ‘truth and honesty’¹²⁴ in the country.

After the Second World War was over, Spain under Franco’s regime was not the only country in Western Europe where puppet theatre was used for the ideological indoctrination of children. In the German regions occupied by Soviet troops, then in the German Democratic Republic, the Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth) created in 1946 brought together children from two organisations: the Jungpioniere (young pioneers, aged 6–10) and the Thälmann-Pioniere¹²⁵ (aged 10–14). *Die Maschine* (*The Machine*) was created within the context of these activities, first as a play for amateurs under the title *Der Knecht* (*The Servant*) in the ‘Kleine Bücherei der Freien Deutschen Jugend’ (Little Library of the Free German Youth), and then as a glove puppet play staged by the Berlin-based company Die Nussknacker (The Nutcracker) and published in 1951.¹²⁶ According to Erich Hammer, who wrote the text’s preface, and likely adapted the play, it was aimed at children aged 8–14.

The ‘servant’ is actually a ‘machine’, Professor Mechanikus’s invention that can simultaneously plough, harvest, sow, and thresh grain. Kasperl is tasked with taking it to a peasant couple in difficulty, along with the advice that it should remain the collective property of the village because if it belonged to one individual, it would no longer be a ‘servant’, but a ‘master’. Michel and his wife, the two peasants, have accumulated debts with the shopkeeper Dollarmann, whose wealth came from selling them poor-quality tools. When Dollarmann discovers the machine, he seeks to take it from them. He gets the peasant drunk, extorts the machine from him in exchange for wiping their debts, and hires a thug to attempt (without success) to kill Kasperl. When the peasant wants to harvest his crops, the machine is not available as Dollarmann has rented it to another peasant: since the villagers must now pay to use it, it has become the ‘master’ that its inventor dreaded. Assisted by a police officer and the children in

¹²⁴ Schultze, *Der Jude im Dorn*, 63.

¹²⁵ Named in homage to Ernst Thälmann, President of the German Communist Party (KPD), assassinated at Buchenwald in 1944.

¹²⁶ *Die Maschine, ein Handpuppenspiel der Berliner Puppenbühne ‘Die Nussknacker’* (Berlin: VEB, 1951). I thank Lars Rebehn for having given me a copy of this work.

the audience, who are called upon numerous times throughout the show, Kasper obtains justice for the peasant, Dollarmann is thrown in prison, and the machine is placed under the management of the *Maschinen-Ausleih-Station* (MAS), the borrowing station for agricultural materials set up by the East German authorities.

Other plays for puppets written in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) during the same period also criticised attempts at individual wealth accumulation and promoted the need for the collective management of resources. For example, in *Der Schatz im Walde* (*The Treasure in the Forest*) by Elsbeth Schulz¹²⁷ (1908–2001), the inhabitants dig up the whole forest in search of the treasure buried there before realising that it is not a chest filled with silver and gold as they had imagined, but a spring with miraculous medicinal properties. An innkeeper wants to buy it so that he can make a profit on it, but Kasper is opposed and, warned by the animals of the forest, decides that the water from the spring will be divided in two: a stream will continue to be accessible to the animals, and another will serve the inhabitants of the village. The shunned innkeeper leaves without further ado. Kasper invites the children in the audience (aged 6–12), who are addressed at several points during the performance, to draw the suggested division of the spring, and to give him their drawings at the end of the show.

REIMAGINING THE WORLD OR UNDERSTANDING IT DIFFERENTLY

With its allegorical meaning, use of animals, audience participation, and peaceful resolution to the conflict, the example of *Der Schatz im Walde* shows how, beyond the question of indoctrinating young spectators through puppet theatre, artists began to create the elements of a dramaturgy specific to children's theatre from the 1950s onwards. This dramaturgy would be developed further in the following decades by companies and institutions dedicated to this new sector in most European countries: drama centres for young people, specific departments within large institutions, culture centres, national and international festivals. In both Eastern and Western Europe, a new branch of the performing

¹²⁷ Elsbeth Schulz, *Der Schatz im Walde. Ein Puppenspiel* (Berlin: Deutscher Zentralverlag, 1951).

arts gained visibility, a professional structure, and recognition by public powers. Despite the tense context of the Cold War, various actors came together from 1965 onwards as part of the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People (ASSITEJ). With the expansion and the growing dynamism of this sector, the puppetry arts found the keys to economic development and institutional support in theatre for young audiences, which would lead the two to overlap entirely for several decades, a situation that persists in certain countries. Space constraints do not permit me to give an account of the richness of artistic productions that emerged in this context, or even to outline the resulting developments. In the remainder of this chapter, then, I will focus solely on identifying what puppetry brought to children's theatre and which of its expressive potentialities were explored.

The first of these potentialities is a simplified representation of conflicts. Since everything happens through gestures (Marcel Temporal has described the puppet as 'a synthesis by way of expression'),¹²⁸ using puppets allows for situations and behaviours to be depicted with a significant economy of means and in a way that is immediately accessible to an audience of children or adolescents. The simplified 'description of the world', to cite Eli Rozik's expression,¹²⁹ that is produced increases readability: the oppositions staged are made starker in the construction of the figures and the interplay of colours, shapes, and materials. For this reason, beyond the subversions it led to under totalitarian regimes, puppet theatre for children continued and still continues today to be used for educational and activist ends. Whether it addresses big or small causes—pacifism, anti-globalisation, feminism, ecology, minorities, biodiversity, the situation of refugees, the fight against bullying in schools—puppet theatre for young audiences very often delivers an unequivocal message of interest to all; in many ways, a moral or at least civic lesson.

The most radical version of this simplified representation employs techniques from activist theatre which reduce everything to the extreme.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Marcel Temporal, 'Marottes et marionnettes. Propos à l'usage des éducateurs', *La Vie active* 5 (1950): 3.

¹²⁹ Eli Rozik, *The Roots of Theatre. Rethinking Ritual and Other Theories of Origin* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), 186–87.

¹³⁰ See *Le Théâtre d'intervention depuis 1968*, 2 vols. (Lausanne: L'Âge d'homme, 1983); Olivier Neveux, *Théâtres en lutte. Le théâtre militant en France des années 1960 à aujourd'hui* (Paris: La Découverte, 2007).

Pour la planète (For the Planet), based on a proposal by François Lazaro, Guillaume Lecamus, and Aurelia Ivan (Clastic Théâtre, 2009), brings together several three-to-ten-minute sketches performed in the street, schools, third places, and in homes, that seek to raise awareness of the dangers of climate change amongst the young spectators. Advertised for children aged nine and above, this ‘series of short shows with puppets and reclaimed objects’ explicitly aims to ‘open our eyes, change our habits, and promote sustainable development’ while the quick succession of brief and very diverse forms avoids creating a sense of defeatism and despondency amongst the children. For half an hour or an hour depending on the circumstances, several micro-fables follow on from one another, such as Marie Hebert’s ‘Chacun ses raisons’ (‘Everyone wanders around a field of magnificent flowers and picks whatever they like, all with their good reasons at hand ... until the field disappears’, four minutes) and Pierre Gatineau’s ‘L’état de la Terre’ (‘Holding a ball of paper representing the Earth in his hands, an actor tells the story of the planet. Little by little, the ball of paper begins to sink in water and disappears’, four minutes). Elzbieta Jeznach’s five-minute sketch ‘Nouvelles du monde’ (News from the World) uses ‘talking newspapers’ from agitprop by adapting them to the format of a TV news programme: ‘Three short gag-sequences that briefly parody the 8 o’clock news. At the pole, bears and ice banks are disappearing, and bees are taking refuge ... in cities.’¹³¹

The simplified representation produced by using puppets or animated objects also serves as a structuring principle for shows in larger dimensions. The systems of opposition are used either between two antagonistic groups or worlds, as the puppeteers in the former GDR practised for ideological purposes during the Cold War,¹³² or between two key moments of dramatic action, that of crisis and resolution. *História da Praia Grande (Story of the Great Beach, 2003)*, written and directed by João Paulo Seara Cardoso (1956–2010) and performed at the Teatro de Marionetas do Porto, illustrates this principle. At the Great Beach, a line of black

¹³¹ All these citations are taken from the show’s programme: *Pour la planète, marionnettes d’intervention pour un développement durable*, created by Clastic Théâtre/Laboratoire Clastic, Clichy-la-Garenne (2009). I thank François Lazaro for having sent me this document.

¹³² In Inge Borde-Klein, *Trombis Erdenreise [Journey on the Trombi Planet]* (Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1963), for example, the Martian Trombi first arrives in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), where he finds a sad, grey, and excessively militarised context, then he goes to the GDR where he makes friends in a joyous and bright country.

rocks separates a colony of penguins and a colony of pelicans, two groups that mutually hate each other but are forced into cohabitation. Matias, a young penguin, strikes up a friendship with a pelican called Gabriel, who has been banished from his community after falling in love with a tern. One day, the wind blows a pelican in flight into penguin territory and he defaecates on the head of their chief, the Emperor-Penguin. War breaks out between the two populations. Assisted by an old sailor, Matias and Gabriel leave in search of a golden-headed fish who explains to them using an enigma how to bring an end to the fighting: warned that all the fish will disappear for seven days, they present this temporary disappearance as a punishment ordered by the King of the Sea for the war, which obliges the two sides to reconcile.

Inspired by the shock at the outbreak of the Iraq War in March 2003, *História da Praia Grande* conveys a pacifist message that is immediately understandable to a young audience.¹³³ The show plays on children's familiarity with the environment of the beach, the comedic acting of the two groups of birds represented by puppets and actors, and, in particular, the broad accessibility of the action whose lesson is made even more effective by using a parable. As Jean-Pierre Sarrazac observes, 'driven by the parable, the dramatic form becomes less dramatic',¹³⁴ namely that it is more readily accepted by the young spectators who do not see two peoples killing each other, but two colonies of rather ridiculous large birds clumsily throwing themselves at each other. The rise of reciprocal intolerance, the futility of the conflict's pretext, the inability for the fighters to find the means to get out of it themselves, the fact that the beach is evidently big enough and there are enough resources for everyone to live in peace, and the joy produced by reconciliation: on a child-friendly level, all is said about the deadly chains of events and the senselessness of war.

Therein lies puppet theatre's second contribution to the dramaturgy for young audiences: since it gives an evident presence to the representation of non-human characters—whether for the purposes of addressing very human issues through an animal fable, as in *História da Praia Grande*, or not—it is an easy way to animate all sorts of real or imaginary creatures and depict the interactions between different kinds of living beings. In addition, tales of friendship between children and animals, an

¹³³ The show is advertised as suitable for those aged four and above.

¹³⁴ Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, *La Parabole ou l'enfance du théâtre* (Belval: Circé, 2002), 12.

inexhaustible source of inspiration for stories, picture books, and films, found a suitable theatrical form with puppets that plunges audiences straight into the fable, whichever register is chosen. It could be, for example, the supernatural world of fairy stories. In Laura Poli's *Il Gatto Mammone* (*The Big Tom Cat*—Pupi di Stac, 1987), based on popular Tuscan tales,¹³⁵ a large cat living in a glass house offers splendid gifts to the young Marietta who obeys his every word, but he staples a donkey's tail to the forehead of her half-sister Mariaccia who has been misbehaving; his kittens then evade a trap set by Mariaccia's mother, thereby allowing the prince to marry Marietta. In Nadja's *Chien bleu*¹³⁶ (Blue dog), an adaptation of a picture book for shadow theatre by Fabrizio Montecchi (Teatro Gioco Vita, 2010), a little girl befriends a big blue dog who saves her life. The dog spends one whole night fighting the Spirit of the Woods who, transformed into a panther, has come to devour the girl. In a more dreamlike vision, Eddy Pallaro's *Le Rêve d'Anna*¹³⁷ (Anna's dream), directed by Bérangère Vantusso (Compagnie trois-six-trente, 2014), offers opposing depictions of the dreams of two little girls: one who sees a big white horse and the other a menacing bull, incarnations of confidence in the future and a fear of unemployment respectively.

In many other registers beyond fantasy or supernatural tales, the puppet confers the same visual presence onto the staging of animal characters. It could even be applied to absurd humour as in Manuel Molins's¹³⁸ *Rosegó, el rodamón* (*Rosegó the Vagabond*), directed by Rosa María Navarro i Calvo (compagnie Lluerna Teatre) in 2008. Lluc picks up a stray dog and tries to teach him to play football and do some circus tricks, while the animal wants his new owner to learn to bark and raise a paw. At the other end of the spectrum is the poignant dramatization of *War Horse*, the theatrical adaptation by Nick Stafford of Michael Morpurgo's novel,¹³⁹ in which the young Albert crosses the First World

¹³⁵ Laura Poli, *Il gatto Mammone* (1987), which is an unpublished transcription. I thank Enrico Spinelli for having given me a copy of this text.

¹³⁶ Nadja, *Chien bleu* (Paris: L'École des loisirs, 1989).

¹³⁷ Eddy Pallaro, *Le Rêve d'Anna* (Arles: Actes Sud-Papiers/Heyoka Jeunesse, 2012).

¹³⁸ Manuel Molins, *Rosegó, el rodamón* (Alzira: Bromera, Micalet Teatre, 2001).

¹³⁹ Michael Morpurgo, *War Horse* (London: Kaye & Ward, 1982); Nick Stafford, *War Horse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/National Theatre Playscripts, 2018).

War battlefields in search of his pure-bred Joey. Directed by Tom Morris and Marianne Elliott for the National Theatre in London with life-size horses from the Handspring Puppet Theatre (2007), the production shows the extent to which the puppeteers, trained by the South African company,¹⁴⁰ combined with the exact reproduction of the anatomy and the smallest movements of the animals, can give life, at once powerfully realistic and clearly artificial due the partially visible skeletal structure, to the puppets. Its international success across all generations demonstrates how *War Horse* not only surpassed the confines of the young audience that Morpurgo's novel was initially intended for, but also afforded the theatre of animated objects the means of production and distribution that had until then been inaccessible.

Original expressive possibilities, in particular, emerge from the ease with which the puppet portrays non-human characters in shows for young children. Animals, plants, and natural elements are animated and speak, transforming the stage into an enchanted world. In the rewriting of *Petit Poucet* for the Pajot-Walton's string-marionettes created at the Théâtre de l'Étoile in 1924, the French poet Pierre Albert-Birot (1876–1967) involves a cast of non-human characters in the action and has them converse: Bird, Wind, Wolf, Cow, Imaginary Beast, Big Cloud and Little Pink Cloud, Moon, Good Star, Bottles, and Beef 'ready for the spit'.¹⁴¹

Some decades later, the puppeteer Marcel Temporal (1881–1964) brought together several texts that could be performed in schools in the collection *Textes et animatextes pour marottes et marionnettes à gaine. Le Petit Chaperon Rouge, le Loup et le Petit Lapin Agile (Little Red Riding Hood, the Wolf, and the Little Nimble Rabbit)*, for example, rewrites the encounter scene in the forest in Charles Perrault's tale. The Wolf, locked in a cage, manages to convince Little Red Riding Hood to free him so that he can quench his thirst. It is, of course, only a trap. As the Wolf is about to devour Little Red Riding Hood, the little girl accuses him of having taken advantage of her naivety. He protests setting out his case and accepts her request for arbitration: 'We will pose the question of whether I have the right to eat you to the first three living beings we meet on the road.'

¹⁴⁰ The Handspring Puppet Company was established in 1981 in Cape Town by Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones.

¹⁴¹ Pierre Albert-Birot, *Le Petit Poucet, Théâtre*, vol. 6 (Mortemart: Rougerie, 1980), 8.

The first of these ‘living beings’ is a butterfly who reminds the little girl of her cruelty, when she pinned members of its family to a cork and pulled off their wings. The second judge is a flower who reminds her of the flower ‘massacres’ she commits when strolling in nature: both conclude that the wolf can eat her. Fortunately for Little Red Riding Hood, the third living being they question is the Little Nimble Rabbit, who endeavours to save her despite the fact that she has often eaten the meat of his peers. In a similar way to how Polichinelle asks the executioner to show him how to put his head in the noose hanging from the gallows, the Little Nimble Rabbit pretends not to understand how the Wolf was locked in the cage and convinces him to return inside.¹⁴²

Although this play dates from the immediate post-war period, the idea of a continuum of living beings, which has since become commonplace, is explicitly expressed. Undoubtedly that is one of the main contributions of puppet theatre to the dramaturgy for young audiences: since a puppet can take any form of existence, it confers the same quality of presence onto all beings and treats them all equally, offering fertile ground for experimenting with ‘disanthropocentric’ representations.¹⁴³ As Julie Sermon has shown, the ecopoetic considerations, which emerged within literary studies, are now extending to the performing arts,¹⁴⁴ and the puppet clearly offers the most immediate translation of it: the miniature stage can easily become the representation of an ecosystem where animals of all sizes, humans, plants, and natural elements cohabit.

Julie Aminthe’s *Notre vallée*, directed by Émilie Flacher (compagnie Arnica, 2023) offers a case in point: it reveals how all the beings living in a valley, as well as the forests, the streams, and the rocks, contributed to creating the landscape over a 30-year period. Another text resulting from a commission from the same company, */T(e)r:::r/ie:::r (Terrier)* by Gwendoline Soublin (2020), interweaves the perspectives of a badger, a water shrew, and a barn owl who share the same sett. The animals speak

¹⁴² Marcel Temporal, ‘Le Petit Chaperon Rouge, le Loup et le Petit Lapin Agile’, in *Textes et animatextes pour marottes et marionnettes* (Paris: Les Presses d’Île-de-France, 1952), 62–63.

¹⁴³ Emma Merabet, ‘Décentrer l’humain sur les scènes contemporaines. Mutations dramaturgiques et perspectives écopoétiques’ (PhD diss., Lumière University of Lyon 2, 2024).

¹⁴⁴ Julie Sermon, *Morts ou vifs. Contribution à une écologie pratique, théorique et sensible des arts vivants* (Paris: Éditions B42, 2021).

in a language that, far from anthropomorphism, reflects their individual viewpoints, rhythms, movements, and sensorial explorations of the environment. The badger, for example, examines his sett not by using his poor eyesight, but through smell and taste:

(breathe) here (breathe) wheat (breathe) hmm wheat (breathe) I chew this wheat (breathe) lemon urine here a deer (breathe) oh a worm (breathe) rubber smell here there he is there this delicious worm I chew sticky I swallow (breathe) (breathe) (breathe) (breathe) droppings acid droppings are they my droppings? are they your droppings? (breathe) no his droppings his elder seeds not mine, who lives there? his house? their house.¹⁴⁵

The technique of having animals or things speak, first seen in the old *féeries*, is now part of the current dramaturgical perspectives that emerged within the context of increasing concerns over the ecological and climate crises. It is not a case of simply creating new supernatural representations of the world, but reinventing the modes understanding it and living within it, and especially for the youngest generations.

LEARNING TO PLAY

Since the puppet is first of all something we look at, an artefact with a fluid identity, it can represent beings in the process of becoming, constructed or modified before the audience's eyes. For example, inert objects may suddenly take human form, such as the large pillows in Sue Buckmaster's *Sleep Tight* (Theatre-Rites, 2000–1) that transform into menacing faces with just a few small folds. In *Rubbish* (2013), another production from the same company, the most improbable creatures assembled from different pieces of rubbish emerge from bin bags: a large lightbulb becomes the head of a human figure, while a milk churn and other cleaned tins are arranged to form a duck. In puppet theatre, the most ordinary materials shapeshift: large sheets of crumpled, twisted, and knotted paper create a dancer-puppet in *Krafff* by Joanny Bert and Yan Raballand (Théâtre de Romette, 2007); toilet paper becomes flowers, birds, and human silhouettes in Barbara Mélois's *Petite histoire à l'eau de*

¹⁴⁵ Gwendoline Soublin, */T(e)r::r/ie::r* (2020), which is an unpublished electronic text. I thank Émilie Flacher for sending me a copy of this work.

rose (*Little Sentimental Story*, 2008), and in her *Diaphanie ou les mémoires d'une fée* (*Diaphania or a fairy's memoirs*, 2007), Cinderella's sumptuous carriage emerges as if by magic from a folded sheet of cellophane.

The visible staging of appearances and disappearances, the transformations of one being into another, and the shift from the formless to form, or conversely from form to formless, became from the end of the twentieth century the main scenes of shows that interweave the narrative thread and modifications to the theatrical matter, linking preliminary sketches, accidents, incomplete attempts, and spectacular successes. *Grimm—I guardiani del pozzo* (*Grimm—The Guardians of the Well*, 2013) from the Italian company Riserva Canini offers an illustrative example of this artistic orientation. In it, the two actor-directors Marco Ferro and Valeria Sacco extract from a well a large ball of crumpled paper that seems to autonomously rise to the surface, like a brain emerging from a skull. They grab it, smooth it out, scrunch it up again, hide under it like a sheet, rip it into small pieces that take flight like birds, and are engulfed by it. From it, the heads of animals, a flower, and little characters emerge. The large sheet of paper is held up to create a screen on which a shadow show inspired by the Brothers Grimm fairy tales is projected. It gives birth to a second, smaller sheet of paper, then is folded and modelled to become the puppet of a large wolf. The two artists' sometimes comic, sometimes worrying disagreements with this simultaneously soft and bulky, protective and menacing material from the depths of the well not only form the main narrative thread of the show; around the incidents staged, they open up a rich range of sensations and associations of ideas produced by the material and manipulating it: relationship to books and memory, images of protection or submersion, domination or submission, scenes of giving birth or games of hide and seek.

Since the theatrical fiction is reinforced through this additional level of fiction produced by the transformation of an object into a living being, the puppetry arts are based on conventions whose origins lie in playful childhood activities. Undoubtedly their main contribution to theatre for young audiences is simply the fact of presenting adults on stage acting like children who explore and recount the world through games. To a greater extent than the shows like Riserva Canini's that stage the expressive potentialities of the materials, more radical productions from the theatre of objects openly assume this dimension. Through the literal or subverted use of everyday objects including mass-produced toys, the disregard for cultural hierarchies and aesthetic categories, and in how the

dexterity of animation is renounced and childlike codes (objects grabbed with the whole hand, making noises with the mouth to imitate a motor) are adopted, the shows of these companies, even when they address a multi-generational audience, appear as the elevation of a game for children. The youngest spectators will witness adults imitating them; the oldest will rediscover long-forgotten gestures.

In *Odissea—epopea dell'eroe tornato in patria* (*Odyssey—An Epic of a Hero Returning to the Fatherland*), an adaptation of Homer's poem by the Italian company Assondelli e Stecchettoni (1988), Lui Angelini as Ulisse plays in a bath with a small plastic boat while Paola Serafini, in the role of Penelope, washes his hair and body. The storms unleashed by Poseidone emerge from the shower's water jet, Ulisse's companions hiding as sheep in Cyclope's cave are played by small bars of soap that slide away to escape, and Cariddi and Scilla are two rubber gloves into which Ulisse slips his feet and waves them to create their deadly whirlpools. Finally, Penelope wears a garland of balloons around her neck—the suitors—that the two of them burst. The fragments of the story of Ulisse performed by Lui Angelini still retain their epic tone, which accentuates the contrast between the triviality of the situation depicted on stage and the heroic grandeur of the story recounted.

The ever-present playful dimension in object theatre is based on very different configurations. Comedy can emerge from the most improbable instances of subversion: in *Cappuccetti rossi* (*Little Red Riding Hood*, 1994), again from Assondelli e Stecchettoni, the two puppeteers have been deprived of their equipment after one of them, rebelling against the tradition, split the puppet booth in two with a hedge trimmer. They endeavour to recount Perrault's fairy tale using different metaphors by inserting plastic bowls of different sizes and colours into one another or by moving foldable tape measures. In contrast, Christian Carrignon, in his *Théâtre d'objets – Mode d'emploi* (*Théâtre de Cuisine*, 2011), an anthology of successive scenes borrowed from the founding companies of object theatre, uses toys that are the miniature yet literal image of what they represent: an Action Man depicting a climber scaling Mont Blanc, a miniature truck skidding in a suitcase of sand to re-create a scene from Henri-Georges Clouzot's film *The Wages of Fear*, a small plastic house and a plastic stag ('cerf' in French) singing a gory version of the nursery rhyme *Dans sa maison un grand cerf*. The theatrical dimension here comes from placing children's toys in parodic contexts enhanced

by cinematographic references. A third perspective that plays with slip-pages of meaning between what is said and what is shown is explored in the productions of Michel Laubu's Théâtre Turak. In *Deux pierres* (*Two Stones*, 2006), language games and wordplay form the matrix for several props and the action performed. Familiar expressions are taken literally: actual nutshells ('coquilles de noix' also meaning small boat) are used to depict vessels. To show that the boat is at rest, it is laid in a small cot. A plastic pig ('porc') on a spring at the top of a pole indicates the direction to its homophone, the 'port'.

Even when it is addressed to the youngest spectators, object theatre plays with the assembly of heterogeneous objects to offer additional layers of understanding the show to older audience members. Whilst children enjoy seeing adults control familiar objects with the same mimicking and gestures they use in their own games, the adolescents and adults who accompany them smile at the collisions produced between the triviality of these random objects and the respect owed to the masterpieces. Like the epics and myths of Ancient Greece, the works of Shakespeare provide the subject matter for innumerable rewritings or variations in puppet theatre. In *Baby Macbeth* (Compagnie Gare centrale, 2017), 'a family show from 12 months', for example, Agnès Limbos welcomes spectators of all ages to half an hour of condensed scenes from Shakespeare, presented in 'old English'. To perform the encounter between Romeo and Juliet, she holds up a small red plastic heart, the most banal and pathetic symbol of love, between two figurines; then taking a garland with fairy lights from the table in front of her, she puts it on as a necklace across her cleavage and points to it with the words 'the balcony'. For the older audience members, the image of a balcony bra is superimposed onto this evocation of love, whilst for the younger ones, the effect produced by the illuminous garland transforming into a piece of jewellery is one of wonder.

Since the end of the twentieth century, specifically within the field of theatre of objects and more broadly across the puppetry arts, addressing young audiences has ceased to be shrouded in the discriminatory reputation that was imposed on children's theatre for several decades. Companies now often prefer to advertise their shows as open for all rather than targeting a particular age bracket. When theatre opens up to a plurality of meaning, a diversity of viewpoints is guaranteed within its performance. The theatre of figures or animated forms, with the polysemy of the objects it draws upon, can only contribute to enriching the perspectives offered.

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The Theatre of Poets and Writers

WRITING FOR PUPPETS

Prior to the end of the eighteenth century, most authors and playwrights who wrote theatre plays for puppets only did so sporadically, as a marginal activity within their careers, without fully taking into consideration the specificities of this type of show. Filippo Acciaiuoli and António José da Silva were notable exceptions. Some texts, as has been previously shown, were only destined for puppets by default, after troupe directors had to renounce performing them with actors or singers to respect the privileges of the royal theatres. Many of the works written for puppet theatre have been lost as they were opportunistic compositions that remained unpublished: Charlotte Charke's plays, for example, have never been recovered and, without the handwritten collection compiled by Alexandre Martineau de Soleinne at the beginning of the nineteenth century, plays by Denis Carolet, Louis Fuzelier, and Valois d'Orville for Parisian fairground theatres would have met the same fate.¹ As ephemeral productions, these texts, even for those who wrote them, were simply entertainment without literary value.

The considerable flourishing of theatrical activity in Paris from the end of the eighteenth century radically transformed the context in which these shows were produced. Over time, a new category of writers who made

¹ Françoise Rubellin, ed., *Marionnettes du XVIII^e siècle, Anthologie de textes rares* (Montpellier: Espaces 34, 2022).

dramatic texts their trade was established. Contrary to their predecessors who simultaneously exercised other professions or benefited from pensions or private incomes that assured their means of existence, these playwrights found a way to make a living, whether comfortably or precariously, from their literary production through the income they earned on performances and publications of their works.² Coinciding with the opening of venues for marionette shows, the emergence of these professional writers might suggest that, as for pantomime,³ puppetry benefited from contributions of experienced playwrights. This was not the case.

Dorvigny (1742–1812) and Charles-Jacob Guillemain (1750–99) were the most important contributors to the Théâtre de Séraphin, but only *Le Pont cassé* (*The Broken Bridge*) was printed during their lifetimes.⁴ Though the number of playwrights continued to grow during the nineteenth century, the economic and professional transformation of Parisian theatrical production had little direct influence on the puppet repertoire, which largely remained anonymous. Three factors contributed to this specificity. First, the number of specialist venues remained low and, aside from the Théâtre de Séraphin, their existence was too brief and too irregular to attract writers. Second, these venues (as the previous chapter has shown) prioritised children, an emerging audience for whom no theatrical tradition existed: faced with the pressing commercial necessity of making money to balance the books, theatre directors may have been reluctant to ask more experienced writers. Third, the legal status of puppet theatre companies was still oscillating between curiosity show and theatre.⁵ Although shows were advertised in newspapers and sometimes received the honour of a short review, they garnered more attention for their technical feats than for their dramatic qualities. The authors' names were never mentioned in the press and only rarely featured in the manuscripts submitted to the censor's office—only the name of

² See Martial Poirson, *Spectacle et économie à l'âge classique XVII^e–XVIII^e siècles* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2012).

³ See Isabelle Baugé, ed., *Pantomimes* (Paris: Cicero, 1995), which brings together texts by Charles Nodier, Théophile Gautier, and Jules Champfleury.

⁴ Dorvigny, *Le Pont cassé* (Paris), Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris, cote GD-16280. See Chapter 7, n. 21 on the difficulties of attributing this play.

⁵ Clare Siviter, 'Réguler la nouveauté en protégeant les traditions? La réglementation des "spectacles de curiosité" de la fin de l'Ancien Régime à la fin du Premier Empire', *Histoire, économie et société* 1 (2025): 87–102.

the establishment requesting authorisation to perform it was sometimes included.

With little hope of earning a regular income or social prestige from works for puppet theatres, professional playwrights only rarely wrote specifically for them. The exceptionally few writers in the second half of the nineteenth century that did, such as Adolphe Joly and Charles Foliquet, chose not to include these texts in publications of their works. In other countries where levels of theatrical activities were often insufficient for a playwright to live on the income from their plays, the links between literary creation and puppet shows were far weaker. Even specialist venues rarely called upon writers: at the Teatro Fiano in Rome (1812–44), apart from Giovanni Giraud's comedy *Il viaggio sull'asino di Cassandro sposo*⁶ (*The Groom Cassandro's Journey on a Donkey*, 1826), the repertoire was written by the troupe itself,⁷ and the repertoires at the Teatrino San Rocco in Turin and the Teatro Gerolamo in Milan drew upon plays taken from live theatre that were condensed and transformed to include comic characters.⁸ Practices of adaptation were widespread across Europe and long persisted amongst puppeteers, especially itinerant artists, who cared little about respecting the integrality of works or copyright. As the Berliner Friedrich Daniel Schuchart wrote in a letter in 1810:

If, for example, a popular play was on at the National Theater, I then went along as a spectator and a few days later, I performed it in my puppet theatre, but under another title.⁹

⁶ Giovanni Giraud, 'Il viaggio sull'asino di Cassandro sposo', *Opere edite ed inedite*, vol. 11 (Rome: Alessandro Monaldi, 1842), 89–133. In 1832, Count Giraud authored a second play for puppets aimed at children: 'Malvinuccia, ossia la bambina di quattro anni', *Opere edite ed inedite*, vol. 9 (Rome: Alessandro Monaldi, 1841), 155–84.

⁷ Davide Marzattinoci, *Cassandrino al Teatro Fiano, Il teatro delle marionette a Roma nella prima metà dell'Ottocento* (Azzano San Paolo: Edizioni Junior, 2006), 214–32.

⁸ See, for example, Giovanni Moretti, 'Le batiaje teatrali di Sales-Gianduja', in Alfonso Cipolla and Giovanni Moretti, *Gianduja, una riscoperta in corso* (Torino: Seb27, 2003), 20–21. At Teatro Gerolamo, Lady Morgan saw *Zemire ed Azore*, an adaptation of Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's *Beauty and the Beast. Italy by Lady Morgan*, vol. 1 (Paris: A. and W. Galignani, 1821), 154.

⁹ Friedrich Daniel Schuchart, cited in Beatrix Müller-Kampel, *Puppentheater im 19. Jahrhundert. Mit Kasperl und Pimpel, Hanswurst und Hännneschen, Peterl und Polichinell* (Graz: Unipress Graz Verlag GmbH, 2019), 23.

The gap between the professional circles of puppet theatre and playwrighting was so large that even when the works of recognised authors were performed, most puppeteers did not mention it. For them, the concept of literary property meant owning a handwritten copy: the fact that a play was published in some way made it available to all.¹⁰ Lars Rebehn cites an anecdote on this subject published in a Berlin newspaper in 1821:

... last week a man brought a production written about ‘a Gypsy’, which pleased the censor. When the man came to collect the manuscript, this conversation followed. – Censor: Who wrote this play? – Puppeteer: I did. At your service! – Censor: That is very much to your credit. It is a very fine play! – Puppeteer: Yes, it is also by von Kotzebue! – Censor: But you just told me that you wrote it yourself? – Puppeteer: That is also true. I write down all the plays I perform!¹¹

In most cases, the few authors who started writing plays specifically for puppets at the end of the eighteenth century did so independently of the very real developments in the professional environment of companies and specialist performance venues. For all these writers, playwrighting was neither the centre of gravity of their literary activity nor their principal source of income. Poets, novelists, critics, and essayists generally distanced themselves from dominant theatrical forms, in particular melodrama and vaudevilles. The choice of the puppet as a theatrical device thus represented a space of liberty in relation to the rest of their work: they could explore different expressive registers without submitting to the constraints imposed by live theatre. Yet the fact that writers maintained a distance from the professional world of puppetry had the potential to imprison their texts between the pages of books without enriching the repertoire of artists.

¹⁰ Lars Rebehn, ‘Vorzensur, Nachzensur, Selbstzensur – Das Puppentheater, der Staat und die Moral’, *LiTheS* 16 (2020): 114–15.

¹¹ *Der Gesellschafter oder Blätter für Geist und Herz*, 17 January 1821, cited by Rebehn, ‘Vorzensur, Nachzensur, Selbstzensur’, 117. In the original German, the author plays on the proximity of ‘schreiben’ (to write) and ‘abschreiben’ (to copy). August von Kotzebue published *Die kleine Zigeurin* (*The Little Gypsy*) in 1810.

THE PUPPET AND WITZ

The phenomenon of writing plays for puppets without a direct connection with puppeteers first appeared in Germany. Writers like Johann Friedrich Schink (1755–1835) initially drew on the discredited image of the puppet to ridicule the theatrical productions of their time. Schink's two plays published under the title *Marionettentheater* (1778)¹² were not intended for the stage, but to be virulent pastiches of the pre-Romantic movement, the Sturm und Drang. The first, *Hanswurst von Salzburg mit dem hölzernen Gat* (*Hanswurst of Salzburg with the Wooden Ass*), parodies the title of Goethe's historical drama *Götz von Berlichingen mit der eisernen Hand* (*Goetz of Berlichingen with the Iron Hand*, 1773). In the characters' lines and scathing annotations at the bottom of the page, Schink explicitly mocks Goethe's work as well as Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz's *Die Soldaten* (*The Soldiers*, 1776) and Heinrich Leopold Wagner's *Die Kindermörderin* (*The Infanticide*, 1776), the main targets of his criticism.

The action of *Hanswurst von Salzburg* seeks to make the reader laugh through provocations and absurdity: Hanswurst's newborn daughter offers to recount some episodes from Goethe's novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) that she heard in the womb. In the last act, all the characters die from poisoning after reading some literary almanacs. Schink justifies these obscenities, incoherences, and improbabilities by comparing them to the liberties taken by his contemporaries in the name of creative genius, the core principle of Sturm und Drang. The action of Schink's second play *Der Stauphesen* (*The Dustbroom*) begins in Utopia where streams of champagne flow and roasted pigeons fly in the sky. Yet, Mercurius comes to warn Apollo that the new geniuses of literature, naked and dishevelled, surviving on tobacco and coffee, have transformed Mount Parnassus into an open-air brothel. Upon arriving there, they discover Minerva in ripped clothing, hitting herself on the forehead with her slipper until her brains spill out and about to hang herself. Like a witches' sabbath, the geniuses ride pigs and brooms. The gods condemn the muses, who have been led astray by literature, and their followers to being transformed into donkeys, spittoons, and bins.

The puppet is no longer only the symbol of the artificial, inauthentic theatricality that Henry Fielding mocked in *The Author's Farce* (1730).

¹² Johann Friedrich Schink, *Marionettentheater* (Vienna/Berlin/Weimar, 1778).

Nor does it reinforce the comedy of the characters and the unlikely situations as it did between the end of the eighteenth and the start of the nineteenth centuries in society theatre plays for so-called ‘living puppets’, actors who imitated the rigidity of puppets.¹³ Schink’s choice to publish these two plays under the fanciful title of ‘marionette theatre’ opens up an unbound space, giving free rein to these fantasies. With the pretext of outdoing the excesses of Sturm und Drang, the author pushes the rejection of decorum and the transgression of public morals to the point of caricature. Referencing Wagner’s *Die Kindermörderin* in which a young girl is raped off-stage, *Hanswurst von Salzburg* goes a step further by bringing the sexual act to the stage and, a few moments later, the birth. Time is so compressed that Hanswurst and Frau Knips’s newborn son leaves to explore the bridge of the ship taking them to Turkey, whilst his twin sister demands to join the Sultan’s harem because she ‘really wants to sleep with a man’.¹⁴

Two decades after the publication of *Marionettentheater*, Schink published *Prinz Hamlet von Dänemark*, a rewriting of Shakespeare’s tragedy once again presented as a ‘play for marionettes’.¹⁵ This text, however, presents a more complex relationship with puppet shows. Schink’s parody, which largely follows the original plot, is a distorted reflection with abrupt shifts in register. Familiar expressions, trivial actions, and incongruous details cause interruptions in the tragic action: the ghost of the assassinated king appears on the ramparts, wearing a dressing gown, a nightcap under his crown, and yellow slippers; Hamlet, who is no less terrified, calls him ‘papa’ and offers him some snuff, which makes him sneeze. Schink borrows a common technique from parody,

¹³ Several plays from this period were designated as such. For example, *Alfarazambul oder die Marionetten* (*Alfarazambul or The Marionettes*, 1790), attributed to Johann Georg Jacobi; August von Kotzebue’s *Der Graf von Gleichen* (*The Count of Gleichen*, 1808); Friedrich August Schulze’s *Die Kuhpocken oder der Ehrenschnurrbart* (*Cowpox or the Mustache of Honour*, 1803); and even the purported ‘Greek tragedy’ inserted into the fourth act of *Simon Lämchen oder Hannswurst und seine Familie* (*Simon Lämchen or Hannswurst and his Family*, 1803) by Siegfried August Mahlmann. See Jean Boutan’s talk, ‘Plays for Living Puppets around 1800’, which is available online at <https://nakala.fr/10.34847/nkl.2c8782ac>.

¹⁴ Johann Friedrich Schink, *Hanswurst von Salzburg mit dem hölzernen Gat*, in *Marionettentheater*, 42.

¹⁵ Johann Friedrich Schink, *Prinz Hamlet von Dänemark. Ein Marionettenspiel* (Berlin: Christian Friedrich Himgurg, 1799).

with numerous contemporary allusions: the prince reads and comments on the works of Kant and Fichte, and hums Papageno's aria in *The Magic Flute* for Ophelia.

Yet, the play goes beyond parody's usual limits to develop a play-within-a-play of puppet theatre that warrants close examination. Schink substitutes the troupe of actors that arrive at Elsinore Castle for a travelling puppeteer. This puppeteer first performs the tragic monologue of a bare-chested, pale, and thin woman with a glove puppet for Hamlet: an allegory of the German Constitution, sick with 'the French disease' syphilis, and the amputation of the left bank of the Rhine, which became the Cisrhenian Republic in 1797. The play that Hamlet then asks the puppeteer to perform for the king and queen is *Die Morgen-Schokolade* (*The Morning Chocolate*), an allusion to the beverage that poisoned the King of Denmark. Performed this time with string-marionettes¹⁶ as the frame play, it starts with a pantomime between Pantalón (the old king), Colombine (the queen), and Pierrot (Claudius); then, again following the composition of Shakespeare's tragedy, the murder is replayed in the form of a long, dialogued scene between the same three people, stripped of their transposition onto masks from the *Commedia dell'arte*.

Aside from replacing the poison poured into the ear of the sleeping victim with the more trivial detail of poisoned chocolate, this second scene of 'puppet theatre within puppet theatre' in Act 4 of *Hamlet, Prinz von Dänemark* shows the ambivalence of Schink's own feelings: the original work is at once admired and mocked due to its cult status amongst writers of the time.¹⁷ These scenes also reveal precise attention being paid to, and perhaps even a fascination with, puppets. In the same way that Shakespeare's Hamlet addressing the actors seems to convey the playwright's thoughts, Schink's Hamlet appears to speak in the author's name when he expresses the emotions he felt in front of the puppet booth. This new Hamlet is not fascinated with the emotion of the actor playing Hécube,¹⁸ but the feeling produced by looking at this 'piece of painted wood'.¹⁹ Thereafter, under the mask of paradox, it becomes impossible to decide

¹⁶ Schink, *Prinz Hamlet von Dänemark*, 74.

¹⁷ See Jean Boutan, 'In the peep box of satire: Johann Friedrich Schink's *Prinz Hamlet von Dänemark*', *Cahiers élisabéthains* 116, no. 1 (2025): 11–24.

¹⁸ 'What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, / That he should weep for her?', in William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II, 2, 561–62.

¹⁹ Schink, *Prinz Hamlet von Dänemark*, 81.

what falls within the bouffon or the serious in the advice that he dispenses to the puppeteer:

Never match the gesture to your words.
 If you speak of the Sky, point to the Earth,
 And if you speak about reason, the hand shows the chin.
 The gesture must not be attached to the words
 That they depict. So, when you say, 'I'm flying',
 Stretch out the arms of your puppets
 Far from their bodies, spreading the fingers;
 The feet paddle to give the impression of swimming;
 And let the head lift up in the air.
 If you say 'I'm trembling', shake every body part,
 So not one muscle remains still.
 Let the first law of your art be: Banish nature!
 Look out for a tender pain and fool the tyrants.²⁰

Whilst loyal to the spirit of the Enlightenment, Schink virulently opposed the poetics of Sturm und Drang and thereafter Romanticism. However, the direction to 'banish nature' shows that he saw the puppet like most of his contemporaries who drew a parallel with automata, even wax figures, as the symbol of a fake life: it no longer represented humanity in miniature, but the mysterious power of an artefact.²¹ The puppet also provoked a contradictory discourse, very close to 'Witz' (sometimes translated as wit) or Romantic irony as theorised by Friedrich Schlegel in fragments of *Lyceum*,²² before its full, detailed formulation in the journal *Athenaeum*²³ published between 1798 and 1800. Given that the puppet itself is an ambivalent object, oscillating between real and fake, life and death, it can only be spoken about in an indeterminate way, by shifting from one point of view to another, allowing Schink's Hamlet to be heard.

Another type of ambivalence is found in the collection *Marionetten-Theater* (1806) by Siegfried August Mahlmann (1771–1826): rather than

²⁰ Ibid., 87.

²¹ See Bernhild Boie, *L'Homme et ses simulacres. Essai sur le romantisme allemand* (Paris: José Corti, 1979).

²² See Marie de Gandt, 'Schlegel et le Witz: l'ironie romantique contre l'esprit du XVIII^e siècle', *Texte* 37–38 (2005): 47–62.

²³ See Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

the puppet and the values attached to it, it is based on the theatrical genres that these works are part of and their limitations.²⁴ Whilst *Die neue Gurli oder die Prophezeiung* (*The New Gurli, or the Prophecy*) and *Harlekin, der Ebeflicker* (*Harlequin the Household Mender*) reproduce traditional comic plot outlines (the tutor wanting to marry his pupil raised away from the world; the couple arguing over choosing a son-in-law) without any perceptible innovation, the collection's two other plays introduce elements of black humour,²⁵ leading to disconcerting ruptures in tone. The one-act tragedy *König Violion und Prinzessin Clarinette* (*King Violin and Princess Clarinet*) parodies the tragic genre as evidenced in the introduction of informal language and French expressions into the rhyming verse. Yet it ends with a series of suicides for the three protagonists (the princess, the king who wants to marry her, and the rival prince and son of the king): notably, the princess plants a fork in her heart. In the three-act farce *Der bezauberte Prinz, oder des Doktor Pandolfo Begräbnis und Auferstehung* (*The Bewitched Prince, or Doctor Pandolfo's Burial and Resurrection*), a character needs to be buried alive to break the spell that has changed the prince into a canary. These unexpected manifestations of cruelty create a dissociative effect, which can be classified as Witz. Commenting on Novalis's formula that 'Wit, as the principle of affinities, is at the same time *menstruum universal* [universal solvent]',²⁶ Serge Meitinger writes:

Witz is foremost a solvent, the instantaneous capacity to break down a situation, a fact, a character, or an area of experience, a figure of thought into its constitutive elements, to undo all that was, until then, indissolubly linked, to split, to make heterogeneous what was homogeneous.²⁷

Mahlmann was also the first writer to justify the choice of the puppet by criticising the live theatre of his time. The German stage, he affirmed in his preface, was confined to serious subjects: historical dramas that

²⁴ Siegfried August Mahlmann, *Marionetten-Theater, oder Sammlung lustiger und kurzweiliger Actionen für kleine und grosse Puppen* (Leipzig: Georg Boss, 1806).

²⁵ See André Breton, ed., *Anthology of Black Humor*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997).

²⁶ Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Margaret Mahony Stoljar (Albany: State University New York Press, 1997), 32.

²⁷ Serge Meitinger, 'Idéalisme et poétique', in *Romantisme* 45 (1984): 3–24 (at 5).

required spectators to possess an in-depth knowledge of global history, tragedies that necessitated prior study of Antiquity, and plays that demanded a familiarity with aristocratic court life and elegant society. Mahlmann contrasted the boredom that these productions generated with the light-heartedness of Italian, Spanish, and French theatre,²⁸ their freedom in defining character traits, their taste for the caricature and creating plots. He used these models in his own plays, which seemed to him better suited to puppets than his country's actors who were incapable of assuming a comedic acting style. Some years before Heinrich von Kleist's 1810 essay on marionette theatre,²⁹ Mahlmann sketches another perspective from an entirely different point of view: the puppet's superiority over live actors, an idea that already seemed paradoxical as it ran counter to public opinion.

Whilst Schink and Mahlmann maintained a distance from Romanticism, the relationship between puppet theatres and Witz became even closer within the movement through the work of Ludwig Tieck (1773–1853). In addition to his first novels, Tieck wrote a farce for puppets, *Hanswurst als Emigrant* (*Hanswurst Émigré*, 1795), which would only be published posthumously.³⁰ In the play, Hanswurst has a double identity: he is at once a French émigré fleeing the Revolution and Hanswurst, the historical lustige Figur making his return after having been banished from live theatre half a century earlier by Johann Christoph Gottsched and Caroline Neuber. From the very first lines, the fictional pact is broken: the young amorous Leander addresses the servant Lisette with nine successive verses rhyming on ‘-acht’ (‘Nacht’, ‘Pracht’, ‘angefacht’), but is rebuffed and she shows she is as capable as him. Leander claims to be able to perform the exposition scene so that neither the spectators nor the playwright are lost. Lisette gets annoyed, declares that the performance would only ever be ‘a pitiful puppet play’, and predicts that the spectators will be bored since it was not written by Iffland. The pair then take it in turns to attempt a new way of expressing themselves: a grandiose lyricism intended to be incomprehensible. When the dramatic

²⁸ Mahlmann cites the Théâtre du Vaudeville and the Théâtre Montansier in Paris. See Mahlmann, *Marionetten-Theater*, iii.

²⁹ Heinrich von Kleist, ‘On the Marionette Theatre’, trans. Thomas G. Neumiller, *TDR: The Drama Review* 16, no. 3 (1972): 22–26.

³⁰ Ludwig Tieck, *Hanswurst als Emigrant. Nachgelassene Schriften*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1855), 75–126.

action finally begins, the conventions of the comic genre are mishandled. Leander's love for Rosalie, the daughter of the innkeeper Ubaldo, is not reciprocated: she does not even know him and, when awoken in the middle of the night by his dawn serenade, threatens to call a servant to beat him up. A little later, Hanswurst's entrance astride on his valet, whom he presents as his horse and treats as such, shifts the dialogue into the absurd. Pretending to be the Prince of Artois, Hanswurst orders extravagant meals and declares he wants to marry Rosalie, but her mother rejects his request in a violent dispute that forces him to hide behind the innkeeper.

Witz appears in the buffooneries and incoherences as well as numerous metatheatrical elements: characters referring to themselves as marionettes; Hanswurst seamlessly interrupting himself in the middle of a conversation to address the spectators and advise them not to make the play a failure by being too critical; and finally, in the last act, he reveals his true identity and denounces his banishment. This farce for puppets, which remained in manuscript form, appears as a prototype for the disassembled, heterogeneous dramaturgy that would achieve its full potential two years later in Tieck's *Der gestiefelte Kater* (*Puss in Boots*, 1797), an adaptation of Charles Perrault's tale. The play, with its burlesque prologue, interlude, and epilogue staging the reactions of a fictitious audience, does not contain any references to puppets: the deconstruction takes place in the context of live theatre which is pushed beyond its performance limits, notably through the presence of animal characters and the visual transformation of Popanz (meaning both bogeyman and puppet) in Act 3, who takes the role of the Ogre in Perrault's version.

Puppets would explicitly return to Tieck's works for an instance of theatre-within-theatre in the six-act play *Prinz Zerbino, oder die Reise nach dem guten Geschmack* (*Prince Zerbino or the Journey towards Good Taste*, 1799). In Scene 8 of Act 4, Jeremias, servant of the magician Polykomikus, sees a crowd of people rushing towards him to seek advice from his master who lives in a cave in the middle of a desert. Believing, like Schiller,³¹ that theatrical performances have a beneficial effect on society, Jeremias sets up 'a small moral theatre to correct humanity's

³¹ Friedrich von Schiller, 'Theater Considered as A Moral Institution', in *Poet of Freedom*, trans. John Sigerson and John Chambless, vol. 1 (New York: New Benjamin Franklin House, 1985), 209–20.

weaknesses'.³² He begins by performing a tragedy with marionettes: a king and a queen are worried that the people prefer drinking and smoking over defending the city. When a messenger announces the enemy's arrival, the king leaves to fight, risking his life. A spectator then interrupts the performance which, according to him, lacks naturalness because the play is in verse. To satisfy him, Jeremias introduces two new puppets on stage for a 'bourgeoise tragedy', this time in prose: a woman reproaches her husband for having opened the city gates for the enemy who destroyed it. When she declares that the only thing left is to die, the husband attempts to kill her and then himself. The audience once again shows their dissatisfaction as they do not feel moved enough. Jeremias agrees to introduce yet more naturalness: the third scene shows a man reproaching his son for having stayed out all night. The son advises his father to calm down because, having already lost his mother, he does not want this anger to endanger his father's health. The father is touched, takes his son in his arms, and reiterates his advice but, after he leaves, the young man declares that he will not follow it because he is in love. Several spectators begin to cry. Jeremias seizes the puppet and asks the audience if they should accept the son's refusal to change his behaviour. The puppet protests that it must be allowed to perform until the end as the son's character completely transforms in Act 5, but Jeremias refuses to wait so long. The puppet reproaches Jeremias for not having listened closely enough to the essayists and critics of theatre: if the son's behaviour immediately changed, this transformation would lack naturalness and not follow the laws of aesthetics. Jeremias gets rid of the puppet by tossing it outside the theatre to the laughter of the spectators; it decides to leave for the town and throw itself into the first available wood-burning stove. At the end of a new scene that picks up the story of the city taken by the enemies and shows the victors' triumphant parade, a puppet of the magician Polykomikus appears in the little theatre, followed by a long procession at the same time as the real Polykomikus enters on stage and is angered at the show given by Jeremias. The furious servant throws puppets and musical instruments at his head. Polykomikus hits him and Jeremias attempts to push him away with his broom before leaving with Satan who has slipped into the audience.

³² Ludwig Tieck, *Prinz Zerbino, oder die Reise nach dem guten Geschmack* (Leipzig/Iena: Friedrich Frommann, 1799), 224.

After the theatre-within-theatre created by the introduction of the puppet show, the dissociation of the character Polykomikus between the actor that plays him and his miniaturised double on the puppet stage (an ‘act of high treason’³³ protests the magician), the corrosive action of Witz crosses a new threshold in Act 5 by giving speech to objects. Entering the Garden of Poetry, Nestor, the servant of Prince Zerbino, sees the forest, gigantic flowers, bushes, and even the blue of the sky coming to converse with him. In the following scene, the furniture of a bedroom, musical instruments, even wine and food speak to him to offer him their services. The prince himself then hears the voices of the natural elements, sources, mountain streams, and storms. Like in *Der gestiefelte Kater*, which ends with Hanswurst’s speech to tell the audience about the emotion felt by the scenery that had been applauded in its own right and asks them to excuse the tears that obliged it to exit the stage, leaving the set empty and the walls bare, *Prinz Zerbino*, by giving a place to non-human characters, shows that the choice of the puppet for Tieck was only a halfway stage in the process of dissolving theatrical performance.

APPROACHES FROM POPULAR CULTURE

Using the image of puppets to convey the poetics of Witz through multiple acts of dissociation and heterogeneity was confined to an imaginary theatre on paper without any aspirations to stage performances. However, the role that the puppet played in literary creation from this period, and especially within German Romanticism, evidently was not limited to this emancipation from the credible or the rational, demonstrating the all-powerful creative spirit within the world it forged, or to the multiple variations of the theme of the effigy and artificial life in narrative literature or philosophical speculation.³⁴ Poets and writers also developed a real fascination for puppet shows, which had essentially remained a popular practice in the German-speaking lands: they watched their performances, conversed with the artists, and sometimes considered writing for them.

Since the puppeteers’ repertoire preserved the heritage of medieval comic traditions and a collection of ancient legends, the most famous

³³ Tieck, *Prinz Zerbino*, 238.

³⁴ Boie, *L’Homme et ses simulacres*.

being Faust, the German Romantics saw in it the traces of a national art orally transmitted: the theatrical equivalent of the popular tales and songs in which Johann Gottfried Herder and the authors of Sturm und Drang had begun taking an interest, and which Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano compiled in the three volumes of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (*The Boy's Magic Horn*, 1806–8). Tieck, for example, wrote in his *Briefe über Shakespeare* (*Letters on Shakespeare*):

What I have just argued regarding folk legends, I have always found it proven even more so for puppeteers, who own a certain amount of old plays that, precisely due to their age, cannot completely become outdated, and stem from the work of true poets because, though they are disdained, they form our true German theatre.³⁵

Despite this clear interest, authors were still hesitant to write for puppeteers. Brentano, for example, met Johann Georg Geisselbrecht in 1800 at the Frankfurt Fair and was enthusiastic about his Hanswurst. In a letter to Friedrich Carl von Savigny in September 1801, he stated he wished to write a play for puppets and to be publicly known as a ‘poet for puppets’,³⁶ but this declaration was not followed up.

Goethe’s short sketch *Hanswursts Hochzeit oder der Lauf der Welt—ein mikrokosmisches Drama* (*Hanswurst's Wedding or the Way of the World—A Microcosmic Drama*, 1775), from a quarter of a century earlier, only remained in fragments: character lists and the start of a dialogue of scatological humour in which Kilian Brustfleck, a traditional peasant character, worries about the bad manners of his pupil Hanswurst, who is about to marry.³⁷ Goethe also published a small volume entitled *Neueröffnetes moralisches politisches Puppenspiel* (*Newly Opened Moral-Political Puppet Play*, 1774), which contains three texts. Only one of them, *Jahrmarktsfest von Plundersweilern* (*Fair at Plundersweilern*), is presented as a

³⁵ Ludwig Tieck, ‘Briefe über Shakespeare’, in *Kritische Schriften*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1848), 161.

³⁶ See Lars Rebehn, ‘Poets of the puppet booth. Johann Georg Geisselbrecht and the beginnings of literary puppetry in the German-speaking area’, in *L'Écriture littéraire pour marionnettes en Europe de l'Ouest (17^e–21^e siècles)*, ed. Carole Guidicelli (Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée, forthcoming 2025).

³⁷ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Hanswursts Hochzeit oder der Lauf der Welt* (Hannover: Steegemann, 1921).

‘play for puppets’,³⁸ despite also having the subtitle ‘Schönbartspiel’ (play for carnival masks).³⁹ Slightly modified in 1778, this text is only a literary satire, a parade of fleeting appearances behind which the critics sought to identify the author’s contemporaries.⁴⁰ Between the shouts of traders and conversation between customers, the text’s main action comprises a very brief dispute between a young zither player and his marmot over a coin given to them, the repeated announcements of a shadow play exhibitor, and extracts from a parodic tragedy performed on fairground trestle stages. The dramaturgy of *Jahrmarktsfest von Plundersweilern* seems to draw inspiration from optical shows (magic lantern, shadow theatre, mundinovi) rather than puppet theatre itself by successively introducing different image-based figures. Popular culture is here less a source of inspiration than the subject of an amused yet somewhat distant contemplation.

In 1813, Achim von Arnim (1781–1831) brought together several plays inspired by popular theatre under the title *Schaubühne (Theatre)*. Some feature the lustige Figuren Pickelhering, Hanswurst, and Kasperl, but these plays are intended for actors or shadow theatre. The only play for puppets, *Die Appelmänner*⁴¹ (*The Appelmänner*), is a historical drama inspired by a sixteenth-century news story.⁴² A son threatens to burn down his father’s barn after his request for a large sum of money was refused. The father, the burgomaster of a small town in the northern German lands, condemns his son to death and has him executed. Achim von Arnim transforms this anecdote into an edifying tragedy: the son joins the Dutch Republic’s fight against the Spanish occupier, and he needs money to support this cause. The town actually begins to burn. The son is executed, but then the play shifts into the supernatural: the executioner

³⁸ For example, in the 1808 edition of his works: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Werke*, vol. 8 (Tübingen: J. G. Cotta’sche Buchhandlung, 1808), 241–72.

³⁹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Neueröffnetes moralisches politisches Puppenspiel* (Leipzig/Frankfurt, 1774).

⁴⁰ Wilhelm Scherer, *Aus Goethes Früizeit* (Strasbourg: Karl J. Trübner, 1879), 27–41.

⁴¹ Achim von Arnim, ‘Die Appelmänner’, in *Die Schaubühne*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Veit & Co., 1840).

⁴² According to Yvonne Pietsch, who established a critical edition of *Schaubühne* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), von Arnim’s source was the chronicle by Paul Friedeborn, *Historische Beschreibung der Stadt Alten Stettin in Pommern*, vol. 1 (Alten Stettin: Jochim Rhetes Erben, 1613), 113–15.

who decapitates the young man possesses a secret oil that allows him to re-attach the severed head and bring the condemned back to life. Father and son thereafter reconcile and reunite with the son's fiancée who was thought to have died in the fire. The supernatural element, which recalls the miraculous cephalophore saints and martyrs, is likely why von Arnim did not intend *Die Appelmänner* to be played by actors: first, the decapitation scene is easier to execute and more acceptable to the audience when performed by puppets⁴³; and, second, the supernatural is inherently part of this type of show, as the inheritor of a popular tradition, according to the German Romantic writers.⁴⁴

Most of the puppet plays written by Romantic poets or their contemporaries were less inventive than the works they composed for shadow theatre,⁴⁵ and remained in keeping with the literary canon. In the cases of Joseph von Eichendorff's⁴⁶ (1788–1857) *Das Incognito*, and Julius von Voss's (1768–1832) comedies *Pigmalion und die Bildsäulen*⁴⁷ (*Pigmalion and the Statues*), *Der grosse Hamilcar* (*The Great Hamilcar*) and *Das Judenkonzert in Krakau*⁴⁸ (*The Concert of Jews in Kraków*), the models employed were satire, parody, and even French-style vaudeville and owed nothing to popular culture. Moreover, the practice of using the puppet as a theme is absent, and the choice of this device seems only to be motivated by a desire to strengthen the comical treatment of the

⁴³ The story of St Dorothea, a martyr decapitated during the reign of Diocletian, is one of the subjects most frequently performed by sixteenth and seventeenth-century travelling actors. In the eighteenth century, only puppeteers kept it in their repertoire, as audiences could no longer bear the saint's torment. See Christian Neuhuber, 'Ein Gottesgeschenk für die Bühne – Dramatisierungen der Dorothea-Legenden im deutschen Sprachraum', in *Johann Georg Gettner und das barocke Theater zwischen Nikolsburg und Krumau*, ed. Margita Havlíčková and Christian Neuhuber (Brno: Masarykova Univerzita, 2014), 131–81.

⁴⁴ On Romanticism and the supernatural, see Alain Montandon, 'Le merveilleux romantique en Allemagne et ses modèles', *Romanticismi* 4 (2019): 83–98.

⁴⁵ See Sophie Courtade, 'Le Théâtre d'ombres en Europe de l'Ouest (1770–1920) – L'émergence d'une dramaturgie' (PhD diss., University of Montpellier Paul-Valéry, 2025), 141–50.

⁴⁶ Josef von Eichendorff, *Das Incognito* (Opole: Georg Maske, [1841] 1901).

⁴⁷ Julius von Voss, *Possen und Marionettenspiele zur Erheiterung in trüben Stunden* (Berlin: Schüppel'sche Buchhandlung, 1816).

⁴⁸ Julius von Voss, *Neue Possen und marionettenspiele zur Erschütterung des Zwerchfells* (Berlin: Schüppel'sche Buchhandlung, 1826).

play by deepening the distance between the audience and the characters depicted.

Just one play from this period draws upon the comic potential of the animated object: Justinus Kerner's (1786–1862) sketch *Der rasende Sandler, ein politisches dramatisches Impromptu*⁴⁹ (*The Mad Sander, A Political-Dramatic Improvisation*, 1817) ridicules the local government officers in Wurtemberg who were confronted with King Wilhelm I's administrative reforms. The Oberamtsmann delivers a presentation in front of an audience of the Amtsschreiber, the Stadtschreiber (both played by rod-marionettes), and several Schultheissen (represented by immobile plaster figures that can only nod their heads).⁵⁰ When the Oberamtsmann finishes, the Stadtschreiber loses his temper, frenetically shakes his box of sand,⁵¹ and shouts his indignation, making all the other officers turn pale before chasing them. He writes a letter of protestation to a minister and leaves himself. Hanswurst arrives, intercepts the letter, reads it whilst imitating the gestures of the Stadtschreiber, then takes his pipe and forms clouds of smoke. The play ends with the appearance, in the middle of clouds and lightning, of a knight walking over a monster from head to toe and on whose tongue 'Die böse Gewohnheit' (evil habit) is written in letters of fire. Although Justinus Kerner plays on the mechanical character of the figures and precisely describes how to create various visual effects (for example, the fall of a plaster head that breaks, so that the marionette's torso speaks), the text is only a satire intended to be read: a 15-minute interval is placed between two lines, the smoke from Hanswurst's pipe forms impossible images such as fourteen prelates riding barrels or court clerks drinking alongside chained-up mayors.

Johannes Daniel Falk's (1768–1826) *Die Prinzessin mit dem Schweinerüssel*⁵² (*The Princess with the Pig's Snout*, 1804), which was indeed

⁴⁹ Justinus Kerner, 'Der rasende Strandler', in *Ausgewählte Werke* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1981), 77–83.

⁵⁰ Titles of civil servants in the kingdom's administration by order of decreasing importance.

⁵¹ A small receptacle containing a mixture of ash and fine sand to be dusted onto writing paper to accelerate the drying of ink.

⁵² Johannes Daniel Falk, 'Die Prinzessin mit dem Schweinerüssel', in *Neueste Sammlung kleiner Satiren Gedichte und Erzählungen* (Berlin: Johann Friedrich Unger, 1804), 142–223. In later editions, Falk modified the play's title, which became *Die Prinzessin mit dem Zauberrüssel* (*The Princess with the Magic Snout*). The two swineherds also became

staged, is a more complex case. The writer regularly attended shows by the puppeteer Geisselbrecht during his season in Weimar and expressed his dissatisfaction with the repertoire performed, which he found unwitty and ‘very heavy-handed’.⁵³ He wrote *Die Prinzessin mit dem Schweinerüssel* for Geisselbrecht, and its first performance at the Weimar City Hall was highly successful. At the end of the show, Falk included an epilogue delivered by the puppets of Hanswurst, the Devil, and Pantalón in the role of the doctor. All three sing a song that parodies Schiller’s *Reuter-Lied* (*Horseman Song*) to mock the actors:

Up, up comrades, onto the boards, onto the boards,
 Into the world, transported onto the stage:
 Like actors, human beings are still worth something ...⁵⁴

The city’s furious actors went to see Goethe, director of the Hoftheater, and obtained an interdiction against Geisselbrecht giving another performance at the town hall. In response, Falk had the play performed at his house and invited passersby to watch through the windows.⁵⁵

This example shows how literary writing and popular tradition had started to become interwoven. As Henryk Jurkowski states,⁵⁶ Falk employs an ancient legendary motif that had previously appeared in the anonymous novel *Fortunatus* (1509) before being used in different tales: a magic fruit that modifies physical appearance when eaten. In the play, the Princess of Schmarkand rebuffs the Prince of Cachemire’s marriage proposal and declares that she would rather marry a swineherd. The prince takes her at her word and dons a disguise. Discovering wild strawberries that make a snout grow on one’s face, then the river water that makes it disappear, he follows the advice of a genie and offers the strawberries to the princess. She is transformed and starts acting like a pig.

shepherds. See Johannes Daniel Falk, *Auserlesene Werke (alt und neu), Dritter Theil oder Narrenbüchlein* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1819).

⁵³ W. Luddecus, *Aus Goethes Leben* (Leipzig: Hermann Hartung, 1849), 47.

⁵⁴ Falk, ‘Die Prinzessin mit dem Schweinerüssel’, 220.

⁵⁵ See the anonymous review ‘Bericht von einem lustigen Kriege: zwischen Geisselbrechts Marionetten und den Hofschauspielern in Weimar’, *Zeitung für die elegante Welt* (1804), cols. 545–48.

⁵⁶ Henryk Jurkowski, *Écrivains et marionnettes. Quatre siècles de littérature dramatique* (Charleville-Mézières: Institut International de la Marionnette, 1991), 145.

The prince brings her the water that reinstates her original appearance, is recognised for his deed, and obtains her hand. The influence of popular legends can be found in the motifs of the prince's romantic quest, the genie, and the magical object, whilst puppeteers' traditional modes of working are perceptible in the distribution of roles: though Hanswurst does not appear amongst the characters, his puppet serves to play the second swineherd, a friend of the disguised prince.⁵⁷

The play's literary dimension is also clear: the text is complete and leaves no room for improvisation, it is composed in rhyming verse ('Knittelvers'), and the parody of Schiller's song is addressed to the audience of Weimar's Hoftheater, who may have heard it being sung at the same venue six years earlier in *Wallenstein*.⁵⁸ Yet, paradoxically, due to Geisselbrecht's touring throughout the German-speaking lands, Falk's play enjoyed such success that it ended up being considered as emerging from popular tradition. The motif of a young girl saddled with a pig's snout from a spell was used some decades later in *La Tête de cochon ou la fête aux fleurs*,⁵⁹ a Guignol féerie in Lyon presented as being inspired by an 'old German legend'. This play has no relationship to the original: the young girl's deformity is caused by a curse she received at birth and will disappear on her twentieth birthday.

CONSTRUCTING A REPERTOIRE

The Romantic age introduced a new dimension to the imitation of popular puppet shows by writers, which had until then been used for essentially satirical purposes. This technique was progressively enriched with a focus on the expressive power of puppets, their capacities to create different special effects (metamorphoses, apparitions, visual dismembering and recomposing bodies), and the imaginaries that they conveyed, in particular the supernatural and the fantastic. The inherent characteristics of the devices, the repertoires, and the contexts in which they were

⁵⁷ This indication appears at the start of the epilogue in the 1804 edition. See Falk, 'Die Prinzessin mit dem Schweinerüssel', 218.

⁵⁸ The *Reutterlied* ('Wohlauf, Kameraden, aufs Pferd, aufs Pferd!') is taken from the first part of the trilogy *Wallensteins Lager* (scene 11). The production took place in Weimar in October 1798.

⁵⁹ See [Jean-Baptiste Onofrio], 'Introduction', in *Théâtre lyonnais de Guignol* (Lyon: N. Scheuring, 1865), xvii.

used thereafter became a source of inspiration for inventing a literary dramaturgy for puppet booths.

The first phase of consolidating this dramaturgy occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century: no longer limited to isolated, singular attempts, it took the form of systematic experimentation, sometimes carried out over several decades. The writers who turned their attention towards the puppet constructed real repertoires with reoccurring characters and plot developments as part of a series or in successive episodes. Franz von Pocci (1807–76) from Munich is undoubtedly the most accomplished of this new generation. Known as *Kasperlgraf* (Count Kasperl) because of his noble title and his functions at the court of Ludwig I of Bavaria, he authored around 50 plays featuring Kasperl, the majority of which were intended for the *Münchener Marionettentheater* directed by Josef Leonhard Schmid. Pocci is the only nineteenth-century writer who was not a puppeteer himself, but was able to successfully dedicate the core of his work to puppets. He also composed music for them, was a renowned illustrator (he regularly contributed to the satirical publications *Fliegende Blätter* and *Münchener Bilderbogen*), and designed characters, costumes, and some scenery.

Pocci published his first texts in the 1840s in the form of short, illustrated stories for children that featured Hanswurst. His Hanswurst is, like Pulcinella,⁶⁰ born from an egg and is depicted in the manner of the famous Vienna actor Josef Anton Stranitzky (1676–1726): white ruff, a neckline of a black beard, and pointed hat. In 1852, Pocci followed the growing practice amongst puppeteers and renamed his protagonist Kasperl: *Kasperl auf der Jagd* (*Kasperl Goes Hunting*), a short fable presented in narrative form, starts with the verse ‘Kasperl, once called Hanswurst / Well-known by all children’.⁶¹ The character thus gradually appeared as a lazy drunk and pleasure-seeker, captured in more elaborate stories: *Kasperl bei den Menschenfressern* (*Kasperl amongst the Cannibals*), an illustrated, versified tale in the manner of shadow theatre, and *Kasperl in der Türkei* (*Kasperl in Turkey*), the first dialogued play, were

⁶⁰ Franz von Pocci, ‘Hanswurst’ (1842), in *Kasperls Heldentaten*, ed. Manfred Nöbel (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1984), 39–41. See also ‘Puppenspiel’ (1845), *ibid.*, 43–52.

⁶¹ Franz von Pocci, ‘Kasperl auf der Jagd’, in *Pocci’s lustiges Bilderbuch* (Munich: Verlag von Braun & Schneider, 1852), 28–32. In Manfred Nöbel’s edition, the first verse is ‘Der Kasperl, auch Hanswurst genannt’ (Kasperl, also called Hanswurst): see von Pocci, *Kasperls Heldentaten*, 53.

published in 1854 in almanacs for children. In 1855, half a dozen comedies appeared in a volume entitled *Neues Kasperl-Theater*.⁶² Pocci's first plays were, as Manfred Nöbel⁶³ observes, intended for glove puppets. The comedy is essentially verbal, based on confrontations between two characters, and borrows much from popular shows. *Kasperl in der Türkei*, for example, ends with the Sultan being killed by the whacks of a club; his puppet is then thrown out of the booth, like the baby in the *Punch and Judy Show*.

Pocci's meeting with Josef Leonhard Schmid in 1858 reveals the distance that separated authors and puppeteers and the misunderstandings that emerged from it.⁶⁴ When Schmid wrote to Pocci to offer to compose for him a refined repertoire without any of the 'Hanswurstisms that more or less encourage crudeness amongst young people', it was the same 'Hanswurstisms' that amused Pocci and he delighted in making use of them.⁶⁵ The plays he wrote for the Münchner Marionetten-Theater, compiled under the title *Lustige Komödienbüchlein* (6 volumes, 1859–77), did not follow the moralising movement that would later transform Kasperl's character into a behavioural model in children's publications: the hero retains all his faults without ever being punished. In *Kasperl wird reich* (*Kasperl Gets Rich*, 1872), for example, the protagonist is suffering in poverty and appeals to the Devil to help him. The ghost of a damned soul reveals that there is treasure buried at the foot of the gallows and, if it were to be dug up, he would be free from Hell. Kasperl finds the treasure and, having become rich, keeps the fortune for himself: he pours the chamber pot over the head of the tailor, who presents him with a bill, while the cobbler, whom he ordered boots from, is whacked with a club as his payment. He then locks up a policeman who comes to arrest him and hangs him on the washing line. Thrown in prison, he appeals to the

⁶² Franz von Pocci, *Neues Kasperl-Theater* (Stuttgart: Blum und Vogel, 1855).

⁶³ Manfred Nöbel, 'Anmerkungen zu den Stücken', in von Pocci, *Kasperls Heldentaten*, 442.

⁶⁴ Josef Leonhard Schmid, cited by Karl Winkler, in Manfred Wegner, Klaus Peitzmeier, and David Schuster-Stengel, eds., *Chronik des Münchner Marionettentheaters* (Munich: Allitera, 2018), 29.

⁶⁵ Jean Boutan, 'La barbarie et l'enfance: les deux sources de l'écriture pour marionnettes chez Franz von Pocci', in *L'Écriture littéraire pour marionnettes en Europe de l'Ouest (17^e–21^e siècles)*, ed. Carole Guidicelli (Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée, forthcoming 2025).

ghost, who tells him that he has erased all his misdeeds as a thank you for having freed him from Hell: the policeman survives and resumes his service. The stage is then transformed for a grand finale: the dungeon is replaced with a heavenly garden in the middle of which Kasperl, on his knees, is crowned with laurels by the policeman.

The parodic dimension of Pocci's writing is not only present in this immoral and improbable ending. The intertextuality significantly contributes to it through direct allusions to Faust, Justinus Kerner's macabre fantasy, Friedrich Kind and Carl Maria von Weber's *Freischütz*, and 'Hamlet in the *Magic Flute*', which Kasperl cites.⁶⁶ Yet the play also has abrupt changes of register: after Kasperl faints having just made the infernal treasure appear in a storm scene, the curtain raises on the excessive banalities that two busybodies exchange on the road to market: one of them excuses herself to serve morning coffee to her dogs. Social satire, citation games, and absurd details combine with the lustige Figuren's usual verbal comedy—puns from distorting words or proper nouns—and fantastic or supernatural elements. There are visual changes of scenery: the moon bursts out laughing, and the ghost suddenly appears decapitated with his head in his hands, explaining that he is filling in for the Devil whose horns are being repaired. With such a diversity of effects that combined literary clichés and the memories of popular shows (notably puppet theatre and Vienna's Volkstück),⁶⁷ Pocci's plays were clearly intended for a broad audience and not only for children.

In France, the first author to construct an extensive puppet repertoire was Maurice Sand (1823–89). From 1847 to 1886, he composed and performed almost 200 plays for puppets, first at his mother George Sand's home in Nohant, then for friends in Paris and finally in Passy.⁶⁸ Contrary to what *Le Théâtre des marionnettes*,⁶⁹ a collection of 14 of these plays, suggests, this production was not only split between comedies and farces;

⁶⁶ Franz von Pocci, 'Kasperl wird reich', in *Kasperls Heldentaten*, 324.

⁶⁷ See Boutan, 'La barbarie et l'enfance'.

⁶⁸ The handwritten notebook *Mémento – Répertoire des pièces jouées sur le théâtre des marionnettes de Maurice Sand à Nohant et à Paris* (SAND-H0322, Fonds Sand, Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris) counts 159 plays, including several that are split into episodes, whilst others are reproduced under different titles. A breakdown is included as an annex in Bertrand Tillier, *Maurice Sand marionnettiste* (Tusson: Éditions du Lérot, 1992), 209–22.

⁶⁹ Maurice Sand, *Le Théâtre des marionnettes* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1879).

it also comprised féeries, parodies, melodramas, and dramas, even if they were treated with a spirit of ridicule that characterised the evenings at Nohant and inevitably took on comic tones. Whereas Pocci only authored one play for actors,⁷⁰ the writing of this repertoire for puppets was accompanied by the composition of a dozen plays or pantomimes for actors, whether by George or Maurice Sand. They spent evenings at Nohant sometimes improvising on the ‘big stage’, other times on the ‘small stage’ depending on the number of participants: in both cases, the scenarios were put down on paper during dinner served at six o’clock, then worked and performed the same evening without having been rehearsed. Subjects circulated between stage and puppet booth, between mother and son, and even served as drafts for plays that were then confided to Parisian theatres, as Marine Wisniewski has revealed.⁷¹ Yet more circulations occurred between the dramatic and narrative modes: *Azote*, a three-act drama performed by Maurice Sand’s puppets on 4 June 1871, borrows from his novel *Mademoiselle Azote* published the previous year⁷²; and the tale *La Sirène* draws on a plot developed in *Le Vase de bronze ou la Syrène*, a féerie comprising five acts, a prologue, and 12 tableaux from October 1881.⁷³ Despite its size and historical significance in its own right, Maurice Sand’s puppet theatre must be considered as an integral part of what Roberto Cuppone describes as a vast ‘writing laboratory’⁷⁴ set up at Nohant. For this reason, it is difficult to isolate characteristics that are specific to texts for puppets within the corpus, particularly as, aside from the few published pieces, the repertoire remains in its original state of ‘written scenarios with a basic dialogue which the performer

⁷⁰ Franz von Pocci, *Gevatter Tod* (Munich: Braun & Schneider, 1855).

⁷¹ See Marine Wisniewski, ‘Les marionnettes, ou “le théâtre toujours possible”’, *Cahiers George Sand* 45 (2023): 11–20.

⁷² Evidence of this drama is found in the *Mémento*. Despite being classified amongst the ‘Pièces de théâtre et pantomimes’, the manuscript held at BHVP (SAND-H0333) is that of a novel.

⁷³ Maurice Sand, *La Syrène*, manuscript, SAND-H0326, BHVP; *Le Vase de bronze ou la Sirène*, SAND-H0326-3, BHVP.

⁷⁴ Roberto Cuppone, ed., *George Sand, Maurice Sand, Théâtre inédit, documents et dessins*, vol. 2 (Torino: Centro Interuniversitario di Ricerche sul Viaggio in Italia, 1997), 11–21.

can embellish'.⁷⁵ Searching for any distinctive characteristics was not at all conceivable according to George Sand, who stated that:

On stage, the puppet obeys the same fundamental laws that preside over large theatres ... There is not two dramatic arts, there is only one.⁷⁶

Undoubtedly one of the main contributions of the experiments conducted at Nohant to the history of puppet theatre is having treated the two stages equally, refusing any hierarchy between the noble and the trivial, large and small theatres, both being defined by the pleasure of acting, not by the literary value of the text. Many writers, like Duranty, would remember this example and claim it as their own,⁷⁷ whilst forgetting in their enthusiasm that Maurice Sand authored the texts performed by his puppets, not his mother.

Several specific characteristics nonetheless emerge from this corpus of puppet plays. In particular, there is a trend of seriality that seems absent from the comedies for actors improvised in the same circumstances.⁷⁸ From 1849 onwards, an idea was formed to 'perform the whole French Revolution in a series of plays',⁷⁹ a project that was interrupted after the first two episodes. Next came *Le Vase de bronze* (*The Bronze Vase*, 1874) in three parts; a series of five plays in 1875; the five parts of *Castagnet le subtil* (*The Skilled Castagnet*) in 1876; and a new series of ten plays in 1880–81. Over time, this repertoire sketched out a gallery of recurring characters (the author's double Balandard, Corisande, Capitaine Vachard, and the innkeeper Friturin), a familiar geography of the local area's most pleasant village names (La Châtre, Jeu-Maloches, Fouarons, Foin-la-Folie, Viremollet), and a range of fanciful situations, such as the inn named the Hôtel du Veau Qui Désire Téter (Hotel of

⁷⁵ George Sand, 'Le théâtre de marionnettes de Nohant', *Le Temps*, 11–12 May 1876. Republished in George Sand, *Œuvres autobiographiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 1249–76.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Duranty, 'À madame George Sand', in *Théâtre des marionnettes du jardin des Tuileries* (Paris: Dubuisson et Cie, 1862), [9].

⁷⁸ See the texts compiled in Cuppone, *George Sand, Maurice Sand, Théâtre inédit, documents et dessins*.

⁷⁹ George Sand, 'Le théâtre de marionnettes de Nohant'. George Sand writes that the project was interrupted by the events of February 1848, but according to the *Mémento*, the two episodes were performed in April 1849.

the Calf Who Wants to Suckle). Whilst the scenarios for actors written by George and Maurice Sand generally drew inspiration from the *Commedia dell'arte*, Romantic pantomime, and a hotchpotch of heterogeneous references parodying drama or melodrama,⁸⁰ those intended for puppets were more focused on local chronicles and satire. From the 'big stage' to the 'small stage', the dramatic composition techniques remained the same (disguises and false identities, misunderstandings, revelations, recognition scenes) but the reference universe shifted; impressions of provincial life, rather than clichés of Parisian theatre, was the source of comedy. Municipal councillors, notaries, railway employees, police officers, fire-fighters, aristocrats, young women of marriageable age, and widows were all attributed a burlesque name (Madame Pétenvert, Colonel Vertébral, Olympia Nantouillet, Crétinet, Madame de Bonbricoulant), a manner of speaking, and obsessions, which contributed to the creation of a quaint fresco mocking the absurdities of the bourgeoisie and aristocracy in the Berry region.

This dimension of social satire would be later used by the Nabi painter Paul Ranson who organised performances of *L'Abbé Prout*, a cycle of comic plays for glove puppets begun in 1889, at his Parisian studio. The serial construction was taken even further in this case. Each of the seven plays published under this title in 1902 constituted an episode in the lives of a small group of people:

In each play, the same characters in different plots are moved, chat, and love each other; their social situation sometimes changes slightly, but their character always remains the same. Whatever their role, they retain the same attitude, the same voice, the same mannerisms: in short, it is the same models that act in different adventures.⁸¹

The series features, among others, the titular Abbé Prout, inventor of the Vaseline of the Immaculate Conception, 'a fat jovial parish priest with an apoplectic colouring and a very ecclesiastical voice'; the Marquis de Percefort, 'a handsome old man, very aristocratic, somewhat senile'; and the

⁸⁰ For example, in *Le Druide peu délicat* (*The Rude Druid*, 1846), the druid, the King of the Gauls and his daughter, Princess of Grenada, a drum major, and the bandit Charabiatinos. See Cuppone, *George Sand, Maurice Sand, Théâtre inédit, documents et dessins*, 23–25.

⁸¹ Paul Ranson, *L'Abbé Prout, Guignol pour les vieux enfants* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1902), 13.

politician Député Trousselutu; Clotilde de Blanc-Bedon, ‘a courteous, elegant, and pleasure-seeking young blonde’. Even the secondary characters are characterised by their physicality (drawings of their faces appear at the start of the collection), their voice, and their language tics, as much as by their social position. There is ‘the nationalist idiot’ Duc Gontran who ‘huffs and puffs’: ‘as soon as he deigns to emit some Prudhommeque extravaganza, out comes hot air’. Clotilde’s tic is that ‘she cannot feel a pinch on the arm ... without immediately crying out in a voice like the call of a flute: “Mummy, mummy, the little birds!”’. Ranson’s comment emphasises the appeal of stereotypes: ‘Is that not charming, and spoken so well in puppet?’⁸²

Through the reoccurring protagonists the satirical treatment, erotic colour, and risqué humour of the situations, *L’Abbé Prout* condenses and accentuates certain characteristics sketched out by Maurice Sand’s repertoire. Since it is based on a group of sculpted figures, each highly individualised so they could be identified despite their small dimensions and the narrow opening of the puppet booth, the dramaturgy of traditional glove puppets necessitates stock characters, or ‘maschere’ (masks) as Italian puppeteers refer to them using the vocabulary of the *Commedia dell’arte*, and writers draw inspiration from them. Similar to how the comedy of the ‘burattini’ is fuelled by the shock of dialects and social profiles, laughter in the works of Maurice Sand and Ranson emerged from the contrast of accents and idioms of highly stereotyped characters, who were immediately recognisable by the audience. As an art of synthesis and typification, this ‘speaking in puppet’ reflects the techniques of caricature and newspaper drawings that use an emblematic character to refer to a whole class of individuals, a profession, or a social rank. From 1860 onwards, these techniques were also used by the puppeteer Louis Lemer cier de Neuville (1830–1918) for his Pupazzi shows in which he mixed the figures of Monsieur Prudhomme, Robert Macaire, and Madame Benoiton with the literary, artistic, and political celebrities from the Second Empire and the Third Republic.⁸³

⁸² Ranson, ‘Préface’, in *L’Abbé Prout*, 7.

⁸³ See Louis Lemer cier de Neuville, *Paris-Pantin* (Paris: A. Lacroix, Verboeckhoeven et Cie, 1868); Joël Huthwohl, ‘Lemer cier de Neuville: de la bohème littéraire au théâtre de marionnettes’, in *L’Écriture littéraire pour marionnettes en Europe de l’Ouest (17^e–21^e siècles)*, ed. Carole Guidicelli (Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée, forthcoming 2025).

FROM DOUBLE READING TO DOUBLE VISION

Neither the extensive productions of Pocci, Maurice Sand, and Lemerrier de Neuville nor the plays of Ranson took the series construction as far as Duranty (1833–80) in his *Théâtre des marionnettes du jardin des Tuileries* (1862), which was published a year after the inauguration of a puppet booth in the gardens.⁸⁴ Bringing together 24 comedies that the writer composed for his small open-air theatre, the volume arranges them in three groups of eight: ‘Polichinelle lettré’ (Educated Polichinelle), ‘Pierrot philosophe’ (Philosopher Pierrot), and ‘Arlequin artiste’ (Artist Arlequin).⁸⁵ These plays, likely written within a short period of time,⁸⁶ are formatted and presented identically: each text occupies ‘14 pages of the volume, with a preceding director’s note that summarises and provides commentary on the plot, and two engravings of Duranty, one as a frontispiece and the other as a header for the first page of the text. Despite some variations, the dramatic configuration⁸⁷ largely relies on the cyclical return of a small group of key characters from Italian comedy, as they were established by the Théâtre de la Foire and later by the pantomimes at the Théâtre des Funambules (Arlequin, Pierrot, Polichinelle, Cassandre, Colombine), and their traditional partners from glove puppet (the gendarme, the commissaire, the Devil, Death) or string- and rod-marionette (Mère Gigogne) theatres. Duranty sometimes included some original figures alongside them, either referred to by their job title (the pork butcher, the notary, the executioner, the innkeeper) or portrayed in broad brushstrokes like character types from farce—for example, the rich Lord Niflanguille, the gourmand Gripandouille, and the doctor Catacysterium.

⁸⁴ Duranty, *Théâtre des marionnettes du jardin des Tuileries* (Paris: Dubuisson et Cie, 1862).

⁸⁵ This somewhat artificial classification would be removed for the second edition (1864).

⁸⁶ See Marcel Crouzet, *Un méconnu du Réalisme: Duranty (1833–1880)* (Paris: Nizet, 1964), 133–66; Carole Guidicelli, ‘Le répertoire pour marionnettes à gaine de Louis-Edmond Duranty: entre virtuosité instrumentale et sophistication dramaturgique’, in *L’Écriture littéraire pour marionnettes en Europe de l’Ouest (17^e–21^e siècles)*, ed. Carole Guidicelli (Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée, forthcoming 2025).

⁸⁷ The dramatic configuration is the structuring mode of a group of characters within a theatrical action. See Karl Konrad Polheim, ed., *Die dramatische Konfiguration* (Stuttgart: UTB, 1997).

Whether separately, as a pair, or a trio, Arlequin, Pierrot and Polichinelle feature in 20 of these plays, generally as protagonists. Their main function is to accelerate and intensify conflicts, making them more brutal through acts of aggression, fraud, and theft. These characters bring out an already-present social violence, beating and knocking out anyone who crosses their path, responds to them too slowly, or impedes upon their desires. In *Le Mariage de raison* (*The Marriage of Reason*), Pierrot completely destroys Mme Trifouillon's room and fights with her to oblige her to marry him; she vows to get her revenge. In *La Malle de Berlingue* (*Berlingue's Trunk*), Arlequin kills Madame Berlingue and, to get rid of the body, plans to make it disappear in the baker's oven. In *La Tragédie d'Arlequin* (*The Tragedy of Arlequin*), Cassandre asks his daughter Colombine to choose between three suitors, Arlequin, Pierrot, and Polichinelle, who each arrive with a gift (a bouquet of dandelions, some ham, a bottle of wine). Colombine violently rejects Pierrot and Polichinelle, but chooses Arlequin. Pierrot and Polichinelle then ambush Arlequin before killing and burying him. A pig digs him up and brings him back to life. The two accomplices then kill the animal, cut it up, preserve it in salt, and eat it to prevent it from testifying against them. Two nightmarish visions, a Saucisse-Gendarme and an Andouille-Commissaire, torment them in their sleep. They admit their crimes and Arlequin can marry Colombine.⁸⁸

With a frenetic tempo, which would have been demanding for the puppeteers but perfectly suited to the comedy of glove puppets, Duranty's plays rack up fights, adventures, disguises, real and fake deaths, and games of hide and seek. Freed from any form of vraisemblance, interpersonal relationships are reduced to a range of burlesque confrontations. A pair of lawyers look for clients kill Pierrot's cat and Madame Bégrich's parrot to make the two owners file complaints against each other, but the commissaire on the case takes them for the murderers of their own animals, shifting their status from complainant to accused, and condemns them to death.⁸⁹ In these arguments of whacks of clubs, repeat hangings, slips of logic, and reversals of situations, the classic techniques of shows performed in the streets can be readily recognised. *Pierrot et le pâtissier*

⁸⁸ Duranty, 'La tragédie d'Arlequin', in *Théâtre des marionnettes du jardin des Tuileries*, 33–48.

⁸⁹ Duranty, 'Les plaideurs malgré eux', in *Théâtre des marionnettes du jardin des Tuileries*, 225–40.

(*Pierrot and the Pastry Chef*), for example, reuses yet modifies the fight against an animal and the hanging of the executioner: Pierrot pulls off a dog's tail, kills it, then hides the club in its body to deceive the pastry chef with this simulacre; after having asked the gendarme to show him how to slip his head in the noose and hanging him, he kills the pastry chef and the apothecary by beating them with the gallows.⁹⁰ In *Polichinelle et la Mère Gigogne*, Polichinelle is responsible for feeding Mère Gigogne's ten babies, but he beats them instead, then throws them out the window like in the *Punch and Judy Show*. Three of them return to punish him.⁹¹

Duranty thus rewrites the stock sequences from the street puppet booth, heightening their cruelty and arranging them according to new structures. The dramatic action no longer follows the principle of gradation inherent to improvised shows and rarely ends with the punishment of the guilty party; rather, it is made up of unjustified acts of cruelty—the slightest annoyance results in a whack of a club, while the smallest breach leads to the gallows. According to Duranty, an allegorical meaning hides behind this apparent simplicity. Insisting that his work addressed a double audience, 'very naïve minds' and 'very learned minds', the playwright stressed the presence of a symbolic backdrop in his paratextual material. For *Le Mariage de raison*, he wrote 'No one would dare deny that reason teaches us to accept and bear our lot with resignation', and for *La Malle de Berlingue*:

The trunk here symbolises humans' wandering, restless situation on Earth, their voyage through life, their upheavals, their differences and their mistakes, their taste for the unknown, and their haste, their greed and their stupidity, the terrible uses of their free will, the fickleness of their fortune, and their reckless judgements. Moreover, at the end, the Commissaire, touched by compassion for the precarious state of the man, becomes sympathetic to the abolition of the death penalty and shouts 'Don't hang anyone!' (Not even the playwright, implicitly and explicitly understood.)⁹²

⁹⁰ Duranty, 'Pierrot et le pâtissier', in *Théâtre des marionnettes du jardin des Tuileries*, 97–112.

⁹¹ Duranty, 'Polichinelle et la Mère Gigogne', in *Théâtre des marionnettes du jardin des Tuileries*, 65–80.

⁹² Duranty, 'La malle de Berlingue', in *Théâtre des marionnettes du jardin des Tuileries*, 49–50.

Even if it is tinged with irony, this claim of a double reading is supported by the engravings accompanying each text: whilst the image placed on the first page of the text depicts a moment of dramatic action, the preceding frontispiece (Illustration 8.1) shows scenes from modern life that inspired it. In *Théâtre des marionnettes du jardin des Tuileries*, iconographical and paratextual devices thus converge to mark writing for puppets' entry into a new signifying regime: an opening up to multiple interpretations.

Whilst this regime reproduced the traditional alliance between entertainment and instruction, it cannot be reduced to it because Duranty instils doubt: he warns that 'some things will escape the children', but also

Illustration 8.1

Duranty, 'Polichinelle précepteur', *Théâtre des marionnettes du jardin des Tuileries* (Paris: Dubuisson et Cie, 1862)



that ‘some things will escape very learned minds’.⁹³ It is not enough for the readers to know how to decipher a moral or philosophical lesson; they must also accept irrational violence, systematic injustice, and the darkest irony. When the unfortunate Pierrot, having not eaten for two days, asks Niflanguille for a small piece of bread, he is accused of failing at his duty, which is to preserve himself. ‘Run quickly to the restaurateur’, orders Niflanguille, ‘do you not know that hunger pushes people into crime? Do not come and see me with the face of a hung man!’⁹⁴ Through this black humour and the rapidly reversing situations, Duranty’s writings for puppets prefigure twentieth-century comic forms, especially cartoons and burlesque cinema.

Like Duranty, Marc Monnier (1829–85), writer and professor of comparative literature at the University of Geneva, and author of a dozen plays for puppets published between 1852 and 1871, insists on the necessity of a double reading. The editor’s note at the end of the volume grouping together some of his plays informs us that: ‘This *Théâtre de marionnettes* (do I really need to warn the reader?) is a collection of political satires, an abridged version of contemporary history.’ He continues:

All these comedies ... reproduce recent events through laughter. *Polichinelle* embodies the people from the July Revolution to the coup d’état ... *Regina* represents Italy in 1859. *Le Curé d’Yvetot*, an ideal pope like the king of that happy country was; *Paillasse* reminds us of all the somersaults of French governments since Louis XIV until the Encyclical; finally, *L’Équilibre* summarises the main facts of the European tightrope walkers from Magenta to Sadowa.⁹⁵

Like in the satirical engravings published in the form of flyers or in illustrated periodicals, each country is personified not by its sovereign, but by an emblematic character, evoking its history or a character trait considered as typical. In *La Princesse Danubia* (1855), for example, Malbrouc symbolises the UK, Chauvin France, Petit-Poucet the Kingdom

⁹³ Duranty, ‘Petit discours de Polichinelle au lecteur pour terminer’, in *Théâtre des marionnettes du jardin des Tuileries*, 386.

⁹⁴ Duranty, ‘Le sac de charbon’, in *Théâtre des marionnettes du jardin des Tuileries*, 180.

⁹⁵ Marc Monnier, *Théâtre de marionnettes* (Geneva: F. Richard, 1871), 263.

of Sardinia-Piedmont, and Pantoufle Prussia. The names of these characters are often borrowed from literary or cultural history, creating a melting pot of heterogenous references: *Le Curé d'Yvetot* (1861) brings together Jean Douille (Gianduja), Don Quixote, Fra Diavolo, and Scipio Africanus. Historical references appear as intertextual games: in *Paillasse* (1865), Molière's *L'École des femmes* (*The School for Wives*) is cited to symbolise young Italy's (Agnès) desire for emancipation from Rome (Arnolphe). In *L'Équilibre* (1867), Don Quixote complains to Sancho Panza about the international tensions represented by the conflict of animals from La Fontaine's *Fables*.

In Monnier's plays, the rather thin dramatic action is often limited to a succession of antagonistic speeches. When the characters are not the allegories of European states, they appear as symbolic entities, but they have sometimes to be interpreted in both of these ways. In *Le Congrès de la Paix* (1871), for example, the conflict between Arnolphe and Agnès serves to illustrate the war of the sexes:

Panrace
Well then, what must we do?

Arnolphe
Lock up women.

Agnès
Chain up men.⁹⁶

Like the medieval morality plays and soties, Monnier's puppet plays double the fantasy of dialogues and theatrical situations: they set up a costume ball of improbable encounters, an allegorical commentary on the order of the world, rendered yet more complex through the intertextual play with the monuments of European literature.

Though in a much simpler and less original way, this intertextual dynamic, a symptom of an essentially literary approach to a dramaturgy for puppets, can be found in the repertoire written for the Erôtikon Theatron. Under this name, a small group of writers and artists composed and staged a series of short pornographic plays between 1862 and 1863

⁹⁶ Marc Monnier, *Le Congrès de la Paix* (Geneva: F. Richard, 1871), 15–16.

for private performances in Paris.⁹⁷ *Les Jeux de l'amour et du bazar* (*Games of Love and Whoredom*) by Lemer cier de Neuville, for example, transposes the inversion of social positions imagined by Marivaux in *Les Jeux de l'amour et du hasard* (*Games of Love and Chance*) onto the domain of prostitution. Sylvia and Dorante are no longer two masters disguised as servants to leisurely observe the man and woman they are respectively about to marry: Sylvia is the Madam of a brothel who wants 'for one night, to rediscover the flame of her youth'⁹⁸ by taking the place of one of her employees; the pimp Dorante harbours the desire to play the role of a client. Another of Lemer cier de Neuville's plays, *Un caprice*, like Alfred de Musset's work of the same name, adapts the theme of renouncing adultery, not because the husband fears, like his wife, being cheated on, but because he was spurned by his mistress after prematurely ejaculating. *Le Bout de l'An de la noce* (*The End of the Year of Nuptials*), co-written by Lemer cier de Neuville and Jean Duboys, is a burlesque subversion of Théodore Barrière's *Le Bout de l'an de l'amour* (*The End of the Year of Love*, 1863). In the original play, created at the Théâtre du Gymnase, two men await two women to dine in a private room, then, tired of waiting, they decide to leave before they arrive. In its rewriting for Erôtikon Theatron, two women in the same situation choose to spend the night together rather than wait for the two men to arrive.⁹⁹

The regime of double reading recalls parody, yet these plays go far beyond it. Whereas, for example, playwrights at the Théâtre de la Foire imitated the productions at the Comédie-Française and the Opéra to mock their pomposity and contest their prestige, Erôtikon Theatron used hypotexts more as supports to construct the fiction, as pretexts for erotic and comic subversions, machines producing fantasy: at once 'burlesque travesty' and 'caricature', to cite the categories proposed by

⁹⁷ See *Le Théâtre érotique de la rue de la Santé: son histoire* (Batignolles, 1864–66), 1–12; Alfred Delvau, *Le Théâtre érotique français sous le Bas-Empire* (Paris: Pincebourse, 1865).

⁹⁸ Lemer cier de Neuville, 'Les jeux de l'amour et du bazar', in *Le Théâtre érotique de la rue de la Santé*, 68.

⁹⁹ Théodore Barrière, *Le Bout de l'an de l'amour* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1863).

Gérard Genette.¹⁰⁰ The works of Lemerrier de Neuville and Jean Dubouys reveal an imitation and transformation of the subject (dramatic situations borrowed from Marivaux, Musset, and Barrière), and a modification of style, as the two playwrights saturate their dialogue with the slang of prostitutes. Using puppets for subversion thus creates an overexposure to the obscene, ruthlessly laying intimacy bare.

This brutality and obscenity in a scatological rendering are also present in the work that makes the strongest claim to a plurality of reading modes: *Ubu roi* by Alfred Jarry (1873–1907). Though Jarry claimed in a short introduction to the first public performance at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre in 1896 that his play 'was never written for puppets, but for actors pretending to be puppets, which is not the same thing',¹⁰¹ the character Ubu was indeed born at the puppet theatre in shows given by a group of teenagers from Rennes in their parents' home between 1888 and 1891.¹⁰² He also featured from 1898 onwards as a string-marionette in performances at the Théâtre des Pantins, then in 1905 as a glove puppet in *Ubu sur la butte* (*Ubu on the Hill*) at the Cabaret des Quat'z'arts in collaboration with the Guignol puppeteer Anatole. Even more than the dramatic action, Jarry's protagonist lends himself to several interpretations. As the author claims:

... you are free to see in M. Ubu however many allusions you care to, or else a simple puppet – a schoolboy's caricature of one of his professors who personified for him all the ugliness in the world.¹⁰³

M. Ubu is a comic avatar of Macbeth, a symbol of the tyrant, the bourgeois, or even the anarchist, a monster and perfect sphere, and, according to Jarry in another presentation of the play, 'a vile individual, which is

¹⁰⁰ See Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), esp. Chapters 12 and 17.

¹⁰¹ Alfred Jarry, *Ubu Roi*, trans. Beverly Keith and Gershon Legman (New York: Dover, 2003), 2.

¹⁰² See Yanna Kor, *Les Théâtres d'Alfred Jarry: l'invention de la scène'pataphysique* (La Fresnaie-Fayel: Otrante, 2022).

¹⁰³ Jarry, *Ubu Roi*, 1.

why (underneath) he resembles us all'.¹⁰⁴ The noisy materiality of Ubu reveals, in the plurality of meanings, the burlesque reversal of the poetic programme laid out at the beginning of Jarry's *Minutes de sable mémorial* (*Black Minutes of Memorial Sand*, 1894): 'To suggest rather than to state, to make a crossroads of each word in the street of sentences.'¹⁰⁵ However, Jarry's works do not simply layer different levels of meaning, but rather explore other regimes of them, close to 'signifiante',¹⁰⁶ a process whose mode of functioning Julia Kristeva has analysed in the poetic writings of Lautréamont and Mallarmé. Refusing to associate a hidden signification with an evident signification, the puppetesque or puppetised bodies of the Ubu cycle structure the effects of contradictory and non-hierarchical meanings between them according to a fundamentally unstable 'signifying process',¹⁰⁷ in what they manifest, simultaneously and indissociably, as living organisms and as objects. Alongside Ubu and his defining features of an enormous belly ('gidouille') and the 'phynances' hook, there are the 'Palotins', the 'rubberised servants' who are also mechanical, 'only wound up again by sleeping',¹⁰⁸ and susceptible to exploding; and even Mère Ubu, ripped by her husband, but then reborn like a puppet can be.

Brutality, rapidity, uncertainty between body and object, appearances, and metamorphoses: the links that unite literary writing and puppet theatre in the Ubu cycle (even Jarry's entire oeuvre)¹⁰⁹ condense the developments undertaken over the previous two centuries. For the first time in the history of the puppet, the ambivalence inherent to this theatrical device found its translation in literature, no longer at the margin of the text, in short sequences indicated in the stage directions, but in the very characterisation of the characters and the plotting of the action. The

¹⁰⁴ Alfred Jarry, 'Discours d'Alfred Jarry prononcé à la première représentation d'Ubu roi', in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 400.

¹⁰⁵ Alfred Jarry, 'Lintel', in *Black Minutes of Memorial Sand*, in *Adventures in Pataphysics*, trans. Paul Edwards and Antony Melville (London: Atlas, 2001), 23.

¹⁰⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 17.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 68–71.

¹⁰⁸ Alfred Jarry, 'Visions of the Present and Future', in *Adventures in Pataphysics*, 205. 'Palotins' has been translated in various ways, including 'Champions' in Keith and Legman's translation.

¹⁰⁹ Kor, *Les Théâtres d'Alfred Jarry*.

double vision analysed by Steve Tillis¹¹⁰ was no longer only created in the perception of the spectator; it became a process embedded in the very moment of writing, on the actual pages of the text.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the broad directions of a dramaturgy specific to puppets were already being established by successive waves of poets and writers. Whilst developments led by professional companies gradually stalled, whether through using ageing repertoires, the increasingly neutral adaptations of tales and legends for children, or in the miniaturised reproduction of circus and music hall numbers, artistic and literary circles took up the baton of artistic innovation, laying the groundwork for the transition that would lead to the resurgence of this art form in the second half of the twentieth century. Sometimes in isolated initiatives and other times as group activities, these artists revived theatrical writing for puppets by extending and diversifying the avenues opened up by Romanticism and Symbolism, all the while drawing upon part of the heritage left by the nineteenth century's popular puppet theatres.

Space constraints do not permit me to examine the hundreds of works for puppets composed by poets and writers during the transitional period approximately between the 1880s and the 1960s, nor those that followed up to the present day. Due to the plurality and concurrence of the directions explored by playwrights, presenting them in one chronological line, the approach taken thus far in this chapter is not feasible either. Instead, exploring three successive aesthetic and thematic strands of literary writing for puppets will highlight the contributions of writers to affirming and enriching the specificities of this theatrical language since the end of the nineteenth century¹¹¹: the relationship to popular forms inherited from the past, the search for a poetic form of theatre, and exploring the co-presence of actors and puppets on stage. Continuing

¹¹⁰ See Chapter 1.

¹¹¹ Other strands have also been established in the outputs of the *PuppetPlays* project financed by the European Union (ERC GA 835193): in particular, the digital platform *PuppetPlays.eu* with its database of a thousand analytical records, and the publication of conference proceedings. See Carole Guidicelli, ed., *L'Écriture littéraire pour marionnettes en Europe de l'Ouest (17^e–21^e siècles)* (Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée, forthcoming 2025).

the selective approach taken in this book, its effects will be more immediately perceptible for these better-identified repertoires¹¹²; works that have already been the subject of substantial literary criticism will simply be mentioned, whereas further light will be shed upon lesser-known examples. Rather than reproducing yet another gallery of great works, my intention is to highlight the routes by which poets and writers contributed to redrawing the imaginary territories of the puppet.

PRESENCES OF THE PAST

From the turn of the twentieth century, authors who chose to write for puppets were conscious that they were rowing against the current of their time, turning away from the age of industry, the crowds, and the big cities, and unearthing artistic forms that had disappeared or were disappearing. In 1906, Gustave Kahn announced ‘Guignol is dead!’ in the preface to what he falsely presents as a rediscovered text of the ‘drame de Polichinelle’ used by the Champs-Élysées puppet booths: the text in fact republishes a French translation of Collier’s *Punch and Judy Show*.¹¹³ Increasing congestion and traffic noise chased glove puppeteers from urban spaces, and they took refuge in theatres for children, cabarets, and other small performance venues. This reduction of activity can be observed across many forms of popular puppet theatre, which, at different rates depending on the region, entered a phase of decline in the space of a few decades after its peak. The strengthening of links between literary creation and traditional puppet theatre thus occurred during a moment of existential crisis in puppetry and, for this reason, it was often accompanied by a criticism of modernity.

Symbolist circles, in particular, widely employed archaic, classical, or medieval references to legitimise their productions. The poet Maurice Bouchor (1855–1929) established the Petit-Théâtre de Marionnettes de la Galerie Vivienne in Paris with Henri Signoret. Though he declared himself a defender of secular morality and public schools,¹¹⁴ Bouchor wrote several dramas with religious subject matter for the venue whose

¹¹² See Jurkowski, *Écrivains et marionnettes*.

¹¹³ Gustave Kahn, ‘Préface’, in *Polichinelle (de Guignol)* (Paris: E. Sansot et Cie, 1906), 9. See also Chapter 3.

¹¹⁴ Maurice Bouchor, ‘Préface’, in *Noël, ou le Mystère de la Nativité* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1901), 5–23.

titles recall the literary or theatrical models of another age: *Tobie* (1889), *Noël, ou le Mystère de la Nativité* (*Christmas or the Mystery of the Nativity*, 1890), *La Légende de sainte Cécile* (*The Legend of St Cecilia*, 1892), and *La Dévotion à saint André* (*The Devotion of St Andrew*, 1892). The type of puppets employed at the Petit Théâtre had been in use since the end of the eighteenth century in mechanical Nativity scenes in Provence with some technical modifications: figures mounted on a base and controlled from below with the help of hidden strings in the clothing and linked to a small keyboard. Only movements of the head and arms were possible, offering a hieratic form of acting that sharply contrasted with modern puppetry, represented by the feats of ingenuity and realistic illusion of Thomas Holden's string-marionettes.

The 'freshness', 'simplicity', and even the 'naivety' of Bouchor's performances for the Petit-Théâtre elicited enthusiastic responses.¹¹⁵ Jules Lemaître compared the puppets to the 'naïve virgins' of the Italian Primitives¹¹⁶; Anatole France declared that only puppets could 'express religious sentiment'¹¹⁷; and the polemicist Léon Bloy recounted how he was overcome with emotion during the first scene of *Noël* in which the archangel Gabriel give the animals the gift of speech.¹¹⁸

Beyond Bouchor's works, symbolist circles channelled their fascination with using puppets for religious subjects through adapting theatrical works by the abbess Hrotsvita of Gandersheim (tenth century): *Abraham Permite* (*Abraham the Hermit*) and *Paphnutius*. These adaptations were performed at the Petit-Théâtre, as private shows given by Paul Ranson, or, in a more ironic mode, at the Théâtre des Pantins founded by Claude Terrasse and Alfred Jarry. These texts, to which Anatole France had drawn attention,¹¹⁹ served as the dramaturgical model for *La Légende de sainte Cécile* and *La Dévotion à saint André*. Like Hrotsvita, Bouchor

¹¹⁵ See Didier Plassard, 'Quand le majeur devient mineur: marionnettes et drame religieux dans les cercles littéraires et artistiques de la fin du 19^e siècle', in *Écrire en petit, jouer en mineur. Marginalités littéraires, scéniques et médiatiques*, ed. Marie-Astrid Charlier and Florence Théron (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2025), 115–26.

¹¹⁶ Jules Lemaître, *Impressions de théâtre* (Paris: Société française d'imprimerie et de librairie, 1898), 386.

¹¹⁷ Anatole France, 'Les marionnettes de M. Signoret', *Le Temps*, 10 June 1888.

¹¹⁸ Léon Bloy, 'Revanche des lys', *La Plume*, February 15, 1891, 66.

¹¹⁹ France, 'Les marionnettes de M. Signoret'.

explores the theme of refusing sexuality, which is presented as both a temptation and a stigma. The first play recounts how a young Christian prefers martyrdom over renouncing her virginity; in the second, St Andrew, disguised as a beggar, prevents a bishop from surrendering to the charms of the young Luce who turns out to be Lucifer. The respect with which Boucher treats these subjects borrowed from Jacques de Voragine's *Legenda aurea* (*Golden Legend*, around 1261–66) is not an impediment to introducing some comic elements, burlesque rhymes, trivial details, and transformation scenes (Luce's head pivots on itself to reveal the face of Lucifer), highlighting the debt to popular puppet shows.

Other twentieth-century writers occasionally made use of puppets to revive older forms of expressing religious faith: in 1918, for example, the Swiss art historian Daniel Baud-Bévy (1870–1958) wrote *Sainte Chagrin* (*St 'Grief'*), a 'short mystery for puppets' performed as part of the Schweizerischer Werkbund exhibition in Zurich.¹²⁰ The plot is based on a simplified version of the legend of Sankt Kümmeris (also called St Wilgefortis).¹²¹ In the Brothers Grimm tale *Saint Solicitous*,¹²² a young woman wishes to keep her virginity because she wants to become a nun. Her father obliges her to marry the king, yet, on the day of the wedding, an extraordinary beard appears on her face. She is then crucified and honoured as a saint. After her death, her statue drops a golden slipper in front of a minstrel who is then accused of stealing it. When the statue offers him a second slipper, he is deemed to be innocent. Baud-Bévy's rewriting reduced the supernatural element (the girl in agony on the cross, rather than the statue, offers a present to the minstrel) and changed the frame narrative: when the Lord of Naters returns from the Italian Wars, he sees three young orphans singing and dancing in a field. Chagrin spurns his advances not due to a chastity vow, but because she does not want a warrior who killed a heron in front of her. The abbess from the orphanage makes her accept his proposal, but her face becomes covered with a beard and the furious Naters crucifies her.

¹²⁰ Association of artists, architects, designers, and industrialists established in 1913. Inspired by the Deutscher Werkbund, it shared its mission of bringing together art and industry to promote the functionalism movement.

¹²¹ Known by various names denoting different ideas across Europe, she was honoured in Southern Germany as Sankt Kümmeris ('grief').

¹²² Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, 'Die heilige Frau Kümmeris', in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung, 1815), 293–94.

These modifications seek to make the theatrical action more familiar, facilitating the audience's identification with Chagrin. The links between the characters also become closer: Chargin offers her diamond-embellished marriage crown to the same minstrel whose music she and her friends danced to at the start of the play. Yet, contrary to these modernisations, the playwright gives the play a medievalising frame. The narrative plays out in front of two angels who comment upon it, and it ends with Naters being swallowed by the infernal abyss that opens under his feet. Baud-Bévy simultaneously draws upon an imaginary from the end of the Middle Ages and uses theatrical techniques that, in 1918, only survived amongst some puppeteers from the popular tradition.

During this period, many traditional theatres in the regions devastated by the First World War, particularly Belgium and northern and eastern France, disappeared. Puppet shows' evocation of the past has further significance in these contexts, as a defence of local cultures, with theatres becoming 'lieux de mémoire',¹²³ sites of memory for regional identities. Writing for puppets thus represents becoming the guardian of a collective heritage, even the custodian of a disappeared tradition. In the 1920s, Michel de Ghelderode (1898–1962) published five plays for puppets, which were presented as 'reconstructions' of former Brussels shows. The first, *Le Mystère de la Passion de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ* (*The Mystery of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*), is referred to as 'a document of folklore'¹²⁴ reconstructed using 'the memorial vestiges of a former actor who is now senile'.¹²⁵ The playwright states he took the same approach for *Duvelor ou la Farce du diable vieux* (*Duvelor, or the Old Devil's Farce*),¹²⁶ *La Tentation de saint Antoine* (*The Temptation of*

¹²³ Pierre Nora, ed., *Rethinking France: Les Lieux de mémoire*, trans. Mary Trouille, ed. David P. Jordan, 4 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999–2010).

¹²⁴ Michel de Ghelderode, 'Avant-propos', in *Le Mystère de la Passion de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ pour les marionnettes reconstitué d'après le spectacle* (Brussels: La Renaissance d'Occident, 1925), 5.

¹²⁵ Michel de Ghelderode, unpublished account cited in Jean Francis, *L'Éternel aujourd'hui de Michel de Ghelderode* (Brussels: Louis Musin, 1968), 125.

¹²⁶ Michel de Ghelderode, *Duvelor ou la Farce du Diable vieux reconstituée d'après le spectacle des marionnettes bruxelloises en 1918, Le Rouge et le Noir*, 27 May 1931; reproduced in Robert Guiette, ed., *Marionnettes de tradition populaire* (Brussels: Les Éditions du Cercle d'art, 1950).

St Anthony),¹²⁷ *La Farce de la Mort qui faillit trépasser* (*The Farce of Death Who Almost Died*),¹²⁸ and *Le Massacre des innocents* (*The Massacre of the Innocents*).¹²⁹

From one performance to another, the playwright varied the tale of how he collected the materials for his plays, which has led specialists to cast doubt on his folklorist approach and to view some reconstructions as a ‘mystification’.¹³⁰ Yet comparing the plays published by Ghelderode and the documentary evidence left by popular puppet theatre in Belgium and northern France shows that his claims bear at least a slither of truth. The *Tentation de saint Antoine* is almost identical to the one performed by French puppeteers in the nineteenth century, and *Le Massacre des innocents* shares several episodes with the *Naissances* from Liège. The farces closely resemble the comic sketches (‘stutske bââ’) performed alongside the programme at the Théâtre Toone in Brussels, with the re-appearance of the character Pitje-la-Mort¹³¹; yet, Ghelderode indicates in the *Entretiens d’Ostende* (*The Ostend Interviews*) that he was only able to collect the main plots of these plays, meaning that he wrote all their lines.¹³²

Ghelderode’s rewritings of traditional plays also helped breathe new life into Belgian puppet theatre.¹³³ *Le Mystère de la Passion* was staged by the Brussels puppeteer Jean-Baptiste Hembrauf (Toone IV) in 1934; it

¹²⁷ The first publication of *La Tentation de saint Antoine* appeared in Michel de Ghelderode, ‘Le folklore bruxellois’, *La Renaissance d’Occident* (April 1925): 812–19.

¹²⁸ Michel de Ghelderode, *La Farce de la Mort qui faillit trépasser* (Brussels: Éditions de la Sirène, 1952). Ghelderode first published an overview of this play in a second instalment of ‘Le folklore bruxellois’ (Brussels Folklore), stating that it was performed under the titles *Pietje de Dood* (*Pitje the Dead*), *De Dood op wandel* (*Death Goes Walking*), *De Dood op zwier* (*Death Carousing*), and *De Dût op stameney* (*Death at the Café*). See *La Renaissance d’Occident* (July 1925): 157–60.

¹²⁹ Michel de Ghelderode, ‘Le Massacre des innocents’, *La Renaissance d’Occident* (November 1926): 231–37.

¹³⁰ See notably Roland Beyen, *Michel de Ghelderode ou la bantise du masque, Essai de biographie critique*, 2nd ed. (Brussels: Académie Royale de Langue et de Littérature Françaises, Palais des Académies, 1971), 178–81.

¹³¹ For example, *Comment Pitje-la-Mort aida les Espagnols*, *Un verre de vin et un biscuit*, *Trois paysans en sabots*. See the description of these plays on the *PuppetPlays* database: <https://puppetplays.eu>.

¹³² Michel de Ghelderode, *Les Entretiens d’Ostende* (Toulouse: L’Éther vague, 1992), 118.

¹³³ Hélène Beauchamp, *La Marionnette, laboratoire du théâtre* (Montpellier: Deuxième époque, 2018), 125.

was revived 1960, at the same time as *Duvelor ou la Farce du diable vieux* by Victor José Géal (Toone VII), and is still part of the Théâtre Toone's repertoire today. Ghelderode congratulated himself on this achievement, without mentioning that the puppeteers had largely reworked his text¹³⁴:

So, go see this Passion: it is performed each year on Rue Haute and already no one remembers me even though I 'reconstructed' it. That is okay though: what came from the people has been returned to the people.¹³⁵

In a similar way, Federico García Lorca claimed that his *Tragicomedia de don Cristóbal y la señá Rosita* (*The Billy-Club Puppets*, 1922–25) and *Retablillo de don Cristóbal* (*The Puppet Play of Don Cristóbal*, 1930–34) were part of the cultural heritage of Andalusia and, more specifically, of glove puppet theatre where the origins of several of his characters lie, in particular Don Cristóbal Polichinela. The almost complete absence of written traces of these shows performed at fairgrounds in the second half of the nineteenth century¹³⁶ makes comparing García Lorca's plays with his sources of inspiration difficult, but some fundamental elements can be identified, such as the puppeteer's address to the audience and his dialogues with Don Cristóbal or other characters. This metatheatrical device, a key feature of Andalusian puppet shows,¹³⁷ is used at the start of *Retablillo de don Cristóbal* when the Director asks the glove puppet to show itself.¹³⁸ There is also a trace of it in the Mosquito's prologue for the *Tragicomedia de don Cristóbal y la señá Rosita*. More generally, these two plays borrow several techniques from traditional glove puppet theatre: whacks of clubs, appearances of allegorical figures (Hour emerges from the clock), the extraordinary lengthening of a character's neck like

¹³⁴ See the description of *La Passion* by Pierre Welleman (Toone VI) on the *PuppetPlays* database: <https://puppetplays.eu/oeuvres/315095/la-passion>.

¹³⁵ Ghelderode, *Les Entretiens d'Ostende*, 117.

¹³⁶ Francisco J. Cornejo found two descriptions of shows of Don Cristóbal at fairs in the Seville region: they are included as an annex to the article: Francisco J. Cornejo, 'Don Cristóbal y el tío Juan Misa', *Fantoche* 1 (2007): 13–25.

¹³⁷ See José Gestoso y Pérez, 'Una feria en un pueblo de Andalucía', cited in Cornejo, 'Don Cristóbal y el tío Juan Misa', 23.

¹³⁸ In *Retablillo de don Cristóbal y doná Rosita*, an adaptation performed by García Lorca in Buenos Aires in March 1934, Cristóbal himself addresses the audience before conversing with the poet. See F. García Lorca, 'Retablillo de don Cristóbal y doná Rosita', in *Teatro completo* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2012), 675–76.

in Punch and Kasperl performances, and the miraculous acceleration of time (Rosita gives birth to five children minutes after exchanging kisses with her different lovers). The final lines of *Retablillo*, which call upon different heroes from popular puppet theatre, shows how much García Lorca, whilst rendering homage to Andalusian traditions, is conscious of their place within a pan-European heritage:

Let us honour today in the puppet-show the Andalusian Don Cristóbal, cousin to the Galician Bululú and brother-in-law to Aunt Norica from Cádiz; brother to Monsieur Guñol from Paris and uncle to Don Arlechino from Bergamo. He is a character in whom the pure ancient spirit of the theatre still survives.¹³⁹

The choice of puppets also means choosing an object, which, to strengthen the contrast with the flesh of the actor, can sometimes be confused with automata: when Don Cristóbal discovers Rosita's infidelity, he collapses angrily to the loud clanging of springs, revealing his mechanical nature. The other characters cry 'Cristobita wasn't a real person!' when they discover that not one drop of blood escapes his body,¹⁴⁰ as if they were not also constructed in the same way. Beyond the almost cinematographic joke that it produces, throwing into sharp relief the puppet's artificiality shows how much making a theme of the object, as Jarry systematised it, had become one of the key features of this art's passage into modernity.

Since the second half of the twentieth century, there has been a renewed interest, which still persists today, in Hanswurst and Kasperl in German-speaking countries and Polichinelle and Guignol in France.¹⁴¹ In Austria, several poet members of the Wiener Gruppe in the 1950s and

¹³⁹ F. García Lorca, 'The Puppet Play of Don Cristóbal', in *Plays: Two*, trans. Gwynne Edwards (London: Methuen, 1990), 65–79 (at 79).

¹⁴⁰ F. García Lorca, 'The Billy-Club Puppets', in *Five plays: Comedies and Tragicomedies*, trans. James Graham-Lujan and Richard L. O'Connell (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1963), 13–55 (at 53).

¹⁴¹ See, for Guignol, Stéphane Jaubertie, *Crève Poseville!* (Montreuil: Éditions théâtrales, 2017). For Polichinelle, Robert Destanque, 'Le Caprice de Polichinelle', *L'Avant-scène Théâtre* 1141 (2003); Jean-Gabriel Nordmann, *Sous le masque tu es mortel pauvre orphelin!* (Lille: La Fontaine, 2010).

1960s made the traditional lustige Figuren of Hanswurst,¹⁴² Kasperl/Caspar,¹⁴³ Punch and Judy,¹⁴⁴ and Pierrot¹⁴⁵ the protagonists of their short plays, the ‘dramolettes’, which were characterised by ridicule, language play, and the absurd. The treatment of the character Kasperl within these productions is particularly interesting: H.C. Artmann, for example, writes two plays for him: *die hochzeit caspars mit gelsomina* (*the wedding of caspar and gelsomina*) and *die liebe fee pocahontas oder kasper als schildwache* (*the kind fairy pocahontas, or kasper on sentry duty*, 1961).¹⁴⁶ Playing with the character’s increasing neutralisation as a result of being employed for educational purposes during the first half of the twentieth century, Artmann reinstates his adult desires, contrasting with the rest of his behaviour. Kasper, a soldier during the American Civil War, asks the fairy Pocahontas, who grants all his wishes, to bring him his senior officer’s wife. The wife wearing a babydoll nightie sleepwalks to join Kasper in the bed that, after lengthy hesitation over its quality and comfort, had just been delivered thanks to the fairy’s magical powers.

In Artmann’s texts, aspects of Pocci’s plays can easily be recognised: the theme of cannibalism from *Kasperl unter den Wilden*¹⁴⁷ re-appears in a burlesque manner in *die hochzeit caspars mit gelsomina*. In *die liebe fee pocahontas*, the fairy, called upon by Kasper, appears first with a crocodile’s head, then a gigantic cuckoo head, which frightens Kasper, who believes he is seeing a vulture. Intertextuality more generally runs throughout Artmann’s writings for puppets: the two witnesses for Caspar’s wedding, Rosmarin and Gùldenkrout (Rosemary and Centaurium), are the comic avatars of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern from *Hamlet*, and the first name Johann, given to all the characters in *die liebe*

¹⁴² For example, in Gerhard Rùhm’s ‘hanswurststücke’ (hanswurst plays, 1955–56). The rejection of capitalisation is a distinctive mark of the Wiener Gruppe.

¹⁴³ For example, Konrad Bayer, *kasperl am elektrischen stuhl* (*Kasperl in the Electric Chair*, 1969).

¹⁴⁴ See Marc-Oliver Schuster, *H. C. Artmann’s Structuralist Imagination: A Semiotic Study of his Aesthetics and Postmodernity* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2004), 33–35.

¹⁴⁵ H.C. Artmann, *die cyclopin oder die zerstörung einer schneiderpuppe* (*The Cyclops, or the Destruction of a Tailor’s Dummy*, 1952).

¹⁴⁶ H.C. Artmann, ‘die hochzeit caspars mit gelsomina’, ‘die liebe fee pocahontas oder kasper als schildwache’, in *The Best of H. C. Artmann* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970).

¹⁴⁷ Franz von Pocci, ‘Kasperl unter den Wilden’, in *Lustiges Komödienbüchlein*, vol. 1 (Munich: G. Stahl, 1859).

fee pocahontas (including the president Johann Lincoln), seems to echo the series of Bobby Watsons in Eugène Ionesco's *La Cantatrice chauve* (*The Bald Soprano*). The playwright seeks less to modernise the traditional character of Kasperl than to approach him using new literary strategies, to accord him a place within the heterogeneous and fragmented landscape of contemporary memory.

Revivals of repertoires that had fallen out of favour or continuing the adventures of traditional heroes were the two main avenues for writers and poets who, in their contributions to the puppet repertoire, constructed a link with the past and drew upon the apparent temporal incongruity of puppetry, its disjuncture with the transformation of society. This disjuncture can also manifest itself in an internal tension between the past and present, the time of writing and that of the story recounted. The Catalan poet Salvador Espriu's (1913–85) *Primera història d'Esther* (*First Story of Esther*, 1948), an 'improvisation for puppets', offers a case in point. The Jewish exile in Babylon from the Old Testament serves as a metaphor for Catalan language and culture under the Francoist dictatorship: a form of internal exile. The play's particularly complex temporal structure enhances this parallel by creating multiple inferences between the two worlds. First, it employs the technique of theatre-within-theatre which contrasts the two periods. A performance by puppeteers in a garden in the town of Sinera (the name Espriu gives to Arenys de Mar) serves as the frame, and the show follows the general outline of the story told in the *Book of Esther*: the King of Susa Assuerus's banishment of his first wife, the choice of Esther as replacement, the plot against Assuerus being foiled and denounced by Esther's cousin Mardoqueu, the dignitary Aman's anger against Mardoqueu who refuses to bow in front of him and his decision to massacre the Jews in revenge, and the reversal of the situation as Esther who, supported by Assuerus, saves the Jews and allows them to kill their enemies.

The puppet's grotesque acting style and interventions from the Devil and Death are taken directly from traditional shows, as is the presence of a pedlar and mediator between the two worlds, the Altíssim. This blind beggar, likely inspired by the legendary figure of Homer, simultaneously addresses the audience in Sinera and the characters in the show. Moreover, the biblical episode includes several anachronisms and interruptions to the fictional illusion that produce abrupt collisions with the world of the spectators: some are rather chilling, like when Assuerus's and Aman's orders echo the proclamations of the Francoist regime; others are

comical, such as when the banished Queen Vashti, after having refused to be locked in a convent and fed on dried bread and water, declares that she would rather go to Sinera in an automobile with her cook and a handsome young man. Finally, the text also constructs a link with Sinera's recent past through several mentions of the childhood memories of Salvador Espriu, referred to under the Jewish name Salom. Four historical and memorial time periods thus intersect in *Primera història d'Esther*: Francoist Spain in 1948, the 1920s of Espriu's childhood, late nineteenth-century puppet shows, and biblical times. For writers and poets, the puppet's evocation of the past is not necessarily a refuge; it can be used as a dramaturgical device through which mentioning the past allows for a comparison with the present and the spectators' experience of time to become more complex.

Such a device is found, albeit in a simpler form, in the texts of authors who sought to use the profession of the traditional puppeteer on the theatrical stage to evoke a world that had disappeared. Salvo Licata (1937–2000) wrote *Visita guidata all'Opera dei pupi* (Guided tour to the Opera des pupi, 1989) for the puppeteer and storyteller Mimmo Cuticchio,¹⁴⁸ in which Don Paolo, an old 'oprante',¹⁴⁹ relives moments of his career alone in his workshop: discussions with his assistant, telling off disruptive young spectators, and major scenes from his repertoire. Following a quarter of a century of decline due to the advent of television, the Opera dei pupi seems on the cusp of disappearing at the end of the 1980s; its paladins in shining armour are only phantoms of the past or visions born out of Don Paolo's delusion. The present time, the era of Charlemagne and the Paladins of France, and several episodes from Don Paolo's life interweave to the point of confusion, notably when the tale of Orlando's madness coincides with the memory of the bombing of Palermo in 1943.

In *De dienaar van de schoonheid*¹⁵⁰ (*The Servant of Beauty*), written for the actor Dirk Roofthoof, Jan Fabre (born 1958) bestows a significant part of his own biography and his obsessions on a string-marionette puppeteer. Controlled by the higher force of Beauty, the actor-puppeteer

¹⁴⁸ Roberto Giambrone, ed., *Visita guidata: viaggio per parole e immagini nel teatro di Mimmo Cuticchio e Salvo Licata* (Palermo: Associazione Figli d'arte Cuticchio, 2001).

¹⁴⁹ Puppeteer from the Opera dei pupi.

¹⁵⁰ Jan Fabre, *De dienaar van de schoonheid en andere teaterteksten* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2010).

is surrounded by the guardian figures of his art: Jean Potage, who re-enacts with Marie the scene of the baby's murder borrowed from the *Punch and Judy Show*; Pietche-la-Mort, who offers to marry him; the tamed Monkey, who traditionally accompanied Jan Klaassen shows; his puppet-double; and a puppet of Jan Fabre. Playwright, actor, puppet, and puppeteer are swept around in a carousel of figures where identities are mutually exchanged and reflect each other in the meanderings of the protagonist's memories.

TOWARDS A POETIC THEATRE

Since the end of the nineteenth century, as has often been stated,¹⁵¹ some playwrights and poets first directed their attention towards writing for puppets due to their dissatisfaction with live theatre. With the gravity and conservatism of production modes, the actors' excessive demands, the disproportionate power of normative criticism, and the censor, the system of constraints that presided over professional theatrical life, and against which the first modern directors rose up, was also an impediment to reassessing the dramaturgy. The choice of the generation of Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949), Charles van Lerberghe (1861–1907), Jacinto Benavente (1866–1954), and Ramón del Valle-Inclán (1866–1936) to label their attempts at dramatic writing as 'theatre for puppets' signifies a hesitation of proposing them to established theatres or, at the very least, a warning against using the dominant codes of acting and directing.

Nevertheless, this decision also attested to a real fascination for these shows: Maeterlinck and van Lerberghe regularly went to the Ghent Fair to watch performances by Thomas Holden's puppets and admired the astonishing realism of the 'Sleeping Venus' from the Spitzner collection, the famous anatomical wax model of a young woman with a hidden mechanism that made the chest rise as if breathing. Fabrice van de Kerckhove's editorial work on the preparatory drafts of *La Princesse Maleine*¹⁵² (1891) reveals how Maeterlinck had initially included several techniques

¹⁵¹ See, for example, Beauchamp, *La Marionnette, laboratoire du théâtre*.

¹⁵² Maurice Maeterlinck, *La Princesse Maleine*, ed. by F. van de Kerckhove (Brussels: Espace Nord, 2002).

borrowed from Holden's shows before removing them,¹⁵³ thus creating an atmosphere of strangeness without a visible cause that extends to all his first dramas (Illustration 8.2), from *Les Sept Princesses* (*The Seven Princesses*, 1890), to *La Mort de Tintagiles* (*The Death of Tintagiles*, 1894), as well as van Lerberghe's *Les Flaireurs* (*The Sniffer*, 1889).¹⁵⁴ With the exception of clothes flapping in the wind or a door opening on its own accord in *La Princesse Maleine*, no inherently 'puppetesque' elements remain in the published versions of these texts. Yet the dramaturgical shift enacted by the author, which substitutes the interpersonal for the 'infradramatic'¹⁵⁵ of characters in conflict with the invisible but perceptible powers that surround them, attests to the growing role of the visual and sonorous environment in new modes of narrative agency on stage.¹⁵⁶ By taking this direction, puppet theatre progressively gained new legitimacy.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, some writers endeavoured to redefine the place of puppet theatre within the performing arts as 'drama-of-life' (staging interactions between objects, materials, human or non-human figures, atmospheres of light or sonorous ambiances on the same level as dialogued or monologued speech) rather than 'drama-in-life' (the tale of an individual or collective fight that structures the fable).¹⁵⁷ These interactions are lyrical, not dramatic: rather than staging conflicts, they establish analogical links between the collected elements, as springboards for the imagination. In doing so, they contribute to changing puppet theatre into a theatre of poetry in which the signifying effects are constructed through slippages, echoes, contrasts, metaphors, and approximations within a general suspension of logical constraints or vraisemblance.

¹⁵³ Didier Plassard and Carole Guidicelli, 'Haunted Figures, Haunting Figures: Puppets and Marionettes as Testimonies of Liminal States', *Skenè, Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies* 8, no. 1 (2022): 11–33.

¹⁵⁴ Charles van Lerberghe, 'Les Flaireurs', *La Wallonie* 41, no. 1 (1889): 24–44. See Plassard and Guidicelli, 'Haunted Figures, Haunting Figures'.

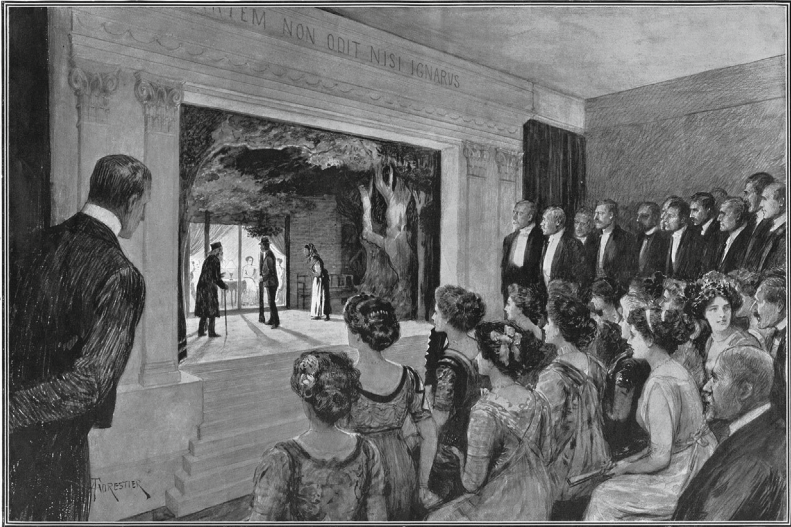
¹⁵⁵ Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, 'La reprise (réponse au postdramatique)', *La Réinvention du drame (sous l'influence de la scène)*, special issue of *Études théâtrales* 38–39 (2007): 7–17.

¹⁵⁶ Denis Laoureux, *Maeterlinck et la dramaturgie de l'image. Les arts et les lettres dans le symbolisme en Belgique* (Braschaat: Pandora, 2008).

¹⁵⁷ Sarrazac, 'La reprise (réponse au postdramatique)'.

SOCIETY'S NEW AMUSEMENT: THE FASHIONABLE MARIONETTE IN A PLAY BY A FAMOUS WRITER.

DRAWN BY A. FORESTER, OUR SPECIAL ARTIST.



PUPPETS IN A MAETERLINCK PLAY: WATCHING THE PERFORMANCE OF "INTERIOR" IN THE NEW MARIONETTE THEATRE.

There are distinct signs of a revival of interest in the marionette, and London promises next season a theatre in which puppets are the chief element. At this marionette theatre, which for the time being is at St. Mark Lane, there has already been produced Maurice Maeterlinck's "Le roi," recently translated for the occasion by Mr. William Archer. The present case is, of course, only a revival. In the eighteenth century, for instance, London had no fewer than four recognized marionette theatres—in Pall Mall Street, in Covent Garden, in the Haymarket, and in Portico.

Illustration 8.2 Amédée Forestier, a performance of Maurice Maeterlinck's *Interior* at the New Marionette Theatre, London, 1909 (*The Illustrated London News*, 6 March 1909). © Illustrated London News Ltd./Mary Evans Picture Library

The following examples sketch out the main development and features of this transformation. In *El encanto de una hora*¹⁵⁸ (*The Spell of an Hour*, 1892), Jacinto Benavente has two porcelain figurines converse: Incroyable and Merveilleuse in Directory-era costumes. Leaving their respective pedestals at midnight, they begin a romantic dialogue and kiss, but a piece of Merveilleuse's face breaks off in a clash of their heads. To fix it, Incroyable approaches Merveilleuse and their amorous enlacement becomes set in porcelain, thereby hiding the trace of the accident. Neither a play for puppets nor a play for actors, this first dramatic sketch of Benavente's 'Teatro fantástico' clearly belongs to the Modernist literary

¹⁵⁸ Jacinto Benavente, 'El encanto de una hora', in *Teatro fantástico* (Madrid: Tip. Franco-Española, 1892).

genre of ‘teatro para leer’ (theatre to be read).¹⁵⁹ Yet like Justinus Kerner in *Der rasende Sandler* several decades earlier, *El encanto de una hora* also explores a material imaginary that foreshadows future developments in puppet theatre.

This material imaginary began finding its way onto the stage in *La Machine volante* (*The Flying Machine*) by the Swiss writer René Morax (1873–1963), a play for string-marionettes performed, like *Sainte Chagrin*, at the Schweizerischer Werkbund exhibition in 1918. The stage directions in the margins attribute non-human physical characteristics to the protagonist, a rich chatelaine:

We can barely see the fat Mme Fichini who is abundantly padded amongst the bulky furniture. It seems that if she were pricked with a pin, she would deflate ... She wears a curly blond wig that she rings like bells; she bounces back like elastic.¹⁶⁰

To punish Mme Fichini’s egotism, Paul, the lover of her adoptive daughter Sophie, plays a trick on her: he places a gas pipe under her crinoline which inflates it like a hot air balloon. She rises from the ground and is carried away by a current of air, transforming her into a ‘flying machine’. In the second act, which takes place entirely in the air, two Ravens, a Lark, Monsieur Wind and Madame Rain humorously, yet with some apprehension, comment on this new human invention. In the third act, Mme Fichini’s pitiful fall onto the branches of a tree, then a pile of manure, concludes Paul and Sophie’s act of revenge.

Following on from Jarry, Maeterlinck, and Craig, instances of humans being made into things, becoming dummies or mechanised began to proliferate in theatre and dance across Europe around the time of the First World War, making significant use of corporeal masks, plastic costumes, and animated models.¹⁶¹ On the miniature puppet stages, avant-garde poets radicalised these acting styles facilitated by the manipulation of strings, whilst also using mechanical or electrical effects in the figuration

¹⁵⁹ Beauchamp, *La Marionnette, laboratoire du théâtre*, 83.

¹⁶⁰ René Morax, ‘La Machine volante’, in *Théâtre de poupées* (Lausanne: Les Cahiers vaudois, 1917), 14.

¹⁶¹ Didier Plassard, *L’Acteur en effigie: Figures de l’homme artificiel dans le théâtre des avant-gardes historiques: Allemagne, France, Italie* (Lausanne: L’Âge d’homme/Institut International de la Marionnette, 1992).

of characters, which underscored the artificiality of their construction. In *Matoum et Tévibar*¹⁶² (1918) by Pierre Albert-Birot (1876–1967), the poet Matoum arrives by air on the planet Mars. When he recites a poem by Guillaume Apollinaire, Max Jacob, Philippe Soupault, or Pierre Reverdy, his head lights up: the walls of the scenery become multi-coloured, and the head of the King of Mars transforms into a joyous face. But the previous grey scenery and the king's sad face return when Tévibar, Matoum's negative double, recites mediocre decadent poems composed by the author before his adoption of Modernism in 1916.¹⁶³

In the three scenarios of the 'plastic dramas' that the Italian futurist Fortunato Depero (1892–1960) wrote in 1917—*Ladro automatico* (*Automatic Thief*), *Avventura elettrica* (*Electric Avenue*), and *Suicidi e omicidi acrobatici*¹⁶⁴ (*Acrobatic Suicides and Homicides*)—catastrophes, burlesque transformations, and car chases follow on from one another in a frenetic tempo that prefigures Tex Avery's cartoons. When an engineer and the wife of a station manager meet at a restaurant in *Ladro automatico*, they mechanically multiply their greetings to the point that the bowing man accidentally headbutts and kills a child. The couple then flees by car. When the station manager realises his wife's betrayal, one of his eyes grows enormously large and becomes green and shiny like a headlight. The man then pursues the lovers on the train tracks which twist, rise up, and drop down as if alive. A little later, three men who died in a rail accident are brought back to life by a short circuit and, shaking with tremors, head off on other adventures until their electrical charge runs out and they fall down inert.

The German dadaist Walter Mehring (1896–1981), author of *Einfach klassisch!*¹⁶⁵ (*A Great Classic!*, 1919), a parody of Aeschylus's *Oresteia* mocking the end of Kaiser Wilhelm II's reign, also uses the burlesque of mechanisation, mixed with the grotesque aesthetics of string-marionettes created by George Grosz and John Heartfield for the performance given

¹⁶² Pierre Albert-Birot, *Matoum et Tévibar* (Paris: Éditions SIC, 1918).

¹⁶³ Didier Plassard, 'L'écriture pour marionnettes de Pierre Albert-Birot', in *Pierre Albert-Birot (1876–1967) Un pyrogène des avant-gardes*, ed. Carole Aurouet and Marianne Simon-Oikawa (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2019), 193–205.

¹⁶⁴ Fortunato Depero, 'Ladro automatico', 'Avventura elettrica', 'Suicidi e omicidi acrobatici', in *Depero e la scena*, ed. Bruno Passamani (Turin: Martano, 1970).

¹⁶⁵ Walter Mehring, *Einfach klassisch! Eine Orestie mit glücklichem Ausgang* (Berlin: Adolph Fürstner, 1919).

at the Schall und Rauch cabaret in Berlin. A door with a target opens automatically and imitates a cuckoo whenever it is shot at with a firearm; a bathtub in the form of a steamboat brings Agamemnon and his mistress Kass Andra on stage; instead of being killed by Aegisth and Clytemnestra, Agamemnon is raised to the fly loft where he remains suspended by his strings. In the following act, Orest throws a grenade in the toilet cubical where Aegisth is taking refuge; the explosion makes Aegisth disappear into the toilet bowl, which, a few moments later, spits out his body in a pink light. In the final act, Woodrow Apollon, an amalgamation of the Greek god and the US President Thomas Woodrow Wilson, slowly descends from the sky to present his 14-point peace plan to Orest and the Steuereumeniden (Eumenides of Tax).

Though favoured by the futurists, dadaists, and constructivists, mechanised staging and dehumanised characters are less common in the puppet repertoires composed by the Spanish poets of the Generation of '27. This group placed more emphasis on the harmonisation of colours, shapes, and sounds to create complex theatrical images where speech is a lyrical extension rather than a conduit for the action. The most radical experiments developed with this model are two short poetic sketches by Rafael Alberti (1902–99): *La pajara pinta* (*The Speckled Bird*) and *El colorín colorado* (*The Red Goldfinch*). Alberti wrote them in 1926, after having watched a performance at the Teatro dei Piccoli founded by Vittorio Podrecca, a string-marionette theatre whose international reputation was built on the high-quality musical, pictorial, and chorographical elements of its shows. In these two plays designed as librettos for short operas,¹⁶⁶ Alberti orchestrated multiple voices that do not pronounce any phrases or sometimes even any comprehensible words: little fragments of rhymes, refrains, songs and lyrics accompanying children's games in *La pajara pinta*, presented by the author as a 'lyrical-farcical gibberish to dance to'; onomatopes and an imaginary language (or Latin for a parish priest) in *El colorín colorado*. In contrast, the elements of scenery with their different chromatic qualities and how they move are precisely described: the poet, as Héléne Beauchamp has analysed, sought a writing 'for musical ends, based plastically and dramaturgically on the naïve aesthetics of popular engraving, and taking the deconstruction of dialogue and language to

¹⁶⁶ Rafael Alberti, 'La pajara pinta', 'El colorín colorado', in *Teatro*, vol. 1 (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 2003).

the extreme'.¹⁶⁷ For Rafael Dieste (1899–1981), the puppet is used in a more traditional manner—for the possibilities that it offers to circumvent the laws of vraisemblance and realism. For example, in the plays of the collection *Retablo de fantoches*¹⁶⁸ (1933–36), a monster appears (*Farsa infantil de la fiera risueña*; *The Smiling Beast's Farce for Children*), the head of a character detaches and reattaches itself at will (*El falso faquir*; *The Fake Fakir*), and the protagonist and his wife climb all the way to the sky (*El Moro leal*; *The Loyal Moor*).

However, a poetic dramaturgy was not only developed through the prominence given to the signifying dimension of its components, whether by evidencing the artificial character of the puppets, liberating the performance from conventions of logic and vraisemblance, or playing with language; more discrete forms of double vision also contributed, such as puppets, referred to as such in the text, behaving like humans. An example is *Antes de começar*¹⁶⁹ (*Before Beginning*), a short piece written by the writer and painter Almada Negreiros (1883–1970) during a stay in Paris between 1919 and 1921, after the short-lived Portuguese futurist movement.¹⁷⁰ A few moments before the curtain is raised for the performance, a pair of puppets discuss in hushed tones their condition, their relationship to the world of humans, and their feelings. Puppets without characters, like actors marking a pause between two roles, the Boneco and the Boneca compare their personalities, discovering their similarities and sharing personal histories and intimate thoughts, like two children who are getting to know each other. No stage acting or visible trace serves as a reminder of their character of artefact, which is only mentioned in the dialogue; since they are designated as puppets and bear witness to their lived experience as puppets—for example, describing their construction—a double vision is fleetingly set up simply through speech. The honing of the story around this one point, that of a dialogue between puppets

¹⁶⁷ Beauchamp, *La Marionnette, laboratoire du théâtre*, 250.

¹⁶⁸ See Chapter 7.

¹⁶⁹ José Sobral de Almada Negreiros, *Antes de começar*, which is available online at <https://bibliotecadigital.agrcanelas.edu.pt/download/148/Antes%20de%20Comecar%20-%20Almada%20Negreiros.pdf>.

¹⁷⁰ See Catarina Firmo, 'Métamorphose et utopie: le corps marionnettique chez Almada Negreiros', in *L'Écriture littéraire pour marionnettes en Europe de l'Ouest (17^e–21^e siècles)*, ed. Carole Guidicelli (Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée, forthcoming 2025).

in which the spectators are led to recognise a part of themselves and untangle the emotional knots between identification and disassociation, is likely the most convincing demonstration of how language alone can offer new ways to develop the double vision inherent to the puppet as an unstable dramaturgical material, conveyor of connotations more than denotations, of the signifying process more than signification—in short, as a poetic material.¹⁷¹

The final stage of the fusion between writing for puppets and poetry was the creation, with the material means of the stage, of classic rhetorical figures of lyricism, a phenomenon already encountered within this study, but which appeared more frequently over a number of decades. From 1959 onwards, Tankred Dorst (1925–2017) observed that ‘through the puppet, the images of poetry become an immediate material reality’.¹⁷² Indeed, since the middle of the twentieth century, metaphors and metonymy have become increasingly present in puppeteers’ shows: spectators have become used to recognising people in parasols and umbrellas,¹⁷³ or the characters of the *Ubu* cycle in a basket of vegetables.¹⁷⁴ A folded hand can form the head of a chicken that is simultaneously an opera diva,¹⁷⁵ a transparent arm floating in space encounters beings whose torsos are topped with an eye or a flower.¹⁷⁶ The stage action itself is even becoming allegory: the pitiful end of a carrot led by desire to frenetically rub itself against a grater and transformed into a small pile of grated carrot ready to be eaten comically illustrates the ‘power of love’ and its dangers¹⁷⁷; feet made of ice walking across a warm surface and melting

¹⁷¹ Jean Cohen, *Structure du langage poétique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1966). See also Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*.

¹⁷² Tankred Dorst, *Auf kleiner Bühne. Versuche mit Marionetten* (Munich: Juventa-Verlag, 1959), 50. See also Mascha Erbelding, ‘From “Kleines Spiel” to big stage: The influence of puppet theatre on Tankred Dorst’s plays’, in *L’Écriture littéraire pour marionnettes en Europe de l’Ouest (17^e–21^e siècles)*, ed. Carole Guidicelli (Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée, forthcoming 2025).

¹⁷³ Yves Joly, *Ombrelles et parapluies* (1954).

¹⁷⁴ Babette Masson and Guilhem Pellegrin (Nada Théâtre), *Ubu* (1990), after Alfred Jarry.

¹⁷⁵ Claudio Cinelli, *Mani d’opera* (1984).

¹⁷⁶ Frank Soehnle (Figurentheater Tübingen), *Hôtel de Rive* (2011).

¹⁷⁷ Isabelle Darras (Night Shop Theatre), *Power of love* (2011).

just before finding refuge in a container of water constructs a poignant image of disappearance.¹⁷⁸

Faced with indirect or fragmentary modes of figuration becoming widespread amongst puppeteers, poets who write for this form of theatre are distinguished less by the originality of their choices than by the distribution of them within the theatrical action, the search of ‘distant and appropriate’¹⁷⁹ relationships between the elements linked by analogy as well as the challenges they pose for the theatrical performance. In their hands, the puppet transforms into an ‘idea-phor’ to use the concept forged by Guido Ceronetti (1927–2018) to designate the minuscule actors of his Teatro dei Sensibili (Theatre of the Senses): works or events concentrated in a gesture, a line, an image, or a shout.¹⁸⁰ In *Les Gens légers* (*Light People*), for example, Jean Cagnard (born 1955) evokes how the memory of the Holocaust weighs on the conscience through two images: one metaphorical (the shrinking sky) and the other metonymical (a character named Petit Tas de Cendres [Small Pile of Ash] that continually grows).¹⁸¹ In *L’Entonnoir* (*The Funnel*) by the same author, the protagonist Précair loses his arms after having lost his job. He attempts to replace them with two tree branches, bread and croissants emerge from his skull, then his legs fall off. Disguised as a green plant for a society reception, he is used as an ashtray and then as a urinal by the guests. Finally, his head remains stuck on the seat where he is lying down, it is temporarily replaced with a bottle and gradually the job seeker transforms into a dog.¹⁸² Developments such as these demonstrate that puppet theatre is no longer borrowing techniques from poetic writing: what is shown is literally constructed as a poem, between flashes of brilliance and enigmas.

¹⁷⁸ Élise Vigneron (Théâtre de l’Entrouvert), *Impermanence* (2011).

¹⁷⁹ ‘The more relationships between two realities brought together are distant and appropriate, the stronger the image will be and the more emotive power and poetic reality it will have’: Pierre Reverdy, ‘L’image’ (1918), in *Nord-Sud, Self-Defence et autres écrits sur l’art et la poésie (1917–1926)* (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), 73.

¹⁸⁰ Guido Ceronetti, *Mystic Luna-Park* (Oderzo: Becco Giallo, 1988).

¹⁸¹ Jean Cagnard, *Les Gens légers* (Montpellier: Espaces 34, 2006).

¹⁸² Jean Cagnard, *L’Entonnoir* (Montreuil: Éditions théâtrales, 2007).

SPLITTING THE STAGE

At the start of the twentieth century, the return of devices of theatre-within-theatre, first imitating those of the baroque stage, initiated a third form of experimentation through which poets and writers explored the specificities of theatrical writing for puppets and opened up the avenue for the contemporary transformation of this art. *La senda del amor* (*The Path of Love*, 1905), which Jacinto Benavente included in the second edition of his *Teatro fantástico*, is presented as a brief moral fable performed by puppets at the invitation of the poet in front of a Marquise, so that she understands that ‘deaths must not hinder the path of love’.¹⁸³ This life lesson translates as carnage in the puppet theatre: when the curtain is raised, Celia discovers the body of a rival killed by Leandro who, interrogated by Celia, mentions other victims of his jealousy. Polichinela enters on stage to criticise Leandro’s behaviour and is soon killed. Lastly, Isabela, Leandro’s spurned lover, reproaches him for his infidelity before leaving to put an end to her days. The contrast between the detached tone of the conversation between the two spectators and the violence that is unleashed inside the puppet booth acts as an indicator of the urges hidden by the mask of social hypocrisy.

In 1906, Arthur Schnitzler (1862–1931) compiled three one-act plays in a volume entitled *Marionetten*,¹⁸⁴ of which only *Zum grossen Wurstel* (*To the Great Hanswurst*, 1901–04) makes use of glove puppets and string-marionettes at the same time as actors. The action takes place at Prater amusement park in Vienna. Whilst a glove puppeteer performs silent Hanswurst farces in a puppet booth at the side, a group of spectators take their places in front of an open-air cabaret stage occupying the centre of the scenery for a performance given by string-marionettes. The play in verse that they perform (a grandiose and parodic story of thwarted adulterous romance) is constantly interrupted by the comments from the spectators, the theatre’s director, and the playwright. Other incidents occur, such as the entry of a wrestler who, against all expectations, is pushed off stage by one of the marionettes; the discovery of a woman’s body; and a shooting number. Death’s arrival causes excitement amongst the audience, and the confusion between the two levels of fiction reaches

¹⁸³ Jacinto Benavente, ‘La senda del amor’, in *Teatro fantástico* (Madrid: Imprenta de Fortanet, 1905), 59.

¹⁸⁴ Arthur Schnitzler, *Marionetten* (Berlin: Fischer, 1906).

its height when one of the marionettes calls out the author to reproach him for having caused this chaos as he did not know how to conclude the play. Finally, a stranger suddenly arrives and cuts all the marionette's visible strings with his sword and then the humans' invisible strings. Marionettes and humans collapse, but they then get back up again when the theatre director starts his opening pitch once more.

From the first decades of the twentieth century, the introduction of puppets acting within live theatre meant they spilled out from the enclosed space in which the setting of a stage box inside another had ordinarily kept them. The coexistence of different modes of representation on the same stage may produce confrontation or competition, like in Schnitzler's work, yet it can also depict a fragmentation of identities. The Italian futurist poet Luciano Folgore (1888–1966), for example, wrote the 'dramatic synthesis' *Ombre + fantocci + uomini*¹⁸⁵ (*Shadows + Puppets + Humans*, 1920), in which three characters are surrounded by their doubles: in front, a string-marionette, and behind, a projected shadow. The characters—two men and a woman—are performed by actors who already appear split in two, between the time of being awake and the time of sleep. Their diurnal voice expresses a reasoned and socially acceptable point of view, while their nocturnal voice gives free rein to desire. Their doubles accentuate this first dissociation: the shadow reveals the unconscious, darker face of their personality, whilst the puppet summarises everything through burlesque gesticulation.

In *The Drama for Fools*,¹⁸⁶ a gigantic theatrical cycle for puppets begun in 1914 but never completed whose performance was intended to span an entire year, the director and theatre theorist Edward Gordon Craig (1872–1966) imagines complex theatrical devices that are juxtaposed or inserted, allowing certain characters to appear in successive episodes of the cycle—for example, the journey of Cockatrice, an incarnation of hypocrisy, from the creation of the world until the start of the twentieth century—or its interludes, and sometimes comment upon them. There are no live actors in this lengthy, unclassifiable theatrical project, but several modes of figuration coexist: string-marionettes, glove puppets,

¹⁸⁵ Luciano Folgore, 'Ombre + fantocci + uomini', *Roma futurista* 2, no. 66 (1920).

¹⁸⁶ Edward Gordon Craig, *Le Théâtre des fous/The Drama for Fools*, ed. Didier Plassard, Marion Chénétier-Alev, and Marc Duveillier (Montpellier: L'Entretemps, 2012).

shadows, and silhouettes. In *Shopping* (1916), for example, the string-marionette a Real Lady enters a shop to choose a ‘foil’ to accompany her in her social engagements. The Shopman, who only appears as a shadow projected onto the interior wall of the shop, advises her on different models. The first, Real Horror, frightens the young woman. The second is a gigantic van Gogh with only his feet and lower legs visible; the rest of his body is lost in the fly loft. Yet this model makes growling noises when it hears people talk about money, which deters the client. She decides upon the small string-marionette of a Real Gentleman, a tailor’s dummy in tops and tails, who trots along on all fours. She takes him on a lead to call upon her friends. The silhouettes of Charles Darwin and John Ruskin, who comment on the action, appear behind the shop window, whilst, in a second scene below the first, three character-spectators who cross the entire theatrical cycle, Buddha, Ahah, and the parrot Columbus, decide to time travel and leave for a century or two in the past, but not without having firmly closed the window that separates the two stage boxes to prevent the Real Lady and her era from returning to the *Drama for Fools*.¹⁸⁷ Despite their different modes of incarnation, the characters share the same space, so they can interact within the same action (the Shopman and Real Lady). They can be witnesses, simply separated by a scenery wall (Darwin and Ruskin), or even develop on a distinct level of the story and on another stage (Buddha, Ahah, Columbus). Whatever their degree of involvement or not in the interlude, they do not participate in any parallel action and do not endanger the cohesion of the whole: the position of the audience, not the dramatic action itself, is put into perspective by these fictional spectators.

In contrast, in *Siepe a nordovest*¹⁸⁸ (*A Hedge in the Northwest*, 1919), a ‘farce in prose and music’ by Massimo Bontempelli (1878–1960), three concurrent actions happen within the same theatrical space. The characters played by actors—a woman and two men—are caught in a classic adultery plot: a woman and her lover endeavour to hide their relationship from the husband, who is immobile after a fall and watches them

¹⁸⁷ Craig, ‘Shopping’, in *The Drama for Fools/Le Théâtre des fous*, 304–09.

¹⁸⁸ Massimo Bontempelli, *Siepe a nordovest* (Rome: Valori Plastici, 1922). See Cristina Grazioli, ‘États de présence: acteurs, marionnettes à fil, marionnettes à gaine sur les scènes de *Siepe a nordovest* de Massimo Bontempelli’, in *L’Écriture littéraire pour marionnettes en Europe de l’Ouest (17^e–21^e siècles)*, ed. Carole Guidicelli (Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée, forthcoming 2025).

from the window of a house overlooking the garden that serves as the play's scenery. There, string-marionettes appear in a parallel dimension invisible to the humans. The little characters need to construct a fence to protect their city from the northwesterly wind, so they sawed the post that the husband's hammock was attached to, resulting in the fall that immobilised him. When, at the wife's request, the couple's servant brings on stage a screen that allows the lovers to escape the husband's watchful eye, the arrival of this unexpected rampart is welcomed by the string-marionettes who believe it is a miracle. Its construction is credited to the hero who receives the hand of the king's daughter as a reward. Neither group is conscious of the existence of the other in the same space, but the modifications to the environment carried out by the humans or the marionettes have consequences for all. A third level of presence accompanies this device: in a puppet booth placed at the forestage, two glove puppets, Colombina and Napoleone, intervene for the prologue and short comic interludes in which they laugh at the accidents and the misunderstandings created by these two neighbouring populations being unaware of each other.

Other plays from the interwar period placed several regimes of figuration side by side on stage. In Luigi Pirandello's *I giganti della montagna* (*The Giants of the Mountain*, 1931–33), the 'fantocci' fall silent and still as soon as living beings enter their territory; and in the *Burlilla de Don Berrendo, Doña Caracolines y su amante* (*Short Farce for Don Berrendo, Doña Caracolines and Her Lover*, 1936) by José Ricardo Morales (1915–2016), the puppeteer attempts to oppose the plots of his own puppets. This technique reached its full development in the last third of the twentieth century, when it aligned with the evolving practices of artists and companies. During this period, the exit from the puppet booth and the principle of visible control began to become the predominant mode of staging puppets; this choice was first motivated by the desire to benefit from the network of theatre venues, which profoundly modified the puppeteer's ways of working, completing the transformations underway since the end of the Second World War. First as visible controllers on stage, then acting partners with their devices in distinct imaginary worlds, the puppeteers have become actors interacting with simulacra that they may or may not control. Thereafter, it was necessary to give meaning to the new staging techniques uniting puppets and living actors in the same visual field: a dramaturgy needed to be constructed. Whether in dialogue with artistic teams or in the solitary work of writing, writers contributed

to the development of this plural dramaturgy from the 1970s onwards by experimenting with the possibilities of different modes of presence sharing the stage. Often this choice led to reinforcing contrasts by imagining puppets as almost immobile and silent, as enigmatic and unnerving absent-presences. No longer ‘puppet theatre’ but ‘theatre with puppets’, these works have opened up an unprecedented imaginary space at the intersection of poetry and fantasy.

The playwright François Billetdoux (1927–91), for example, wrote two shows at the start of the 1970s which brought together actors, paintings, sculptures, sonorous objects, and large human-sized puppets created by the painter Jacques Voyet. Billetdoux himself played the leading role in these two productions that staged different facets of his biography, interweaving dreams and memories acted out or recounted by amplifying modes of presence and temporal levels: recorded voice-overs, mobile sculptures, painted portraits suddenly spotlighted and speaking, a tale told to the participating microphone, alongside the puppets and their controllers, to develop a ‘multimedia’¹⁸⁹ theatre with significant dramaturgical complexity. In the first of these plays, *Ne m’attendez pas ce soir* (*Don’t Wait for Me This Evening*, 1971), a single human-sized puppet is present, but almost always immobile, first as a pile of rags then as a feminine icon in which the memory of a lost mother is lodged until it sits up with a long cry ‘of pleasure and birth’.¹⁹⁰ In the second, *Les Veuves* (*The Widows*, 1972), 21 puppets populate the back of the stage. At two metres high, they are controlled by puppeteers dressed in black with their faces covered like in the Japanese Bunraku tradition, whilst an orphaned child is represented by a small fabric puppet animated by an actress. Emerging from and disappearing into the shadows, silent presences (the eponymous widows) haunt a village where all the men have left. They smother Oncle Rouge-et-or, who returns to the places of his childhood at the request of three young girls who were worried about the fate of the orphan-puppet. In a way that was still unusual for the time, the puppeteers fleetingly quit the role of operators to become characters—for

¹⁸⁹ François Billetdoux invented the concept of a multimedia author and was one of the founders of the copyright collective, the Société Civile des Auteurs Multimédia in 1981.

¹⁹⁰ François Billetdoux, *Ne m’attendez pas ce soir* (Arles: Actes Sud-Papiers, 1994), 60.

example, one of them is attacked and thrown to the ground by the figure he controls.¹⁹¹

A year after *Les Veuves*, Jacques Voyet made the puppet Cancre for René de Obaldia's (1918–2022) play *Classe terminale* (*Graduating Class*)¹⁹²: it features another immobile and silent character, a large sad clown unaware of the homages of his classmates who freed him from the prison where he was locked up and attempt to reawaken his memories. Though he is mute, they are persuaded of his divine nature and address their prayers to him, but the puppet suddenly moves and kills the teenagers by simply pointing his finger at them. Other confrontations between a group of actors and an unanimated puppet are found in two plays by Edward Bond (1934–2024), *The Children*¹⁹³ (1999) and *The Under Room*¹⁹⁴ (2005). Here, the relationship is reversed: a dummy is subject to a violent outburst from the actors. In *The Children*, the schoolboy Joe, with the help of his classmates, massacre his double by throwing bricks at it; in *The Under Room*, an illegal immigrant is discovered in the basement of a house by the woman living there. The immigrant, represented at once by a dummy and an actor who doubles him, is protected by the woman until he refuses to leave with her to flee the dictatorship that is cracking down around them. Out of spite, she stabs him, stamps on him, and disembowels him. The doubling of the character in two concurrent incarnations, 'Dummy' and 'Dummy-Actor', allows him to be involved in the action and the dialogue, and to reveal, in the most extreme way, how violence is unleashed upon him.

The use of puppets allows playwrights to intensify the performance of violence, to take the grotesque even further as Daniel Lemahieu (1946–2015) does in *L'Ogre et la poupée* (*The Ogre and the Doll*, 2010), a 'score for objects, actors, shadows, and puppets, accompanied by stellar

¹⁹¹ François Billetdoux, *Les Veuves*, Fonds Billetdoux, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms 4-COL-162 (314) et Ms 4-COL-162 (315–16). The text published in *L'Avant-scène théâtre* 571 (1975) is a rewriting of the show in narrative form and does not contain this instruction. See Didier Plassard, 'De Ne m'attendez pas ce soir aux Veuves, l'écriture avec marionnettes de François Billetdoux', *Komodo* 21 24 (2015), which is available online at <https://komodo21.numerev.com/articles/revue-4/3012-de-ne-m-attendez-pas-ce-soir-aux-veuves-l-ecriture-avec-marionnettes-de-francois-billetdoux>.

¹⁹² René de Obaldia, 'Classe terminale', in *Théâtre*, vol. 5 (Paris: Grasset, 1973).

¹⁹³ Edward Bond, *The Children & I Have None* (London: Methuen Drama, 2000).

¹⁹⁴ Edward Bond, 'The Under Room', in *The Chair Plays* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

melodies, noise music, and noises from the mouth'. Its actors are responsible for giving life to the puppeteer Mimmo, the ogre Harpo, the doll Lily, and the rag cuddly toy Kouki: they massacre each other, give torturous 'puppet lessons' that dismantle them, rip each other into pieces, eat each other in a monstrous cannibal feast, entrap each other in sexual games and requests of love (Illustration 8.3). Even body parts seem animated by destructive urges:

*(All of a sudden, in the cemetery, a leg and an arm set about making themselves puppets: a Guignol-leg armed with a knife against a Polichinelle-leg armed with a cleaver. A theatre of prosthetics; a puppet booth of screams and breakages. They fight and injure each other. They hate each other and reconcile. And begin again. Worse than humans. Worse. Lili and Kouki take refuge in a corner. Frightened. Invisible.)*¹⁹⁵



Illustration 8.3 Daniel Lemahieu, *L'Ogre et la poupée*, directed by François Lazaro (Clastic Théâtre), 2010. Photograph: Christophe Loiseau

¹⁹⁵ Daniel Lemahieu, *L'Ogre et la poupée* (Pézenas: Domens, 2010), 61.

Puppets, dummies, and other artificial bodies are thus the instruments through which theatre can attempt to approach the performance of evil and, in particular, the part of inhumanity that inhumanity itself must confront.

The same devices can represent disabled or sick bodies and liminal states such as birth or extreme ageing. In *Or You Could Kiss Me*¹⁹⁶ (2010), a text written for the Handspring Puppet Theatre, Neil Bartlett (born 1958) portrays the South African company's two founding puppeteers, Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones, controlling their own ageing doubles in 2036, one of which, Old B., is on the cusp of dying from emphysema. These two old men, as they are about to die, reminisce about the brilliance of their first meeting in 1971 at the age of 20: caught between the memories of their youth and their anticipated physical decline, the puppeteers become the carers of their doubles, the startling emblems of their bodies' transformations and the fleetingness of existence.

As Carole Guidicelli¹⁹⁷ has analysed, one of the emerging functions of the puppet on the contemporary stage is the power to show, through the focused attention that the smallest movements awaken, the most fragile and insubstantial states of living beings, their disappointments, their limitations, and their errors. The coexistence of actors and puppets in the same space is thus a measurement of the human condition, its successes, and its failures. The device offers a lens through which both a reduction of possibilities and a surpassing of what is possible through the power of the imagination can be observed. This imagination has the power to create a back-world, like the transparent glass bodies of the figures who double the protagonists in Howard Barker's (born 1946) *The Swing at Night*¹⁹⁸ (2001), which opens up behind them an enigmatic dimension, an undoubtable beauty in the sordid universe that contains them.

However, the imagination can also spread in the world like the imaginary creatures of Giuliano Scabia (1935–2021), the 'golden poet'.¹⁹⁹ He draws on two founding experiences: first, the 1973 construction of a

¹⁹⁶ Neil Bartlett, *Or You Could Kiss Me* (London: Oberon, 2010).

¹⁹⁷ Carole Guidicelli, 'Le geste défaillant de la marionnette', *Komodo 21* (forthcoming 2025).

¹⁹⁸ Howard Barker, *The Swing at Night* (Richmond: Calder Editions, 2001).

¹⁹⁹ Massimo Marina, *Il poeta d'oro. Il gran teatro immaginario di Giuliano Scabia* (Florence: La Casa Usher, 2023).

gigantic blue horse Marco Cavallo created with the patients at a psychiatric hospital in Trieste to celebrate the end of their sectioning; and, second, the numerous singing parades of *Gorilla Quadrumàno* (1974–75), a travelling performance by university students from Bologna using the manuscript of a comedy previously played by peasants from the Emilia region. Thereafter, Scabia composed a mythology that was at once personal and provided through sharing, populated by fabric and cardboard cut-out figures, dummy heads and giant puppets, masks and costumes of the angel or the Devil. The ‘Prologue in the Sky’ from *Fantastica visione* (1973) is a scene for ‘actors, characters, people, glove puppets, shadows, and voice’, in which Scabia reuses the popular legend of a butcher selling the flesh of his own clients to create an allegory of consumerist society. The Teatro Vagante (Roaming Theatre), simultaneously cave, house, crib, and chariot, falls from the fly loft before the actors’ eyes, and they marvel at having been able to see a fantastic vision of the ‘theatre of gods’. One of the actors offers a correction: ‘Images produced by us – nothing more.’ It is in this tension of the gaze between the power of the imaginary world and the materiality assumed by its production that puppetry, today as yesterday, draws its extraordinary vigour.

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Conclusion

LIMITATIONS, NOT BORDERS

There is no simple answer to the following question: what does it mean to write for the puppet? The same would be true of writing for theatre in general. However, in this book's analysis of works from Western Europe over the course of more than four centuries—in reality, a minuscule part of the activities of puppeteers—one common factor clearly emerges: the contexts of production have a greater impact on writing shows than the puppetry devices themselves. Though the same devices may have been used across different time periods, it is the contexts—economic means, target audiences, and performance conditions—that determine the main dramaturgical directions of puppet theatre.

The humble glove puppet confined to its booth has been used for a multitude of very different purposes: improvised shows, linked routines transmitted through oral tradition, acts based on scenarios, written acts that retained some improvisation, entirely fixed dialogue, and plays in verse. It could feature in parodies or fantastic dramas, grotesque farces, or moralising fables. The same diversity is also found for marionettes: rod, string, or combining rod and string. Whilst contemporary creative processes generally involve artistic teams choosing the animation techniques, constructing the devices, and defining the role of the actor-puppeteer, the question of whether the puppet dramaturgy possesses a specificity, understood as a series of constraints determining the works

that would be possible or not to bring to the stage, makes less sense than ever.

Contemporary artists even draw energy from setting themselves challenges, and the suggestion that a given repertoire might be impracticable for them only fuels their desire to test it out: in the aesthetic regime of art,¹ once the belief in the existence of domains fit for each discipline has been dispelled, artistic creation continually surpasses the limitations assigned. The limitations that usually surround puppets (they cannot take on texts that are too long, they cannot remain immobile when they ‘speak’, realism and psychological depth are not permitted) must always be carefully scrutinised: the texts examined here show that these limitations have often been transgressed and are likely to be even more so in future. Aside from some practical considerations for the format of performances—reduced-sized actors require an additional level of concentration that audiences cannot maintain for a very long time—it seems that the main limitations of puppet theatre are entirely individual factors, relating to talent, inventiveness, and, of course, the means at the artist’s disposal.

The path traced throughout this research has not led to the circumscription of a domain reserved for the puppetry arts. The goal was not to establish a general history of Western European puppet theatres or to create an inventory of all the repertoires they performed. Writing such a history would have involved studying revivals, adaptations, and imitations (parodic or otherwise) of live theatre in much more depth. Documentary traces and existing studies show that for centuries, a great many popular puppet theatres brought successes from large theatres to audiences that were hard to reach due to their living standards or geographical location. Future research might fruitfully compare these two repertoires to highlight the choices made by puppeteers. This would require collecting a large corpus of data comprising announcements in newspapers, police reports, manuscripts submitted to the censor, and the archives of performance venues and artists. Only after having carried out such a quantitative investigation would it be possible to write a history of theatrical practices that compared what actors performed and what puppeteers performed in the same region during the same period and, thereafter, analyse in depth their respective strategies of complementarity and competition. Despite

¹ Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, trans. Zakir Paul (London/New York: Verso, 2013).

all the efforts already made in this direction, it remains an impossible endeavour at present.

CONVERGENCE LINES WITHIN THE PUPPET DRAMATURGY

Despite its broad geographical scope, the approach chosen for this book was much more straightforward: by analysing texts written or rewritten specifically for puppets, it sought to examine how awareness of the specific qualities of these devices gradually formed from their history, and how it contributed to redrawing the contours of this art after its former conditions of existence had disappeared. This story, as it was presented here, remains incomplete in several respects: many preserved or documented works do not feature or are only mentioned briefly. Had space allowed me to examine them more closely, additional nuance or different insights into the phenomena observed may have been gained at certain points. These absences are notably perceptible in the most recent decades, a time in which the exponential growth of producing shows sometimes makes it difficult to grasp the internal movements within the artistic landscape that they construct. The complexity of this landscape still needs to be mapped out, yet it was not one of the aims of this study.²

Recent evolutions in the puppet dramaturgy were outlined here through a reading focused on written traces. Another possible approach would be to centre the growing importance of visual artists, painters, sculptors, figure and theatrical object makers, the indispensable partners in this art where speech and image are so closely connected. As a result, the variety of aesthetic choices by contemporary companies would be further highlighted, and the impact of the main twentieth-century artistic moments (avant-garde movements, abstract art, Arte Povera, Outsider Art) would likely appear decisive. Yet, this history, which is already well documented,³ only really began in the twentieth century. Focusing too heavily upon it would have overshadowed what the ERC *PuppetPlays* research project intended to do: to highlight the extraordinary diversity of

² The interactive map on the ERC *PuppetPlays* project website nevertheless offers a first glimpse at the diversity of aesthetics for the puppet, including for the contemporary period: <https://puppetplays.eu/base-de-donnees?view=MAP>.

³ See Henryk Jurkowski, *Métamorphoses, la marionnette au XX^e siècle* (Montpellier: L'Entretemps, 2008), as well as the journal *Puck: la marionnette et les autres arts* 1–20 (1988–2014).

practices and puppet imaginaries constructed by previous generations and, in doing so, reveal the continuities, discontinuities, and transfers between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’, leading to the transmission of tools and the invention of new usages.

My hypothesis of a slowly maturing awareness of the specific qualities of puppetry devices could not be tested by following the usual route of aesthetic concerns and studying theoretical reflections on the subject. The corpus of frequently cited essays by Heinrich von Kleist, George Sand, Alfred Jarry, Paul Claudel, and Edward Gordon Craig is ultimately rather thin and discontinuous. Given that it sheds very little light on the material reality of puppet shows, it could not have served as a guide for this study. The often-swift formulations found in these texts have been inexhaustible sources of inspiration for artists; yet their singularity means they have almost no utility for historians. Only by analysing texts written for puppets and a corpus of documentary evidence could the working hypothesis formulated at the beginning of this project be verified. Thereafter, the emergence of a collective awareness of the specific qualities of puppets appeared as the only possible explanation for their contemporary resurgence, which has now been underway for a little over half a century. Even if they were not explicitly formulated, these qualities needed to be tested and identified before artists and writers could employ puppets in contexts of production and reception that were radically different from the previous generations. This re-appropriation of puppets was all the more surprising as it has been extending to other branches of live performance: theatre of *mise-en-scène*, dance, street theatre, and performance art.

Being aware of the qualities of puppetry devices does not mean that a domain reserved for them has been identified, but rather that puppeteers and artists have understood how their use can bring a particular efficiency to certain systems and symbolic processes, sometimes superior to that of live theatre, sometimes simply different from it. Many of these qualities, as was demonstrated in the previous chapters, relate to the visual and spectacular dimension of the performance: playing on different scales; easily performing changes of scenery, apparitions, supernatural movements and metamorphoses; emphasising the presence of materials, the construction, and the control gestures. Others relate to the sociological or political order: the roots in popular traditions, the spontaneous attention of children, the schematisation of conflicts, and the visibility given to a non-anthropocentric representation of the world. Others concern

poetics: freedom from logic and *vraisemblance*, the capacity to create metaphors, metonymies, and allegories with the material means of theatre, working on the signifying process rather than the signification, playing with ambiguities between inert matter and living body.

All these qualities are perceptible in the writings that document works destined for the stage, whether produced prior to their performance in texts written for puppets, or in subsequent recorded or collected traces. In doing so, they establish the contours of what has been called a ‘puppet dramaturgy’, even if some of the traits listed can indeed be found in other theatrical contexts. Taking this examination further would allow for a distinction to be made between the properties that are specific to the puppet, such as acting on different scales, metamorphoses, or the uncertainty between body and matter, and those shared with other, minor or marginal, theatrical forms, even with certain production contexts. To cite but a few examples: shows by amateur groups (living Nativity scenes, peasant farces, carnival acts, mummers’ plays, ‘*maggio drammatico*’, and so on) also have roots in popular tradition; the freedom from logic and *vraisemblance* runs through a large part of the experimental dramaturgies from the twentieth century, from avant-garde movements to the theatre of the absurd in the 1950s and 1960s; and the schematisation of conflicts and the allegorical treatment of the action are typical techniques in agitprop or militant theatres.

Taken together or separately, these observable qualities have no prescriptive value. They alone do not predetermine what should be a ‘good’ text for puppets. When combined, they may create a work that is too finely tuned or too polished, which could end up being counter-productive. Instead, they are the lines of convergence within the puppet dramaturgy, the directions where it diverges from the dominant models of theatrical writing to expand the spectrum of what is possible to say or do on stage. Theatre with puppets, especially in terms of how it is practised today, must be considered as an expanded form of theatre: a theatre whose expressive means are not reduced, but rather very much enhanced by the exploration of these lines of convergence, in the confrontation between words, things, and matter, the silence and inertia of the non-living, the raw violence and the ethereal beauty of figures, the indirect language of poetry and the multiple modes of existence for non-human agents.

ANOTHER HISTORY OF THE THEATRICAL TEXT

Closely examining texts written by puppeteers showed that they bear traces of this progressive awareness of the specific qualities of puppetry devices. Often anonymous and transmitted or refashioned from generation to generation, they bear witness to another history of the theatrical text. This history did not keep in step with the successive aesthetic movements and acts of rupture, but it was influenced by more complex interactions between stage practices and public expectations in which works were being transformed rather than disappearing. It is thus a slower history: some repertoires lasted for almost two centuries, genres developed against the trends of their times—for example, Nativity acts in the middle of the Enlightenment—and even major theatrical reforms, such as the imposition of the norms of Aristotelian classicism, went unheeded. Since they addressed much more socially and geographically diverse audiences than those of the large stages of live theatre, puppeteers' shows were developed, evolved, and disappeared according to their own temporalities, which only corresponds to the usual historiography of the performing arts in a very approximate way.

The linear sequencing of European theatre history, with its defined periods (baroque, Classicism, Romanticism, Realism, Symbolism, etc.), is much less applicable to puppet theatre: it reveals many more divergences than meeting points. Based on a very hierarchical approach to literary history, where even genres as important as melodrama, the *féerie*, and vaudeville are barely attributed a place, this periodisation cannot accommodate many of the phenomena observed within this research. For example, from the middle of the nineteenth to the first decades of the twentieth century, medieval epic matter captivated popular audiences in several regions of Europe to the point that spectators followed a new episode each evening and strongly identified with its heroes. If these tales were to be included in dominant histories of literature, it would be necessary to dilute the definition and temporal limits of Romantic theatre. At the same time, the formal liberties of puppet theatre, which meant that its texts were given the status of marginal works without commercial value or symbolic prestige beyond their circle of spectators, allowed evolutions to emerge more quickly than is generally observed in the dramatic production of their time—at several points, its narrative techniques foreshadowed those of cinema, cartoons, or comic books. The comic techniques and storytelling methods that would be developed more fully in the twentieth

century were invented in puppet theatres and optical shows. More generally, the reduced dimensions offered a space of radical experimentation in which theatrical techniques, such as those of the baroque stage or the Romantic *féerie*, could be pushed to their extreme limits.

Through the necessary detour of the itineraries traced by the history of dramatic literature, the study of written texts for puppets brings rich insight that challenges the simplifying outlines of a linear historiography. Not only does it favour an account that includes the cultural complexity of a given time period, the heritages it preserved, and the forces that ran through it, each with their own trajectory, but it also requires renouncing any arbitrary distribution of value, even any form of symbolic hierarchy between the observed phenomena. Drawing on mostly unpublished corpuses and thus without any preliminary selection, the analysis had to focus on a very large sample of works to arrive at the most objective results possible. For this reason, genres like military plays, saints' lives, Nativity acts, bandit tales, dramas based on news stories, and theatrical epics were included. Though some of these repertoires found their place on stage in shows supported through patronage, amateur companies, and society theatres, they remained unpublished and are still neglected by historians. This study thus confirms the necessity of reassessing several of the parameters with which the history of Western theatre, even for more recent periods, is generally written. Space should be made for stages other than the great theatrical institutions of capital cities, for genres other than those that have long been shrouded in literary dignity, for authorial statuses other than that of individual playwrights, and for ways of epitomising an era other than ruptures with the past. Continuities are just as significant as discontinuities, transmissions and reinterpretations are just as important as innovations. One final look at the dramaturgy of puppet theatres illustrates this principle.

Identified and progressively demonstrated by puppeteers, the qualities of puppetry devices were taken up and developed in the works of poets and writers. By experimenting with these qualities, authors established written traces that remain accessible today, thus conferring longevity and visibility to them as traditional theatre was in the process of disappearing. To cite one example, the transformation characters, which simultaneously play with the puppets' resemblance to a human being and its potential dismemberment as an object, first appeared in popular shows, like so many comical attractions: detachable head, double face, extending neck, and body transformable at will. These metamorphoses were then used by

writers to serve more complex dramaturgies in the registers of the supernatural, the fantastic, or poetic lyricism. The fantasy of a body that can transform and be disassembled thus found new purpose to the point that it now represents a plurality of meaning, one of the classic techniques of the puppet dramaturgy, employed by authors or companies.

Therefore, this study should be read as a history of transmission. The organisation of the material to recount it only makes sense from this perspective. By differentiating between popular forms and aristocratic forms, theatre for children and theatre for all, the role of artists and the role of writers, the different routes taken by the puppetry arts could be identified and precisely mapped out. Yet these routes converged in the final decades of the twentieth century, and it is no longer possible to distinguish between them. New training schemes and new working conditions for the actor-puppeteer have emerged and transformed puppet theatre into theatre with puppets: no longer a distinct domain, or, more precisely, a mosaic of distinct micro-domains within the performing arts, but one of the languages of the contemporary stage, used to varying levels of concentration depending on individual artists or their projects. The lines of convergence of the puppet dramaturgy have become a shared reality, as can be observed both in writing and in staging decisions, surpassing all the limits that previously contained it.

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