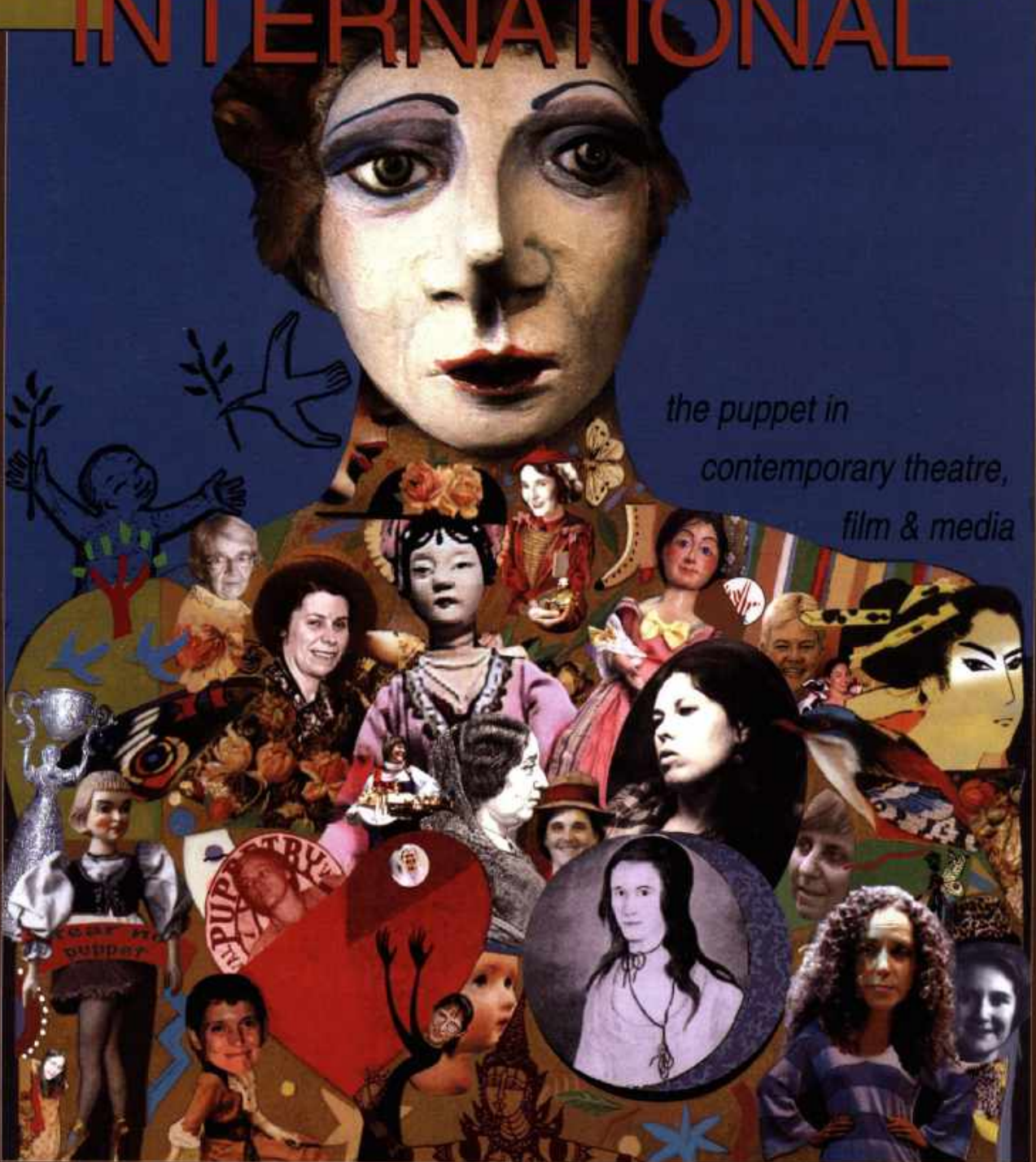


P

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

*the puppet in
contemporary theatre,
film & media*



WOMEN

- Russian Modernists • George Sand Speaks
- India's Feminist Divide

\$5.95 US \$7.95 CAN



43

0 074470 875116

Basil Twist's

SYMPHONIE FANTASTIQUE

Hear it with your eyes.

**"BOGGLES
THE MIND!**

**True magic, with wit that
goes beyond words."**

-Ben Brantley, The New York Times

The underwater gem, in a brand-new setting

Telecharge.com (212)239-6200

↳ Dodger Stages, 340 West 50th St., NYC

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

the puppet in contemporary theatre, film & media

issue no. 16

The Editor's Page 2

O PIONEER WOMEN!

Russian Women in the Silver Age <i>by Dassia Posner</i>	4
Pauline Benton <i>by Stephen Kaplin</i>	11
George Sand <i>by Stephen Carter</i>	16
Feminist Divide in India <i>by Anna Sobel</i>	20
Helen Haiman Joseph <i>a memoir</i>	22
Loie Fuller <i>by Hanne Tierney</i>	26
"Petrushka" (<i>an entre Eflimova script!</i>) <i>trans. Dassia Posner</i>	29
Automata (<i>new group with Janie Geiser and Susan Simpson</i>).....	33
Sue Hastings <i>by Doris Grubidge</i>	34

ON STAGE

A Visit to Remember <i>by Norman Roessler</i>	36
---	----

BOOKS

Adventures of a Russian Puppet Theatre <i>by Dassia Posner</i>	24
Marionette Theater of the Symbolist Era <i>review by Dassia Posner</i>	43

IN MEMORIAM

Peter Baird, 1952-2004 <i>by Joseph Jacoby</i>	48
--	----



UNIMA-USA

c/o Center for Puppetry Arts
1404 Spring Street, NW
Atlanta, GA 30309 USA
404-873-3089
www.unima-usa.org

Production

Terrie Ilaria, Lillian Meier
STEINWAY STUDIO
Kittery, ME

Print Consultant

Gary Stratton
GPRINT FIRST
gprintfirst@aol.com

ON THE COVER:

"Girls and Dolls"
by B. Periale



This project is supported, in part, by an award
from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Editor

Andrew Periale
56 Woodland Drive
Strafford, NH 03884
ap3001@worldpath.net

Designer/Assistant Editor

Bonnie Periale

Editorial Advisor

Leslee Asch

Historian

John Bell

Media Review Editor

Donald Devet

Advertising

Reay Kaplan
reaypuppet@yahoo.com

Distribution

Lia Powell

Advisors

Vince Anthony
Eileen Blumenthal
Meg Daniel
Norman Frisch
Stephen Kaplin
Mark Levenson
Michael Malkin
Dassia Posner
Hanne Tierney
Amy Trompetter

Puppetry International is a publication of
UNIMA-USA, Inc., American Center of the
UNION INTERNATIONALE de la
MARIONNETTE (known as "UNIMA").

Board of Directors, UNIMA-USA, Inc.

Founding President JIM HENSON
President Marianne Tucker
V.P. Mary Robinette Kowal
Treasurer Kathy Foran
Archivist Bradford Clark
Drew Allison
John Bell
Kathy Foley
Kuang-Yu Fong
Reay Kaplan
Manuel Moran
Gretchen Van Lente

Ex-Officio Board Members

General Secretary Vincent Anthony*
Publications Andrew Periale
Bonnie Periale
Consultants & Leslee Asch
Councilors Cheryl Henson
Allelu Kurten
Michael Nelson
Roman Paska*
Lia Powell
Lisa Rhodes
Bart Roccoberton*
Nancy L. Staub*
Web Guru Donald Devet

EDITOR'S PAGE—

WHY WOMEN?!



I have thought for a long time that we should have an issue of *Puppetry International* that honored the achievements of women in our field: Women Pioneers of Puppetry. I was a bit surprised to find that not everyone shared my enthusiasm for this idea. In fact, there were people who looked at me as if I had proposed we do a "Swimsuit Edition." "Why women?" they asked. "Why not just 'Pioneers of Puppetry?'"

Why women?

photos: Robert Smythe

from *The Visit* (see review, page 36)

I don't know. And, if I did know, I wouldn't bother pursuing it. Admittedly, having women as our theme is fraught. It cannot help but be seen as a political act. Putting this magazine together, though—no matter what the theme—is a journey of discovery. We bring some of the best minds in the field together to write about great art and great artists and, as things proceed, the process becomes less like chemistry and more like alchemy. Proven formulae turn weird; serotonin kicks in and the ser-

endipitous erupts; the commonplace, in short, is transformed into something precious.

The trick as editor, it seems to me, is in knowing when to get out of the way. This is not an exhaustive study of Women in Puppetry. It is not complete or even logical. It is more like a collage: the whole is more than the sum of the parts. With luck, by the time we go to print, I will have an answer to the question, "Why women?"

At the moment, our minds are full of "Olympic Moments"—visions of athletes who've overcome tremendous obstacles to jump higher, swim faster, throw farther than anyone else. Words like "Courage," "Glory" and "Fair Play" drop from sportscasters' lips like quarters into one-armed bandits. Out of the hundreds of newspaper articles in the sports sections, I was led as if by an occult hand to this small item: "Little League to Honor Maria Pepe." At age eleven, Pepe made the Little League team in Hoboken, NJ. She was good. Heck, she was their starting pitcher! It only took three games, though, for Little League officials to notice. Because she was a girl, Pepe was out.* Not only was she oppressed by the sport's "old boy" power structure, she was hurt by the crowds' insults: "They said stuff like, 'You're supposed to be playing with dolls.'""**

You're supposed to be playing with dolls.

Pretty strong stuff.

During Russia's "Silver Age," men dominated the theater world. Not all women were content to remain in their "assigned seats," and a number of them found a new freedom in the world of puppetry, where they were not considered a threat to the status quo. Perhaps because they were only "playing with dolls." Dassia Posner looks at four of these women whose works and writings had, and continue to have, an impact [page 4].

In contemporary India, whether or not a woman is even allowed to perform with a puppet may depend on where she is living [Sobel, page 20]. Nineteenth century French writer George Sand took on a man's name (and a few "masculine" vices). She also wrote movingly about puppet theatre [Carter, page 16]. Helen Haiman Joseph brought puppet performances to thousands of American children. When she could find no good book on the subject in English, she wrote one! [Joseph, page 22].

A number of the women spotlighted in this issue were blatantly discriminated against because of their gender, but oppression is not always such an obvious thing. Our designer, Bonnie Periale (who is, not coincidentally, my wife and puppetry partner), has been oppressed throughout her long career as a puppeteer. Her primary oppressor has been myself— a fact of which I am not proud. My blatant bullying— as unpleasant as it is— is, however, relatively easy to spot. Far more insidious are the journalists who address all their questions to me, sponsors who call and ask to speak with me, and people who send invitations with only my name on them. They do so not because I'm the better artist (I'm not) or because I work harder (I don't), but because I am the man and therefore presumably in charge. Some of the offenders are women, and I imagine the slights are unintentional. This should not be surprising— I have no doubt that some of the hecklers admonishing Maria Pepe to "play with dolls" were women, too. We are all part of a system in which certain types of discrimination are deeply ingrained.

So, for myself, the answer to the question, "Why women?" is: for Bonnie. And: for Maria Pepe.

But read the magazine. It's for you, too.

— ANDREW PERIALE



*This was 1972. The Feminist Movement was in full swing and the National Organization of Women filed a lawsuit on Pepe's behalf. This succeeded in changing the rules in 1974, by which time Pepe was too old to play Little League ball.

**Pepe's coach, Jimmy Farina, quoted in *The Boston Globe*, 8-19-04 by Globe staffer Stan Grossfield.

AN ALTERNATIVE THEATRE: RUSSIAN WOMEN PIONEERS IN PUPPETRY

BY DASSIA POSNER



Merlin

The early twentieth century was a crucial turning point in the history of Russian and Soviet puppetry. Previously, puppeteers were itinerant, performing at seasonal fairgrounds and on street corners, or going door to door at Christmas time. Fairground and street performances declined at the end of the nineteenth century, in large part due to governmental restrictions. At the same time, avant-garde theatre artists who hoped to reform and revitalize theatre and art turned to the vivid theatricality of the fairground for inspiration. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the traditional, itinerant, working-class puppetry forms such as *Petrushka* and *vertep* died out, to be reincarnated in the first permanent puppetry companies established by Russia's artistic elite.



Prologue Puppet

The early twentieth century has been called Russia's Silver Age in part because of the proliferation of small, intimate artistic forms. The puppet was one of these "small forms" embraced during the Silver Age. Most of the major theatre directors of the Silver Age had a theoretical interest in puppet theatre, mainly as a tool for reforming the theatre of actors. This interest was realized primarily without actual puppets, either through costume design, or through a stiff, "puppetlike" style of movement within the theatre of actors.

Several artists, however, worked with puppets during the Silver Age, and ultimately became the founders of Soviet puppetry after the 1917 Revolution. These early companies were almost all either founded or run by women. Even in the cases where a husband and wife performed together, the woman was the initiator and the driving force. At a time when directors like Stanislavsky and Meyerhold had become prominent in the theatre of actors, puppetry became a way for women to head their own companies, design and perform with puppets, and write theatrical theory, all independently of the larger, more famous, but male-dominated actors' theatres. The most important women in Russian puppetry during the nineteen-teens and early Revolutionary period were Olga Glebova-Sudeikina, Julia Slonimskaia-Sazonova, Liubov' Iakovleva-Shaporina, and Nina Simonovich-Efimova.¹

OLGA GLEBOVA-SUDEIKINA

Olga Glebova-Sudeikina's skills as an artist were diverse; she was an actress, dancer, visual artist, sculptor of porcelain figurines, musician, and puppeteer.² She married the prominent visual artist Sergei Sudeikin in 1906.³ Even after the couple divorced, they remained artistic partners and collaborated a great deal in the years leading up to the Revolution, influencing one another's work. In one of their joint projects, Olga Glebova-Sudeikina played the Virgin Mary in Mikhail Kuzmin's play *The Birth of Christ: A Puppet Vertep* (in which the only actual puppet was the baby Jesus, designed by Glebova-Sudeikina) at the cabaret "The Stray Dog," in a production designed by Sudeikin.

One of the achievements Glebova-Sudeikina is most remembered for, according to one scholar, is her puppets:

[I]t was her puppets that brought her particular success; she brought them to life not only to take part in puppet productions, but also because for her they held individual artistic worth. [...] Her talent as a puppetry artist received recognition in Paris as well, where she emigrated after the Revolution...⁴

A number of Glebova-Sudeikina's puppets have been preserved at the Akhmatova Museum in St. Petersburg and in a private collection in Paris, without there being any information about what performances these puppets may have played in. One scholar calls Glebova-Sudeikina's creations "dolls," although it is evident from photographs that at least some of them were on strings.⁵ Therefore, it is possible that, even though the puppets were based on current theatrical themes, they may not have been used in performance.



Dwarves. Figures on this and previous page are from Slonimskaia's *The Forces of Love and Magic*.—Reproduced from "Marionetka," Apollon 3, 1916.

These works by Glebova-Sudeikina are significant, nevertheless, because of the correlation between these puppets and current theatrical productions:

The puppets made by Glebova-Sudeikina... have a direct correlation to the characters in theatrical productions of the nineteen-teens. Among them should be noted the presence of the "Little Moor", [which] took part in many of Vs. Meyerhold's productions, including *Columbine's Scarf*, *Don Juan*, and *Masquerade*.⁶

Meyerhold had used these characters as "proscenium servants" in several of his productions; these characters were onstage, visible scene-shifters who were meant to underscore the theatricality of these productions. Glebova-Sudeikina's "little moors" were much less representational than many of the puppets created by other artists during this period. These puppets had arms and legs made of multiple fabric balls stuffed with cotton wadding, with no discernible hands or feet. The faces and torsos were black with sewn-on features, decorated with beads and lace. Glebova-Sudeikina also created a wide variety of other characters from contemporary productions, such as *Columbina*, *Pierrot*, *Don Juan*, *Desdemona*, and *Hamlet*. They were generally detailed and highly decorated, with small, tapering feet and rather abnormally large heads, usually made of satin recycled from worn-out ballet slippers.⁷

Glebova-Sudeikina was not alone in creating puppets based on the theatrical productions of the day. The cabaret "The Bat" spoofed several Moscow Art Theatre productions beginning in 1908, including a parody of Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird*, in which marionettes of Stanislavsky (as Tytyl) and Nemirovich-Danchenko (as Mytyl) searched for the "Blue Bird" of "theatrical happiness."⁸

JULIA SLONIMSKAIA

Julia Slonimskaia, a writer and historian, became interested in puppets in 1911. For the next several years, she and her husband Pavel Sazonov planned the foundation of an artistic marionette theatre, traveling to Europe to see puppets there, learning how to operate marionettes, and attracting other artists to their project. The "Kukol'nyi Teatr [Puppet Theatre]," which its founders Julia Slonimskaia and Pavel Sazonov boldly dubbed "Russia's first puppet theatre," opened its first performance, *The Forces of Love and Magic*, in St. Petersburg in February, 1916. Although this theatre was not actually Russia's first marionette theatre, it was the first successful attempt by the artistic elite to stage a marionette play with the ultimate goal of founding a professional artistic marionette theatre.

The Forces of Love and Magic is a seventeenth-century French fairground play in three interludes, one of the first to use dialogue in defiance of the monopoly of the Comédie Française.⁹ It is filled with fantastical creatures, magical stunts, love, and divine intervention. Russian Acmeist poet Georgii Ivanov translated the play from French into Russian, adding some songs and plot details in the process.¹⁰ *The Forces of Love and Magic* in Ivanov's version centers around a love triangle that involves three main characters: the shepherdess Gresinda, the sorcerer Zoroaster, and the latter's comic servant Merlin.



The play begins with a prologue puppet speaking briefly in defense of puppet theatre: "Many people regard us as wooden, but we are nerved beings, so much so that our naked nerves are sometimes almost visible, stretched out just like strings in the air."¹¹ After the prologue, Gresinda enters, singing gentle words as she tends her sheep. Merlin follows and gets into a number of comic scrapes as he repeatedly attempts to rebel against his master, without the seemingly all-powerful sorcerer noticing, and is duly punished. He is doubly frustrated because he loves the shepherdess as well. Against his will, he informs the shepherdess that she has been summoned to Zoroaster's den.

In the second interlude, the sorcerer tries to woo the innocent shepherdess with fantastical magic tricks:

After three successive bursts of flame, darkness falls. Zoroaster waves his staff, and on the table monkeys appear. The monkeys make several leaps and, growing in height gradually, reach monstrous heights and form a second set of stage wings. The dance of the devils. With a wave of the wand, two knights on steeds appear, clash and fall apart. On the table a marquis and marquise appear. They dance a minuet. Dwarves appear and do a dance. A newt appears in the air and pours water on them. They run away. The languid dance of the toad. Spiders appear and surround the shepherdess with a squeak, contracting their legs, in addition to which the toad continues to dangle back and forth in front of her.¹²

Rather than wooing her, this demonstration frightens her so much that she agrees to become Zoroaster's lover.

At the opening of the third interlude, Gresinda has returned to her hut in despair, and appeals to the goddess Juno. Juno enters and saves the shepherdess just in time by deceiving Zoroaster with the same kind of trickery he had used on the shepherdess, temporarily turning Gresinda into a toad each time the sorcerer tries to embrace her. After several unsuccessful attempts to capture the shepherdess, the sorcerer finally concedes. The moral that love cannot be coerced is reiterated as Merlin gently reveals his love for the shepherdess. The play ends with a duet sung by Merlin and Gresinda, in which they declare their mutual love.

Slonimskaja used her connections with the editor of a contemporary journal to attract artists from a famous group called the "World of Art" to become involved in her project as puppet and scene designers. Kalmakov created the designs for all the puppets for *The Forces of Love and Magic*, while Dobuzhinskii created the logo for the Puppet Theatre, and designed the stage portal and prologue puppet.

Slonimskaja hired an iconostasis carver and a fairground puppeteer to create the puppet bodies based on these designs. The final marionettes were detailed and elaborate, from the painted soles of their feet, to their hair made of real silk thread.

The Puppet Theatre performed at private homes and cabarets, including a famous cabaret called "Privat Komediantov [The Comedians' Halt]." Although the theatre was short-lived and its performances were criticized for the overly static movement of its marionettes, it is known for its lavish sets and puppets, its inclusion of some of the most famous artists of the day, and the attendance at its performances by, as one contemporary described it, "all of artistic Saint Petersburg." After the shows at the Comedians' Halt, the war brought an end to the Puppet Theatre. Two of the puppeteers were called to serve in the war, Sazonov moved south to the Crimea, and Slonimskaja emigrated to France.

Slonimskaja combined research and experience to publish a forty-two-page article entitled "The Marionette" in the journal *Apollon [Apollo]*.¹³ Her essay, published a month after *The Forces of Love and Magic* opened, defended puppetry as a valid art form in its own right for those who had previously viewed it only in terms of its relationship to the traditional theatre. In this article, Slonimskaja argues that a marionette has a soul, and that "the soul of the marionette is movement."¹⁴ Slonimskaja wrote this in part to counter several assumptions Gordon Craig had made about the marionette.

Craig had proposed that the actor be replaced by an Über-marionette. He introduced the idea that puppetry could be a form of high art, theorizing, in an attempt to prove puppets' lofty origins, that they are descendants of ancient temple automata. The puppet was, for him, also linked with the idea of death, which above all represented freedom from the kind of mundane life depicted in stage realism. In his famous essay, "The Actor and the Über-marionette," he presented a very clear image of the puppet as an emotionless automaton, an attribute that, in Craig's mind, made the puppet "great and noble."¹⁵

Slonimskaja insisted that the marionette cannot have its origins in the mechanical movement of the automaton, and therefore also cannot have the very qualities that made it attractive to many of the directors in the theatre of actors:

A false understanding of the marionette is embedded in the argument of the primacy of the actor or the puppet. The marionette is stubbornly considered an automaton. The tirelessness, obedience, and impersonality of creative work which are attributed to it are actually characteristics of the automaton only... the performance of an automaton is cold and unchangeable, it is tireless and impersonal... In reality, they don't have any of these qualities. The marionette gets tired like an actor because it is moved by human hands,



Dobuzhinskii's logo for Slonimskaia's Puppet Theatre.

Reproduced from her *Kukol'nyi Teatr'*

its voice is human, and thus cannot be tireless; it cannot be more tireless or obedient than that of the actor...

The marionette is an embodiment of the forces of life, movement, and cannot, as Gordon Craig says, be the bearer of death charms. On the contrary, the marionette is the victory of the forces of life over lifeless matter. A piece of wood moves, lives, and expresses passions like a creature of a special variety, created by the charms of art.

The mechanical qualities that were falsely attributed to the marionette occluded its real artistic merit. The understanding of a marionette as a passionless automaton methodically fulfilling stable actions once and forever is absolutely unlike the real marionette, which is eternally changeable, always surprising, endlessly different, truly inspired.¹⁹

This clarification of the nature of the marionette was Slonimskaia's most important contribution to the theatre of her day.

Slonimskaia continued her efforts at creating marionette theatre in Paris. Her "*Théâtre des Petits Comédiens de Bois* [Theatre of Little Wooden Actors]" toured Europe in 1926. Slonimskaia continued doing painstaking, lavish work in Paris with new collaborators, including the artists Milliotti, Goncharova and Larionov. She eventually moved to the United States, and briefly ran a puppet theatre at the Putney School in Vermont.

LIUBOV' IAKOVLEVA-SHAPORINA

In 1912, the artist Liubov' Iakovleva tried unsuccessfully to establish a puppet theatre in Saint Petersburg with a group of students. In 1914, Iakovleva and N. Petrov, a director from the Aleksandrinskii Theatre, along with several others, joined forces to collaborate on a marionette production of Carlo Gozzi's *The Green Bird*.¹⁷ Iakovleva was responsible for the translation of the play into Russian, and also created the designs for the puppet costumes. Several of these designs have been preserved at the State Museum of Children's Theatres, and are reproduced in Keith Tribble's book, *Marionette Theater of the Symbolist Era*. They depict highly naturalistic human figures clothed in beautifully detailed costumes, although one does get some sense that they are marionettes from drawn-in strings extending from their wrists.¹⁸ Unfortunately, the performance never took place. Iakovleva, however, continued to seek opportunities to create puppet theatre. Not only did she create the marionette costumes for Slonimskaia's 1916 *The Forces of Love and Magic*, but in 1918 became the director and founder of the first state marionette theatre for children in Petrograd.

Six women from various cities became collaborators in running the State Marionette Theatre: Iakovleva-Shaporina (head of theatre), architect Elena Ianson (stage manager and puppeteer), artist and scene designer Elizaveta Kruglikova (assistant puppeteer), the artists Nina Baryshnikova (assistant puppeteer), Elizaveta Davidenko (puppet theatre technician), and Elena Dan'ko (assistant puppeteer). These six artists went into the project with almost no practical knowledge of the marionette theatre, but were determined to create a theatre that they found both artistic and meaningful. Initially, they experienced a vast number of technical difficulties. They bought some marionettes from folk artists to learn with, in addition to making some of their own, but did not have anyone to teach them how to manipulate the puppets. Hence their first productions were clumsy, although the puppets were carefully designed and costumed.¹⁹

The theatre premiered with another production of Mikhail Kuzmin's puppet verstep, *The Birth of Christ*, this time performed with marionettes. Some of the other productions that were staged between 1918 and 1923 included works by Gogol and Pushkin, as well as an adaptation of *Krasnaia Shapochka* [Little Red Riding Hood]. Iakovleva-Shaporina's State Marionette Theatre moved in the summer of 1919 to an auditorium at the Petrograd Folk House.²⁰ The theatre, at least in its early incarnations, seems to have had primarily educational goals aimed at child audiences. The theatre was transferred to the Leningrad Theatre for Young Spectators in 1923, where Pavel Sazonov directed *Prianichnyi Domik* [The Gingerbread House] in the 1923-1924 season.²¹

NINA SIMONOVICH-EFIMOVA

Of the Russian women puppeteers I have discussed, Nina Simonovich-Efimova is the most well-known in the United States, mainly because her 1925 book, *Zapiski Petrushechnika [Notes of a Petrushka Player]* was adapted into English in 1935 under the title *Adventures of a Russian Puppet Theatre*. The Russian version, besides recounting the history of her early career, relates her theatrical theory, publishes a number of her plays and drawings, and is one of the first manuals on how to create puppets.

Rather than coming from a literary or theatrical background, the Efimovs were visual artists: Nina was a painter, and her husband Ivan a sculptor. Nina Efimova had experimented with puppets since childhood, but gave her first public shows in Moscow in 1916, when she performed a Petrushka show at the Moscow Association of Artists and a shadow show at Nikita Baliev's cabaret "The Bat." These early shows were so successful that she and Ivan formed their own theatre, continuing to perform in this early period at artist gatherings. They designed and built all their puppets, wrote or adapted the stories themselves, and performed all the shows. Not only did they perform "sanitized" ²² adaptations of Petrushka shows, but wrote, designed, and performed in a number of stories by the Russian fable writer Krylov.

One of Efimova's most beloved Krylov adaptations was *The Hermit and the Bear*. In this tale, a Hermit and a Bear meet and, after some initial hesitation, become fast friends. When the Hermit decides to take a nap, the Bear takes a protective stance over the Hermit, shooing away a fly that threatens to disturb the Hermit's sleep. Unfortunately this fly is persistent, and, after numerous energetic and unsuccessful attempts to catch or chase off the pest, the Bear smashes a large stone down on the Hermit's head in a misguided attempt to kill the fly sitting on the man's forehead. The play ends with the Bear's tragic realization of what he has done:

The Bear stands motionless for an instant, looks, but then immediately, apprehensively begins to touch, to try to wake up the man.

He figures out what has happened, he anxiously grabs hold of him, lifts the Hermit's head, looks, and drops it with horror. The head, knocking about the stage, dangles... down, the skullcap falls off, revealing the glossy wood of a bald head.

The Bear runs away to the edge of the stage, covers his face with his paws, and trembles, afraid to return. But he resolutely walks up to the murder victim, slowly lowers himself onto the Hermit, lies on top of him, as if wishing to warm him, and with his paw mournfully strokes the dangling wooden head. ²³

Following the action of the play, the "author," a hand-and-rod puppet version of Krylov in a green caftan, ²⁴ then gives a moral, the only spoken line in the play: "And the Bear's friend lay there for a long time." Krylov was the Efimovs' first rod puppet, a style of puppet in which they later made some significant innovations. Krylov made

appearances in the many Efimov adaptations of his fables, including "Two Dogs," "The Wolf and the Crane," and "Death and the Peasant."

The Efimovs made a number of contributions to early Soviet puppetry for which they are still remembered today. In summing up her life, Efimova herself divided her work into three main categories: visual art, theatre, and literature. ²⁵ Her lasting contributions fall, however, into two main categories; the first is the theatre's pioneering approach to performance. Efimova's theatre, along with agit-prop puppetry, is seen by Soviet puppeteers and scholars as a major part of the birth of the Soviet puppet theatre. In fact, hand puppets are currently used in almost every puppet theatre in Russia, while there are few if any permanent marionette theatres.

The second major contribution is Efimova's published work. According to Nekrylova, *Notes on a Petrushka Player* was the first Soviet theoretical and practical work on puppetry. ²⁶ In addition to the theoretical information and the practical, how-to guide for puppeteers, Efimova also did a great deal of research into the history of hand puppets in an attempt to provide a more rounded and less condescending perspective on the genre. She also gathered valuable information about several contemporary popular Petrushka players, puppeteers of whom we otherwise would know nothing today.

Efimova's artistic theory differs from that of her contemporaries. Like Slonimskaja, she disagreed with Gordon Craig, but she goes even further in her refutation. Efimova was passionately dedicated to the development of hand puppets, or "petrushki" as she calls them, as an artistic theatrical form. Although marionettes were all the rage at the beginning of the twentieth century, Efimova rejected puppets on strings, preferring instead to adapt the fair-ground hand puppet tradition to artistic and literary ends. According to her:

The marionette is a mechanism, a system of strings, levers, hooks. She is something forced, melancholic...

But Petrushka is a flame; in him is spontaneously poured the inspiration of the artist.

Because a live human hand is in him!... There is no intermediary in the form of strings and operator. ²⁷

Efimova maintained that it was the intimacy between hand puppet and palm that was of primary importance, and that the hand, and therefore soul, of the puppeteer filled the puppet with life as it literally filled the puppet itself. She, too, argued that focus-



Efimova's drawing of backstage of "Hermit and Bear," from the original edition of her *Notes of a Petrushka Player*

love for puppets was the same, but the way we loved them must have been different."²⁹

The Efimovs gave their early performances in artist cafes and cabarets, but became itinerant after the 1917 revolution; in this later period they performed mainly for children, peasants, and workers. Nina Simonovich-Efimova performed an immediate theatre, shows based on folk methods and themes; a theatrical theatre, one which grew out of the conventions which it employed, letting the movement of the puppets determine the story to be told; and a theatre in which all the performative elements were unified, in which the director-artist literally had control over the performers and visual elements. Nina Efimova remained a puppeteer and visual artist for the duration of her professional life. There is currently a studio-museum dedicated to the Efimovs at their former studio in Moscow, and a number of their puppets reside permanently at the Obratsov Museum.

It is significant that most of the early pioneers in Russian puppetry were women. Efimova and Slonimskaia were both the driving forces and major theorists in their puppet theatres. Glebova-Sudeikina created a number of puppets over a span of several years, and Iakovleva-Shaporina founded the first state marionette theatre in Petrograd. Although some attempts to create puppet theatres were made by men, and although many of the most prominent post-Revolutionary Soviet puppeteers were male, for the most part, women took the first crucial steps in making the Silver Age puppet more than a metaphor.

ing on movement would unleash the form's artistic possibilities, and she stated that her theatre's mission was to "show how expressive and subtle the gestures" of hand puppets could be.

In addition to becoming widely accepted as children's performers, the Efimovs also became known as pioneers in creating puppetry performances for adult audiences.²⁸ This focus has, in part, enabled puppetry in the former Soviet Union to be seen at least in part as a genre for adults. The Efimovs also furthered the use of several styles of puppets: they created a kind of rod puppet with concealed rods attached to the elbows of the puppet, built life-sized puppets for more than one production, and raised awareness of shadow theatre as an art form in Soviet Russia.

The Efimovs were a significant influence on the most famous of Soviet puppeteers: Sergei Obratsov. He frequented their home and received guidance from them on puppet construction and manipulation. He was also introduced to other puppet enthusiasts there. Although he admired their work, he was to grow apart from them and ultimately develop his own style, saying, "Our

Dassia Posner is a puppeteer with Luna Theatre and a doctoral candidate at Tufts University where she is currently writing her dissertation on E. T. A. Hoffmann's influence on Silver Age Russian Theatre. She teaches theatre at Boston College.

¹ Please note that these women sometimes went by their maiden names, sometimes by their married names, and sometimes by both. In these latter instances, the surname is hyphenated, with the maiden name appearing first.

I have omitted Alexandra Exter from this discussion simply because she created puppets later than the other artists here, and created them only in emigration. Nevertheless, her puppets are fascinating and highly worthy of study. See Louis Lozowick, "Aleksandra Ekster's Marionettes,"

Theatre Arts Monthly: Special Issue: The Marionette 12, no. 7 (July 1928), and John Bowlt, "The Marionettes of Alexandra Exter."

Alexandra Exter: Marionettes Created 1926 (New York: Leonard Hutton Galleries, 1975), 2-8.

² Elaine Moch-Bickert, *Kolombina Desiatikh Godov: Kniga ob Olge Glebovoi-Sudeikinoi* (Paris, Saint Petersburg: "Arsis," 1993), 28. All translations from the Russian are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

³ Although he is best known for his stage designs, Sudeikin nurtured an interest in puppets throughout his career: he made a short-lived attempt to co-found a puppet theatre with Andrei Belyi in 1907; he was active in cabarets that gave puppetry performances; and his paintings are filled with puppets and other fairground attractions.

⁴ Dora Zinov'evna Kogan, *Sergei Iur'evich Sudeikin: 1884-1946* (Moscow: "Iskusstvo," 1974), 185.

⁵ Elaine Moch-Bickert, "Ol'ga Glebova Sudeikina. Amie et Inspiratrice des Poètes" (Lille: Service de reproduction des thèses de l'Université de Lille, 1972). A caption to photos of her puppets in *Khudozhestvennyi Trud* calls them "silk sculptures." See "Kukly—Tsvetnaia Skul'ptura iz Shelka."

Khudozhestvennyi Trud. 1 (1923): 13-14.

⁶ Moch-Bickert, *Kolombina Desiatikh Godov*, 188.

⁷ Moch-Bickert, 57.

⁸ N. E. Efros, *Teatr "Letuchaiia Mysh" N. F. Balieva: Obzor Desiatiletnei Khydozhestvennoi Raboty Pervogo Russkogo Teatra-Kabare* (Petrograd: "Solnste Rossii," 1918), 24-26.

⁹ Pavel Sazonov, "O Teatre Iu. Slonimskaia," in *Chto Zhe Takoe Teatr Kukol?: Sbornik Statei* (Moscow: Soiuz Teatral'nykh Deiatelei RSFSR, 1990), 22. See also M. M., "Pervye Spektakli Kukol'nogo Teatra" *Apollon* 3 (1916): 54-56.

¹⁰ Keith Owen Tribble, "European Symbolist Theater: Conventions and Innovations," Ph.D. diss. (University of Washington, 1990), 924. Barry Russell confirms that the love interest between Gresinda and Merlin and all the songs are original in the Russian adaptation, but states that the remainder of the story is faithful to the original. Russell, e-mail to author, 24 June 2001.

¹¹ Iulia Slonimskaia, "Kukol'nyi Teatr," *Teatr i Iskusstvo*, 9 (28 February 1916): 179-180. I have transliterated Slonimskaia's first name as "Julia" in the body of this paper for the reader's convenience, but have retained a more direct transliteration in the notes.

¹² "Sily Liubvi i Volshebstva," adapted by Georgii Ivanov, in I. N. Solomonik, *Kukly Vykhodiat na Stenu: Kniga dlia Uchitelia* (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1993), 155.

¹³ Iulia Slonimskaia, "Marionetka," *Apollon* 3 (March 1916): 1-42.

¹⁴ Iulia Slonimskaia, "Marionetka," in *Chto Takoe Teatr Kukol?: Sbornik Statei* (Moscow: Soiuz Teatral'nykh Deiatelei RSFSR, 1990), 58.

¹⁵ Edward Gordon Craig, "The Actor and the Über-marionette." *The Mask*, 1 (1908-1909).

¹⁶ Julia Slonimskaia, "Marionetka," 56.

¹⁷ Scholars generally agree that this failed project took place in 1914. Magda Lukashevich, the sole dissenting voice, gives the year as 1916. See Magda Lukashevich, "Stranichka Muzeinoi Zhizni (ili Istoriia Odnoi Nakhodki)," in *Marionette Theater of the Symbolist Era*, ed. Keith Tribble, Mellen Studies in Puppetry, vol. 3. (Lewiston; Queenston; Lampeter; Edwin Mellen Press, 2002).

¹⁸ For reproductions of the costumes designs for the King of Terradombra, Brighella, and Smeraldina, see Tribble, *Marionette Theater of the Symbolist Era*, figures 9, 33, 34.

¹⁹ N. I. Smirnova, *Sovetskii Teatr Kukol, 1918-1932* (Moscow: 1963), 99-100.

²⁰ Smirnova, 101.

²¹ Information on repertoire gathered from N. Verkhovskii, *Kukol'nye Teatry LENTIUZA: Sbornik Statei* (Leningrad: OGIZ, Gosudarstvennoe Izd-vo Khudozhestvennoi Literatury, 1934), 77.

²² Term borrowed from Catriona Kelly, "Sanitary Petrushka and Sanitized Petrushka," in *Petrushka: The Russian Carnival Puppet Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 179-211.

²³ Nina Simonovich-Efimova, "Pustynnik i Medved'," *Zapiski Petrushechnika, i Stat'i o Teatre Kukol*, ed. N. A. Zhizhina. (Leningrad: "Iskusstvo," Leningradskoe Otdelenie, 1980), 68. Referred to henceforth as *Zapiski*.

²⁴ Sergei Obraztsov, "U Efimovykh," in *Ob Iskusstve i Khudozhnikakh*, comp. A. B. Matveeva and A. I. Efimov, (Moscow, 1977), 173.

²⁵ Simonovich-Efimova, *Katalog Vystavki*, 7, quoted in Anna Nekrylova, "Predislovie," in *Zapiski*, 31.

²⁶ Nekrylova, "Predislovie," in *Zapiski*, 20.

²⁷ Simonovich-Efimova, *Zapiski*, 49-50. Efimova deliberately contrasts the gendered pronouns in the original Russian. The word "marionette" is feminine, and the word "Petrushka" is masculine. I have retained this in the English translation.

²⁸ Nekrylova, "Predislovie," 24.

²⁹ Obraztsov, "U Efimovykh," 173-174.



The Language of the Puppet

\$12.45 per copy
(includes shipping in U.S.)

This landmark book brings together 19 top puppetry performers, artists and scholars from three continents, and is full of beautiful pictures.



Available from UNIMA-USA:
1404 Spring St. NW, Atlanta, GA 30309 <unima@puppet.org>

You can now purchase UNIMA publications online with credit/debit card and electronic checks.

PAULINE BENTON:

A LIFE IN THE SHADOWS

STEPHEN KAPLIN

If the definition of a pioneer is one who goes before and prepares the way for others to follow, then Pauline Benton surely fits the bill.



In our present age of glib cross-culturalization, it's hard to imagine how radical it might have seemed in the 1930s and 1940s to present a traditional Asian puppetry genre to American audiences, not as some sort of exotic ephemera, but as an art form worthy of inquiry and recognition in its own right. Other scholars of her era made thorough investigations into Chinese shadow theater—Benjamin Marsh and Genevieve Wimsatt come to mind—but no one else outside of Asia had ever

devoted themselves with the same single-mindedness to mastering its techniques in performance.

She was not an innovator and had no interest in reinterpreting or deconstructing the traditional forms. Her fifty year infatuation may have sprung, in part, from a somewhat romanticized idealization of a glorious lost Chinese culture, yet her dedication to conserving and preserving a vanishing, endangered art form is truly admirable. While the work she left behind is scant—a few brief essays and articles, the unpublished manuscript of a book, a short 16mm film of excerpts from one of her most popular productions—her real legacy is the Chinese shadow puppets (one of the largest private collections outside of China) she left behind.

In many articles written about her career, Benton is referred to as "The Shadow Lady." This seems particularly apt since most of the details of her personal life are lost in a haze. She was born in 1898 in Baldwin, Kansas; that much can be garnered. Nowhere in her writings and manuscripts, however, does she bother to mention her childhood or formative experiences. All that survives from her early years is a slim teenage travel diary, written while on a grand tour of prewar Europe, which hints at a strong attraction to the far off and foreign. Lucky for her, her family had the means to

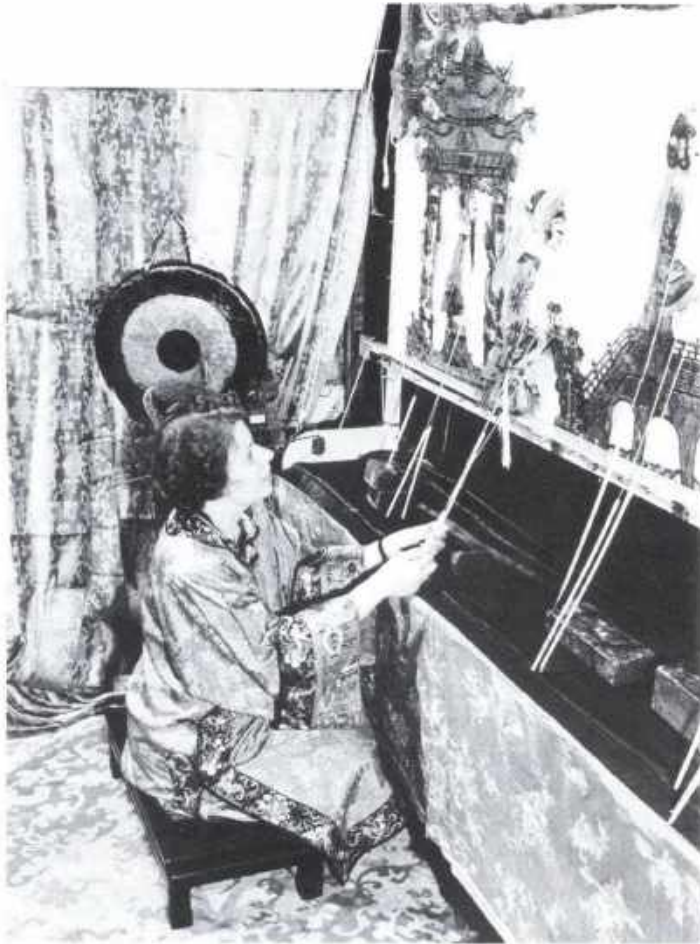
indulge this passion to the fullest. Her father became the president of the University of the Philippines in Manila, which afforded her an opportunity to venture off into the Orient.

But the glowing coals of Benton's love affair with the Far East seemed to have been fanned more effectively by her aunt, Emma L. Konantz. Konantz was a woman of formidable intellect and eccentric self-direction—a professor of mathematics at Ohio Wesleyan University at a time when it was no small accomplishment for a female to penetrate the hide-bound, masculine enclaves of Academia. An avid interest in Oriental art and culture prompted her to visit China, where she found a teaching position at Yenching University. Settling in the suburbs of Beijing, Konantz turned her small house and garden into "a shrine of beauty for all lovers of Chinese art," which soon became "a haven for students in need of counsel and sympathy." Clearly "Tante Emma" was a formative influence on the young Pauline. In 1921, after graduating from Miami University, she took the first available opportunity to visit her aunt in Beijing. It was the first of several trips. In all of Benton's autobiographical writings, sketchy as they are, this is the point where she begins her narrative.

The year before her first China journey, the Field Museum in Chicago had mounted an exhibition of Bertold Lauffer's collection of shadow figures (now residing at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City). Having heard of this exhibition, Benton was curious to see a genuine Chinese shadow performance once she got



to Beijing. Unfortunately, at that time, the traditional shadow theatre was in a period of serious decline. The civil chaos and economic depression which followed the fall of the last Imperial Dynasty, along with competition from motion pictures (known as "electric shadows" in Mandarin), had done in most of the shadow troupes in the city. Resourceful Aunt Emma managed to track down one of the few surviving companies still performing in the traditional "Luanchou" or "Eastern" style. (Luanchou refers to the village in the vicinity of the capital that had been a center for the art of Chinese shadow theater for several centuries.) The performance, in the courtyard garden of Konantz's house, must have moved Benton deeply, for she described it breathlessly in a number of different articles and essays:



“

I cannot imagine any explorer having more thrilling adventures than I experienced on my journey of discovery into China's rich and glamorous past through the medium of the shadow play.... Our evening's entertainment consisted of episodes from three plays, depicting exciting battles in which the victor was aided by breathtaking acrobatic and juggling feats, the mischievous pranks of the Monkey-god and the burning of a bamboo forest. I watched the performance by teetering back and forth between the front and back sides of the stage in an effort to see the "cause" and "effect" all at the same time. It was difficult to tell whether the players or the audience were enjoying themselves more. At the end of the performance, the leader of the troupe looked at me, smiled, and said, "Finish," the only English word in his entire vocabulary! (From the article "Turning a Gay Hobby Into a Full-Time Job," *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 2, 1941)

”

Seized by a desire to make her own shadow shows, Benton bought several figures in the antique markets and brought them back to New York City, where she was then living. Several years passed before the opportunity arose to actually use them in performance. A group of Chinese student friends requested that she do something for a variety program they were putting together. She complied, using a small paper screen and an outside narrator to explain the action. Although simply and crudely done, the audience responded enthusiastically to the beauty and agility of the figures themselves. Inspired by this first success, Benton went on to build herself a larger screen and search for play subjects in the available translations of Chinese literature. Thus began her obsession:

The statement has been made that "To know the Chinese theatre is to know in no small way the Chinese people." How true I have found this to be! The secrets of Chinese costumes, arts, architecture, religion, history and mythology were all held in the quiet forms of the shadow figures. One thing led to another; there was no end of it all. Mr. Lee Tuo Chen, the shadow player with whom I later studied in Peking told me: "I have been doing this for more than 40 years and am still a student." (Introduction to unpublished manuscript for "China's Colored Shadow Plays," 1941.)

Benton was quite diligent in her studies. She collected as much primary source material as she could find, aided once more by Aunt Emma, who tracked down and translated traditional play scripts and other related articles and texts. A fruitful correspondence began with Mr. Lee. His family had been shadow performers for the Imperial Manchu household, regularly presenting their shows in the Forbidden City palace complex. When the last Emperor was deposed in 1912, they lost their prime patrons. Mr. Lee attended an American missionary school, where he became perhaps the only Chinese shadow master with any knowledge of the English language. Because of this, he was frequently called upon to do shows for visiting foreigners, and became a primary informant for both Marsh and Wimsatt.

By the late 1920s, Benton was already performing her shadows regularly in New York City. She began to collaborate with several artists to create new works: William Russell, a musician and specialist in comparative musicology, who composed and performed all the musical accompaniment on authentic Chinese instruments; and Lee Ruttle, an actor and former member of the original Provincetown Playhouse, who directed, adapted the translated Chinese play scripts for American audiences, and assisted in the manipulation of the figures. In 1932, the company was legally incorporated as "The Red Gate Shadow Theater," which was amended in 1935 to "The Red Gate Players."

In 1936, Aunt Emma died—victim of a fast moving cancer. Despite the rapid deterioration of her health, she managed to teach up until a month before her death, when student unrest caused by the Japanese invasion of Northern China closed down the universities. Her death deeply affected Benton. She returned to Beijing that year to help sort and sell off her aunt's estate, but stayed on to study further with Mr. Lee. She took lessons in manipulation from him (social taboos forbid males touching females, so he had to correct her faulty efforts with sign language). She conducted interviews and pumped him for information about his life as a showman and particulars about his extensive repertoire. ("If I asked him a question about one of his favorite plays, such as *The White Snake*, he would talk for 45 minutes without stopping!") She also closely observed his performances, taking meticulously detailed notes on blocking, effects and stage business.

In addition to studying with Mr. Lee, Benton traveled about the north of China on expeditions arranged by one of her aunt's colleagues at Yenching University, Dr. Ch'en Tsai-hsin. Dr. Ch'en, a true aficionado of the shadow theatre, brought her to see performances by some of the best traditional players still active in Northern China. During this period, she commissioned the leading craftsman of the Lu family [see PI # 15, page 4] to make her a complete set of figures for several productions. She also collected additional figures, musical instruments and other necessary shadow paraphernalia. These were all put to good use when the worsening wartime conditions in China forced her back home to New York City.

Judging from existing programs and publicity materials dated between the mid 1930s through the late fifties, the Red Gate Players' repertoire consisted of about a dozen different short pieces adapted directly from traditional Chinese shadow texts ("*Whitesnake*," "*The Cowherd and the Weaving Maid*," "*The Legend of the Willow Plate*," "*The Legend of the Silk Goddess*," "*The Burning of the Bamboo Garden*" and "*The Moon Lantern*"). There were numerous short interludes, designed to highlight the figures themselves (Peking Street scenes, sword dances, etc.). For the most part, the focus was on creating authentic Chinese shadow theatre programs, in English for a general audience. She avoided a "pedantic approach," opting instead to find a balance between authenticity and its interpretation for audiences that had little or no familiarity with the culture that the performances represented. This approach, coupled with their high level of artistic technique apparently moved audiences quite strongly and earned them a degree of critical acclaim.

During the late thirties, American audiences had begun to take an active interest in Chinese culture. China was already being viewed as a potential ally against Japan, and the suffering of the Chinese people was being widely reported. The Red Gate Players played upon this sympathy to the fullest. Before and during the War years, they performed at numerous benefits for various China Relief Agencies.

The company remained quite active throughout the forties and fifties, even after the Communist takeover of the mainland instantly transformed China from a WWII ally into a



Cold War foe. Benton relocated to Carmel, California and reconstituted the company with new members including Arvo Wirta, Andrea Ja and Marcina Karem. By the late fifties, though, the old repertoire must have been becoming stale. She experimented with creating shadow figures out of a variety of plastic materials, with colorful designs painted with transparent dyes. She used them to present standard children's fare such as "*The Three Bears*," "*Wynken, Blinken and Nod*," and adaptations of Chinese folk tales such as "*How the Elephant got its Trunk*." But these western style productions really didn't cut any new ground. Moreover, the traditional style productions that were Red Gate's bread and butter seemed to become more nostalgia-drenched as the China which Benton had visited and loved was swept away by the hot swirl of political struggles.

By the 1960s, Benton had pretty much retired from performing. She passed on the company to one of her students, Marcina Karem, who kept it going for some time. The hundreds of shadow figures were packed away into trunks



and stored away in the garage of her home in Carmel. Benton's health was failing. Although Karem prodded her to publish her writings, based largely on the notes she took in the thirties while studying with Mr. Lee, the manuscript remained unfinished. She began to sell off portions of her vast collection to institutions such as the Minnesota Museum of Art in St. Paul. In 1970, the MMA put together an exhibition of some of the more spectacular figures and scenic elements in Benton's collection. The exhibition sampled all the major styles of Chinese shadows and other Asian shadow traditions as well. Benton helped with the curating and compiled the notes for the catalog. But it was her last major project. Brain cancer took her life in 1974.

Although Karem kept Red Gate's name, the wind had gone out of its sails with its founder's passing. When Karem herself died in the early 90's, the several large wooden trunks containing hundreds of shadow figures, Chinese musical instruments and the old Red Gate shadow stage (with its beautiful antique embroidered hangings and curtains), as well as boxes of scripts, photos and archival material, were bequeathed to Jo Humphrey and the Gold Mountain Institute for Traditional Shadow Theatre. Humphrey had seen Red Gate performances as a young girl. Later in life, while she was working at the Museum of Natural History, cataloging their extensive Lauffer Collection, she conceived (together with veteran puppeteer Shirley Roman) of the idea of creating traditional style performances, using exact replicas of the Lauffer figures. Together, they formed the Yueh Lung Shadow Theatre, which followed pretty much down the same paths explored by Benton. Humphrey changed the company's name to GMI as she conceived a broader mission of preservation and scholarly research in addition to performances and workshops. As the only other

company in North America dedicated to the art of Chinese shadow theatre, GMI was a natural repository for the Benton Collection.

After several decades in storage, the shadow figures had become badly deteriorated. The antique figures had been coated with tung oil which, while it conditions and preserves the animal hide, never fully dries. Rather, it remains sticky in humid conditions so that during the long years that they were packed inside their stuffy trunks, the oil extruded out as a gluey mess that fused the individual figures together into a solid mass. Humphrey spent years of painstaking labor, carefully prying the figures apart, drying out the tung oil by exposure to air and then stripping it off with turpentine soaked cotton swabs. There was little written on the subject of shadow puppet preservation, so she had to figure out the process by trial and error. But her efforts resulted in the refurbishment of nearly half the collection, including many of the finest figures and scenic units. The cleaned and rejointed figures were either stored in wooden flat files, or mounted on stretched canvas screens for exhibition.

Since Humphrey's retirement in 1998, custody of the Benton Collection has passed on to Chinese Theatre Works. CTW's artistic director, Kuang-Yu Fong, and I have begun using some of them again in performance. The first time we picked up the White Snake figures to begin rehearsals, there was a palpable feeling of serendipity, as though the figures themselves were overjoyed at once more being free to come to life. Later on, we went through the boxes of old Red Gate black-and-white publicity photos, and there they were—the same figures dancing in Benton's hands, sixty-five years earlier.



Aside from the obvious direct impact that she has had on our own work, Benton's Red Gate Players injected a strong Asian cultural influence into the heart of American puppetry. Her work in this regard has had wider repercussions than the original effect of her performances on the public at large. Her studied and respectful approach to traditional genres of non-western performance are echoed in the cross-cultural productions of contemporary artists like Larry Reed, Tamara Fielding, Maria Bodman (all who have worked along similar lines using Indonesian wayang kulit as the inspiration) and the Carter Family (whose son, Dmitri, has married into the family of a well known Chinese puppet master). These artists certainly owe a debt to "The Shadow Lady," and to her grand obsession with traditional Asian puppetry forms.



Tears of Joy Theatre and Mark Levenson Present

Between Two Worlds (The Dybbuk)

The UNIMA-USA Citation-Winning Production!

"Gutsy... remarkable... striking. Tears of Joy pulls it off." — *The Oregonian*

"Proves that puppet theater isn't just for kids anymore." — *Willamette Week*

"Superb, dramatic... the production explores the thoughts that are often hidden from words." — *The Downtowner*

"A completely fresh and accessible interpretation of the most classic piece of Jewish theatre." — *Laurie Rogoway, Jewish Federation*

"Most successful... an excellent use of puppet theatre imagery." — *George Latshaw, Puppetry Journal*

Available on Tour Starting 2003

For Information, Contact:

Janet Bradley, Tears of Joy Theatre
503-248-0557; janet@tojt.com

Come to a place where love cannot die.

View America's most prolific and accomplished puppeteers in this entertaining and visually stunning film now available on video cassette.

"unique...an important addition to any collection on contemporary theatre." - Puppetry International

PUPPETRY
WORLDS OF IMAGINATION



Featuring:

Basil Twist
Ralph Lee
Michael Gurry
Cheryl Hensen
and more!



ORDER YOUR COPY
NOW FOR ONLY

\$29.95

To Order, Call The Cinema Guild at
1-800-723-5522



GEORGE SAND
(Extrait du *Monde Illustré*, 1903)

THE PUPPET THEATER OF GEORGE AND MAURICE SAND

TRANSLATIONS AND ARTICLE BY
STEPHEN CARTER



MAURICE SAND
(Extrait du *Monde Illustré*, 1909)

They [puppets] enter into the absolute truth of life, which is a relentless combat against perpetual obstacles...

George Sand, 1876

George, as you may well know, was a woman; a prolific novelist, dramatist, and intellectual of the French Nineteenth Century Romantic Movement. George Sand was her *nom-de-plume*, a necessary device in the male dominated world of Arts and Letters. She exemplified the cultivated salon life of the era, and was an intimate confidante of the likes of Chopin, Flaubert, and Delacroix, to name only a few of the better-known guests that frequented the soirées in her rural chateau of Nohant. She was also mad about puppets, specifically hand-puppets, which she liked to call by the Italian word, *burattini* or its slangy equivalent: *pupazzi*. Through her extraordinary influence, her son, Maurice, took up puppetry among his other enthusiasms, which included geology, botany, lepidoptery, and the study of *commedia dell'arte*. Maurice is often dismissed as a dilettante, in the shadow of his mother, which is perhaps unfair. Maurice was the primary designer, playwright, actor, and operator of the puppets; George sewed costumes, assisted with operating occasionally, and was the undisputed theorist, muse, and critic. The extent of her vicarious maternal identification and pride in Maurice as puppeteer is evident in her impassioned writing. Maurice himself only wrote scraps of outlines and technical notes, which he posted in the wings to guide his improvisations. At George's urging, a number of his puppet plays were transcribed from memory by Maurice, and eventually published posthumously, in 1890.

George, however, composed a lovely monograph in 1876, which is practically a manifesto for the puppet theater. The essay was intended to be a part of her autobiography, which ran to an unbelievable twenty volumes! It has recently been published separately in a charming art press edition edited and with a lengthy preface by Bertrand Tillier. (*Le Théâtre des marionnettes de Nohant*, 116 pages, Editeur Sequences, 1998, ISBN 2-907156-51-9.) Bertrand points out that the thoughts are identical to those expressed in her novel *L'homme de neige* (The Man of Snow) about a fictional puppeteer called Christian Waldo, who is adamant in his belief in the superiority of the handpuppet:

"This is the classic puppet, the primitive, and this is the best!" says Waldo, in contrast to the string puppet which he finds too mechanical, too dry. "This is so much more of a being, that his body hardly exists. The *burattino* has neither levers, nor strings, nor pulleys—it is a head and nothing more; ... a wood shaving, a stick which seems hardly even roughed out."

Here is what engaged the Romantics—the primal, raw quality of the puppet. George Sand is best left to speak for herself, and for Maurice, perhaps. I've selected and translated some gems from her essay, which as far as I know is not available in English. The essay ranges freely, encompassing autobiography, a fond portrait of Maurice, philosophy of theater and puppetry, technical information on their puppets, politics, and anecdotes from their country life and cultural soirées. The order and headings are mine.

ENTERTAINMENT

The big entertainments [of our day] are enervating and tiring. True amusement is for each of us to seek and to realize—in a corner by the fireside—a delightful small ideal. The games that sicken and the malicious chatter where one is obliged to speak ill of one's friends; let us find something else for our children.

HER FIRST PUPPET

I once received a gift of a superb Polichinelle, all brilliant gold and scarlet. I was afraid at first, above all on behalf of my doll, which I cherished tenderly, and which I supposed to be in great danger from this little monster. Only after carefully locking her into the armoire, would I consent to play with Polichinelle. His glass eyes that turned in their orbits through the means of a mechanism placed him, for me, in a sort of spot midway between cardboard and life.

PUPPETRY IN COUNTRY LIFE

The great attraction of puppets in country life is in the staging of histories, comic novels, marvels, or dramas over the course of several evenings. The longer the story, the more the spirit is engaged, and views with regret the arrival of the end of the series.

IMPROVISATION

Improvisation permits the reciting author to make of each act a fully developed chapter for the evening, whiling away the hours. I would have you understand that this is a theater of leisurely charms, and that we here prefer extended improvisation, and detailed, realist minutiae over the sober structure and concise dialogue which are essential in the true theater [i.e. with human actors].

THE NATURE OF THE HAND PUPPET

[Puppets, or *les marionnettes* are grammatically feminine in French, so let us retain the feminine pronoun, as Hercule Poirot would.]

The puppet is a gabber and a wanderer. She has, despite all efforts, curt gestures and astonished eyes, which seem to make an effort to understand all that befalls her, and this naïveté of expression is always comic and touching. When an incident of the drama surprises her, her stupefaction is eloquent. When she finds the means to escape a danger, one would say that she digests the idea, and that she queries of the spectators if it is good.

The play must not press onwards, if the character has these particular resources, these singular qualities, which amuse the eyes and calm the impatience of the spirit. That which would irritate in the [actors'] theater—the hors-d'oeuvres, the episodic scenes—are here delightful strolls, of which no one complains.

... It is necessary that the puppets do and say what is in their nature. These are not roles well written out. They are not literary flourishes, nor hand-picked expressions. These are the reasons they have; the why's and the wherefore's of all their actions. The most ingenious words will not mask an untruth of character, when it comes from a statuette and not a human.

THE CHARM OF DIGRESSION

We had a classic mailman, a garrulous personality, who delivers the fatal letter; the knot of the intrigue, and who, while the principal character with trembling hand attempts to rip open the envelope, exits and returns ten times from the door, all the while recounting the pains of the heart.

...OR,

A stammering tailor arrives with his bill at the very moment when the hero is departing for the ball, or the duel.

All these incidents were, by far, agreed upon as the most interesting moments of the action. One shared with anguish the sufferings of the puppets, without dreaming that they were derived from the fantasies of the puppeteer. To take advantage of these possibilities, without abusing them; that is the science of the "mâitre de jeu" [master of play, i.e. the puppet-master;]. Insofar as he avails himself well of these, the fiction takes on a color of striking vitality.



ON THE DISCIPLINE AND THE "FEVER"

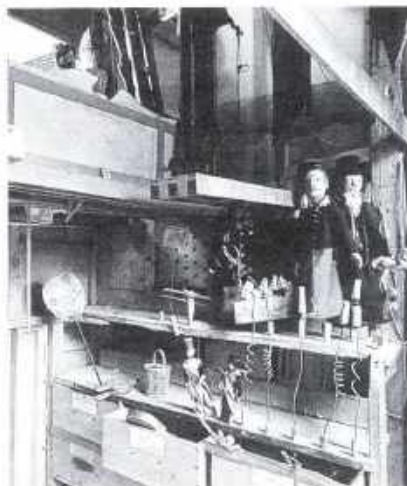
My son did not accept the too flattering idea that he had created a new art form, nor the too severe idea that it was beneath all notion of art. He would say, what I think as well, that this is a manner of translating movement from life, a research into a well-regulated tradition that one no longer sees.

The puppeteer in his narrow booth— invisible, ignored, suppressed, so to speak, has all his thoughts perfectly free from external preoccupations. At the end of his hands, above his head, he puts into motion a world, which realizes and personifies the emotions that come to him. He sees up close the character on his right hand demand imperiously a response from his left hand. He must hold back or he'll become excited, and once in his fever, all will become clear, because his fictions have become flesh and speak for themselves. These are beings that live their own lives, and which demand of him a total effort, under pain of extinction and petrification to the tip of his fingers.

MAURICE ECHOES THE THOUGHT IN HIS VOLUME ON THE ITALIAN COMEDY, "MASQUES ET BOUFFONS"....

The Commedia dell'arte imposes on each character the necessity to feel and believe for himself. There are no words of the author to interpret. All must be drawn from its proper source, with the pleasure of inventing details, sometimes not even foreseen by oneself, and which emanate naturally, be it from the character with which one identifies, or from fantasy...

One of Maurice Sand's plays, *The Candidate of Trepagny*, is translated by Paul McPharlin in his "Repertory of Marionette Plays," published in 1929. It is quite talky and has many characters. In it, a strongman mountebank is mistaken for the provincial assembly candidate; shades of Jesse Ventura and Arnold Schwarzenegger!



No doubt it had similar topical relevance. The defeat of the 1848 Revolution and the conservative repression of the Second Empire distressed George and Maurice Sand. Salon puppetry was largely able to escape the censorship pervasive in the large theaters of the period. The strength of Maurice's performance lay in un-scripted and ephemeral improvisation, upon humorous character interpretation, and on satirical jabs at authority or pretentiousness.

All agree that Maurice was a technical innovator, and fine scenic artist. At first, he made use of assistant operators, although there was not room for more than two in the booth. When the characters exceeded the four hands available, an eye concealed in the hair on the back of the head enabled the puppet to be hung on hooks in the scenery. This sometimes resulted in awkward hops and contortions in the effort to snag the hook. George delightedly recounts the improvisation that resulted:

"What is it with you? Are you in pain?"

"Yes, it is the malady called the hook."

"Bah, I know that! We are all subject to it!"

At other times, if a character was late in responding, another would ask, "Have you the hook?"

Another problem that plagued them was the occasional need to leave the stage inactive and empty while preparing characters, props or effects for entry. They called these, "loups" which means gap or flaw in theatrical jargon. Jokingly, they sometimes referred to their theater as "Théâtre des loups." Maurice sought to remedy these, and the awkward hooks, by devising a system of sliding rails in the wings that could be preset with props and puppets. The rails had little holes in them. Coiled wire springs were fashioned with wooden dowel plugs on either end. One end plugged into the rail, and the other plug could enter the finger hole in the neck of the puppet. The puppeteer could slide his hand into the sleeve onstage, or simply tug on it to impart incidental motion for



an occasional line. Crowd scenes of tiny figures were mounted and slid in upstage, giving a sense of diminishing perspective.

Because the puppets appeared limp when the operator's hand was removed, Maurice later provided his puppets with *papier maché* shoulders and busts. This innovation improved the appearance of low cut dress lines, but met with protest from George initially. The numerous costumes would have to be resewn! She had considerable pride in the hundreds of costumes she had sewn. She tells about scavenging among her lingerie and dismantling the hoop skirts no longer in vogue for the whalebone. A pair of slippers had created the maw of a green monster. As one reads in her novel, she was also attracted by the notion that the *burattino* should be a simple sack with a head. Eventually, she accepted the idea of the alterations, and Maurice's wife helped with the renovations. To give the arms the appearance of natural length, they created padded upper arms stitched to the torso, and the operator's fingers entered at the elbow point of the elbow.

Maurice had apprenticed as a painter in the studio of Eugene Delacroix, and his scene painting was highly accomplished. His mother so enjoyed his decor and the clever oil lamp lighting effects that he invented, that she sometimes wished him to stage a play of decor only! Her favorite play was one called *Games and Mysteries* in which there was a ballet of broomsticks.

Although Delacroix no longer came to Nohant during the period in which they developed the puppet theater, he apparently had been a frequent guest when Maurice was only a child. George reminisces about how Delacroix would paint studies of flowers in a passage which is too much fun to omit:

This man of the world, so fine, so reserved, so inclined to rail against exuberant artists (the wild-haired type) could hardly work without entering a feverish state of vibrant expansion: "These flowers drive me crazy!" he would say. "They dazzle me, they blind me! I cannot decide to toss them out, as I am so much in love with their freshness, their bloom. I shall have to sacrifice three quarts of paint to arrive at their form and extract from my canvas what comes to me."

George had some painted floral wallpaper samples which she used for embroidery patterns. Delacroix became ecstatic in admiration for the grasp of distilled essentials in these samples, so like the craft of scene painting.

"These people are our masters," he would say. "If I were to start my life over again, I would belong to their school!"

Passion was the credo of the Romantics, whether in painting flowers or in the throws of puppetry improvisation. The transportation of this ecstasy was an antidote for less pleasing and banal realities. Puppetry is a vehicle of escape. George, unexpectedly, concludes her puppetry essay with this melancholy note on political reality, which is as apt today as it was in 1876.



THE ERA

We live in a sad and dull epoch. In the aftermath of our great public disaster, we distress ourselves in partisan battles, each much too preoccupied by their particular interests and personal theories. We pass three quarters of our lives striving to know how we shall live tomorrow, under what regime, and under what conditions. Politics truly stupefies us, especially in the provinces, where it is so often said that the scope of action is too narrow; lost words, useless forecasts, chimeric fears, vain hopes, incomplete or false theories, insoluble problems— and always poorly formulated. Those that speak mouth-ing silliness, for the most part; terminal credulity in most that listen. Time wasted without result— such is the intellectual life of these troubled times— from whence the wisdom for the future must emanate, at any rate, so we hope, and we must hope seriously, today! •

THE COUNTRY PUPPETEER AND THE CITY PUPPETEER:
THE FEMINIST DIVIDE IN INDIA

BY ANNA SOBEL



In a little village in the eastern Indian state of Orissa, men crowd a tarp spread out under a tree to demonstrate their simple form of hand puppetry, called "sakhi kandhei nata." The women stand around us in saris minus the blouse, a real sign of poverty in modest India, holding naked children. I keep trying to catch their eyes while the village patriarch sings the old songs. I want to hear something from the women, so when the men are finished, I ask the women to take their places. But they have

no skills with which to entertain me. They only tell me of their two meals a day of watered-down rice and cooked leaves and that the village has no schools or hospitals. When I ask what arts they know, they say they once knew how to tattoo, but now they have forgotten how. They want to know what I can do for them. I wish I knew.

In India, traditional puppet troupes are composed of families, but the women, if they are involved at all, provide the musical accompaniment or sew the puppets. They rarely manipulate them, despite the fact that fewer and fewer children of traditional puppeteers are pursuing the art of their fathers.

For several weeks I stayed in the southwestern state of Kerala with the Pulavar family, who practiced the shadow puppet form called "Tolpava Koothu." During the time I was in their village, three separate families whose children were not interested in puppetry came by to relinquish their families' annual temple performance dates to the Pulavars. The three sons of the late Krishnankutty Pulavar are doing better than most to train their own sons in the art of puppetry with help from government grants, but so far only one boy, Vibin, is showing interest. When I commissioned a show from the Pulavars, the children gave a spontaneous pre-show performance of songs, dances and monologues they were learning in school. I noticed the exceptional talent of Vibin's younger sister,

who performed a bharat natyam dance and a monologue. But while the little boys went backstage and were invited to pick up puppets during the show, the Pulavars would never dream of inculcating women into the tradition. When I made my entry in the Pulavars' guest book to thank them for their hospitality and wish them luck, I did not neglect to mention the promise of Vibin's little sister, whose name I never learned.





In Calcutta, I met Swapna Sen, who had a Fulbright Fellowship in 1999 to study puppetry in Atlanta, and now performs with two troupes of her own in addition to training social workers in puppetry. In Chennai, researcher R. Bhanumathi told me how rare it is for her as an Indian woman to study shadow puppetry. She told me she had discovered a single female shadow puppeteer from the state of Tamil Nadu and sent her to perform in Delhi, which was the first time that woman had ever left her village.

And in Hyderabad, it is Ratnamala Nori who started the Nori Art and Puppet Center, and her husband who plays second fiddle when she performs shows about the problems of dowry or women's reproductive rights.

I believe the impressive work of these women reflects the force of feminism which has swept through India's cities but still not permeated the countryside. Rural Indian women still have a long way to go. I hope just as the urban women have found a voice in puppetry, rural women will also take the strings, and let the puppets speak for them.

If my journey in India had included only villages, it would have been very discouraging for a female puppeteer, but what I observed of the rural women was offset by the incredibly inspiring female puppeteers I encountered in larger cities.

When I was in Ahmedabad, I met Heer Shah, a bright and energetic twenty-six-year-old Gujarati, who trains health workers to do puppet shows about issues such as nutrition, breast-feeding and diarrhea prevention in slum areas. In a country of limited literacy, it is an ideal medium to get such messages across. After the show, the troupe meets with the women of the community to reinforce the new concepts.

Heer's modern hand puppet technique bears the trademark of the woman who is often spoken of as the mother of modern puppetry, Meher Contractor. Contractor, originally an art teacher, believed that creative drama with puppets was the perfect solution to what she observed as a lack of creativity in Indian schools. The many puppeteers she taught went on to use puppetry not only to entertain but to educate, as a tool to spread information on topics as diverse as littering and Hindu-Muslim violence.

These days, self-directed Indian women are using puppetry for all kinds of things. In Delhi, I worked under Ranjana Pandey, who has worked with puppets for years as a form of therapy for disabled girls ever since her daughter was born with special needs.

Anurupa Roy, 26, is already an accomplished puppeteer who has directed and performed 14 shows with the Delhi-based troupe she founded, "Kat-Katha," which performs for large audiences at theatres, schools, and festivals. Her solo bunraku-style piece, "Durga," tells the story of a poor Indian girl who tries to celebrate what is good about life, despite the misery that surrounds her. Her most recent show, "Virus ka Tamashah," spreads awareness about AIDS.



Anna Sobel recently returned from nine months on a Fulbright fellowship in India researching puppetry. Now she lives in New York City.

The World of Puppets

BY HELEN HAIMAN JOSEPH

It is a strange beginning to this story but a true one. I never even saw a marionette in my childhood. Moreover, had I been a better actor of minor parts at the Cleveland Play House in its pioneer days when we were all doing something there, it is probable that I should have continued playing maids' and visitors' and, later, old ladies' rôles to this day! But after struggling with me through several dramas, the director of our little theatre inquired: "How would you like to work with the marionette group?" We were both relieved at this tactful solution of the problem. And so, all unsuspectingly, I began making and manipulating puppets in a marionette production of *The Death of Tintagiles* presented in Cleveland over twenty years ago; and I happily continued for years working with and later directing the Play House marionette group.

It was while searching for suitable puppet plays that I discovered a colorful new world, or rather found myself amazedly wandering in romantic bypaths of the old, old world, following the echoes of tapping little wooden feet through every century and land. The marionettes have existed in ancient India, China, Egypt, in mediaeval churches, and fairs and market places, at the courts of kings and in the studies of writers, musicians, artists, Russia, Turkey, Greece, France, Germany, Holland, England—all have their centuries of puppet history. And these various countries have written volumes concerning the puppets. But except for Gordon Craig's inspiring eulogies on the marionette and the *Übermarionette*, and a few casual articles in magazines, no record of puppetry was to be found in the English language.

After some years of research in libraries and museums, I wrote my *Book of Marionettes*, the first history of puppetry in English, published in New York and London. Here in America, the time was ripe for the book. Tony Sarg's professional marionettes were becoming famous on Broadway, Ellen von Volkenberg was achieving triumphs with her art marionettes at the Chicago Little Theatre, we were giving occasional marionette productions at the Cleveland Play House, and still others were experimenting here and there with puppets. It is probable that the *Book of Marionettes* had some influence in spreading this interest. Today every city of any size has its professional companies (Boston has twenty-three) or its amateur groups in club, college, or high school, presenting marionette plays. America is now "puppeted" from coast to coast. Another phase of this activity was somewhat stimulated by the book at the time of its publication. The "project" had entered the classroom of the progressive schools to enliven the usual routine. No more delightful and stimulating activity could be imagined for a group of boys and girls than the puppet show,



for which they needed to bestir themselves in many school

subjects and handicrafts. The account of the uses of marionettes in European schools seemed to start hundreds of our teachers in that direction and today there is scarcely a school in America that has not had its classes making marionettes.

In 1921, we went abroad and lived for almost three years touring the continent and England in a diminutive Citroën. Everywhere the book was an Open Sesame to marionette studios and guarded, backstage puppet mysteries. The vivid contrasts between the marionettes of various nations made this a chain of exciting surprises. In Prague, how truly Bohemian in purpose and aspect were the carved, wooden marionettes of the sculptor Sucharda, playing old folk tales in the school auditorium? What a collection of puppet devils the learned Professor Pisek displayed for me—Czechish and Slavish—red devilkins, black devils, furry and shiny, horrible and funny!

In Munich, the architect Paul Brann welcomed me into his studio and later into his exquisite little *Marionetten Theater Münchener Künstler* where finished puppet performances were to be enjoyed under perfect conditions. In Munich, too, in a poor section of town, stood old Papa Schmidt's marionette theatre where his daughter gave a special performance and warned the ragged juvenile audience to behave so that Kaspar might show off his best tricks for *die Dame aus Amerika*. In Baden-Baden the clever artist Ivo Puhonny put his charming marionettes through their paces for my benefit—a repertory from fairy tale and acrobat to portions of Goethe's *Faust*, with an extraordinary performance of a short Wedekind drama which considerably extended my conception of the puppets' versatility. In Vienna the studio of Richard Teschner was decorated with his frescoes and carvings, filled with tiny works of jade, amethyst, onyx, strange instruments, all creations of this artist of the precious. Herr Teschner have me a few private showings of his exotic *Figuren Theater*, where weird little creatures, reminiscent of the Javanese Wajang, moved rhythmically in a fabulous world.

The Guignols of Paris were jolly, pert little comedians, thriving along the Champs Elysées. But in Lyons, where I made a pilgrimage to the *vrai Guignol*, the original Guignol had fallen upon sad days. In the dilapidated rooms down on the wharf the puppets sang their operetta to the accompaniment of a blind old pianist. In Antwerp, it was even more melancholy. For the *Poesjennelleskelder* had been closed since the War. But we found the old showman living near the wharf and he led us down into the cellars under the streets and finally, kindled by our enthusiasm, made his wooden marionettes enact a scene of riotous old play while we held a few candles to give light.

In Italy, the marionettes are still important. The fashionable *Teatro dei Piccoli* in Rome with handsome large marionettes performing Grand Opera and Shakespeare was a revelation. But the Piedmontese puppet theatres in Turin and Milan have a robust, genuine popularity. There, in miniature red-plush Scala theatres, large audiences of working people sit until two in the morning enraptured with the sallies and antics and adventures of the puppet stage. The showmen come from dynasties and pass the theatres down from father to son. It was Signor Carlo Colla III who showed me backstage where interesting, vivid old wooden marionettes hung beside newer but less appealing puppets, and where the scenery was dated and the properties "period."

In England, the sculptor William Simmonds and his wife led me into their studio thatched with golden straw and adjoining their cottage in the Cotswalds, and entertained me with the loveliest performance of marionettes that I have ever seen. Mr. Simmonds manipulated the perfect little wooden marionettes which he had designed and carved, and sang old sea chanteys and quaint ballads of the woods and countryside, while Mrs. Simmonds accompanied the ditties and dances on the virginal. What magic there was in it all— from the noisy battles of the Italian *Orlando Furioso* to the delicacy of this *Light of Love*, tripping daintily to the tinkle of the old instrument.

After this European interlude came the return to America where an advanced and private "depression" of my own forced me, habitual dilettante of thirty-five, to turn to some sort of real work. My friends, the puppets, with an elegant wooden gesture of noblesse oblige, repaid the years I had given to their service by offering me a profession. So I became a puppet showman in earnest. It was a strenuous but gratifying labor: writing plays, modeling, carving, painting and dressing the

marionettes, selecting and training puppeteers, rehearsing the plays, promoting and selling them, and going from school to school, from club to church, to store, to hospital, giving plays. Of all phases of this activity, the most satisfying was the contact with hundreds and hundreds of children. It seemed an almost too delicate, too poignant power— playing upon the hearts and imaginations of these great groups of boys and girls, evoking their laughter, their sorrow, their fears, their loyalties by the twitch of a finger inside a wooden doll, or the simplest monosyllable. I was indeed sorry to give up this part of my work when the program grew too strenuous.

Now, in its eleventh year, the puppet theatre tours from coast to coast, playing each season to some fifty thousand children. We have a repertory of ten or twelve plays ready to give, and the two young men who travel with the show have been with the puppets ten and six years respectively and are as skilled puppeteers as any in the country. They pride themselves upon the quality of their performances and they judge by the fact that children neither cough nor wriggle at their plays.

About four years ago I wrote a story book for children telling of the adventures of our own Mr. Clown, who is so important a personage in our puppet theatre. To help sell the book, I designed a toy Clown to put in the shops along with the story— a simplified marionette with five strings which any child could pick up and dance easily. The book was tolerably popular, but Mr. Clown, himself, made a tremendous success. Thousands of him were sold in toy departments east, west and south. The second year a black Sambo joined him and next came a jolly Sailor. This season there will be six amusing little marionettes and also a "kit" of wooden parts with an assortment of heads from which to select and assemble a puppet— also costumes, scripts, and possibly a marionette theatre. These will enable children to dress, paint and stage their puppet shows without the tedium and frequent disappointment attendant upon many such projects.

Thus the marionettes, casually encountered some twenty-odd years ago, have filled time with incessant work and continued interest. They have rewarded me with unusual contacts, fair financial returns, and some slight recognition in their own world. Even if I tried, I could no longer escape from them. Letters pour in from puppet enthusiasts in Europe, in Japan, in Mexico; letters from children, showmen, scholars, department stores, circuses. There are not days enough in the year to write all the articles, prepare the lectures, give the classes or promote the many new marionette projects which are waiting to be launched. As one little girl said to me, years ago, in a grimy school: "It must be lots of fun to be a puppetess."

This account was found in a 1935 edition of the Vassar Quarterly. Ms. Joseph was a tremendous influence on American Puppetry and puppeteers, including George Latshaw, whom she hired right out of college.



FURTHER ADVENTURES OF A RUSSIAN PUPPET THEATRE

Adventures of a Russian Puppet Theatre.

Translated by Elena Mitcoff. New edition: Canada: Charlemagne Press, 2003. 172 pp. \$30, spiral bound. Available from the Puppetry Store.

Early twentieth-century Russian puppeteer Nina Simonovich-Efimova is an important figure in the history of puppetry. She and her husband Ivan Efimov transformed hand, shadow, and rod puppet performance by bringing in theories and aesthetics that had not previously existed in the puppet theatre. They applied principles of composition, sculpture, and painting to puppetry and incorporated elements of current trends from the theatre of live actors. They came to see puppetry as essentially an artist's realm, and the puppet itself as a painting or sculpture set in motion. In their theatre's first five years alone they created over thirty shows, including adaptations of *Petrushka* plays and numerous Krylov fables.

Efimova was prolific not only as a performer, but also as a writer: beginning in 1918, she published articles on her new style of puppetry. She also published several books and pamphlets that were mainly how-to guides for the aspiring puppeteer, including a couple later in her career on rod puppets and shadow puppets. Today she is best known for her 1925 book *Zapiski Petrushechnika* [*Notes of a Petrushka-Player*]. This book chronicles her early performances, provides insight into her artistic theory, includes several of her plays, prints a number of drawings, and is one of the first manuals on how to create puppets. According to scholar Anna Nekrylova, Efimova was "the first among Soviet puppeteers who began the discussion on the specifics of puppet theatre." Nekrylova also states in the introduction to the 1980 Russian edition of the book that "*Notes of a Petrushka-Player* is a serious, deep exploration, a most interesting monument of the history of our culture, which reflects the first and a very important era in the establishment of Soviet puppet theatre."

Sensing the importance of Efimova's work, American puppeteer and historian Paul McPharlin asked Elena Mitcoff to translate *Notes of a Petrushka-Player* into English; the 1935 English edition was published by Puppetry Imprints under the title *Adventures of a Russian Puppet Theatre*. As the difference in title suggests, this latter edition was more



of an adaptation than a translation; although the translator was in correspondence with Efimova, portions of the book were significantly rewritten, reorganized, omitted, or otherwise altered. It is not an especially reliable source of information on the history of the Efimovs' Petrushka Theatre since so much has been changed, and in some cases mistranslated, from the original, and does not accurately represent the depth of Efimova's theoretical framework. However, the English edition does contain several chapters not present in the original, and remains one of the most beloved books on puppetry available in the English language.

The 2003 reprint of *Adventures of a Russian Puppet Theatre* is a faithful transcription of the 1935 English edition. Although it does not, unfortunately, undertake to retranslate the original Russian text, correct errors, or restore several omitted sections, it makes Efimova's influential book available to a broader audience. It also provides some photographs which are not in any of the three previous versions of the book; these images and a timeline by John Bell, with approximate dates of some of Efimova's performances, help to contextualize and emphasize the importance of Efimova's contribution to modern puppetry.

One of the most unfortunate omissions from the 1925 Russian to the 1935 English edition of Efimova's book was the exclusion of a number of her plays, including, among others, two versions of Petrushka plays and one about Baba Yaga. The 2003 re-release of *Adventures of a Russian Puppet Theatre* by Charlemagne Press attempts to address this at least in part by including Mitcoff's translation of Efimova's play "Zadumchivaia Intermediia [A Pensive Interlude]," translated under the title "Pensive Puppets." This was one of several shows Efimova had presented at the studio of her voice teacher Ozarovskaia; according to Efimova, she first performed it in 1923 for the studio's tenth anniversary at five in the morning. In this play, Efimova deals comically with the issue of actors being treated like puppets; she provides a unique point of view on the ongoing Russian theoretical interest in puppets which had become so incorporated into the understanding of the actor that a number of directors were, more than ten years into the craze, still experimenting with having live actors move or dress like marionettes. This trend continued throughout the 1920s until the oppression of Socialist Realism in the early 1930s. In her translation, Mitcoff makes several changes to Efimova's text as her translation was intended for performance before an American audience; for example, Efimova had referred to the theatrical wisdom of Meyerhold, while the Detroit puppeteers substituted Gordon Craig's name instead.

Although I would love to see *Notes of a Petrushka-Player* translated into English in its entirety, its American cousin, *Adventures of a Russian Puppet Theatre* remains an important historical document, and is, to my knowledge, the only book by a female Russian puppeteer to be translated into English. It is a fascinating picture of the plight of the artist during the revolutionary period, and is still essential today for its advice on puppet construction and repertoire.

REVIEW BY DASSIA POSNER

NINA EFIMOVA

ADVENTURES
OF A RUSSIAN
PUPPET
THEATRE

Charlemagne Press

OTHER WORKS BY NINA SIMONOVICH-EFIMOVA:

- Adventures of a Russian Puppet Theatre*. Translated by Elena Mitcoff. Birmingham, Michigan: Puppetry Imprints, 1935.
- Katalog Vystavki. Zhivopis'. Grafika. Teatr. Keramika [Exhibition Catalog. Paintings. Drawings. Theatre. Ceramics]*. Moscow, 1968.
- "Kukol'nyi Teatr v Derevne [Puppet Theatre in the Country]." *Vestnik Teatra [Theatrical Messenger]* 74 (1920).
- "Notes on Hand Puppets." Translated by Elena Mitcoff. *Puppetry: A Yearbook of Puppets and Marionettes* 1 (1930): 55-58.
- "O Petrushke [About Petrushka]." *Vestnik Teatra [Theatrical Messenger]* 34 (23-28 September 1919): 6-8.
- "Ocherki Zhizni i Tvorchestva I. S. Efimova [The Life and Creative Work of Ivan Efimov]." In *Ob Iskusstve i Khudozhnikakh [About Art and Artists]*, compiled by A. B. Matveeva and A. I. Efimov, 30-39. Moscow, 1977.
- Pensive Puppets*. Translated by Elena Mitcoff. Detroit: Puppetry Imprints, 1937.
- "Pustynnik i Medved' [The Hermit and the Bear]." In *Kukly Vykhodiat na Stseny: Kniga dlia Uchitelia [Puppets Enter the Stage: A Book for Teachers]*, 158. Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1993.
- "Tenovoi Teatr [Shadow Theatre]." *Kukart* 3 (1992): 54-61.
- Zapiski Khudozhnika [Notes of an Artist]*. Compiled by A. I. Efimov and I. L. Golitsyn. Moscow: Sovetskii Khudozhnik, 1982.
- Zapiski Petrushechnika [Notes of a Petrushka-Player]*. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1925. First edition.
- Zapiski Petrushechnika, i Stat'i o Teatre Kukol' [Notes of a Petrushka-Player and Articles on the Puppet Theatre]*, edited by N. A. Zhizhina. Leningrad: "Iskusstvo" Leningradskoe Otdelenie, 1980.

LOIE FULLER:

"A FIRE ABOVE DOGMAS"

BY HANNE TIERNEY

Loie Fuller, born in 1862 in Fullertown, Illinois, became one of the most celebrated and best-loved dance stars in Europe at the turn of the century. Although appreciated in America, her appearances here never provoked the same veneration, adulation and respect they did in Europe. There, she became "La Loie." Her dances inspired Rodin, Toulouse-Lautrec, the entire *Jugendstil* movement and the poet Mallarmé. Her immense artistry came from her understanding of the movement of fabric, and of the magical power of light. She aimed for a synthesis of movement, light, and space, and she was celebrated for achieving it. The forms and shapes she created in her dances by manipulating vast amounts of silken fabric into fantastic organic forms entered the popular aesthetic of the times: vases, bronzes, paintings and posters depicted her swirling dances. These images encapsulated the essence of the visual language of Art Nouveau.

In the field of dance, though, European or otherwise, she has oddly remained a sort of "one night stand." Isadora Duncan's freewheeling and revealing dances, and her idea of letting the body express itself, became a major influence in the field, an influence felt today as much as it was a hundred years ago. Duncan was Fuller's junior by ten years and at one point, her young prodigy. Loie Fuller's direct influence faded somewhat with the rise of Martha Graham, although she will always be a large page in the history book of dance. None-the-less, many of her inventions are part and parcel of the effects of which the theater makes good use. In a tableau she staged to Debussy's *La Mer* in 1925, for example, she first used the simple device of manipulating many yards of silk into a rolling sea, a sea that has rolled and waved on many stages since.

Perhaps this difference in the reputation of the two dancers, and in the influence they've had on subsequent generations, may well be that technology and mechanical effects, so brilliantly used by Loie Fuller, are constantly overhauled by newer inventions. They are thrilling in the beginning, when first seen, but pioneer work in technology is quickly replaced by further, and usually more spectacular, advances. The changes that transform an art form, as did Isadora Duncan's dances, that change an underlying concept, however, are lasting.

Loie Fuller worked with the dramatic potential inherent in inanimate material. During the time of her early vaudeville performances in the 1870s, the skirt dance became fashionable. No longer the traditional tutu arrangement, this dance introduced a long, soft skirt that could drape and swirl around the female body. Loie Fuller evolved into an artist through her insight into—and her work with—the possibilities of these swirls and drapes, with the sensuousness of fabric's diagonal movement, and by turning the fabric into a dance in its



own right. This she accomplished by holding long sticks in both hands while dancing. The sticks had large hooks on the ends and were hidden under the fabric. She used them to grab and arrange the voluminous silks. In that way she created surprising new shapes that the audience saw as lilies, butterflies, violets or serpentine. When she swirled her fabrics into these forms, her own body disappeared, and the audience saw only a stunning image that shaped and reshaped itself. Her gyrating body became the force that turned the silks into these immensely expressive forms. (Contrary to Heinrich von Kleist's theory on the limitations of the human dancer, Loie Fuller knew her own center of gravity very well.) Then, using the results of her extensive research into light, she would heighten these effects until moments of pure enchantment happened, a dance of color and light.

Loie Fuller's most extraordinary and exciting work, into which she poured hours of research and experimentation, was her original use of the recent invention of the light bulb. It opened the way for much more flexible theatrical lighting; Loie Fuller saw in its potential the theater of the future. She darkened both the auditorium and the stage, a first for contemporary audiences. By only lighting her dance, she fantastically seemed to appear out of nowhere. The play of the colored lights on the sensuous silks she manipulated in her dances was a new and sensational experience for the audience. Her famous Fire Dance, first performed in 1896, needed eight electricians to constantly change colored glass discs in front of the lamps to produce the desired effects. Lighting herself only from the sides and from underneath—she danced on a platform with holes cut out for the light to come through—she managed to produce the effect of floating in midair and dancing in flames. Light had never been used so magically in the theater before. Being a practical woman from the Midwest, she had some of her light designs, her mirrored stage sets and the cut of her silks patented in France and in the US.

Artists and Intellectuals of the avant garde celebrated Loie Fuller as the "Goddess of Light." Critics acknowledged her as "the leading dancer of her time," and sculptors reproduced her dances in bronze, marble and wood. She fit so well into the artistic climate of the European avant garde at the end of the 19th century because she shared her own artistic aims— to evoke rather than to explain in detail—with the Symbolists. Mallarmé loved her dances for their impersonal quality, and the critic and theater theoretician Camille Mauclair described them in a way that could well have served as a manifesto for the symbolist movement: "Art, nameless, radiant—a homogeneous and complete place— indefinable, absolute—a fire above dogmas."

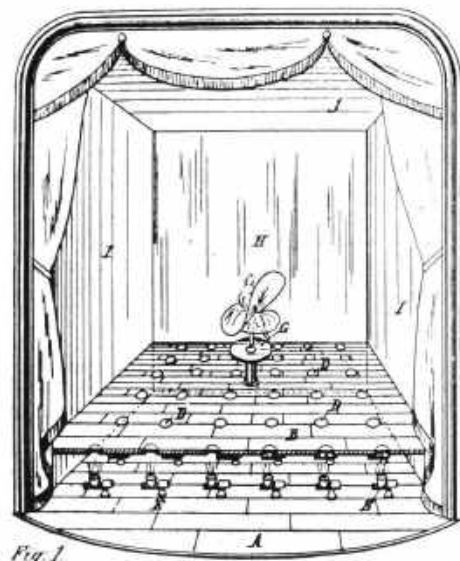


Fig. 1

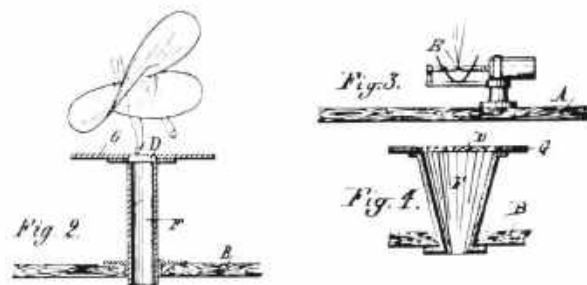


Abb. 8. U.S.-Patent Nr. 513, 102, 23. Januar 1894 «Mechanism for the Production of Stage Effects»



Fig. 1. U.S. Patent No. 513, 102, 23. Januar 1894 «Mechanism for the Production of Stage Effects»



Loie Fuller died in 1928. Earlier in her career, she had founded a dance school for girls, and she spent many years touring with her pupils through Europe. The girls continued to perform her choreography for another ten years after her death, but by then new ideas in dance and the visual arts were replacing Loie Fuller's aesthetic. She was too much of an artist to be able to swing with the times, but her interest in technology carried her into new territory. When her body could no longer stand the strain and fatigue of performing, she took to cinematography and made several dreamlike films that were as much a play of color and light as her dances had been.

Hanne Tierney is an artist well known for her own performances with light and fabric. She has been a frequent contributor to Puppetry International.



THE JIM HENSON FOUNDATION

Supporting innovative and contemporary
puppet theater for over 20 years

*For information on our grant guidelines and other activities,
please visit our web site at:*

www.hensonfoundation.org.

584 Broadway, Suite 1007
New York, NY 10012

Phone 212.680.1400
Fax 212.680.1401
Email info@hensonfoundation.org

PETRUSHKA GETS SICK

BY NINA SIMONOVICH-EFIMOVA

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1925



TRANSLATED BY DASSIA POSNER¹

Dramatis Personae:

Petrushka; Nurse-Caretaker; Old Lady
(All played by one performer.)

Props:

A bed (made out of sticks, with a red pillow and a red sheet nailed to it.)
A patchwork quilt, multicolored.
A cotton wad, tied to a stick.
A handsaw made from a white tin plate.

Petrushka: *[The swizzle energetically sounds backstage, and Petrushka jumps out and sits on the bed.]*
My, what a crowd at my stage.
I guess I must be all the rage. *[Applause.]*
One, two, three, and four, *[He leans toward the audience, pointing as he counts.]*
I can't even count them any more.
I'm so scared it's making me dizzy.
[The puppeteer makes a circular motion with her thumb near Petrushka's head.]
Better not to look. *[Covers his head with both hands, turns sideways away from the audience, and leans toward the bed.]*
Oh, I'm scared, I'm scared! *[He looks to the left, moves his head from behind his hands, and quickly covers his face again, and turns to the left.]*
Oh, I'm scared, I'm scared! *[He whimpers.]*
Oh, I'm scared, I'm scared!
[Pause while the audience laughs. They've been laughing all along, but now they can't contain it any longer.]
[Takes off his cap.]
Petrushka: I did that on purpose. I wasn't at all scared.
[Opens his arms and eagerly sits down.]
This is Nina. *[He points.]*
And this is simply- Ina.
This is Sasha.
And this, I see, is Masha.
And this one- I don't know.
How tragic. *[He covers up his face with his hands.]*
Oh, hello Boris. *[He bows, and as a friendly gesture, sticks out his hand, and bows even lower.]*
Mrs. Konstantinovna, best regards, you're here as well. *[Gives her a friendly nod.]*
You're pretending you don't know me, I'll jump on the bed, and then you'll see!
[He assumes a heroic pose.]
I am- you cannot say? I'm the Russian Petrushka from olden days.
Oh, why does my left ear itch like craaaz-y.
And it itches here, too.

[Scratches, leg, ear, back, starts rubbing back up against the bed.]

It itches so bad!

It itches just like it did on Christmas.

I'm itching all over.

Best thing for me would be to take a nap.

[He pats the bed.]

It won't hurt your feelings, kiddies, if I lie down on the bed right here in the theatre and take a nap, now, will it? No? Thanks! I'll lie down right now.

[Yawns, gets under the covers, tosses and turns, gets comfortable. Unseen to the audience, the artist works the blanket up with the free left hand. When the laughter in the audience subsides, Petrushka begins to sing in a sleepy voice, while patting himself on the head with one hand. Sings sleepily.]

Rock-a-bye baby, in the treeto... *[He snores, his entire body rises and falls.]* What's biting me?

[The puppeteer's left hand scratches him under the blanket.

He starts singing.]

Frog went a-courtin', he did ride, uh-huh, uh-huh.

[Tapping the rhythm on the bed.]

It's biting me again! I gotta look. *[Gets out from underneath the covers, inspects the bed. As he lifts up a corner of the pillow with his left hand, he peeks under it.]* Just as I suspected, in this nook! *[Catches something in the air.]*

How did this get here? *[Continues to go after it. With the left hand of Petrushka, that is with your thumb, the artist moves the covers all the way to the left, and then near-sightedly examines the sheets and tries to catch something here and there with both hands.]*

It all seems so neat and tidy. *[Rolls his eyes up toward the ceiling.]*

I know what it is that's biting!

I brought them over with me from the theatre at Mamonovsky Lane.² *[He keeps trying to catch them.]* A- a- a, there's more...

And I so want to take a nap. *[Throws himself down on the floor.]*

What did you say?

You didn't say it, but you thought it, and I already heard it.

Shake them off? *[Takes blanket firmly by the corners and shakes it out with both hands, beating it against the bed, then against the floor, moving sideways across the stage. He then beats the*

blanket on the side wall of the portal, and then stakes it out towards the audience. He leans all the way to the right and beats it against the right wall. Flings the blanket up over the bed.]

And now, it'll be so clean up here. I don't know about you... *[Makes the bed.]*

Did I get any on you, Sasha?

My fleas are itsy-bitsy... You can't even see'em. *[He lies back down.]*

Petrushka: I'm gonna lie down again, and I'll be quiet, and you be quiet.

Sealing my lips is no mistake.³ *[Lies down quickly, snores, and immediately lifts his head.]*

Now my teeth have begun to ache. *[Moans, and slams his head against the sides of the bed.]* Call for a doctor! Agasha!

Enter Old Lady, gray and unkempt.

Old Lady: *[To the audience.]* Hi there, ladies. *[She bows, bending at the waist.]* Howdy, gentlemen. Hello, Petrushka.

Petrushka: *[Whispering to the audience as he puts his left hand on her shoulder.]* This is my Old Lady. *[Loudly.]* Call the doctor.

Old Lady: *[She takes a step back and shakes her head with concern.]* Yes! A doctor! A doctor! What are you gonna do with a doctor. A doctor won't charge less than seven and a half. How about a registered nurse?⁴ Why, right here on Staramynka there is a pesthouse.

Petrushka: Go now, get her, fast! *[He motions with his left hand away from himself.]*

Drag her here, or I won't last. *[He motions toward himself.]*

Old Lady: I'm going, old man. *[She bows and exits.]*

Petrushka: *[As he, with great suffering, rolls around the bed.]* Is it worth it to get my teeth fixed? Let them hurt: I'll eat less that way. But, oh, I think I hear the doctor. *[He flops back down on the bed.]* *Enter Nurse-Caretaker.*

Nurse-Caretaker: *[Looks around.]* Where is the patient? Where's the poor thing?

Oh my! He's all skin and bones. *[Walks up to Petrushka and touches him.]*

He's in such a sweat from the fever that he's soaked his shirt through. *[Hands together, walks away, and then comes back to him.]* Tell me where it hurts:

Petrushka: *[He sits up suddenly, his back to her.]*

Forgive me if I sound uncouth.

It's my belly-

Nurse-Caretaker: I was told your tooth!

Does it hurt here? *[She hits him on the head.]*

Petrushka: A little higher, lower, to the right, to the left.
[Gesture with the center finger up and down, and with the thumb to the left and right.]

Nurse-Caretaker: I need to listen to your chest.

Lie on your left shoulder. *[Petrushka lies down.]*
Take a deep breath. *[Taps and listens, three or four times; to do this, the performer very quickly taps Petrushka with the middle finger, and quickly places her head on him, first one ear, then the other.]*

Stick out your tongue...

Petrushka: *[Turns around on the bed, his back toward the audience, the nurse leans over him, facing him, and looks into his mouth.]* Ahhhhhh.

Nurse-Caretaker: Your tongue is covered in white bumps.
Your kidneys are starting to grow lumps.
If you want to grow old and wise,
I must have you immunized.⁵
I have the contraption in my pack.
Stay put, and I'll be right back. *[Exits, nodding her head, and returns with a large cotton wad on a stick. Petrushka squeals and hides under the bed.]*

Nurse-Caretaker: *[Looks under the bed.]* Come out,
Petrushka, don't take cover
I'll have to swab your arm one way or another.

Petrushka: *[Continues squealing.]*

Nurse-Caretaker: Come on, Petrushka, I don't bite.
Hey kids, this won't hurt him, right?

Kids: *[They yell back.]* No! No!

Nurse-Caretaker: There, you see.

Petrushka: *[Rolls over under the bed, so that now he is looking up at her.]*

Now, if you want me to get better,
Then my leg off you must sever,⁶
Then I'll have no need of socks,
The single-legged still take walks.
The leg is now the latest fad,
And costs a pittance— not so bad!⁷

Nurse-Caretaker: I have the contraption in my pack.
Stay put, and I'll be right back.
[She exits.]

Petrushka: *[Claps his hands.]*
Oh what a treat, oh what a treat.
On trams I'll always have a seat. *[Sits on the bed.]*
I'll scratch my leg one last time.
Goodbye my le-e-e-g. *[Hugs his leg, and rocks back and forth on the bed with it.]*

Nurse-Caretaker enters with a saw.

Petrushka: *[Darting about the stage.]* Kids, yell to her
with all your might:

Petrushka died under the bed tonight. *[Climbs under the bed, droops over the playboard, head down, his squeals gradually growing softer. Puppeteer removes the three fingers from his head and hands.]*

Nurse-Caretaker: He's dead? Really? *[Drags him out from under the bed by the leg and puts him on the floor to her left, where he droops over again. Raps him on the head three times with the tin saw.]*
He's really dead. Now, what a shame.
I'll have to fetch his poor old dame.
[She exits.]

Petrushka: *[Immediately sits up on the edge of the playboard.]*

Here I am, back from the dead.
I avoided something super bad.
[Sings, clapping his hands.]
Tram, tram tasty,
I ate a pastry.
Tram tram tream,
Filled with cream.⁸

[The music picks up his tune in rhythm. Petrushka exits, closes the curtains and reappears to bow to the applause.]

¹ Nina Simonovich-Efimova. "Bol'noi Petrushka," translated from *Zapiski Petrushechnika, i Stat'i o Teatre Kukol*, ed. N. A. Zhizhina. [Leningrad: "Iskusstvo," Leningradskoe Otdelenie, 1980], 146-148, 150-153. Thanks to Helen Grigorev and Laurence Senelick for their suggestions during the editing of this translation.

² This was the location of the actual performance.

³ Translation for this line by Helen Grigorev.

⁴ Similar to a Red Cross nurse.

⁵ Translation for this couplet by Helen Grigorev.

⁶ This reference is most likely a topical one, since there would have been a great number of amputees in Moscow at the time as a result of World War I. Smirnova agrees with this theory. N. I. Smirnova, *Sovetskii Teatr Kukol, 1918-1932* [Moscow: 1963], 117.

⁷ Translation for this couplet by Laurence Senelick.

⁸ Translation for this line by Laurence Senelick.

What's new at the center for puppetry arts?

The New Directions Series offers diverse performances for adults to enthrall the imagination and engage the mind. Join us for works ranging from the frat-party inspired *The Spooky Puppet Horror Show III*, to the beautiful *The Hans Christian Andersen Storybook* (pictured at right). The 2003-04 season also features four special performances by the Salzburg Marionettes of Salzburg, Austria.

Photo by D.D. Simpich



Photo by Joe Borls

Shows for families feature classic literature and new takes on old tales. American heroes spin tales taller than a ten-gallon hat in *American Tall Tales*. Dr. Deadly Nightshade is threatening to take over the General Botanical Hospital in *The Plant Doctors* (pictured at left). Dragons, shoemakers, billy goats and more round out the season.

The hands-on Museum, *Puppets: The Power of Wonder*, presents over 350 puppets from around the world. More puppets are on display in the special exhibits, including *Bhima*, a hand puppet from India (pictured at right).

Learn how to manipulate and make puppets in the adult education classes.

Photo by Brad Clark



**CENTER FOR
PUPPETRY
Arts**
CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

1404 Spring Street NW • Atlanta, GA 30309-2820
Ticket Sales Office/ 404-873-3391
Administrative Office/ 404-873-3089

For more information, visit online at: www.puppet.org
info@puppet.org

Vincent Anthony, Executive Director
Headquarters of UNIMA-USA

AUTOMATA:



WEST COAST WOMEN SEARCH FOR ARTIFICIAL LIFE!

Automata, located in Los Angeles, California, is an organization committed to the creation, presentation, and preservation of puppet and object theater, experimental film, pre-cinematic attractions, and other lost and neglected forms. Formed in 2004 by artists Susan Simpson and Janie Geiser, Automata presents intimate performances of original work, film screenings of contemporary and historical work, lectures, and exhibitions in a variety of public and private spaces in the Los Angeles area.

Automata's interests are located at the intersection of objects and performance, artifacts and ephemera, magic and mechanics, artifice and interface. In looking at the intertwined histories of contemporary puppet performance, miniature theater, and experimental film, we find common ancestry in the early cinema of attractions, the nickelodeon, the praxinoscope and the zoetrope; in the camera obscura, the shadow theater, automata, the peepshow, and the diorama. That history extends back to magic lantern shows, Punch and Judy shows, traveling marionette performances, 19th Century Toy Theater, fair-ground attractions, Baroque theater mechanics, and the once popular Cabinets of Curiosities; and forward to robotics and virtual reality.

Automata, the early mechanical forms of "artificial life," seems a fitting name for our fascinations. The concept of artificial life is found in nearly all cultures, past and

present, whether in the earliest doll performances and shamanistic rituals, in literature and myth, in popular culture, or in signage and window displays, in puppetry and cinema, or animation or holography. We are interested in work which explores or subverts the concept of artificial life in nuanced and unexpected ways.

Automata's inaugural event was presented at the Museum of Jurassic Technology in Culver City (Los Angeles) on May 16, 2004 to a sold-out audience. The event featured Toy Theater Performance of the first installment of Erik Ehn's play *Frankenstein (Mortal Toys)*, directed and designed by Janie Geiser and Susan Simpson. *Frankenstein (Mortal Toys)* draws from early 19th century American portrait and landscape paintings for its visual vocabulary. The play's atmosphere of mystery and longing was heightened by Gus Seyfert's melancholy electric guitar score. Also featured in Automata's inaugural event were miniature performances by Eli Presser, Cat Cooper, Tracy Otwell, and Alison Heimstead. The next installment of *Frankenstein (Mortal Toys)* will be presented in Los Angeles the first weekend in October.

While Automata does not yet have a physical space, we hope to find a space within the next two years in downtown Los Angeles, or in one of the adjacent neighborhoods. Automata is a non-profit organization. All contributions are fully tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. •

SUE HASTINGS: PUPPET SHOWWOMAN

BY DORLIS GRUBIDGE

Sue Hastings may have been the most unlikely person ever to establish a large, successful marionette company. Raised in Puritan austerity as the only child of a Methodist minister, turned New York City socialite by way of marriage to a successful public relations executive, possessing a love of things theatrical but lacking training in any of the arts and with an admitted ignorance of puppetry, Sue turned an accidental introduction to marionettes into a business acknowledged as the largest and most diversified marionette company in the United States from the late 1920s through the onset of World War II.

Known as "the protégée of Tony Sarg" for her brief stint as a student in a construction class taught by Charles Searle for Sarg, Sue made no effort to distance herself from the association. Instead she capitalized on the Sarg connection because, as she said, "Sarg was liked by everyone and his puppets set the standard for the day." In fact, all the emerging puppet companies looked around to see what Sarg was doing and then tried to compete—Sue was just more successful than the rest. Sarg created elaborate automated dioramas for Macy's Christmas windows; Sue created elaborate live marionette window shows for Gimbels. Sarg marionettes sold merchandise at commercial conventions and so did the Hastings Marionettes. Sarg had shows at fairs and exhibitions and so did Sue. Sarg's company entertained at birthday parties for society children and so did Sue.

Throughout the years, Sue's most loyal non-commercial sponsors were the wealthy, elite families in the New York area who considered it fashionable to engage the Sue Hastings Marionettes to perform in their homes for their adult gatherings and children's birthday parties. Especially during the Depression years, fierce competition existed between the marionette companies (Hastings, Sarg, Gros and the Yale Puppeteers) for the well-paying, short tour engagements. In order to add a touch of her personal charm to each event, Sue always traveled with the company for these special shows. She met the hosts and hostesses and gave her pre-show speech wearing gowns furnished by Jay Thorpe or one of the other fashionable stores that officially dressed her. Then, much to the delight of the celebrities in atten-



Sue Hastings and *Cue Magazine* Santa, circa 1938

dance, Sue disappeared behind the marionette stage and became a puppeteer. Sue's grace and the sophisticated wit of the puppet acts made her and her marionettes the "darlings of the society set." And what a "set" it was: Alma Gluck, the Vanderbilts, Duponts, Whitneys, Fields and Roosevelts—to name a few. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt invited The Sue Hastings Marionettes to perform at The White House in December of 1937. Although Sue had performed before the Roosevelts at private parties, being invited to the White House was a singular honor.

One source of income for Sue Hastings came from endorsing various products and services. With her unusual occupation and celebrity status, and accompanied by one of her currently most popular marionettes, she made interesting copy. For example, the New York Bell Telephone "Shop By Phone" promotion featured a full page photograph of Sue and the *Cue Magazine* cover Santa Claus. The ad overlay (not shown here) says, "Famous marionette show producer does just as well by telephone when she can't shop in person."

By 1928, Sue Hastings was developing her unique contribution to commercial puppetry—that of using marionettes to present fashion shows. These figures became known as Sue Hastings's Fashionettes. The figures which modeled adult fashions were eighteen inches tall. The marionettes used to

model children's clothing right off the racks in the children's sections of the department stores were exact size replicas of children two to seven years of age.

Although not a creation of the Hastings studio, a credit usually assigned to Lillian Owen, portrait marionettes became a specialty of the Hastings studio. Sue hired a noted artist to sculpt the heads of the miniature celebrities which appeared in everything from Broadway musicals and variety shows to nightclub revues, from major fairs and exhibitions to shows aboard luxury liners.

One of Sue Hastings's goals was for her marionettes to be seen as adult entertainment as well as shows for children. Thus, in addition to her work in obvious adult venues such as Broadway musicals, variety houses, and nightclubs, Sue developed a stable of variety numbers that essentially used the same marionettes for adults and children, requiring only appropriate textual changes to suit various ages and audience sophistication. This flexibility proved valuable in that the touring units needed to carry fewer puppets to perform more shows each day: morning and afternoon shows for children and evening shows for adults. Adults from the Midwest Chautauqua tours to the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, in Nassau, and the audiences at the Palladium, in London, were delighted by the antics and wit of Sue's shows. The Hastings Marionettes were also known for the quality of their book shows—*Winnie the Pooh*, *Sinbad the Sailor*, *Peter Rabbit* and many more— which exhibited Sue's love for beautiful puppets, costumes and scenery effects. The acting was always excellent in that the Hastings puppeteers came from the ranks of aspiring or unemployed professional actors or musicians,

many of whom gave up their "legitimate" theatre ambitions for careers in puppetry.

All was not easy sailing for the Hastings Marionettes. When her bank failed at the onset of the Depression, Sue received ten cents on the dollar. Soon after, a major fire destroyed her studio and all but one set of puppets which had been out on tour. With her spirit, determination and business acumen, Sue rebuilt the company to the point that, in 1936, the Sue Hastings Marionettes consisted of over two thousand marionettes being toured by twelve companies. That year, Sue was chosen as one of twenty women for the New York League of Business Women's Award. The award cited Sue's directorship of the Sue Hastings Marionettes, the fact that she was the only woman to succeed in professional puppetry in the United States and that she had succeeded in a field not ordinarily open to women.

Sue Hastings was considered a remarkable woman by all who worked with her. Although she personally chose to characterize her entry into puppetry as "serendipity," and her early successes as luck, it was evident from the beginning that two major factors operated on her behalf: Sue Hastings possessed an unerring instinct for making correct artistic and business decisions and she had a winning personality; indeed, Sue's capacity to attract and retain the services and loyalty of competent artisans was critical throughout her long professional career. Sue was characterized by her former puppeteers as gracious, a hard worker, possessed with a sense of humor, and fair.

The above is freely excerpted from Sue Hastings: Puppet Showwoman, 1993, Charlemagne Press, by the author, Dr. Dorlis M. Grubidge, Emeritus Associate Professor of Theatre.

THE WINNERS CIRCLE



THE CENTER FOR PUPPETRY ARTS has published a charming and informative catalog for their exhibit featuring work from

UNIMA Citation-winning productions

A list of winners by year is included. \$9.95
(\$8.95 for citation winners) includes shipping in U.S.

SUNGLASSES, CIGARETTES, AND PUPPETS:

A VISIT TO REMEMBER IN PHILADELPHIA

REVIEW BY NORMAN ROESSLER, PHD



In the process, the production not only rescued the play from the black hole of American Theater (ironically, almost on the day of the 46th anniversary of the original American production); it also illuminated the aesthetic power of performing object theater and its uncanny mediation of the contemporary *Zeitgeist*.

The Visit presents the story of a dilapidated and bankrupt small town, Güllen (a Swiss-German word for liquid manure) which has fallen on hard times and is completely bankrupt. The only hope for the town is the return of its native daughter, Claire Zuchanassian, a billionaire who seemingly owns the whole world. Claire promises the town a billion dollars if justice is carried out: she wants her former lover, Alfred III, to be killed for the crime he committed against her. Some forty-five years earlier, III had carried on torrid ro-

The Visit/Der Besuch der alten Dame (1956) by the Swiss playwright Friedrich Dürrenmatt (1921-1990) has enjoyed a moderate amount of success over the years on the American Stage, with notable productions in 1958, 1973, 1992, and 2001; yet a signature production and a firm place in the repertory of American Theater have proven elusive. Problematic adaptations of the original German text, American theater traditions of psychological realism, and American cultural predispositions toward redemptive rather than tragic consciousness, could all be considered likely suspects for this state of affairs. Even that most American of efforts, the big-money, big-time musical, has failed to rescue the play from its mediocre reception on the American Stage, as witnessed by the recent failure to land a production by the Goodman Theater of Chicago and its superstar production team of Chita Rivera, Terrence McNally, and Ann Reinking on Broadway. Faced with this theatrical conundrum, the Mum Puppettheatre in Philadelphia went small—a tiny theater house, an intimate stage, and a variety of puppets—and produced a startlingly brilliant production of *The Visit* which featured a dynamic interplay of text adaptation, stage design, choreography, puppetry, and acting.

mantic affair with the teenage Claire. Yet, when she became pregnant, he denied his paternity, perjured himself in open court, and abandoned Claire in order to marry the local grocer's daughter. Disgraced, Claire left town, put the child (who subsequently died) up for adoption, became a prostitute, and eventually married the billionaire Zuchanassian, whose fortune she inherited upon his death. The townspeople at first reject the offer (embracing their deeply ingrained and cherished





Western principles of truth, justice, and morality), but eventually succumb to the lure of lucre. They start to buy items on credit (symbolized,

among other things, by new yellow shoes), slowly rationalizing Ill's murder, and finally killing him in ritualistic fashion at the end of the play (yet never losing their deeply ingrained and cherished Western principles of truth, justice, and morality). It is a brutally efficient yet elegant fable which utilizes tragicomic moments to explore the darker elements of the human experience. From the outset, critics have read greater historical allusions into the play, e.g. Holocaust, Marshall Plan, Vietnam, Capitalism, Modern Tragedy. However, for Dürrenmatt it was a grotesque, not absurd, fable which did not require grand allegorical interpretations and which should never lose sight of its deeply concrete and comic constructions. Despite Dürrenmatt's admonitions, the play and its "grotesque realism" have proven difficult to replicate in English translation and on the American Stage.

The collaborative team leading the production—Robert Smythe (founder and director of Mum Puppettheatre) and Andrew Periale (co-founder of Perry Alley Theatre/New Hampshire)—had enough experience with Dürrenmatt and his English-language adaptor, Maurice Valency, to recognize the difficulties of mounting a new production; as a result, they were able to synthesize a production which was light, quick, humorous, and theatrical. Such descriptors might seem banal, but in relation to the dramatic and intellectual detritus which burdens the play, this approach was nothing short of brilliant. The standard adaptation for the American Stage is Valency's text, used in the 1958 Broadway premiere directed

by Peter Brook and later itself adapted for the 1964 film starring Ingrid Bergman and Anthony Quinn. Exhibiting little faith in Dürrenmatt's prose to translate onto the American Stage, and even less faith in the American Theater public to appreciate the grotesque, stylized drama, Valency transformed the original playscript into a transparent, sardonic melodrama. In contrast, Periale restored the linguistic, comic, and theatrical power of Dürrenmatt's original, by allowing, for the most part, the text and its grotesque theatricality to speak for itself. Several elements of the original playscript were elided or compressed, evoking a few pangs of regret from this reviewer, but the text reductions were more than balanced out by the final product which played fast and efficiently. Periale modernized the text by using contemporary references (e.g. George W. Bush, Martha Stewart) and also changing the symbol of corruption from yellow shoes to designer sunglasses. The use of sunglasses was both courageous and clever: courageous, because it replaced what had become over the last half century an absolute iconic symbol of the play; clever, because it integrated well with the aesthetics of puppet theater (puppeteers/actors stepping in and out of character by removing sunglasses) and also intersected with contemporary images of celebrity identity.

The sunglasses also worked with the wonderfully perverse leitmotif of cigarette smoking inscribed throughout the adaptation. Nearly everyone and everything smoked during the production and several advertising blurbs/jingles from old cigarette commercials were utilized throughout the performance with ironic poignancy. Not only did the smoking motif extend the idea of crass, celebrity, commercialization, but it is something that Dürrenmatt, a big cigar smoker, would have appreciated. (For those interested in this topic, I recommend a viewing of the 1975 film *Der Richter und sein Henker/End of the Game* starring Jon Voight and Jacqueline Bisset which offers a wonderful scene where Dürrenmatt appears as himself behind a cloud of impenetrable cigar smoke.)

Director Smythe and Set/Light Designer Jorge



Cousineau made the most of this compact, dynamic and flexible text, constructing a spare stage which lent itself to evocative tableaux and creative choreography. The small stage emphasized two central playing areas: center stage were a set of double *shoji* screen doors, and downstage left was a smaller playing area set on rotating wheels in front of a *shoji* screen. Evoking the aesthetic of Kabuki/Bunraku design, the central doors were used for various settings during the play, and a rectangular cut-out within the doors constituted the stage for the hand puppets. This area represented the space of Ill and the Gülleners. The downstage space represented the space of the visitor—Claire Zachanassian and her entourage. It was an elegant solution for a difficult stage problem: even though Claire is a principal character in the play, she is, in many ways more malevolent spirit than flesh-and-blood character. In the first act she is fully integrated into the scenes with the

Gülleners; however, in the second and third act, she is largely watching over the proceedings in town from her balcony and does not directly interact with the other characters in the play. Claire's stage area allowed for spotlight emphasis and convenient change of scenery and props. Just like the central doors in the center stage area, this area also evoked a Kabuki/Bunraku atmosphere, reminiscent perhaps, at least in terms of aural and visual tension, of the aesthetic space animated by the *yoruri* narrator and the *shamisen* musician.

Upon this stage performed a hybrid cast of puppets, puppeteers, and actors. Stephen Layne and Bonnie Periale led the design and construction of the performing objects in the play and the principal puppeteers were Andrew Periale, Bonnie Periale, Rainey Lacey, Kate Mangan, Brendon Gavel, and Bradley K. Wren. Award-winning Philadelphia actors, Frank X and Sally Mercer, rounded out the ensemble and assayed the lead roles of Alfred III and Claire Zachanassian. The Gülleners as a group chorus were represented by a dozen hand puppets, and as individuals by table top puppets and a variety of performing object puppetry, e.g. shadow puppets, mannequin legs, and "human" objects. Claire was represented as a full-sized Bunraku-style puppet, while her various husbands were represented by 17-inch hard plastic and vinyl dolls from the Matt O'Neill collection of the Robert Tonner Doll Company. The choices of performing objects for the productions were effective and negotiated the strengths of the playscript and the ensemble. One example was the presentation of Claire's husbands. The Matt O'Neill doll combined with the insipid vocalization provided offstage by Bradley K. Wren through cheap speakers was hilarious but also an aesthetically astute choice. During the course of the play, Claire trots three husbands out for public consumption. The characters are superficial and utterly disposable and given only the smallest of roles; hence, the Matt O'Neill doll was a perfect solution. At the same time, the doll itself played along with the dominant motif of commercialization and worked well with the aforementioned cigarette smoking leitmotif.

The puppeteers and actors negotiated the difficult triad of object manipulation, acting, and vocal projection with technical proficiency and aesthetic virtuosity. The operation and presentation of the Claire puppet was a case in point. The Claire constellation was constructed through the Claire puppet, the three puppeteers (Rainey Lacey, Bonnie Periale and Kate Mangan) and the vocalization of Sally Mercer, from her downstage left area. As the puppeteers

operated the puppet on the center stage, Mercer spoke from her stage area, first with her back to the audience, and gradually turning to face the audience. The dialectic of voice, actor, and puppet was maintained throughout the first act to a powerful effect: Mercer's wonderful vocal projection (highlighted by a loud laughing cackle) and emotive facial and physical gestures along with the puppeteers' fluid manipulations combined to create an ominously present Claire who remained somehow intangible. Capitalizing on Claire's numerous prosthetic body parts (the results of several near-fatal accidents) and the obvious connection to the removable body parts of performing objects, the production opened the second act by having Claire wake up and literally put her prosthetic body together—a custom-made scene for puppet theater if there ever was one. After putting her leg on and proclaiming "some assembly required," Mercer supplanted the puppet Claire for the rest of the play. In the third act, Mercer would eventually descend to the main stage. This dialectical presentation of Claire's character cannot be underestimated. The character of the old lady has always required a studied stylization. As the teacher character so eloquently states, she is something out of a Greek Tragedy—Medea or Clytemnestra. Claire is barely human: her life experiences have left her largely devoid of feeling, just as her numerous accidents have left her body largely devoid of human flesh. The result is a character which has a tremendously small window of playability. Previous productions onstage and onscreen have shown just how tenuous the role is—too often falling into a one-dimensional presentation. One must be supremely patient and disciplined to play the role, and find a balance between the inhuman, mature Claire and the still-human, teenage Klara. Maria Schell in the 1982 Swiss TV production has always been my favorite, although it was largely a performance of facial gesture and vocal intonation. The well-received physical interpretation of Jane Alexander in the 1992 Broadway revival (which I did not see) was described as a female version of Richard III and suggests an interesting variation. However, Mercer's vocal and gestural theatricality combined with the visual and physical presence of the puppet/puppeteers constructed a dialectical tension that captured the contradictory and elusive nature of the character and created to date perhaps the most complete stage interpretation of Claire Zachanassian.

Without question, the second act, in which Ill slowly comes to understand the true intent of his fellow townspeople, was the absolute highlight of the production. The second act, with repetitive scenes emphasizing interaction between expressionistic secondary characters, has always been viewed as problematic on the American Stage, and led Valency and Brooks to make major alterations for the 1958 Broadway production. True to form, the Mum Puppettheatre production remained essentially loyal to the text but through discrete text reduction, brilliant choreography, and the trump card of puppet theater, turned this tradition on its head. The transition between Act I and Act II gave an inkling of things to come. As Act I ended, wooden clackers (tsuke) echoed from the wings as moving spotlights highlighted the main characters. At the same time, the central stage doors were opened and closed repeatedly. In contrast to the realistic illusionist tradition of American Theater, this small effect of Kabuki aesthetics highlighted the mechanics of theatrical production, reminding the audience that it was indeed in a theater. As the second act opened, Ill interacted with his suddenly spendthrift clientele as Claire sat on her balcony, managing her corporate empire, responding to letters from world leaders, and putting up with her insipid husband. The customers at Ill's store, Hofbauer and Helmsberger, were presented as table top puppets (approximately 24 inches tall) operated by Andrew Periale and Brendon Gawel, both visible but hooded. As Claire smoked one of her husband's cigarettes and quipped "tastes good like a cigarette should," she listened to the music of Puccini, silently moving her hand back and forth to the music. The Hofbauer puppet, who had been smoking with Ill, turned toward the sound of the music and mimicked Claire's gesture. The scene was held for a few moments creating a calm yet



frightening aural and visual tableau. It was the "calm before the storm" and proved to be an excellent prologue to the fast pace of the following scenes. In these scenes, the Gülleners gradually turn against Ill as Claire continues to nonchalantly preside over the events from her balcony perch. Although Ill is central to every scene, the secondary actors (policeman, mayor, teacher, priest) are provided significant small moments of dialogue, and this creates difficulties for any production. Not only are the scenes repetitive, but because the characters largely function as one-dimensional expressionistic figures, it is difficult to find an appropriate characterological balance, let alone rhythmic pace. Brook, using Valency's adaptation, had drastically simplified the scenes creating a more realistic and monologic viewpoint. In contrast, the Smythe/Periale production kept the original scenes and through brilliant choreography and set utilization created several amazing interpretive moments. The solution to the one-dimensional nature of the secondary characters was to present them in obscured form, neither fully as puppets nor fully as actors. So, in the policeman's scene, all we see are a set of mannequin legs as we hear the dialogue from Brendon Gawel; in the mayor's scene all we see is the back of Andrew Periale's head; and in the priest's scene, shadow puppetry, created by Bradley Wren and Andrew Periale, was utilized to create an eerie religious moment of corrupted faith. This aesthetic continued throughout the act as Ill was hunted and eventually cornered by the townspeople, who were illuminated only as shadows holding flashlights in the darkness. In the end, it was incredible theater (not just puppet theater) and probably the best synthesis of text, production, and interpretation that I had experienced during the 2003-04 theater season.

Compared to the second act, the final act was good but less effective. This was due, in part, to the symbolic arc of the production's interpretation. Most of the characters began as puppets and gradually became human: the more corrupted and evil they became, the more the characters devolved into humans. Thus, the production reversed the traditional *Frankenstein* discourse which permeates American cultural

identity; that is, that evil is perpetrated by something artificial, monstrous, and inhuman like a puppet, robot, or artificial life form. Intellectually and aesthetically this arc held a lot of merit; technically, it led to a less compelling conclusion. The third act continued to use performing objects, albeit in reduced form, creating a series of actor-dominated scenes with a resultant loss of dynamism. In my opinion, the brilliance of the production was its ability to create multiple and contradictory perspectives of human experience through the dialectical interaction of performing object and human actor; and the reduction of such an aesthetic tension, at least on the technical level, was perceptible. However, the final scene, in which the deceased Ill is presented as a hand puppet (achieving a certain tragic nobility again) and is carried away by Claire in her coffin/purse, was pure theater gold and made a strong case for the production's interpretive arc.

At the same time, the third act did provide some showcase moments for Frank X (Ill), whom I consider the best contemporary actor on the Philadelphia stage. Although Ill begins as a hand puppet with the other Gülleners, within a few scenes the character was fully presented



by Frank X until the final death scene. In an odd way, Frank X might have had the more difficult acting challenge than Sally Mercer or the other ensemble members: in a play dominated by human-puppet dialectics, in which actors repeatedly stepped in and out of puppet personas, Frank X had to stay within character throughout the production. He interacted with other puppet characters, but he himself had no recourse to his own puppet *Doppelgänger*. Much like the character he played, Frank X had to figure out this acting conundrum all by himself. Having seen many productions with Frank X through the years and also having the luxury of seeing the production three times in various forms (rehearsal, preview, closing night), it seemed to me that he originally struggled with this situation;



however, in the end, he worked out these difficulties and presented a very nuanced and effective performance.

The accomplishments of the production were manifold. First, it showed a correlation between the Dürrenmatt's theoretical positions, the architectonics of the play, and the aesthetics of performing object theater: *The Visit* was made for puppet theater, and perhaps can only truly be realized through puppet theater. Second, the production made a compelling case for the aesthetic power of puppet theater. Puppet theater revels in the transparent theatricality of human nature. We are (to paraphrase Nietzsche) creatures of play,

constantly re-imagining our supposed "essence"; moreover (to paraphrase E.T.A Hoffmann via Sigmund Freud), puppet theater operates in the arena of the "uncanny," reminding us on an unconscious level of our deepest primordial selves. Puppet theater works against the grain of standard American performance practices by de-stabilizing notions of reality, individuality, and truth; at the same time allowing us to emotionally and intellectually explore the consequences of such deconstructions. And to end on an impressionistic note, isn't this exactly what we need in America today? Intellectual and aesthetic tools which allow us to consciously reflect on a culture which is increasingly more driven by celebrity, plastic surgery, and computer graphics? In an era when we

as a nation are proclaiming our exceptionalism, our democratic humanitarianism and insisting that the Abu Ghraib prison scandal in Iraq is an aberration carried out by some disturbed individuals, isn't it necessary to pull back the curtain in Oz and illuminate the wizard as utterly human? In an era when we continue to propagate a simplistic *Frankenstein* myth which essentializes evil as the artificial and non-human object and sanitizes our own culpability (the current film *I, Robot* is a stunningly perverse form of this discourse), isn't it time to use performing objects to explore our own all-too-human actions?

Norman Roessler teaches at Temple University in Philadelphia. His scholarship concentrates on German and American Theater and he has published reviews and articles of theater productions in Philadelphia, New York, and Berlin.

THE PUPPETRY STORE

A Service of Puppeteers of America, Inc.



The Puppetry Store

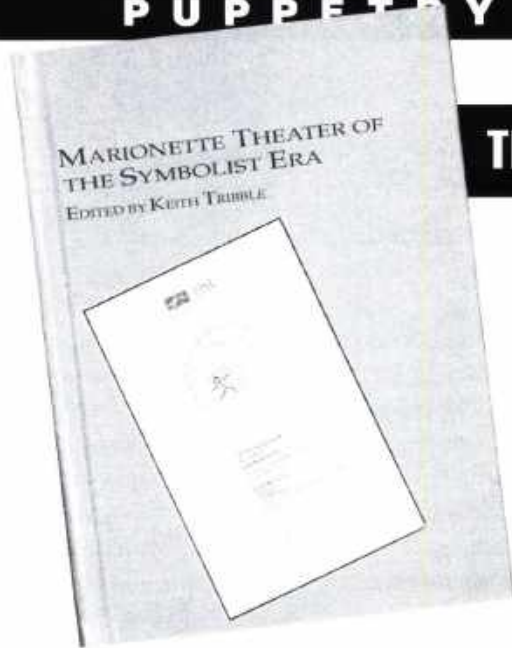
302 W. Latham St.
Phoenix, AZ 85003

P 602-262-2050

F 602-262-2330

E store@puppeteers.org

THE MARIONETTE METAPHOR REVISITED

***Marionette Theater of the Symbolist Era***

Edited by Keith Tribble. 402 pgs. Lewiston; Queenston; Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002. \$130 (discounts available from publisher), cloth.

At the turn of the last century, the puppet was embraced in theatre, literature and art as a universal metaphor for the revolt against realism. Seen as a beacon of theatrical reform, the marionette was viewed in many different ways: as deathlike, noble, childlike, of the people, or mechanical. Likewise, in symbolism, a movement that emphasized the spiritual, inner, religious, and abstract over the realistic and mundane, the puppet represented the embodiment of theatricality as superior to naturalism; an ideal form of conventionalized movement; a regained sense of fantasy in theatre; the ultimate obedient actor; or, most often, a symbol of man in the hands of fate.

Marionette Theater of the Symbolist Era, a collection of essays edited by Keith Tribble, traces the influence of the puppet on many of the greatest European writers, directors, and performers of the early twentieth century, illustrating the multifarious interpretations of the marionette in all their rich variety. The book publishes the proceedings of a conference on the symbolist marionette that was organized by Keith Tribble at the Anna Akhmatova Museum in St. Petersburg in June, 1996. Tribble, an expert on the puppet in symbolist theatre, wrote nearly a thousand pages of his doctoral dissertation on the subject several years earlier. For this project, he drew together twenty-three scholars and

puppeteers to discuss this theme from different points of view in the hopes of achieving a more comprehensive and well-rounded view of the subject, including work by both historians and puppetry practitioners. The book also contains a number of fascinating images from an exhibition that ran concurrent with the conference.

Although the focus of the book is primarily on Russian symbolist experiments in puppetry, the book maintains a broader scope, also concentrating on similar experiments in the rest of Europe and thereby placing the Russian symbolist marionette movement in its international context.

Non-symbolist puppetry experiments during this period are omitted. The book is organized into four sections: "Theoretical Considerations," "The Symbolist Marionette Theater in Western Europe," "The Symbolist Marionette Theater in Russia," and "Echoes and Reminiscences: The Image of the Marionette in Soviet and Russian Emigré Literature." Although nearly two-thirds of the articles are in Russian, Tribble makes them accessible to English-language readers by providing a useful summary of each in English.

The articles in this collection can be further broken down into sub-themes: puppetry performance theory, symbolist puppetry performance, the puppet in dramatic literature, the puppet in the theatre of actors, and the puppet in fiction. Several articles in this collection trace the factors that led to the ubiquitous European interest in the marionette during this period. Tribble and Segel discuss the history of puppet performance in their articles on nativity rod puppets and shadow puppets. There are also essays on famous European writers' interest in puppets: Alfred Jarry, Federico García Lorca, Edward Gordon Craig, Stanislaw Wyspianski, and Arthur Schnitzler. Several authors deal with important Silver Age puppeteers who were pioneers in founding some of the first established theatres: Azadovsky publishes, for the first time, letters by Rainer Maria Rilke on Julia Slonimskaia-Sazonova's Puppet Theatre; several writers touch on the work of Liubov' Iakovleva-Shaporina; and Solomonik provides a useful overview of puppet theatre experiments that took place in Russia. The focus of the collection, however, is on famous Russian writers (Mikhail Kuzmin, Alexei Tolstoy, Alexander Blok, Petr Potemkin, Fedor Sologub, Alexei Remizov, Nikolai Gumilev, Vladimir Nabokov, and Leonid Andreev) and directors (Vsevolod Meyerhold and Nikolai Evreinov) and their interest in the puppet.

Many of the contributors to this volume are renowned puppeteers and scholars in the field: puppetry historian and former UNIMA president Henryk Jurkowski, theatre historian Sharon Carnicke, Russian puppetry scholar Irina Solomonik, editor of the puppetry journal *Kukart* Irina Uvarova, and Mikhail Kuzmin scholar George Cheron, to name just a few.

One shortcoming of the book is its failure to consistently define what a marionette is. One of Russian puppeteer Nina Efimova's most persistent complaints at the beginning of the twentieth century was that there were no clear and reliable definitions for different types of puppets. She struggled to avoid lumping puppets with very different constructions, needs, and repertoires into one homogenous category. The confusing terminology used in the Symbolist Period is, unfortunately, perpetuated in this volume; distinctions between categories of puppets tend to be eradicated, leading to some confusion when hand puppets, rod puppets, shadow puppets, and even dolls, are categorized under the term "marionette."



Efimova illustration

Tribble defends his generic application of the term "marionette" to mean both puppet in general as well as theatrical works that used the marionette in symbolic fashion, stating quite correctly that he uses the term as it was used during the period in question. However, the hazard in failing to make a historical distinction between the puppet as metaphor and the puppet as literal theatrical object is that it becomes easy to confuse the metaphor with the thing itself. Although most of the scholarship leading up to and including this book has treated the idea of the marionette as a kind of umbrella theme, there is often a marked difference between the performances and theory of those who used puppets during this period and those who did not. For example, if the majority of symbolist writers saw the puppet as death-like or mechanical, actual puppeteers tended to view it, conversely, as a spontaneous creature to be filled with a soul. More specific definitions in future scholarship will lead to a deeper understanding of the complexity and diversity of this period.

Despite these issues, this book, along with Catriona Kelly's *Petrushka: The Russian Carnival Puppet Theatre* and Henryk Jurkowski's *History of European Puppetry*, is one of the most important books on European puppetry of the last fifteen years. Its mixture of literary analysis, theory, and history provides both breadth and detail on the history of the origins of modern puppet theatre. *Marionette Theater of the Symbolist Era* is relevant not only to puppeteers and historians, but to the entire theatrical community. As Penny Francis points out in her article, we are now returning to modernist experiments in our own theatrical quests. Back in 1923, puppeteer Julia Slonimskaia-Sazonova complained to her brother in a letter: "Now marionettes are all the rage, but no one knows how to use them." [p. 291] Symbolist plays for puppets were written, but many were forgotten by the time there were puppeteers skilled enough to stage them. I hope, as does Tribble, that this book will provide inspiration and creative fodder for the current puppetry revival by providing detailed information on works inspired by and written for the puppet theatre by some of the past century's greatest writers.

REVIEW BY DASSIA POSNER



The Cotsen Center for Puppetry and the Arts

A laboratory for training and
experimentation in the art of
puppet theatre

Janie Geiser, Director

Cal Arts School of Theatre

Susan Solt, Dean

Visiting Artists
have included:

Lee Breuer

Pablo Cueto

Jane Henson

Dan Hurlin

Ken Jacobs

Jennifer Miller

Zaven Paré

Roman Paska

Larry Reed

Michael Sommers

Mark Sussman

Paul Zaloom

graduate and
undergraduate
study available

Cal Arts' 60 acre campus is located 27 miles north of Los Angeles
24700 McBean Parkway, Valencia, CA 91355
For admission: 800-292-2787 (in CA) 800-545-2787 (out of state)
e-mail: admiss@calarts.edu Website: www.calarts.edu

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL
welcomes submissions

Themes for upcoming issues include:

Spring '05- Genre Benders:
The Thoroughly Post-Modern Puppet

Though puppetry has a long history of breaking boundaries, there is currently an unprecedented level of fusion, collaboration, and synthesis in contemporary work. Pulcinella travels to Brazil, wayang screens are lit up by lasers, and young urban puppeteers are redefining vaudeville. Artists from different cultures- even different disciplines- split a bottle of wine and- POOF!- a new collaboration has begun. Fellow travelers, tell us what you have seen!

Fall '05- PUPPETRY and DANCE

e-mail proposals for consideration to
the Editor: ap3001@worldpath.net



AD DEADLINES

FOR SPRING-
Jan 15, 2005

FOR FALL-
July 15, 2005

ALL AD SUBMISSIONS OR INQUIRIES GO TO:
REAY KAPLAN
3838 HUNTING RIDGE ROAD
LILBURN, GA 30047

REAYPUPPET@YAHOO.COM

UNIMA-USA CITATIONS FOR 2004

The UNIMA-USA Citations for Excellence, founded by Jim Henson, recognize excellence in the art of puppet theater. Citation-quality shows exalt and exemplify the best of the art of puppetry in North America. Through these awards, UNIMA-USA seeks to stimulate and reward excellent puppet theater. There are awards given in live theater and in recorded media.

The review committee is anonymous and we attempt to have reviewers in all areas of the country. Each reviewer nominates shows that she or he feel are excellent in script, direction, design and overall production value. When the show receives three nominations, it has earned a citation.



Hobgoblin Hill Puppets' Dance of Death



Hurlin's Hiroshima Maiden

ROD WANTS YOU



promo for AVENUE Q

CITATION WINNERS

Alice Walker, Hobgoblin Hill Puppets:
The Dance of Death

Blair Thomas:
The Blackbird

Kevin McCollum, Robyn Goodman,
Jeffrey Seller, Vineyard Theatre and
the New Group: *Avenue Q*

Dan Hurlin: *Hiroshima Maiden*

Liz Joyce and a couple of puppets
with Steven Wideman:
Sing a Song of Sixpence

Preston Foerder:
Tales of the Brothers Grimy

David Syrotiak's
National Marionette Theatre:
Beauty and the Beast



from *Blackbird* by Blair Thomas

PETER BAIRD 1952–2004



Almost 30 years had gone by. I'd last seen him when he was 12, when I'd had the good fortune to be rehearsing for his father, Bil, at the Baird studio that was also home to the Baird family at 59 Barrow Street in Greenwich Village. It was 1964. The Chrysler "Show-Go-Round" at The New York World's Fair was upcoming, and as I cast an eye to the corner of the room, I couldn't help but notice a tall, lanky, red-headed kid, leaning against one of Baird's blue travelling crates. It was Peter. "A far away fella," I thought. That's what they called Cagney. That was my very first impression as he gazed somewhere off into the distance, and I wondered what he was thinking. It remains an indelible image to this day. We never said hello.

He was 42 now. And he remembered me: "I think I've got some pictures of you from the Fair," he said. "You got some time?" I asked, "I'd like to come down and talk with you?" "Sure," he replied. And so we began. I had worked with the best— from Bunin to father Baird— but I'd never witnessed the performance genius of Peter Baird. It was a genius born of an open childlike love for his craft, febrile and all-consuming, and a love for humanity, displayed always with humility, which in my judgment spoke softly of his extraordinary gifts.



We worked closely together and I got to know him professionally. His passion and commitment were total and I suspect nothing came before his love of puppetry. He was as fearless on the bridge 10 feet off the ground, as Spiderman on Quaaludes. And nothing short of

yelling: "Peter— It's 7 P.M. They're closing the stage! We've got to get out of here!" could get him to come down.

He spoke to me of the marionettes as family; brothers and sisters all, those he'd literally grown up with, and he wore them like a skin. So certain was his mastery, that they seemingly responded in anticipation of his intent; always one step ahead of him, or him of them.

I was never sure which. But they communed with a oneness that was unimaginable, even as you stood there and watched. The bridge, which Peter commanded, might just as well have been solid ground.

When performing, that "far away fella" was front and present always. It's hard to imagine him not being here and I know I speak for all who knew him. So transcendent was Peter's spirit, though, that I can see him up on that bridge, still, and for whatever comes next, that "far away fella" may be more near than far.

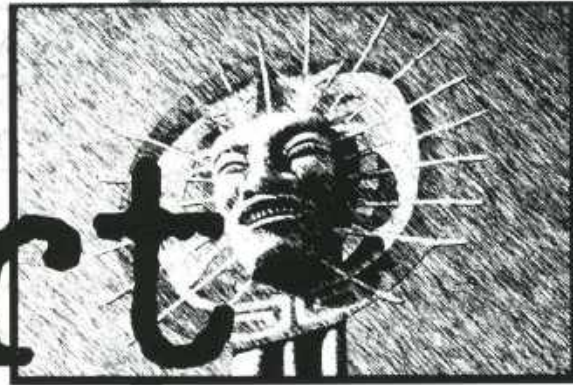
JOSEPH JACOBY

Joseph Jacoby produced, directed and co-wrote (with Peter) the 1995 original filmed musical production, Davy Jones' Locker.

Peter Baird recording voice of Davy Jones.

©Jacoby Entertainment, Ltd.

Introducing
the 2005 Season



in the
heart
of the Beast
Puppet
and Mask
THEATRE

Minneapolis, Minnesota • (612) 721-2535

www.hobt.org



the puppet in contemporary theatre, film & media



Icebergs from Automata

by Janie Geiser and Susan Simpson