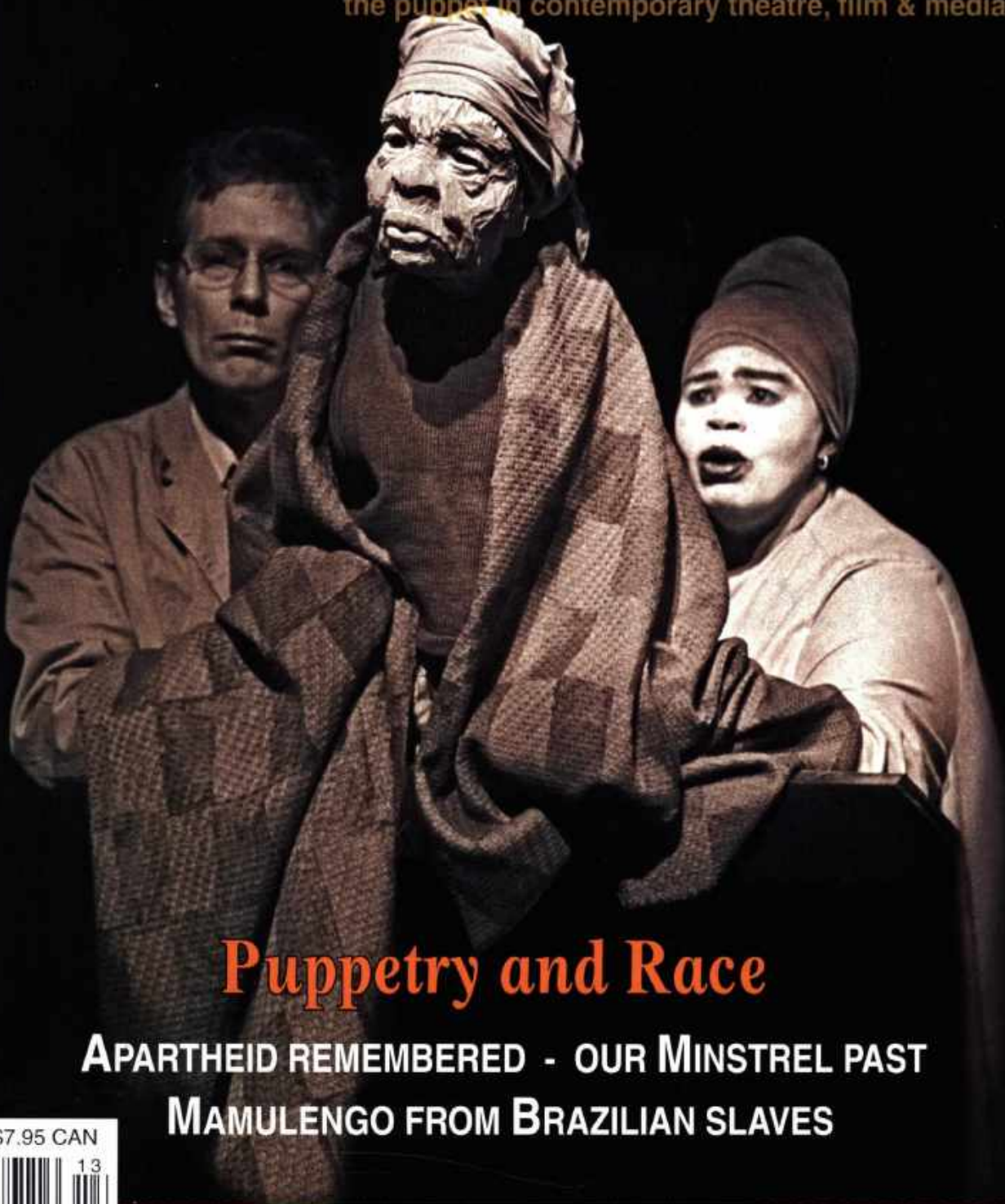


FALL and WINTER 2011 Issue #30

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

the puppet in contemporary theatre, film & media



Puppetry and Race

APARTHEID REMEMBERED - OUR MINSTREL PAST

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Top images left to right: *Moonfishing*, David Michael Friend; *69°S*, Phantom Limb; *Golem*, Czechoslovakian-American Marionette Theatre; *Braquage (Stick Up!)*, Compagnie Bakélite (France).
Bottom images left to right; *The Secret Death of Puppets*, Sibyl Kempson; *The Princess and the Pea*, Matthias Kuchta (Germany); *The Little Prince*, Bristol Riverside Theatre; *Too Loud a Solitude*, Genevieve Anderson



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PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

issue no. 30

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On the COVER

Ubu and the Truth Commission,
Written by Jane Taylor,
Directed by William Kentridge
Actors: Basil Jones and Busi Zokufa
photo: Ruphin Coulyzer
(see article, page 4)



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

Editorial

Discussions about race and ethnicity are often difficult. For a minority culture that has suffered there may be feelings of anger, loss and sadness. For members of a majority culture, there may be shame, denial, even horror in the face of a history in which they or their ancestors were involved in acts of humiliation, cultural repression, enslavement or even genocide.

Yes, discussing race can be hard, and that is why we must discuss it.

That said, it is generally *not* so difficult to discuss other people's shortcomings. Having a little distance between oneself and the consideration of racial disparity or cultural repression, for instance, can be quite instructive, even inspiring.



Welcome to issue #30 of *Puppetry International* magazine. As always, we've picked a topic and put it out to the community of puppeteers and scholars in the hope that they will interpret it in the broadest and most interesting ways imaginable. This issue is devoted to Puppetry and Race. The idea came to us awhile back after receiving an article about Ralph Chesse's production of *The Emperor Jones*, which he first mounted in 1928. Though we did not publish the article, it occurred to us that we really needed to devote an entire issue to Race, a topic that has shaped our nation in profound ways, and has been a source of both pain (slavery, the KKK, the internment of Japanese-Americans—let me count the ways . . .) and pride (the Civil Rights Movement, the Rainbow Coalition, the election of Barack Obama. . .). We were sure that both the struggles and triumphs in this problematic narrative would be reflected in our puppetry as well. We were right.

It was also no surprise that this appeared to be the case all over the world. We knew, for instance, that Handspring Puppet Company, since its founding in 1981 in apartheid South Africa, has dealt with race relations through their work. As articles were proposed, we realized that the differences between "racial unrest" and "ethnic strife," were not always so easy to delineate. In fact, the difference between race and ethnicity is not at all clear-cut. While "race" is generally thought of as having first and foremost a genetic component, a quick search of articles on the internet reminds us that: "Most races actually share multiple genealogies with significant cross-over," and that: "Most racial categories are defined by governments—not by scientists." Ethnic groups may have a common genetic heritage, or might be defined by religion or other shared cultural traits. In her article on endangered shadow puppetry in northern China, Annie Rollins makes a case for traditional shadow puppeteers as a minority whose very identity is threatened by a major cultural shift (page 32).

Gaura Mancaaritadipura, writing about the ubiquity of puppetry and how traditional varieties of puppetry are associated with the ethnic communities that created them "and transmitted them down to the present generations. . . ." reminds us that: "Ethnic communities have migrated at certain times during history, carrying with them their arts and culture, including in some cases puppetry arts" (page 36). Such migrations bring marvelous cultural diversity to an area, but they also bring change to an established culture, resulting in everything from an uncomfortable period of adjustment, to all out war. He (like other writers in this issue) refers to an earlier, troubled time without elaborating on the disturbing details. I think it is natural to want to put the past behind us, particularly when dealing with the ugliness of racism or the suppression of a minority culture in front of an international audience. On the other hand, if we are not fearless in exposing the horrors of our past, how can we find understanding and forgiveness in our

present, healing in our future? Amber West refers to our "post-racial" society (quotes, hers), an expression that gained traction around the time of Barack Obama's election (page 8). Maybe we *are* entering a post-racial period, yet just to say so means we are still using race to define ourselves. Perhaps we will need to play with this concept for a few years, or decades, until a future generation declares itself to be post-post-racial, discarding, at last, the need to feel superior to some perceived "Other," and embracing the real treasure trove of both cultural and genealogical diversity.

-Andrew C. Periale

WARNING: The so-called "N word" appears several times in this issue—not in the cool way in which young, African-American men might good-naturedly taunt each other, or even in the rage of the bigot that comes down like a boot on the throat, but rather in the off-handed, unthinking whiff that reflects a racism so ingrained as to feel entirely unremarkable. Has "N word" even lost its potency as a euphemism, diluted as it is in an alphabet soup of "L," "C" and "M" words, in the way that "-gate" has been applied to every scandal since Watergate? Perhaps. Yet the word itself is still so freighted, so wincingly inappropriate, that "N" is as far as I am prepared to go. Yet here it is in the speech of our forebears as they refer to minstrel shows and other puppet performances of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and *not* to print it would simply be another way of glossing over our own history.

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Be sure and check out our issue #30 on the UNIMA-USA website. Read the longer version of Amber West's article on Black-Face Minstrelsy in America. There are several articles that *only* appear in the on-line edition, including Gary Friedman's exciting project based on Hanus Hachenberg's puppet play "We are Looking for a Monster." Hanus wrote the play in Terezin. It was not performed before his death in Auschwitz, on his fifteenth birthday.



PUPPET FROM A SET USED BY EDWARD PLATT, A PUNCH AND JUDY MAN (1940s TO 1960s). HE USED BLACK FIGURES FOR A MINSTREL SECTION NEAR THE END OF EACH SHOW.

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HANDSPRING on Race and Gender

by Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones

South Africa has a notorious history of racial oppression.

From the 17th century onwards, as Western capital opened up alternate trade links to Asia that could bypass the increasingly hostile ancient route through the Middle East, the southern tip of Africa became contested terrain for strategic reasons.

The halfway station in the long journey between Europe and Asia was at a place called the Cape of Good Hope. It was established to provision ships on their long voyage around the vast continent. However, over three hundred years, it evolved into something quite different. There was fertile land for grazing sheep and cattle and, later, stupendous mineral wealth. This encouraged the early European settlers to venture further and further into the interior, bargaining with local inhabitants for each new piece of territory with a two-pronged fork - the "civilizing" power of the bible and the "persuasive" language of guns.

Over the millennia, the successive domination of empires has made each of us what we are today. From the 12th century onwards, The Malian Empire of West Africa, building on its vast gold reserves, expanded west to east across Northern Africa, absorbing and modifying whole cultures as it went. South of the Sahara, powerful Nguni-speaking agrarian cultures migrated southwards, exerting their dominance over the aboriginal San hunter-gatherers. All this pre-dated the Western colonial period. But in each case the dominance of a group that considered itself "superior" constructed a moral pretext to justify their enterprise.

The discovery of gold in South Africa in the 1880's threw the fault lines of power within the country into stark relief. The greed for wealth, plus the need for labour to produce it, led ultimately to the formalising of segregation based on race that came to be known as "apartheid" - official policy that labeled the population black or white in order to entrench a system of privilege, keeping higher education and economic power in the hands of the colonial descendants.

In 1951, this schizophrenic country, with its leafy "Whites Only" suburbs with "Whites Only" swimming pools and cinemas, and its black townships with tin shacks, no electricity, no sanitation, crime and disease, is the land into which we - Basil & Adrian - were born.

As we left school we were both drafted into the military, the organization that kept apartheid in place. This meant an initial three months basic training followed by yearly three-week call-ups. They were ghastly, as they represented the apartheid apparatus up close and bound one to it as its instrument. And the spectre of military call-ups stalked us into university, where we met.



Busi Zokufa and Dawid Minaar in
Ubu and the Truth Commission ■

As in the USA during the Vietnam War, there were several liberal universities where the students were vociferous opponents of apartheid, and we associated with them. We wonder sometimes why we chose to align ourselves with the left and the fight against apartheid and conclude that it was because of the fact that we too understood prejudice from the inside out. We were gay and right from school onwards we experienced how cruel and irrational prejudice could be.

We abhorred everything the army stood for and tried every means possible to find a way out of it. This was before the days of the End Conscription Campaign, so we didn't have that kind of support. Basil simply ignored some of the call-ups, but ended up in court. The trump card in those days was to declare oneself gay and although he wasn't particularly proud to use this



PHOTO: RUPHIN COUDYZER

option Adrian played it. He was in yet another camp. Adrian finally declared he was gay to the camp commandant when the army was already in Namibia and about to invade Angola and he was determined not to go. The CO's retort was classic: "Ah come on Kohler, we've come up here to fight not to f*ck. I've got sexual problems of my own." Adrian was forced to go, even though as a medic, he didn't have to bear arms.

Soon after we decided to leave the country rather than be called up yet again. So we spent 3 years in Botswana where Adrian ran the National Popular Theatre Programme and traveled the vast country running theatre for development workshops. Basil worked in the National Museum and Art Gallery and helped them acquire a collection of Malian puppets. We became friendly with artists connected to the African National Congress, the (then underground) resistance movement. In this radical milieu we found that our being gay was never an issue.

Louis Seboko and Busi Zokufa
in *Woyzeck on the Highveld* ■

But in 1981 we returned to South Africa to start our own puppet company. Though we felt completely accepted by our colleagues at work, we felt somehow as gays we'd never be received into the broader Botswana society. Back home, the underground liberation struggle was growing in strength, and despite harsh oppression, the liberal universities, some churches, and the trade union movement were flourishing. Founded in the early seventies, the first two non-racial theatres, the Space Theatre in Cape Town and the Market Theatre in Johannesburg were producing their best work. It was with this fledgling theatre movement that the new Handspring Puppet Company aligned itself.

The company's founders were four ex-art school grad students – all white. Fortunately Bill Curry, a black actor friend volunteered to join us informally. He had noted wryly that we didn't seem to have a director. I think we were the only white theatre company in the apartheid period to have a black director. (Usually it was a white director working with a group of black actors.)

Our aims were simple: to make a profession out of performing stories with puppets that spoke of our South African reality. Bill would teach us acting, as our training had been in art not drama.

We began in children's theatre, writing plays with veiled political messages. Usually there was a group of characters, who pull together to defeat the tyrant in their midst. They rescue a kidnapped swallow, abducted by a serval cat because she can mould clay into bottles to store all the honey he is looting from the veld. Or the performers in a circus enlist the rats of the town to help them defeat the ringmaster who only cares about money. An angry ostrich follows her stolen feathers across the country, grabs them back and confronts the thieving farmer.

In schools, anything overtly political in our work would have been immediately shut down. For five years we toured small towns across southern Africa, taking these and other plays to schools, sometimes in conservative white areas sometimes in the black townships. Our initial all-white performing company over time became mixed (and has remained so ever since). This only seldom presented difficulties. The company of four travelled in a truck with built-in accommodation and would overnight in caravan parks. When the racial mix in the truck became apparent at a particular park gate, we were sometimes turned away and had to search for alternative lodgings. Tea in a whites-only school staff room after a performance had sometimes been the subject of intense debate at the school for weeks before our arrival. Dancing in a bar one night in a hotel, people threw peanuts at us. We laughed about it. It hurt a bit, too. And we reminded ourselves how much worse it was for others.

Then, in the face of growing countrywide unrest in 1985, a State of Emergency was declared on 20th July 1985. The country began its slide into the era of harshest political repression. The day happened to be Basil's birthday and he vowed he wouldn't cut his hair until we achieved democracy. Over the next few years, his hair grew longer and longer. Adrian had to bind it into a plait every morning. Eventually it became an embarrassment and it got cut off. During this period, all independent theatre companies were deemed a security threat and were banned from performing in government schools. Our method of earning a living came to an end overnight.

Another door opened. Fearing our company would fold without our ever having had a stab at a piece for an adult audience, we fast-tracked a play Adrian had been sitting on for 5 years. Episodes of an Easter Rising by David Lytton is

about the choices two white women make when confronted on their isolated farm by a wounded black political activist on the run from the police. The fact that the audience gradually discovers that the two women are living in isolation because they are lovers was not lost on us. We expected indifference to an adult play with puppets, particularly one featuring two lesbians and a "terrorist." But this gentle and understated story was received with great warmth and won us the attention of the playmakers we admired around the country. In the long term provided us an entrée into the Market Theatre of Johannesburg.

Our collaboration with the artist and director, William Kentridge began in 1992 during the final years of apartheid's demise and spanned almost a decade of our creative lives. The rough-hewn look of the puppets we created for these productions chimed with Kentridge's expressionist style and for the first time Adrian stopped painting the figures to define race. If our audience wanted to type-cast characters by skin colour, they would have to fill that in from their own imaginations.

Woyzeck on the Highveld, explored the mind of a man humiliated at work who takes his frustrations out on the one he loves most. This was a vintage Apartheid theme. Faustus in Africa bore witness to the nefarious deals that were being done between politicians and the major capitalists and Ubu and the Truth Commission witnessed the sorry tale of how those who's apartheid crimes had been discovered tried to hide the evidence of their shame.

During this period far-reaching negotiations were underway between the Nationalist government and the ANC. After a much speculation and uncertainty, Nelson Mandela was suddenly released from prison, and



Basil Jones, Adrian Kohler photo: John Hodgekiss ■

within a short albeit bloody period we saw the birth of a new democracy. Our friends, the gay activists Simon Nkoli and Edwin Cameron, successfully petitioned key role-players in the drafting of our Constitution to include equality of sexual orientation. Cameron is now a Judge of the Constitutional Court and the only important state official to be openly HIV positive.

So happily, South Africa is now a very different country. After a long struggle, political power rests in the hands of the democratic majority. However, below the surface, the economic stratification resulting from the colonial period still holds sway. The effects of the migrant labour system that split families, the forced removals from traditional land and the provision of inferior education over decades have scarred our country and will take a century to heal.

Meanwhile, in the post-apartheid period, Handspring has moved away from themes directly connected to race politics. Between 2000 and 2007, we produced three plays in succession, all about animals and their affect in society. The Chimp Project looked at the attempted "rewilding" of a chimpanzee who'd been taught to use sign language. It asked the question: "Could a chimpanzee spontaneously transfer sign language to her offspring in the wild?" Tall Horse (a collaboration with The Sogolon Marionette Troupe, from Mali in West Africa), followed a giraffe who had been given as a gift by the Pasha of Egypt to the King of France and War Horse looks at the relationship of a boy and a horse.



Not about race? No, but since biblical times, our relationship with animals has presumed our implicit superiority to them. Yet our own experiences tell us otherwise. And indeed literature is full of references to their wisdom and their sensitivity. So overcoming our species superiority is perhaps one of the final frontiers in the quest towards a world where all living things and even inanimate things are regarded with respect and love.

Which brings one back to puppets and their unique ability to do just that: honour all life through the animation of the inanimate. §

Ubu and his Dogs of War, Dawid Minnaar (Ubu),
Basil Jones, Louis Seboko ■



Blackface Minstrelsy in American Puppetry by Amber West

Though we might rather not admit it in this “post-racial” era, the blackface minstrel show was the first distinctly American form of theater and popular entertainment. Despite enormous popularity during its time, primarily 1830-1930, the understandable discomfort and shame many Americans feel about blackface minstrelsy has hindered research and documentation over the years, stifling awareness not only of its significance during its time, but of its legacy and ongoing effect on American culture today. Within existing minstrelsy scholarship, there is little discussion of the significant ways in which the tradition came to dominate American puppetry, while among contemporary puppeteers this difficult history is often avoided through an insistence that puppets are raceless (Cooper 8). Puppetry has the potential, perhaps more so than any other art form, to illuminate the socially constructed nature of race, to dissolve categories created to divide and control us. At the same time, however, in the Western tradition often just the opposite has occurred, with puppeteers disseminating racist stereotypes in the name of audience appeal and upholding tradition.

Although mythologized to have black southern roots, American minstrelsy “evolved out of the racial fantasies of northern urban whites” (Engle xv) and the struggles of working class European immigrants in the New World. The earliest performances involved a lone white male in blackface, such as Thomas “Daddy,” Rice who is often credited with inventing the form. In 1832 Rice, a young working class New Yorker who had escaped the Bowery slums for a life in showbiz, returned home from a trip west with a new routine he claimed was “inspired by watching an old black slave mucking out some stables in Louisville...singing an oddly catchy little ditty and dancing an eccentric little dance...The old man’s name, he [said], was Jim Crow” (Strausbaugh 58). Rice’s hit song, “Jump Jim Crow,” made him America’s first pop sensation, while his extreme make-up (burnt cork) and costume (threadbare rags) constituted an exaggerated caricature, illuminating blackface minstrelsy’s roots in Western clowning traditions such as “the harlequin of the commedia dell’arte, the clown of English pantomime [and] perhaps the ‘blackman’ of English folk drama” (Lott 22). Strausbaugh discusses “the social function of the clown as an Outsider, an Other, a creature of

difference,” and why Rice might have chosen an African-American slave for his clown character: “Who in 19th century America was more of an Other than the Negro? [T]he clown was allowed to say and do things no one else could...[to] satirize and make political comments” (68). Many white laborers in early America, particularly Irish and Scots who came to the New World as slaves and indentured servants, identified with blacks, whom they often worked and lived beside. In these earliest incarnations of blackface minstrelsy, the surface satire and parody of blacks masked a critique of the white upper class and “urbane East Coast gentility” (77).

In addition to traditions of blackface clowns who “are as often lovable butts of humor as devious producers of it” (Lott 22), minstrelsy is rooted in the Western fascination with the Other. In England, actors and courtiers who played Moors had worn masks since at least the early sixteenth century, but Ben Jonson’s early court plays, *The Masque of Blackness* and *The Masque of Beauty*, were the first recorded instances of players actually darkening their skin. Queen Anne, wife of James I, asked Jonson to write a masque in which she and her ladies could “play black” in 1605 (Rogin 19), and Shakespeare’s “sooty devil,” *Othello*, from 1610 is another of our earliest recorded examples (Paskman 7). Blackface has also long been utilized in European folk traditions such as charivari and mumming plays celebrating solstice. The blackface tradition, then, grew out of relations between medieval Christians and Moors, as well as colonialism and the Atlantic slave trade, while also tapping into longstanding Western European notions such as the superiority of light over darkness, the spiritual darkness attributed to non-Christians and human knowledge as the antidote to the primitive darkness of the natural world. As Rogin explains, “Curiosity about these new peoples, the trying on of their identities as Europeans imagined them, was part of the exploitative interaction between Europeans, Africans, and inhabitants of the New World...Queen Anne’s desire to play a blacked-up role dramatized a curious sym-

“D’ARC’S CHRISTY MINSTREL MARIONETTES” PHOTO BY DOUGLAS HAYWARD,
PUPPETRY YEARBOOK VOL. 2 (1996): 160.
(THANKS TO THE CRAWFORDSVILLE, IN, DISTRICT PUBLIC LIBRARY)

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL



RALPH CHESSE'S MARIONETTES FROM HIS 1928 PRODUCTION OF
EUGENE O'NEILL'S DRAMA, *THE EMPEROR JONES*

pathy for Africans, an effort to imagine oneself inside the skin of an exotic people" (20). Though curiosity and sympathy are important aspects of blackface, the form remains deeply rooted in the racist ridicule and subjugation that were necessary ideological justifications of colonialism. Blackface and all its baggage journeyed to America with the Europeans.¹

By the 1840s, solo minstrel song-and-dance acts like T.D. Rice's evolved into group performances often described as "Ethiopian operas" performed by "Ethiopian Delineators." The Virginia Minstrels, a NYC-based quartet, are credited with adding the now infamous plantation setting, and creating skits to accompany the music and dance. The plantation setting signals a shift in minstrelsy to a focus on "authentic" southern black plantation life around the same time that Jacksonian Democracy was causing white workers in northern cities "to see Blacks less as allies and increasingly as competitors or even enemies" (Strausbaugh 90).² Blackface minstrel troupes began to compete by marketing themselves as more authentically black than one another.³ Their depictions of plantation life were often highly idealized, relating to minstrelsy's role in upholding ideologies that justified racial subjugation as blackface had done for centuries. The Christy Minstrels, led by Edwin Christy, eclipsed the Virginia Minstrels in popularity, greatly increasing the number of cast members and solidifying the minstrel show into a three-act format in 1846 (Engle xviii).⁴ The Christy Minstrels became so popular in the US and England that the name Christy became synonymous with minstrelsy. Numerous traveling minstrel shows unaffiliated with Christy appropriated the name to legitimate their acts. It is the Christy-style minstrel show that is still best known today and that influenced American puppetry the most.

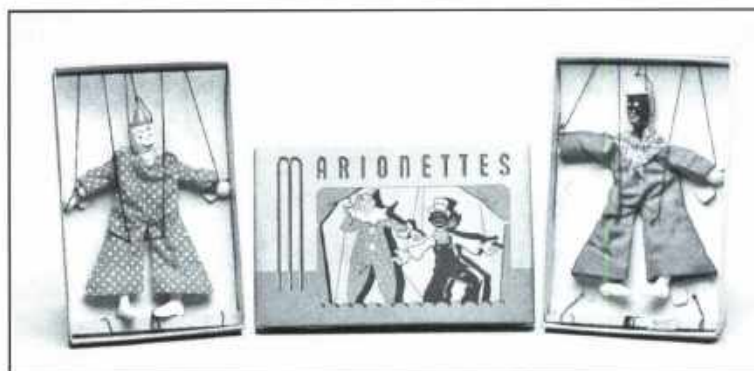
Unconscious that its origins made this a homecoming, blackface minstrelsy arrived in Europe as America's "hot new export" when troupes like the Virginia and Christy Minstrels began touring internationally. It was this "oddly circuitous cultural exchange that initially brought blackface to the puppet theatre" (Fisler 53). British puppeteer William John Bullock created the first puppet minstrel show, inspired by the Christy Minstrels' sensationally successful mid-century tours of England. McPharlin describes minstrelsy's suitability to puppetry through discussion of Bullock's minstrel marionette show: "The row of darkies could be strung in two tandem groups, one on each side of [the interlocutor]; He, Tambo, and Bones... would be separate so that each could rise and cavort by himself. When a specialty dance took place in front of them, all could be hung so that they would sit and watch. Thus two or three puppeteers could animate eleven to fifteen puppets" (159). Fisler provides evidence from British scholar John Phillips that a Parisian waxworker named Lambert D'Arc may have actually built and performed briefly in Dublin with the puppets before selling them to Bullock, whose marionette minstrels received rave reviews opening in St. James Hall in London in 1872 (34). Bullock distinguished his show from numerous other puppet troupes touring at this time by creating a three-part format that included a Fantoccini (a series of spectacular trick puppets), a miniature minstrel show, and an extravaganza (in the style of English pantomime) (McPharlin 159). His minstrels performed some songs that sentimentally denounced the now-outlawed slavery (e.g. "Hunkey Dorum," "Old Runaway Jack") and others (e.g. "The Old Nigger," "We'll All Skedaddle") that idealized plantation life (Fisler 44-8). In this way, Bullock's puppets encapsulated the contradictions of minstrelsy, a form that was widely and diversely practiced, sometimes to justify institutionalized racism and other times to critique it. By the 1870s, the name "Christy" had become synonymous with minstrelsy, and by calling them his "Automatic Christy Minstrels," Bullock tapped into the phenomenon for his own marketing benefit.

Fueled by his huge success in England, Bullock brought his Royal Marionettes to New York in 1873, where he again opened to rave reviews. The *Daily Graphic* said, "The minstrels give songs and choruses in true burnt-cork abandon" (qtd. in McPharlin 165). For nearly two years, Bullock toured his marionette minstrels to cities like Baltimore, Pittsburgh and San Francisco, making an astounding six thousand dollars per month (Fisler 52). Before returning home, Bullock contracted puppeteers John McDonough and Hartley Earnshaw to continue touring his Royal marionettes throughout the country. Much like what had occurred with the (human) Christy Minstrels, Bullock's Royal Marionettes were such a phenomenon in England and America that other troupes quickly began following his highly successful format. The words "Bullock's" and/or "Royal" became synonymous with marionettes, and the inclusion of a minstrel show became standard puppetry protocol. The Middleton Brothers, for example, an English family who had performed with marionettes for generations, commonly presented a three-part variety show in America during this period that opened "with a Negro minstrel first part, with nine characters" (qtd. in Bell 18). In 1882, Daniel Meader, a San Francisco prop maker who had earlier performed with McDonough and Earnshaw, made his own Royal Marionettes, which included "a five-member group of black-faced minstrel brass musicians in formal dress, as well as stereotyped

'darkies' in work clothes, familiar to the white audiences of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" (27). Fisler points out that Meader's minstrels, unlike Bullock's, are coal black "to indicate blackface makeup, rather than authentic African American skin" (66), and that his drummer has the "sharp triangular upper eyelids and jutting chin of [his] Punch...[displaying] a clever synthesis of influences [with] the potential to undermine the racialism at the heart of minstrelsy...by adding the anti-hierarchical essence at the core of Punch and Judy" (69).

For those interested in more details on the relationship between puppetry and minstrelsy, I strongly recommend Fisler's unpublished dissertation, available through Google Scholar and cited here. Tracing blackface puppetry from Bullock to the end of the Federal Theater Project in 1939, Fisler argues that Paul McPharlin started a trend in early 20th century American puppetry in which puppeteers made distinctions between exaggerated blackface/minstrel puppet characters, which they used for lowbrow puppetry (i.e. lighter themes, clowning, farce), and more realistic-looking (albeit exoticized) representations of black people, which were often used for more "highbrow" or "high art" puppet shows (i.e. serious themes, drama). "The less the puppeteers wish their 'negro puppets' to play the fool," Fisler argues, "the more likely they are to try to shape their vestiges within the boundaries of photographic realism" (13). Fisler makes clear that puppetry, like many other forms of American art/entertainment/culture, was overrun with minstrel shows well into the 20th century. He calculates, for example, that ten percent of American puppeteers adapted Helen Bannerman's 1900 children's book, *Little Black Sambo*, to the puppet stage during the 1930s (189), and twenty-five percent depended on blackface puppets for their livelihood in 1934 (175). Particularly in puppetry produced in rural frontier communities and/or for children's audiences, blackface puppetry "was as widely circulated as puppetry itself" (186). Many puppeteers continued to "revive the form for the delight of collective recognition" (185), unwittingly prolonging damaging stereotypes of African-Americans in the name of tradition and nostalgia, particularly through dissemination to schoolchildren.

Reading Fisler's work, I wondered over and over whether every black puppet created and/or operated by a white puppeteer must be considered a blackface puppet. Fisler discusses Ralph Chesse's 1936 puppet production of Eugene O'Neill's drama, *The Emperor Jones*, for example, as an instance of blackface puppetry. Chesse's design for the protagonist was based on Charles Gilpin, the African American actor who he had observed famously playing the role in 1926. Fisler writes, "Chesse's *Emperor Jones* suggests that high artistic principles draw theatre makers toward sincere portraits of race, as they drive them away from the grotesque fantasies of more commonplace art" (214). Despite recognizing the sincerity of the puppeteer's attempt, Fisler still considers Chesse's a *blackface* puppet, rather than a *black* puppet, because its designer/operator is white, and because some of the puppet's facial features (such as his nose, lips and jowls) are exaggerated. He writes that the puppet



THE AMERICAN CRAYON COMPANY MASS-PRODUCED TOY MARIONETTES, BASED ON POPULAR PUPPET VARIETY SHOWS OF THE 19TH CENTURY.

"was Gilpin's corporeal form, with the stamp of minstrelsy upon him. In essence, it was more human than the average blackface puppet, but more stereotyped than the actual

human being that inspired it" (217).

Despite my disagreements with some of Fisler's arguments, his work is vital as the only thorough examination of the use of blackface by countless American puppeteers in the 19th and early 20th centuries, including heavyweights like David Lano, Paul McPharlin, Tony Sarg, Remo Bufano and Ralph Chesse, and also contains an impressive variety of images from the period. Fisler makes clear that minstrelsy is an extremely prevalent and significant but often unacknowledged tradition within American puppetry. For those interested in issues of race and racism in later 20th century American puppetry, I would also recommend another unpublished dissertation by Heidi Louise Cooper, which begins with the many "how-to" puppetry building books published in the 1920s and '30s, and examines a variety of racial representations in 20th and 21st century American puppetry, from children's shows like *Sesame Street* to abstract puppetry for adult audiences by artists such as Hannah Tierney and Basil Twist. Cooper writes, "[T]he desire to claim puppets as unracial is a reflection of the discomfort which many puppeteers feel when trying to represent human diversity while often working in a folk medium with a history of racist images...[But] representations of humanity...almost always have the potential to read in terms of race and ethnicity. It is ultimately more useful to recognize this fact of representation and incorporate it consciously and responsibly into one's art work than to try to de-racialize the medium" (8). The fact that both Fisler's and Cooper's work remain unpublished perhaps speaks to the puppetry community's hesitancy to grapple with these difficult issues, making their work (and this issue of *Puppetry International*) all the more important and necessary.

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IMAGES ON PAGE 9 & 10 FROM JOHN BELL'S *STRINGS, HANDS, SHADOWS: A MODERN PUPPET HISTORY*. DETROIT: DETROIT INSTITUTE OF THE ARTS, 2000.

Cited references, footnotes and a longer version of this article are on the web: www.unima-usa.org/publications

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

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A FIGURE FROM THE EDITOR'S PRIVATE COLLECTION



Professor Albrecht Roser

May 21, 1922 – April 17, 2011

“Only two days after the highlight of his last performances, July 2008, in the studio-theater of his home in Buoch, Germany, Albrecht Roser suffered a stroke from which he never fully recovered. Born on Pentecost Sunday, March 21, 1922, he passed away peacefully on the morning of this Palm Sunday, April 17, 2011. A profound artist, a philosopher, a poet, an ingenious puppet creator, an unsurpassed puppeteer is no longer.”

We received this notice from Albrecht’s longtime partner-in-puppetry, Ingrid Höfer. To her descriptors we could certainly add mentor—so many American puppeteers have learned so much from him (as articles in this magazine have shown over the years). Albrecht was also a big supporter of UNIMA, attending the first world congress and festival after its hiatus during and after WWII. He was also a good friend to many, and someone with whom it was always a pleasure to spend an evening: deeply insightful, charming, with an irreverent sense of humor.

See the entire obituary on our website:

www.unima-usa.org/publications



ROSER WORKING WITH STUDENTS ON A PRODUCTION OF STRAVINSKY’S *L’HISTOIRE DU SOLDAT*, 1994 NATIONAL PUPPETRY CONFERENCE

L TO R: DEBDRAN GLASSBERG, JO McLAUGHLIN, STEVE WIDERMAN, MARY ROBINETTE KOWAL, ALBRECHT ROSER, BREND OGDONIK

PHOTO: RICHARD TERMINE

Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry at the University of Connecticut



2011 Exhibitions

27 March – 18 December 2011

Friday – Sunday 12-5 p.m. or by appointment

Frank Ballard: An Odyssey of a Life in Puppetry

Curated by UConn alumna Rolande Duprey, this exhibition presents the stories, designs, construction processes, and performance of Ballard’s many productions. Featured are puppets and sets from *The Bluebird*, *Two By Two*, *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *The Magic Flute*, *Peer Gynt*, *The Golden Cockerel* and other productions.

Frank Ballard: Roots and Branches

This exhibition examines the many influences on Ballard’s work, from the 1930s traveling shows of Romain and Ellen Proctor, to the puppet modernism of Tony Sarg, Rufus and Margo Rose, Marjorie Batchelder McPharlin, and Jim Henson. Also: the Kungsholm Miniature Opera, Sidney Chrysler’s toy theater, and global puppet traditions including Karagöz, Javanese wayang golek, and Chinese shadow theater.

Jim Crow and Mister Punch

by Virginie Ganivet

In 1828, John Payne Collier and George Cruikshank were commissioned to respectively write and illustrate the transcript of the play as performed by Giovanni Piccini. Piccini was an old Italian puppeteer who, according to most historians, could be credited with the 'invention' of the version of the show that is still known today. Although his role in the history of Punch and Judy has been questioned by George Speaight in particular, his legacy remains remarkable. In Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, first published in the early 1850s, an unnamed puppeteer refers to Piccini as the "real forefather" of Punch professors (44). The Collier transcript proved extremely popular and has been reprinted many times since 1828. It remains one of the most easily accessible playtexts to this day, either in its original form, or in edited versions, and has made Piccini's show a reference for many.

In Collier's transcript, Piccini uses the best-known characters of the show, such as Judy and the baby, as well as an array of other characters, including the servant, a black man. Punch carries a bell, the sound of which annoys the servant's master. The servant asks Punch to stop ringing the bell, but Punch starts to argue that it is not a bell, but an organ, or a fiddle, or a drum, or a trumpet. As with the vast majority of the characters in the Piccini play, the scene ends with a fight and Punch beats the servant to death. This was not the first time this character was used: In the early 1950s, George Speaight noted that there had "almost always been a black man" in the show (193), and traced back an appearance of the character as early as 1825. If Piccini had used the puppet since his arrival in London, it could have been a regular of the shows since the 1780s.

However, in the early nineteenth century, the black puppet was not always a servant, as Speaight pointed out: "Sometimes the black man was a foreigner, usually with a bristling beard, who could utter only one word— 'Shallaballa.'" (193). The puppeteer interviewed by Henry Mayhew mentioned that Shallaballah was also known as "The Grand Turk of Sinoa." He also explained that he did not know where Sinoa was, and believed it was "at the bottom of the sea where the black fish lays" (Mayhew 51). As Robert Leach pointed out, what mattered the most was not the character's exact origins or social status and function, but its exoticism (57, 81). Later on, the servant or Shallaballah became Jim Crow, a character that had identifiable roots:

In the fifties, the popularity of the nigger minstrels transformed the black man into a 'Jim Crow'—from the title of a popular song first sung in London by Thomas Rice in 1836; and Jim Crow he has remained until the present day (Speaight 193).



JIM CROW PUPPET, PERCY PRESS. USED IN HIS PUNCH AND JUDY SHOWS (1925-1950) MUSEUM OF LONDON WWW.MLA.GOV.UK/

The Punch and Judy men had already reappropriated famous historical figures, such as the executioner Jack Ketch, and successful characters from popular culture, such as Polly from John Gay's *Beggar's Opera*. Rice's Jim Crow was reappropriated in the same manner. The puppeteers already had a black puppet, their servant or Shallaballah, and all they had to do was to recast him in the role of Jim Crow.

This had several advantages. In the mid-nineteenth century, the character of Jim Crow was in fashion. The puppeteer interviewed by Mayhew explained how he used this existing success and replaced Shallaballah with Jim Crow:

Then, ye see, being a novelty, all classes of society is pleased. Everybody liked to hear "Jim Crow" sung, and so we had to do it. The people used to stand round, and I used to take some good money with it too, sir, on Hay-hill. Everybody's funny now-a-days, and they like comic business (Mayhew 51).

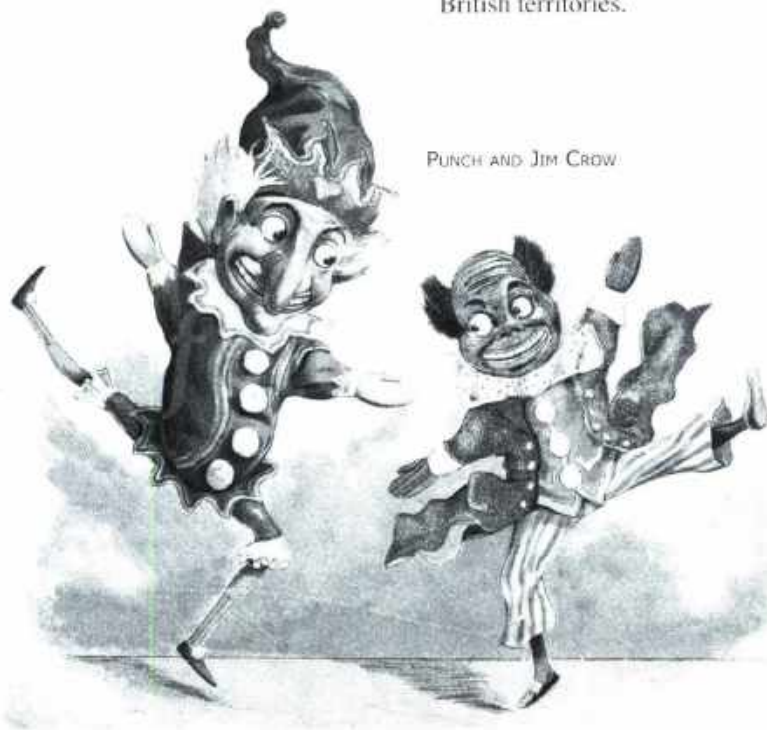
Jim Crow could interact with Punch in ways that were more varied than Shallaballah, and had the advantage of song and dance over the servant.

He also functioned better than the servant as a reflection of the British people's evolving conception of race and of their government's race and immigration politics. Collier's and Mayhew's texts are a good place to start examining the ways in which the issue of

race is dealt with in the Victorian Punch and Judy show. The abolition of slavery in England and the vast majority of the British Empire in 1833 made Jim Crow even more relevant than the servant to their audience. The Slavery Abolition Act resulted in a significant decrease of black immigration to the country for the remainder of the nineteenth century, while blackface minstrelsy enjoyed a continuing popularity and became common in the world of street and seaside entertainment. The black characters in both Collier's and Mayhew's accounts borrow heavily from the racial stereotypes of the time and blackface. In Mayhew's account, the success of the Jim Crow puppet seems to reside in its exoticism, but it is interesting to note that the exoticism there is described as double: The character is not only black and presumably of African descent, he is also from America. This double identity creates a paradox. On the one hand, Jim Crow stands out, with his non-European dual origins, but on the other hand he is likened to Punch, who remains decidedly Italian in the puppeteer's discourse.

One of the most obvious stereotypical traits of the black puppet in both Collier's and Mayhew's transcripts is language. Mayhew's puppeteer explains: He's a nigger. He says, "Me like ebry body;" not "every," but "ebry," cos that's nigger (51). Although this is one of the stereotypes the puppet shares with its human blackface counterparts, this is also another indicator of foreignness, and foreignness is, in the eyes of Mayhew's puppeteer, the object of a certain pride. He gives many details about the Italianate dialect the Punch and Judy men speak among themselves, and linguistic alienation is at the same time a way to identify with the group of performers, and a business tool which allows the puppeteer to communicate with the bottler without being understood by the audience (47-9). In the Collier script, the servant is not the only character who speaks broken English: Punch himself does. Piccini's English was also far from perfect (Collier 74), and it is clear that Collier embellished the language of the play while writing the transcription. It is thus possible that the attempt to render accents for both Punch and the servant came from Collier rather than Piccini. In any case, this results once again in the establishment of a parallel between the two puppets.

In the Mayhew record, Jim Crow is initially presented as a 'great friend and supporter of his old friend Punch' (48). In the play, it appears that Punch and Jim are also the only two characters who sing. The parallel stops there: They quickly get into a fight, but Punch does not kill Jim. In fact, Jim comes back and helps the beadle arrest Punch. Although they both belong to the world of popular entertainment, their social behaviors are in total opposition: Jim sides with the law and the majority of the characters, and the unrepentant Punch is sent to prison. Although the character originally had many of the 'early' black stereotypes, it seems that Jim Crow indeed found a natural place among all the 'imports' of Punch and Judy, and began to integrate British culture in the same manner other characters had. The issues of racism, the morally acceptable and the politically correct as we understand them now, were only raised later, in the twentieth century. This process was largely delayed by the absence of overtly negative connotations in the very name 'Jim Crow' to a British audience. There were never any 'Jim Crow laws' in the United Kingdom. From the nineteenth century on, members of British colonies and later, of the Commonwealth, were given the official status of British subjects regardless of their ethnic background. This means that although the population of Great Britain itself was essentially white, the whole of the British population was already very varied ethnically, as the country had colonized several countries in Africa and Asia. There is a non-negligible history of racism in the country, however: In the twentieth century, this was especially clear during race riots taking place as early as 1919. Although foreign workers were needed after World War II, the government ultimately attempted to limit immigration from countries of the former British Empire in the early 1970s. There has never been any law, however, purposefully and overtly encouraged racial segregation, and eventually the Commission for Racial Equality was created in 1976 to put an end to racial discrimination in the British territories.



PUNCH AND JIM CROW



PROF. WHATSIT'S JIM CROW PUPPET FROM HIS PICCINI SHOW.
VIDEO: SPECKINSPACE.COM/WHATSIT/VIDEO.HTML

It took the British population longer to begin questioning the idea that Jim Crow was a "harmless entertainer." The use of the character continued after World War II, although its popularity was not nearly as strong as it was in the Victorian era. In the 1950s, Speaight noted that Jim was "no longer seen as frequently as he once was" (193). This was, evidently, the reflection of the evolving discourse on race in the second half of the twentieth century. People began to feel that the use of Jim Crow was problematic, and although political incorrectness is Punch's hallmark, discrimination is not. Mr. Punch, in fact, fails to discriminate as he treats everyone poorly and fights with or kills all the other protagonists regardless of their age, gender, social status or race.

The direct outcome of the newer, fairer perception of racial issues was that Punch professors throughout the United Kingdom slowly stopped making use of Jim Crow in their cast. They did, however, keep the puppets, which are still referred to as "Jim Crows" on a regular basis, but they are no longer

minstrels. Jim is now cast in other roles: Professor Glyn Edwards, for example, has used him as the doctor, or as a health and safety officer (Edwards). Professor Bryan Clarke also argued for Jim's use on several occasions, including an article in *The Independent*:

Here's Punch: He's Italian. Here's Judy: She's Irish. Here's a Chinaman who spins plates. Here's Jim Crow. That's a crocodile. Now, why should we take the black man out? That would be a racist act, wouldn't it? (Windsor).

Again though, Brian Clarke does not actually portray a minstrel. The press article describes a performance in which Clarke's puppet was cast as Frank Bruno, a well-known British boxing champion. The uses made of the black character in Punch and Judy nowadays translate the reality of daily life in Britain: Although the population is still predominantly white, there are other ethnic groups living in the country. The role of Frank Bruno may well have been punctual for Brian Clarke's black puppet, however it underlines several key changes in the history of the puppet. Bruno is famous for his achievements, unlike Jim Crow who gained his popularity by confirming fashionable Victorian stereotypes. Most importantly, he is an English man, and it is exactly what Jim Crow, like other characters in the show, has become since the Victorian era.

Virginie Ganivet is a PhD student at Loughborough University, UK. Her research focuses on the Punch and Judy show and its representations in English literature and culture.

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We would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respects to the Elders both past, present and future, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and the hopes of Indigenous Australia.

Confessions of a Headhunter

by Sue Giles

When seeking to make Indigenous stories for the stage, the only way it feels authentic is to immerse yourself as an artist in the Indigenous culture of this country, following the lead of those who hold the stories and traditions and the links to contemporary Indigenous theatre. In 2005 Ilbjerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Theatre Cooperative had just come under the artistic directorship of Wesley Enoch, a well known figure in Australian theatre and one who had staged many successful works in mainstream theatres across the country. Ilbjerri had never made a performance for a children's audience and had never worked in puppetry. Polyglot had made one Indigenous work in its 25 year history – *Widartji*, written by Jack Davis. A conversation between the two artistic directors was energized and fruitful, with an agreement to explore the co-production of a new work to travel to schools, working within that paradigm because of its immediacy in access and breadth of audience, forming a creative team that was a true collaboration between the artists of each company.

The process was enriched by a relationship that was set up with the KODE School in Glenroy, an outer suburb of Melbourne. KODE stands for Koorie Open Door Education and was a branch of education that catered for kids who didn't fit into mainstream schools, had issues with absenteeism and behavior disorders, etc. (This branch of education has now been de-funded, much to the distress and outrage of the community and to the detriment of the children involved. Everything that we were exploring in the play was been undermined by this move – the children's sense of place, the importance of their heritage, acknowledgment of their particular position in society.)

Then, KODE in Glenroy was a feisty, stimulating place, where the kids were given all sorts of arts-based learning, often lead by artist parents, that made them feel valued and considered in the system, and gave them a much needed boost in self-esteem and cultural strength. Polyglot's process places children at the heart of the creative work, starting with them as the touchstone to all new works, and this project was no exception. With the kids, we drew, painted, made models, shadows, road maps, explored boys' relationship with cars, asked about family, special places and secrets. We concentrated on explorations of place, identity and pride in heritage, as well as engaging with a contemporary, urban perspective of Indigenous culture.

The story was fuelled by a wonderful film made by Indigenous film maker Sally Riley, from a story by Archie Weller, *Confessions of a Headhunter*. In the film, we are introduced to a character who

appears to have murdered, over and over again, hiding bits of the victims in the boot of his car. Eventually and comically, it transpires that the body parts are the heads of bronze statues of the explorers and colonial invaders of Australia. The man gets a reputation as "The Headhunter" and is chased by the cops from pillar to post across the land. In the end, he melts down the bronze and makes a new statue, placing it in a park overlooking the sea. It is of a woman and her child – a memorial to the stolen generation – of whom he is one. This story seemed to us to be a wonderful way of connecting the Australian history we learn in schools with the history Australian children don't learn until they reach Secondary school—and then only if they're lucky.

As a jumping off point it was incredibly fertile. The film neatly connected colonial invasion (through the statues of explorers and significant Europeans) to the stolen generation and a widespread suspicion of Indigenous peoples, and underlined the myth of savagery, as all the heads were lopped off and collected. It was also a weird twist on the collection of Indigenous heads and bones by Europeans. Only recently have the last remains of Indigenous people been returned from museums in Europe, and returned to the land.

In our take on this, we were keen to make the story upbeat, gutsy, funny and about the lives of urban Indigenous young people, who can and are able to stand up and take a positive, pro-active approach in forging their place in today's Australia. So the head of our explorer, stolen by accident and stowed away in the boot of the car, could talk and argue and forge a relationship with the humans on the run. Puppetry brought magic to the story, allowing memories to become real and three dimensional, co-travellers in the car along with the humans.

The title *Headhunter* was the subject of much discussion. Wesley Enoch talked about the perception of Aboriginal people in the times of the explorers: the colonial assumption of ignorance, savagery and inferiority of population they wanted to get rid of. White Australia's relationship with the Indigenous population has not been good. Indigenous people were not granted citizenship until 1967, before that being classified along with flora and fauna native to Australia. This was changed in a referendum voted on by an overpowering majority, but even to this day, the understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples is poor. The title *Headhunter* gave our play an edge that we thought was important - acknowledging that children are capable of dealing with difficult issues and are not afraid to try new things.



PERFORMERS: LEROY PARSONS AND MELODIE REYNOLDS

It was exciting to join forces with another company—to see across the table people who were our link to Indigenous Australia and all the questions we were burning to ask. They were faced with puppetry, an art form none of them had worked in before and children's theatre for the first time and had a million questions of their own. We were strangers exploring new territory together – learning from each other and growing in understanding. Our own tale became very different from the original, with a glorious life sized EH Holden Car (made from aluminium and foam with a glossy latex skin) as our main character, a Crow made from an umbrella who symbolised Gran, an argumentative statue Head of an explorer representing the colonial invasion 200 years ago, a Dog made from chip packets and some beautiful and ghostly spirit figures for when they finally arrived back in on the land of their heritage. With the addition of dream-like shadow puppetry, two-dimensional collage characters representing the blown out media story and three dynamic performers, *Headhunter* was ready for the road. The show toured for three years, throughout Victoria to schools first and then regional theatres and theatres in Melbourne, to the Come Out Festival in Adelaide for a spectacular school tour, to UNIMA congress in Perth and back to Adelaide for ASSITEJ in 2008.

Headhunter story

Gina and Rick are on the road. Since Grandma passed away, they have a few things to sort out and a couple of secrets they are not willing to share. A lot can happen when you're in the middle of an adventure and the boot of the car becomes heavier and heavier, threatening to spill secrets on to the tarmac.

Headhunter is a story about two Indigenous young people, urban and alive with possibilities, told with puppetry, music and a very cool car. Funky and fast, it takes the audience on a road trip around an Australia they didn't know existed.

When Nan dies, her two grandchildren are at the funeral. Rick is given Nan's car, much to Gina's jealousy. Rick, blinded by his tears, crashes the car into a statue of a local dignitary and the head falls off onto the bonnet of the car. The townspeople see this and start to shout. Rick panics, stuffs the Head into the boot and drives off, meeting Gina on the road. Gina has a secret too – she has stolen Nan's ashes and is taking them back to her land to bury them there.

They join forces, neither knowing the other's secret, until some way down the road the Head makes its presence felt and joins the party as an unwelcome guest. As they travel across Australia, they touch on significant moments in Aboriginal history as they gradually bring the Head to acknowledge his

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

role in the suppression of a great people. Other puppetry elements include a Crow, a symbol of Nan, being her totem and a symbol of death. A memory of Nan's Dog Spike becomes a chip packet construction, barking happily and with his head out the window, enjoying the wind. The spirits of Nan's land are visualised as figures made of rope in the style of Indigenous traditional art. The constant presence of the radio in the journey is illustrated by two-dimensional collage characters, pasted together newspapers and magazine images, that keep the pressure on the fleeing young people through news reports and threats of police chases.

At journey's end, when they finally reach Nan's land, the two fight when Rick realizes Gina has Nan's ashes. She is doing something without the family, her own decision made without consultation and he doesn't like it. She has plenty to accuse him of, too, and they storm off in opposite directions, leaving the Head alone with the land and the spirits, when he at last knows how vast his ignorance is.

Headhunter was a collaboration between Polyglot Puppet Theatre and Ilbijerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre Cop-op. Two ground-breaking companies joined forces to create a new schools show suitable for prep – six.

Puppeteer: Megan Cameron

Performers: LeRoy Parsons, Melodie Reynolds

Director: Wesley Enoch

Puppet Director/Dramaturge: Sue Giles

Designer: Katrina Gaskell

Composer: Lou Bennett

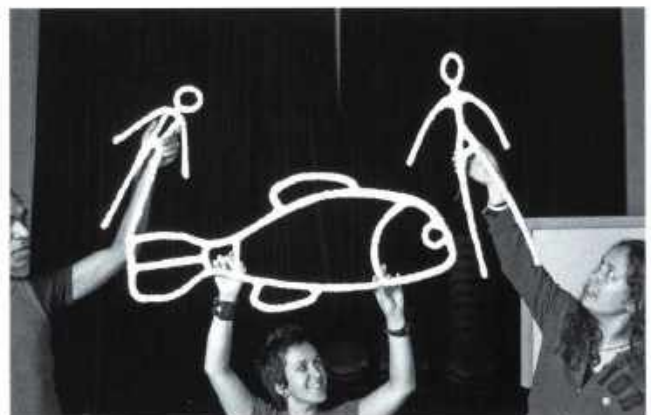
Devised by Sue Giles and Wesley Enoch

Written from a Creative Development Process with Polyglots Kids Creative Committee, featuring children from the Croc Fest in Swan Hill and also from the Koori Open Door Education School in Glenroy

The collaboration was deeply significant for Polyglot and for me in particular as Artistic Director. The relationship between the two companies has been excellent ever since and we are good friends. The cultural learning was wonderful – members of Ilbijerri were generous with time, stories, memories and teaching us protocol. With each personal journey, we were taken further into understanding the incredible link with their land, their heritage and their sense of belonging, something that the non-Indigenous artists had very little connection with, having immigrated here.



Together we created a beautiful and powerful piece that had a huge impact on audiences. In one school in Melbourne's western suburbs, a poor area with a large population of newly arrived refugees and immigrants, mostly from the African countries, a small boy stood up in the front row of the audience at the end of the show and said with great pride and confidence, "I'm Aboriginal, too." And he stood with the cast and took his bow before his admiring school friends. He had never said that before. There was ownership of this play, from the kids who were part of the creation and from the kids who watched it. There was pride in their heritage, that they were singled out, that their stories were important. And for non-Indigenous children, this play allowed them to ask questions, to find out and to experience a different perspective on the world, from people who live in the same place they do, but who have such a very different relationship with it. §



PHOTOS: GAVIN D ANDREW

The Black Puppet Hero in the Traditional Brazilian Puppet Theater

by Isabella A. Irlandini

Once there was a farmer in the middle of our state [Pernambuco] who owned lots of slaves. He was rustic, perverse to his slaves. When one of them would get sick, he would have him killed and would keep only the slaves who had perfect health, and he would say: "A sick slave produces nothing." There was one black slave who was really smart. His name was Tião.



MAMULENGOS, MAMULENGO MUSEUM IN OLINDA, PERNAMBUCO, BRAZIL

One day he got reprimanded by his owner because he was late for work:

- Tião, why are you late?

- Sir, I'm late because Maria, my wife, received the stork's visit.

- You nigger imbecile, my wife is the one who receives the stork's visit, not you nigger! You, nigger, receive the vulture's visit!

The black man was shocked, and protested:

- Sir, that is not possible, we are human too.

- You know already to speak, don't you? You are going to be harshly whipped to serve as an example to the others.

So he whipped the black man and tied him to the trunk.

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

At night, when the black man got back to the slave quarters, at the place where he used to sleep, he started to complain about his situation saying to the others:

- Our master doesn't seem to have what we have inside the chest and is called heart. It seems that inside his chest there is a stone. Even his face is made of stone.

As fast as he could, the black man sculptured a puppet adding some rags to it. He placed a straw mat by the entrance door of the slave quarters, and started to do everything his owner did during the day:

- Go, you nigger bum! Work! Nigger is like a pig, you kill one, and then you find another.

Among the slaves there was a man who was a snitch. He ran inside the main house and said:

- Sir, Tião is mocking you, doing everything you do to us during the day.

Then he said:

- I'm going to punish him.

He picked up a crude whip, arrived at the door of the slave quarters and stayed there enjoying the rest of Tião's story. When the slaves saw their owner, they knelt, bowed respectfully and asked for mercy.

- Sir, it wasn't me, it was Tião.

The master said:

- Tião, since what you said was true, you are going to be forgiven. Those who speak the truth deserve forgiveness.

The farmer went back to the main house where he met his wife. Then she said to him:

- You are not so wild, so brave, so why did you let this nigger mock you?

He was shocked, and the next day he went to Tião:

- Tião, now you will do to your Mistress the same thing you did to me.

- Sir, you have an evil heart, but my mistress got worse. She will have me killed.

- I am the one in charge here. Sculpt her!!

Tião sculpted the mistress. The next day he started in again. One of the slaves went soon to warn the mistress:

- Mistress, Tião is now doing the same thing with you.

She stood up and said:

- You didn't beat him, but I will.

The farmer got her by the hand and said:

- No, I am the boss here, you are second to me. Go and rest.

The next day the farmer's administrator scolded the two. [...] He wanted to beat Tião, but it was not possible. Then the boss came and said:

- Tião, from now on you may continue with your play after work, when you are tired, have nothing else to do and no fun. Go on with this mamulengo.

Tião, happy about this, took on doing mamulengo every Saturday in that town.

And that is how it started the Northeast Brazilian mamulengo.



MASTER CHICO DANIEL AND PUPPET PHOTO: SÉRGIO SCHNAIDER



GLOVE PUPPETS, MASTER TONHO

The puppeteer Januário de Oliveira from the city of Recife, Northeast Brazil, told this story to the researcher Hermilo Borba Filho, probably in the early sixties while the latter was trying to trace the history of *Mamulengo*. *Mamulengo* is the name given to the popular puppet theater in the state of Pernambuco, in Northeast Brazil. In different parts of Brazil, this tradition took different names: *Mamulengo* in Pernambuco, *João Redondo* in Paraíba and Rio Grande do Norte, and *Casemiro Coco* in Paraíba, Sergipe, Alagoas, Ceará, Maranhão and Roraima.

There are several versions of the origins of this traditional Brazilian puppet theater. Many of them ascribe the beginnings of the play to slaves who wanted to mock their owners using the medium of puppetry. The story of Tião brings forth quite vividly the spirit intrinsic to this art form: a life-force of rebellion of the oppressed against his oppressor within a culture rooted in the relationships of slavery.

In Brazil, the abolition of slavery was officially signed in 1888, but the relation between land lords and workers did not change much: It passed from land lords to land owners, and one can still identify the presence of a slavery mentality in many parts of Brazil.

All the variations of popular Brazilian puppet theater have in common a black puppet hero who fights against the established earthly or heavenly powers, be they in the form of the land owners, the police, doctors, priests or even the

devil. The performances play with a constant inversion of hierarchy where the black hero fights the authorities with all sorts of direct or indirect confrontation. The protagonist is usually a young, small, black puppet antagonizing an old, big white, pink or yellow puppet.

The black puppet hero represents not only color but class—that of the humble downtrodden people. He is usually a smaller puppet in comparison with the representative of the power that could be a captain, a landowner or Satan. Even though he is smaller, with a thinner voice and seems to be weak, he fights his big opponents and always wins his battles. It is the fight of good against evil. Usually an injustice is committed against the black puppet at the beginning of the scene. Through a smart move or blunt fight, the black puppet hero always wins. There is a lot of humor and a lot of combat in the fashion of his puppet cousins—such as Pulcinella—accompanied by live music.

In the state of Paraíba, this popular puppet theater is called *João Redondo*. The main puppet character there is called Benedito, and he takes his name from the Catholic black patron Saint Benedict. Benedito is a popular hero who fights farmers, policemen, doctors and priests. The audience gets a thrill from his battles and tricks, which always succeed in vanquishing and demoralizing the unjust authority in order to uphold his rights. The character may also fight an animal: a snake, a jaguar or a calf, which proves his strength. Benedito is fearless and invincible.



PROF. TIRIDA (GIVE'N TAKE), MASTER GINU



GLOVE PUPPET LIMDEIRO, MASTER BOCA RICA



PUPPET BENEDITO AND MASTER SAUBA

Most of the popular puppet theater in Brazil is produced by poor puppeteers who are usually illiterate and have other work as their main source of income such as being a barber, a tailor, a land worker or a tinker. They are thought as masters of the laugh, and improvisation is a key element in the performance. The puppets talk and relate to the audience which, in turn, interacts passionately with them. This lively communication between puppets and audience is based upon a repertoire of traditional scenes.

Behind a colorful curtain, there may be only one or two puppeteers who play all the puppets with different voices. Nevertheless, there is a group structure supporting the performance. Standing behind the curtain, usually next to the puppeteer, is his wife or a boy who passes the puppets that are lined up in order of entrance on a table next to the puppeteer. Outside there is a live orchestra of musicians who play in front of the curtain and there is also a man who is a sort of clown-mediator. The musicians open and close the show, punctuate the puppets' entrances, the fights, and also interact with the characters. In the *João Redondo*, he may be called *Arriliquim*, a clown-mediator who works as a bridge between the puppets and the audience. He may also collect money from the public during the performance.

Even if loved by the children who watch it, the traditional Brazilian puppet theater is primarily done for adults. It is usually performed at night in the streets near a bar or in a rural area in an open space where alcohol is generally served. Once the women and children have gone to bed, the play often takes

a lusty turn, with a big increase in the amount of lewd humor and brawling. The length of the play will vary based on the enthusiasm of the audience. Puppeteer and spectators share a common social stratum—that of the poor working class, with the same outlook, struggles and imagery. It is this common ground that enables the humor in the play, presented by the puppeteer as an offering to the audience through jokes and situations. The puppets even mimic human bodily functions including farts, vomit, urine and pronounced sexuality. It constitutes a physical revenge of the black puppet hero upon the false morality of the dominant class. The black puppet also functions as the puppeteer's alter-ego, able to retaliate against those who subjugate him in real life.

With his head and hands carved in *mulungu* or cork wood, the puppet is usually a glove puppet—a rod puppet—with colorful dress usually made from *chita*, a kind of calico fabric. The puppets are carved with strong lines without details. They are on a par with the people they represent: strong and colorful. These are resilient people who resist by using laughter, sarcasm and music, inverting the hierarchies and revealing the calcified social structures in a carnivalesque fashion.

The traditional Brazilian puppet theater has several elements in common with other forms of traditional puppet theater from around the world—Karagöz, Pulcinella, Punch and Judy, Guignol, etc. It has a repertoire of traditional scenes in which improvisation and a relationship with the audience (with its universe) is central to the performance.

-continued on page 31

The Ground on Which the Puppets Stand:

Race in Mabou Mines' Peter and Wendy



by Emma Halpern and Dan Venning

In his famous 1996 address to the Theatre Communications Group, "The Ground on Which I Stand," August Wilson attacked the practice of colorblind casting.¹ Demanding more funding for theatre created by minorities, he questioned the idea that any theatre could be "universal." He writes that "colorblind casting is an aberrant idea that has never had any validity other than as a tool of the Cultural Imperialist who views their American Culture, rooted in the icons of European Culture, as beyond reproach in its perfection... Their gods, their manners, their being is the only true and correct representation of humankind" (Wilson 1998, 498). In the same year that Wilson gave his address to TCG, the New York-based avant-garde theater troupe Mabou Mines premiered their puppetry piece *Peter and Wendy*, a theatrical adaptation of J. M. Barrie's 1911 novel about Peter Pan—a character who, to use Wilson's phrase, is an "icon of European Culture" if there ever was one.

Barrie's novel, the source material for *Peter and Wendy*, is itself a novelization of his most famous play, *Peter Pan*. Mabou Mines' adaptation was conceived and created by playwright/producer Liza Lorwin, designer Julie Archer, director Lee Breuer and composer Johnny Cunningham, in collaboration with actress Karen Kandel, who plays a role referred to as The Narrator in the script. The piece was workshopped at St. Ann's Warehouse in 1991, as well as at the New York Theater Workshop in 1994. After its 1996 premiere at the Spoleto Festival, it was presented by New York City's The New Victory Theater the following year. The New Victory has since presented it again in 2002, and just this past Spring in May 2011.

Founded in 1995 as part of The New 42nd Street in Times Square, The New Victory Theater is the only performing arts center in New York City that is dedicated exclusively to presenting theater for children

and families. Its season boasts local, national and international works and it strives to present "sophisticated, thought-provoking professional productions that are as artistically rich as they are entertaining." The theater frequently programs companies that are mostly known for their "adult" work, such as Theater for a New Audience, Berkeley Rep, Steppenwolf Theatre Company and National Theatre of Scotland. This unique approach to children's programming makes The New Victory a particularly appropriate venue for Mabou Mines' piece, which is both challenging and family appropriate.

Like the aforementioned companies, Mabou Mines' work is mostly for adults. Founded in 1970, Mabou Mines creates collaborative shows that often feature striking musicality (Philip Glass is a founding member): the company also experiments with theatrical form. *Peter and Wendy* is not their only foray into the world of puppetry. Their 2003 *Dollhouse*, an adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in which the men were played by actors no taller than four and a half feet, featured puppets in its metatheatrical conclusion. Their current *A Streetcar Named Desire* also features puppetry by Basil Twist, and their 2010 *B'rer Rabbit in the Kingdom of the Monkey King* was a collaboration with the Guanxi Puppet Art Troupe of China. Mabou Mines and its members have won a variety of awards, both in the US and internationally. *Peter and Wendy* is one of their most critically acclaimed shows, winning a 1997 *Village Voice* OBIE award for Best Production, as well as garnering performer Karen Kandel a wide variety of awards. The show has also received a UNIMA citation for Excellence in Puppetry.

The text of *Peter and Wendy* is taken nearly verbatim from Barrie's novel. The show, however, is performed using puppets designed by Basil Twist,² with the puppeteers onstage wearing white, Victorian-inspired outfits and masks. The only character not represented by a puppet is Wendy, who is played by Kandel herself – the only performer whose face is visible onstage. Kandel, also dressed in Victorian garb, additionally voices every single character in a tour-de-force performance that must be incredibly exhausting as she shifts voices between characters (and animals!) from moment to moment. The only text not from Barrie's novel or spoken by Kandel are several songs interspersed throughout the show, sung by Siobhan Miller from one of the boxes house left.

While *Peter and Wendy* is a wonderful example of how various forms of puppetry can be profoundly emotionally affecting for audiences, one of the most fascinating aspects of the show is how, like Wilson, it calls into question the central tenet of colorblind casting—³ that it is possible for race not to signify on the stage.

Kandel is black and, as the only human actor visible onstage, for the majority of the show the audience is led to believe that her race is not meant to signify the race of the characters— that *Peter and Wendy's* story of childhood and growing up is universal and thus Kandel has been cast solely because of her virtuosic ability, regardless of race. In fact, Kandel is coded somewhat neutrally in terms of gender as well, due to her very closely cropped haircut and the loose dress she wears, which hides her figure. For most of the show, it seems that if Kandel's race is meant to signify at all, it is solely aesthetically; her dark skin contrasts intensely with the white color that is used throughout the sets and in her and the puppeteers' costumes.⁴

Most of the puppets in *Peter Pan* reinforce the idea that the show is designed to suggest that Kandel's race does not signify. The puppet Peter is white, as is the puppet Captain Hook, both of which are Bunraku-style hand-and-rod puppets.⁵ Most of the remaining puppets are presented in a fanciful fashion. Wendy's brothers John and Michael are depicted through nightshirts held on poles or manipulated with the puppeteers' feet through the sleeves (Lorwin 1996: 2, 24). Their parents the Darlings are represented at times by shadow puppets on the upstage screen of the set; at another point the Narrator twirls a top hat on a cane to represent Mr. Darling. Peter's Lost Boys are small, mannequin-like wooden dolls, and the Indians are represented by the puppeteers putting their fingers above these dolls "like war bonnets" (Lorwin 1996: 25). The dog Nana

is a human-arm puppet that is transformed with an alternate head into Hook's crocodile nemesis. Birds in Neverland are marionettes, and many other characters are represented by shadow puppets: the children flying to Neverland, the wolves and the Lost Boys when they have grown up. None of these puppets depicts race in any way that seems to signify, and thus contribute to the perception that *Peter and Wendy* is using "colorblind" casting.

However, *Peter and Wendy* explodes the notion that it is "colorblind" in the final scene, when the puppet Jane, Wendy's daughter, appears. This puppet is designed to look black, like Kandel. The revelation of Jane and her race – and thus the significance of Kandel's – is designed to be quite striking. The Bunraku puppet Jane first appears only in silhouette, behind a sheet with the Narrator as Wendy. The sheet is suddenly dropped, "revealing bunraku JANE with NARRATOR" (Lorwin 1996: 61-2). The audience's realization that Kandel's race has signified all along is thus sudden, and comes only at the very end of the show. It is designed to force the audience to reevaluate how they have looked at Kandel's body throughout the earlier part of the show, and how they have read the puppets.

This *coup de théâtre* accomplishes three major feats, the first of which is that it gives the character of Wendy a physical context. Apart from being briefly portrayed by a nightshirt along with her brothers, Wendy is the only character for which there is no puppet or visual indicator. There is only Kandel's body and voice, and unlike with Peter Pan, Captain Hook and other main characters, Kandel does not give Wendy an English or Scottish accent. If race doesn't signify in her portrayal of Wendy, then Wendy is left without any signifier at all. The audience can only know what Wendy looks like, or if she indeed looks like anything or anyone at all, by looking at her daughter. By revealing a black Jane, the production makes a conscious choice to give Jane a race (rather than make her "universal") and, therefore, to give Wendy a race – the only corporeal characteristic of hers we know.

Second, the use of the Jane puppet illuminates the limitations of colorblind casting. It becomes obvious that Wendy and Jane are not raceless "universal" characters – they exist in a particular time and place, and their particular story falls outside of the purview of the black experience. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the Jane puppet proves that the exposure of colorblind casting's limitations can lead to a resistance of those limitations. The production resists the racial specificity of the Peter Pan story not by making the story "universal," but by placing characters of one specific race in a story that is ostensibly about characters of another race. The resulting story onstage isn't about a neutral "universal" girl, but a black girl. For children living in New York City during the Obama Presidency, this use of multiculturalism in storytelling should not seem unusual. With the great diversity that is characteristic of American urban life, many children in New York negotiate daily through what, if anything, race and ethnicity signify in a multicultural society. The circumstance of a black Jane, and therefore, a black Wendy, having roles in an otherwise "neutral" Peter Pan story mirrors circumstances that many children in New York experience in their daily lives.



photos: Richard Termine

Through the racial characteristics of a single puppet, Mabou Mines not only allows *Peter and Wendy* to become more applicable to the diverse community of children in New York City, but also raises the questions of what it means to be a “universal” story, and whether such stories exist at all.

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Dan Venning is a doctoral candidate in Theatre at the CUNY Graduate Center, writing his dissertation on Shakespeare in Nineteenth-Century Germany. He holds a B.A. in English and Theater Studies from Yale University and an M.Litt. in Shakespeare Studies from the University of St. Andrews, Scotland. He recently presented a paper on puppetry in a 2006 production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* at the International Puppetry Conference in Storrs, CT.

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Footnotes

¹ The address was subsequently published in both *American Theatre* and *Callaloo*; we rely on the latter version here.

² Although Mabou Mines’ *Peter and Wendy* is the most well known version of Barrie’s story to use puppets, it is worth noting that the most famous film version of *Peter Pan* is Disney’s 1952 cartoon version. At the 2011 International Puppetry conference in Storrs, CT, in the session “The Interdisciplinary Puppet: A Working Group Discussion,” Lisa Reinke defined a performing object as “anything that absorbs agency” in order to further her theory of a continuum of performing objects from puppets to pixels. In Reinke’s continuum, cartoons are certainly performing objects, although more abstract signs than physical puppets.

³ “Colorblind” casting is a disputed term; Actors’ Equity Association prefers the term “nontraditional casting,” but the definition is essentially the same: “the casting of ethnic minorities in roles where race, ethnicity, or sex is not germane” (Eisenberg 1988).

⁴ Even vocally, Kandel as Wendy is coded neutrally: While Mr. and Mrs. Darling have British accents and Peter speaks with a light lowland Scottish brogue, Wendy sounds like an American child.

⁵ The pirate Smee, also a hand-and-rod puppet, is obviously not white, but he is a minor character and a comic servant; thus his race does not disrupt the initial perception of a “colorblind” production.

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Puppets and the Performance of Race

by John Bell

The connections between race and puppetry are rich, varied, and longstanding. In a United States context the most obvious examples involve racial and ethnic stereotypes, which are as easily rendered in three-dimensional moving objects as they are in political cartoons, comic books, and animated cartoons. As a boy growing up in the 1950s, my conception of the recently ended Second World War was heavily educated by the extreme caricatures of German and (especially) Japanese military figures in cartoons that must have been made for mass consumption in war-time movie houses, but were then televised nationwide in the post-war years, and considered entirely appropriate content for children—war-obsessed and barely human Japanese soldiers with yellow skin, slanted eyes and round, black-rimmed glasses, who clearly deserved whatever comeuppance Popeye or Mighty Mouse had in store for them.

I later realized that these popular and entirely “legitimate” ideological caricatures of race had been preceded by an earlier and far deeper obsession that haunted American culture in the 19th century, and still haunts it today: the nature of black/white relations in the shadow of slavery. While researching a book about the Detroit Institute of Art’s vast puppet collection in the 1990s, I realized that the largest single category of American puppets in the 19th and early 20th centuries was black-face minstrel puppets performed by white puppeteers. To my mind, the question of race—and specifically the portrayal of African-American characters by white puppeteers—had never and has never been addressed as a central issue of American puppetry, and I was simply surprised at the extent to which black-face minstrel puppets populated the *dramatis personae* of late 19th and early 20th century United States marionette companies.

Like many aspects of puppet theater, this one simply reflected the nature of contemporary actors’ theater, which in the 19th century was also obsessed with race, in the blackface minstrel shows which were the most popular form of comic entertainment, and the melodrama *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which was the most popular serious stage show of the time. But long after blackface minstrelsy with actors fell out of favor in the 1930s, blackface puppets continued to appear, and still do appear, as staples of cabaret marionette and ventriloquist acts. Why?

The performance of black characters by white performers in the United States

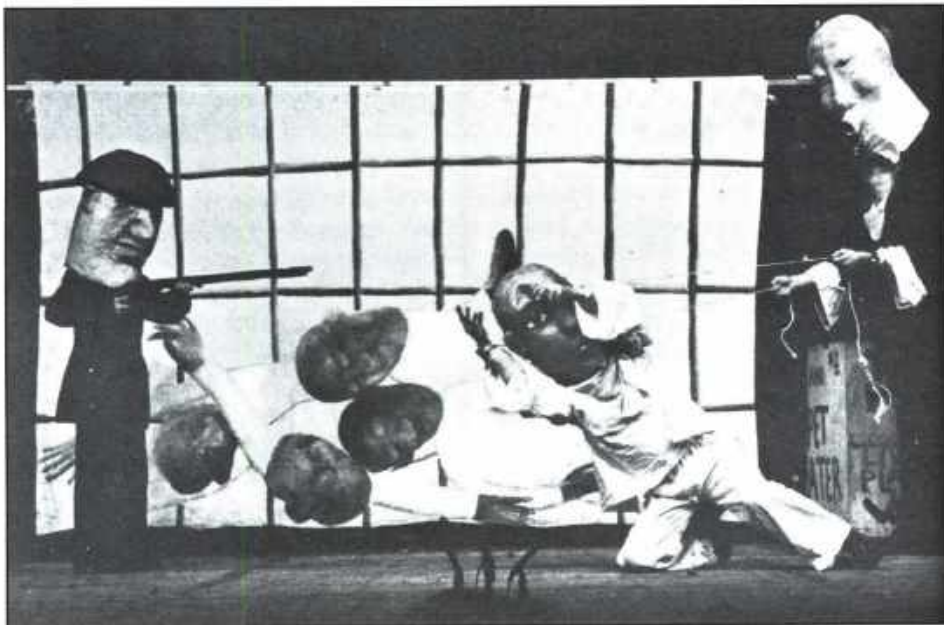
is inevitably an attempt to come to terms with our country’s long and tortured history of slavery and racial segregation. It is no longer socially easy for white actors to “black up” in the old tradition; and the confidence that white actors could effortlessly portray African-Americans, so ubiquitous from the 1840s to the 1930s, has for the most part been undermined. But performing race with puppets is different than performing race with actors.

The performance of race is most often the performance of “the other,” an objectification of a particular ethnicity that allows gross generalities, attributions of common character traits to entire populations, and easy ways of clearly defining as a group human beings who would otherwise have to be dealt with individually. Puppetry accomplishes this objectification literally: We create performing objects that not only represent, but *are*, in fact, not “us.” Different from applying makeup to our own skins and trying to act as “the other,” puppetry allows us to maintain our own racial identity, and yet still perform another character, literally at arm’s length. We don’t need to “become” the racial other we seek to portray, we simply manipulate a sculpture that already has its own identity.

The performance of race in puppetry is tightly connected to the performance of color, but sometimes the two are not identical. For example, Mobarak, the central personage of Iranian puppet theater, traditionally has a black-painted head, but this does not at all seem to represent African-ness, as it would in the United States. Instead, as Australian puppeteer Sean Kenan put it in 2006, “Mobarak’s black face represents [the] lower class,” just as his traditionally red costume “represents a feisty spirit, one who fights back.” Some Alpine carnival masks in Europe are also black, without specifically referencing African characteristics, and many medieval European devil masks were also colored black without signifying African-ness.

Turkey’s Karagöz tradition, on the other hand, represented black African characters as one element of the panoply of ethnic and

racial types—Persians, Greeks, Arabs, Armenians, Jews, and Europeans (or “Franks”)—that populated the Ottoman Empire. Another Mediterranean culture that juggled complex issues of race and ethnicity—Sicily—routinely used dark-skinned puppets with specifically African



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features as Muslim Moors in the cycles of the *opera dei pupi*. In other words, it seems that societies marked by a constant mix of ethnicities need puppets denoting racial difference as a public means of sorting out such difference.

For undoubtedly complex reasons related to the transmission of African culture to the United States via the slave trade, strong traditions of African puppetry do not appear to have taken direct hold in the U.S. My guess is that slaveholders, determined to repress the unifying strength of tribal customs among their African slaves, could easily eliminate the material culture of sculptures and other images, while the immaterial and body-specific forms of music and dance left no physical traces and were harder to repress. Popular African or African-influenced performance traditions in the Caribbean and Latin America have routinely incorporated puppets and masks in the politically charged culture of Carnival, which is always concerned with overturning existing power structures. But, other than in New Orleans, it is hard (at this moment anyway) to locate specific African-American traditions of puppetry from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the catalogue of *African and African-American Puppetry*, Schroeder Cherry's ground-breaking 1994 exhibition at the Center for Puppetry Arts, Nancy Staub could conclude with some confidence that "most African-American puppeteers have probably not been influenced by African puppetry"—an assertion that could generally apply to white puppeteers as well.

The performance of black stereotypes by white puppeteers in 19th century minstrel show contexts began to be countered in the early 20th century by African-American puppeteers performing African-American puppets, for example in the 1930s productions of the Buffalo Historical Marionettes, one of the many puppet units of the Federal Theater Project. These puppets were clearly made in the style of European marionette theater on a proscenium stage, but accomplished the great feat of performing race on the puppet stage without the obvious problems presented by minstrel puppets operated by white puppeteers.

One could imagine that the intense political activity of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements might have inspired many activist puppet shows dealing with race, but this does not seem to have been the case (although there is a dearth of information about the history of African-American puppet theater). An exception seems to be Bread and Puppet Theater, whose work in streets, parks, lofts, and theaters in New York City inevitably connected it to the complexities of the city's rich ethnic and racial environ-



Backstage view of the Buffalo Historical Marionettes production of Uncle Tom's Cabin. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress Federal Theatre Project Archive, George Mason University.

ment. A photo in the second volume of Stefan Brecht's *Bread and Puppet Theatre* shows Peter Schumann and other puppeteers on the boardwalk in front of their Coney Island theater on May 30, 1970, playing music to draw an audience indoors for a *Lamentation for Phillip (sic) Gibbs and James Green*, two black college students recently killed by police at Jackson State College in Mississippi, during protests against the May 4th Kent State University massacre in Ohio. Schumann made a series of oversized African-American head masks for a number of shows of the early seventies focused on the traumatic and racially charged violence of the time: *The Story of Harvey McLeod*, *Revenge of the Law*, and *The White-*

washing of the Dirty Sheets of Attica, all "newspaper stories" based on current events. The *Attica* show was a response to the September 13, 1971 killing of 39 mostly black prisoners during a revolt at Attica Correctional Facility in upstate New York, and was created and performed at Goddard College in Vermont only three days after the massacre. Schumann's puppet heads of young black men are, in a way, caricatures (as most puppets inevitably are), but created in an entirely different way than the minstrel puppets of older American traditions, as they are marked by a kind of poignant humanity rather than comic extremity.

Schroeder Cherry's 1994 *African and African-American Puppetry* exhibition chronicled a wide variety of African-American puppeteers active since the 1960s, including Brad Brewer, David Chapman, Garland Farwell, Akbar Imhotep, Kevin Clash, Gary Jones, John McDonough, Leslie Perry, Sandra Robbins, Willie Reid, and Winnie Wilson. These puppeteers have employed hand puppets, rod puppets, giant puppets, shadow figures, and ventriloquist dummies to create a wide range of stories and characters, many expressly focused on articulating the black experience. For example, Gary Jones of Blackstreet USA Puppet Theatre in Los Angeles described the company's mission as follows—"Through highly stylized Black puppets; to dramatically reinforce a positive self image among Black people, and to educate others in the cultural complexities of the largest minority in the USA."

In the early 20th century, visual artist Kara Walker came to shadow puppetry from her work with 19th century-style silhouette paper cuts. Her animation of highly racialized black and white characters in such films as her 2004 *Testimony* brings us immediately back to the world of 1800s racial strife which minstrel puppetry of the era mined so effectively as light comedy. Walker goes for tragedy instead—an African-American artist using the ancient American tradition of puppet stereotypes to look at her country's history of race in an entirely new way.



AFRICAN KARAGOZ SHADOW FIGURE

Since 1969, race has been a dominant element of one of the most popular American puppet shows. *Sesame Street*, produced by CTW and aired on PBS channels, has specifically focused on an urban and thus obviously multi-racial environment, and while the show used a multi-ethnic cast of actors, Jim Henson's puppets for *Sesame Street* brilliantly denote racial difference without specifically referencing it. That is to say, by creating a green Kermit, yellow Big Bird, purple Cookie Monster, yellow Bert, orange Ernie, and red Elmo, Henson and his associates implied a multi-racial world while at the same time avoiding the challenges of performing specific racial identities. The long and burdensome history of American racial stereotyping in the minstrel tradition could thus be avoided, ironically by the use of color itself: the bright, primary colors of the Muppet fleece used to build the puppets.

Because of this, the performance of the most popular *Sesame Street* puppet, Elmo, has been achieved by puppeteer Kevin Clash in a way that allows us to know him as a brilliant African-American puppeteer, but does not peg his performances with Elmo as the performance of race. Clash, it could be said, achieves a performance that is "post-racial"—the chimeric quality some have connected with the rise of Barack Obama. Kara Walker, on the other hand, seems to say in her work that the history of race in America cannot be transcended, but must be re-thought by going back to its roots. The fact that both of these approaches can be achieved through puppetry speaks to the strength and versatility of the form. §

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“Black Like Me”– Who is the Black Clown of Persian or Indonesian Traditional Puppetry?

by Kathy Foley

Puppet and mask theatre often have a black-faced or black-bodied clown, and white is often painted on the face of the refined character. The Iranian *kemeih shab bazi* and Indonesian *wayang* puppet traditions provide good examples. When I teach these forms to American students, they are quick to see racism as the source and hypothesize that this is part of the colonial legacy. Their reactions are understandable, but the color codes certainly precede the colonial era and have less to do with European whiteness than with class in traditional culture or perhaps earlier with the dichotomy of ancestor/spirit (white) vs. living/material person (black). While the black is often associated with comedy and disruption, it is often also the side to which the theatre form gives the greatest authority in terms of viewer identification and moral force.

An example of this is *kemeih shab bazi* a string puppet form of Iran whose major clown is black-faced Mobarak. He stands in as the voice of the little man at the opposite pole to the exalted (and pompous) monarch Shah Salim. He has a red patterned shirt, trousers and a pointed hat. His beloved is Miss Tayareh who is a light-skinned dancer linked to the court. He is a rambunctious but beloved troublemaker who talks back to the interpreter/musician who appears at the front of the stage as he talks back to the vizirs, soldiers, court and the Shah, himself. The most frequently presented show is where this character talks back, as a wedding ceremony for the son of Shah Salim is prepared. Everyone comes (usually character by character) to participate in preparations, celebration and wedding procession and Mobarak gets his chance to tease and test them all. A clear cousin of Mr. Punch, he is the ignoble and outspoken everyman.

Mobarak corresponds to the black-faced clown of the improvised Persian comedy, *ruhowzi* (Beeman 1982). Due to the black skin, some feel that he represents a black eunuch set to watch over the court harem. His tendency to mangle words represented by the *safir* (reed) is said by them to be due to his African roots, which made him less fluent in Farsi. But others feel that Africa is not the source of this character and the dark skin is merely linked to the class difference.

These sources argue it is the tradition of court jesters (*dalqak*) of the Safavid and Qajar periods that form the base for the black-faced Mobarak. Jokers attached to major and minor court were often given great leeway to criticize the leader and nobles in the Persian and Mughal kingdoms from the Middle East to India. When the courts fell to colonial hegemony, the jesters are said to have turned to markets and fairs. They found their sustenance in these venues. Many of these black court jester figures are claimed as ancestors by the contemporary *bhand* of the Indian subcontinent. These are comic, trickster-like performers who generally work in pairs—one as the straight man (who sets up the jokes, a task taken on by the musician in the *kemeih shab bazi*) and the second as the



THE IRREPRESSIBLE MOBARAK

fall guy (a trickster like Mobarak). Such paired comics continue to perform at weddings and related events in places like India-Pakistan-Afghanistan (Pamment 2007 and Emigh 1986). They know both family lineages and all the local gossip and are responsible for praise or criticism of the elite at public events. Though the *bhand* are low in class, the elite like to keep on their good side and must pay *vail* (money donations) when these jokesters appear so these elite masters will not become the butt of *bhand* jokes. When they do critique the elite about injustices, inequities or boondoggles (replete in contemporary Pakistan!) the aristocrat must take it in stride or bear the brunt of public laughter.

The figure of Shah Salim as an elite holding a wedding in the Mobarak play *Shah Salim*, and the black-bodied clown character who improvises social, political and general comic critique is a link to this long-standing tradition of the court jester-*bhand*. The relationship of the elite and the jokester is that which we encounter in *bhand* performance. As Shiva Massoudi notes, Shah Salim represents Ottoman Sunni power (Turks) while Mobarak is the voice of the Shia underdog of Iran. He says, “All the characters are introduced through the relationship they have with Shah Salim: They are his slave, his son, his daughter-in-law. Shah Salim represents political power and the force of the patriarch. His money, his power and his glory are what Mobarak constantly mocks. . . . Shah Salim gets top billing in the title, but the royals are only for pomp and circumstance and produce the problem that the menials must overcome . . . The only real story is that of Mobarak, who represents in his improvised

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commentary the desires, dreams and bravado of the mostly male and often lower class hero" (Massoudi 2009: 273-75).

This black-faced Mobarak is in revival in contemporary Iran, as students have taken on the puppet voice of Mobarak to comment on the current political situation. Massoudi, in reporting on the growth of *kemi shab bazi* in contemporary Iran, notes: "Mobarak is a frank, reckless, humorous character whose disobedience is his appeal. This has been the secret of his survival through centuries. He is the one who talks back" (278).

This character is related to low-class puppet clowns Kargoz, Kasper, Kasperl, Pulcinella and Punch. But instead of tracking him west where he loses his color, I am going to go east where the importance of his black color is deepened.

The black-bodied Semar is the major clown (and god) in Indonesian wayang. Some relate this blackness to ethnicity and see this major clown as related to Melanesian ethnicity rather than Austronesian (continental Asian) roots. They feel Semar represents the aboriginal peoples of Indonesia and give this as the reason that Semar is seen as the protector (demit) of Java. He has correspondences throughout the Malay world: Pak Dogel in the wayang siam of Malaysia and Twalen in the Wayang Parwa of Bali, among others. In each case, this clown is a divinity and yet serves as the comic servant of the major hero who is considered the party of the "right hand" (the hero operated by the right hand of the performer) that customarily will "win" whatever battle is being represented in the confrontation of the evening. The character of the "left" (operated by the performers left arm in battle sequences) will be a jerk—both literally (the left hand is less fluid) and figuratively (it is usually an ogre or demon that the hero must subdue).

In traditional theatres, this black or dark bodied clown who serves the hero may have the additional job of translating what is obscure or dimly understood in archaic Sanskrit-influenced dialogue, spoken by the noble character, into understandable local language and modern terms. Sometimes the clown is a straight-faced translator of what is going on in the epic action. But more often his function is to fill in the comedy and make the actions, which relate to a mythic story, jibe with a contemporary world and its ethos. The dark-faced clown is about comic intervention and bringing the material "down to earth" and "up to date." The ethereal "white" ancestral story comes down into the "black" world of matter and form that the audience inhabits.

Cosmologies of color underlie the use of black or dark-faced figures in the Hindu-Buddhist-Sufi structures which generate these popular theatres. There are two paradigms of color which dominate in Asia: One is polychromatic and the other is the black-white scale. Both are intimately intertwined with traditional theatre performance in a vast swatch of land—having moved with Buddhism to far reaches of the continent.

The colors can vary: green/blue-red-white, black and yellow (as in the Ch'oyongmu dance of Korea). In Java, the more customary mix is white, red, yellow, black and luminous. In each of these configurations the last color represents the center—the place of absolute power. Black is the direction north, associated with the mountain and power. The color black is also associated with determination and meditative force (hence major characters when they are practicing meditation in Javanese wayang will appear with black faces rather than white, which might be their normal visage).



THE POMPOUS SHAH SALIM

(PHOTOS: COURTESY OF SHIVA MASSOUDI)

The meaning of these colors is associated with more complex thinking on the four directions, the stages of life, microcosm and macrocosm, and will not be dealt with here. We will rather see the world more dichotomously.

A more simple scale is the movement from white to black or light to dark. Here I refer to the Indonesian model, but realize it is also related to the yin-yang of Chinese daoist iconography, etc. Here the white is male, refined, ancestor, divine, and black is female or androgynous, unrefined, chthonic, material. In the Indonesian clown Semar, for his costume and his body he will customarily have a mixture of the black and white: black body and white face and black and white checks for a lower body wrap (in Indonesia this pattern is called *poleng*) to show he is (like all humanity) a mixture of the two elements—refined/divine, male/female and material/demonic. While it is true that elements of class put the darker as lower and servant, the mythos of the clown character continues—as with Mobarak—to perpetuate the topsy-turvy perspective.

Semar, the major black-bodied clown, is a high god of the universe sent down to serve the white-faced character. But he is also arguably the "afterbirth" (sibling protector of the hero) since the distorted dark afterbirth is traditionally felt to be the human's spirit "elder brother." He, along with the hero (white-face), makes up a cosmic whole. His dark body is low, fat and farty, yet he is seen as representative of the people. The moment he wants, he can turn into a white-faced god (his true form: Sang Hyang Ismaya). The black-bodied clown is the most powerful puppet in the set (as well as the funniest). The first to emerge when the cosmic egg that forms the universe cracked open, Semar is the high god and

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an elder brother to the white-faced Batara Guru (AKA Siwa [Shiva in India]). His name is interpreted as Samar (to hide) or Asmara (god of love). One of my neighbors in an Indonesian village once gave me a mantra to help get a "boyfriend" (worried that at thirty I would never find a husband). It was a mantra calling on Semar.

A related clown figure persists in mask/puppet theatres of Asia—Maltuggi in Korean mask dance and puppetry is probably related. Perhaps even the black mask and triangular patterned cheeks of Harlequin's costumes are related and he is part of this Indonesian clown's family tree.

While in Europe, the black-faced clown character often gets recast as a devil, for most of the world he is a trickster god who came at the beginning of time out of some cosmic egg and who uses humor, love and life-power to initiate the audience into contemporary applications of old myths and stories that lead us toward enlightenment.

While the use of this character of course has lessened as Asia modernizes, the black characters and the assumption of a black face or mask have not been about cementing racial authority. Indeed, putting on black face or playing a black puppet was perceived as a mode of promoting a more democratic society.

Color and impersonation of black characters is more than ethnic or racial representation. Ideologically, the black character is used because all humans are, in some ways, black. The clown, the slave, the jokester is "black like me"—the Iranian student, the low class bhand or the black-bodied god moving through the material world, pointing us in directions of truth and eternity.

Kathy Foley's scholarly pursuit of Southeast Asian puppetry has taken her through most of that region. She is a professor of theater arts at UC Santa Cruz, the editor of "Asian Theater Journal" and has performed as a dalang of wayang golek rod puppets and wayang orang dance drama for more than 20 years.

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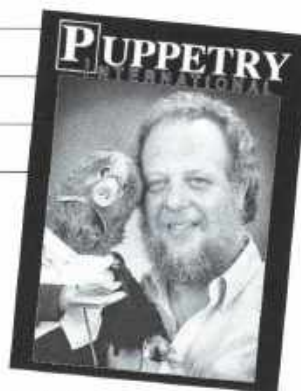


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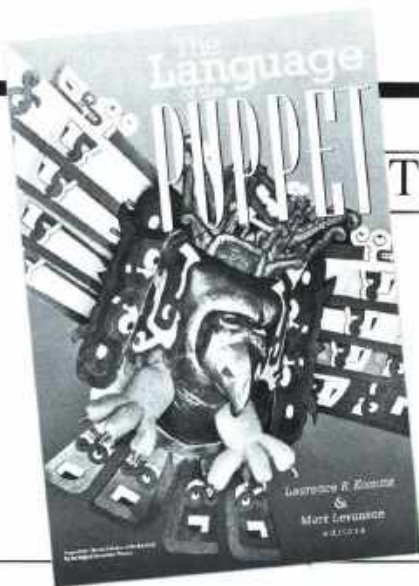
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Brazilian Puppet Hero
continued from page 21

However, the imagination that produced this black puppet hero is the one situated in Northeast Brazil and only there. It is a universe immersed in poverty, inequality and exploitation, but rich in music, dance and poetry. The black puppet Benedito and his counterparts are heroes that were probably born in the slave quarters and are still alive in the northeast and north of Brazil. There may be a time when this hero may not be needed anymore. He might evolve and become something else, or he might simply fade away, vanishing as many others have before him.

Isabella A. Irlandini is a graduate student in Theater in Brazil. She has worked in Brazil, Europe and the US as an actress, director and puppeteer. Her current research is on figurative puppetry and animated objects and voice.



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RÓD PUPPET JANEIRO VAI, JANEIRO VEM (EXPANDABLE NECK), MASTER ZÉ DA VINA

The Inheritance of Shadows

by Annie Katsura Rollins

On our swiftly globalizing planet, it becomes harder and harder to identify oneself. Racial, ethnic and cultural titles become increasingly hard to identify both externally and internally. Race and ethnicity are inherited traits and culture, often one of circumstance, and one could argue that the latter is where we truly differ. Perhaps now, then, the most important titles are the ones we give ourselves, the larger and smaller ways we identify within our culture and circumstance that truly define us. Such is the case with a small and diminishing group of traditional shadow puppet makers and players that are working tirelessly to ensure one of China's oldest folk arts survives the increasing pressures of modernization and urbanization in today's new China.

In the last couple of decades, China has been experiencing the largest migration of people in recorded human history. An estimated 300 million people from the countryside have packed up their belongings and headed to the city centers, with a conservative estimate that another 400 million will have followed by the end of 2025. To put those numbers into perspective, in the span of 35 years, China will have moved the population of two United States into their cities. The largest cities currently hover around twenty million and mid-sized cities are bulging at a respectable eight to ten. There are obvious issues with an urban migration of this size and speed, like housing and transportation infrastructure. But there are even subtler and perhaps more detrimental shifts happening quietly, out in the empty countryside.

Chinese shadow puppetry is believed to have started in the courtyard of Emperor Han Wudi (Han Dynasty 206BCE–220AD) when his advisor recreated the likeness of the Emperor's late wife in shadow, in order to cure his heartsickness. From there, the form quickly spread through the military as a form of nighttime entertainment. The military left the tradition behind in every village they occupied and soon the country had sprouted hundreds of shadow puppet troupes.

For almost two thousand years, the Chinese have been passing down a collective cultural history through these performances, tracing every major event and character, even through the artistic repression of the Cultural Revolution. It's a rare form of puppetry that has remained relevant for such an extensive period of time and embodied its creators so directly.

And while the country is still politically communist, this migratory shift from rural to urban has China culturally trending more towards a capitalist system. New residents in the cities have come for opportunity, self-made. This convergence of political ideologies, coupled with rapid urbanization, has made a messy collision. A few folk arts have made the leap, but most have not.

Shadow puppetry is alive, but in triage. Many troupes, styles and methods have been left to fend for themselves, while the funding and personnel has been appointed to the few who show the most modernizing potential.

There are numerous reasons why traditional shadow puppetry has lost relevance and finds itself in the current predicament. Digital forms of entertainment in China have proved an overwhelming competitor. Urbanization and migration have dismantled the very fabric of the community that fostered shadow puppetry in the first place. The Communist takeover, coupled with the Cultural Revolution, created a thirty-plus year break in shadow puppet history—long enough to disband the majority of troupes and create a gap in the training of apprentices. Many masters died before they had a chance to pass on their skills and knowledge.

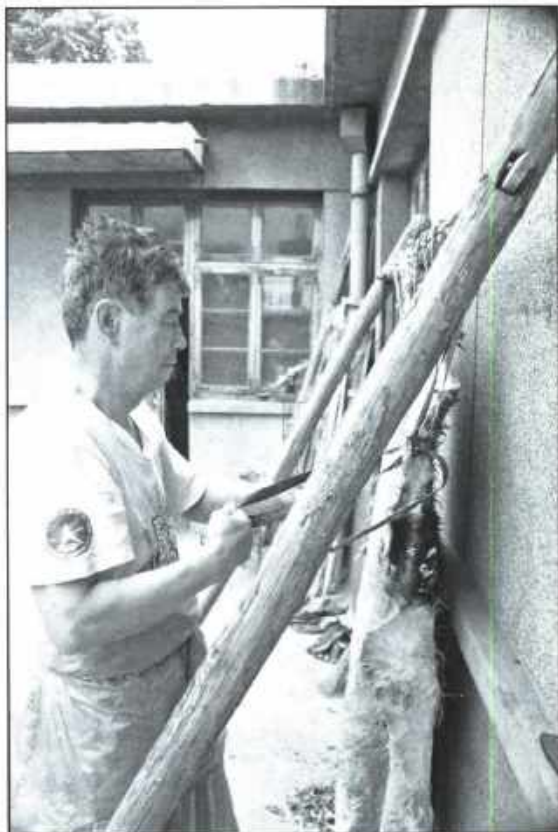
The remaining practitioners in the countryside are cobbling together a living as best they can, in whatever way they can. In most areas, this means jumping onto the commercialization bandwagon. The hand-cut leather Chinese shadow puppet itself is a cultural commodity with growing value. Troupes are now hired merely as PR for puppet making companies and cutting masters are hired to create a few custom pieces, or crank out popular designs according to the tourist demand.



New apprentices are not asked to innovate, but asked to recreate time-tested hit shows or the top ten popular puppet designs. This lack of creative freedom and diversity of challenge is not only hurting the form itself, but keeping the form's apprentices from transcending from the realm of skilled labor to mastery. Without a line of masters, a link to the skills and methods passed down for 1500 years is broken. If and when a newer generation of artists wants to revitalize the form or innovate from the historical past, they will be doing it from books and video. No one knows how much artistry will be lost without hands and hearts teaching.

The new wave of modern shadow puppetry, popping up in cities, bears little resemblance to its village predecessor. The puppets are simply cut, often made out of plastic, and painted with Technicolor saturation. The shows channel a Sunday-morning cartoon vibe with a Disney-like score and a digestible ten-minute length, better suited for our modern attention spans. Upon leaving, however, these new performances leave nothing to be debated, pondered or wondered at. They are simplistic, enjoyable and too universal to be anything more than pure entertainment.

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THE LU FAMILY HOUSEHOLD AND STUDIO

MASTER LU STRETCHES RAWHIDE ON A FRAME

DETAILS ARE CUT INTO THE FIGURE

NEIGHBOR VISITS DURING PAINTING SESSION

The masters are keenly aware of their predicament as a shrinking minority. Sixty years ago, they would only pass their priceless knowledge down to their male offspring, and now they're sharing it with a young American female. They're taking anyone and everyone with an interest.

Upon my recent research trip to Tangshan, China, I encountered this question of continuity on a micro level. I was welcomed as an apprentice by Master Lu and his family who are still practicing the craft of shadow puppet making by hand. Tangshan is a third-tier city that lies directly east of Beijing, about 150 kilometers, with an urban population hovering around three million. Not far beyond the city limits are farmlands that are still being farmed the way they've done it for hundreds of years. There are no machines there.

The Lu family household sits in the outskirts of Tangshan proper, among a small row of single-level brick homes. The house is a typical three-room layout with a rough cement floor, no running water and an outhouse beyond the courtyard wall. The majority of their small home and courtyard is centered around the shadow puppet making process. Their small plot of corn is a 15-minute bus ride away.

For Master Lu, the patriarch of the family, what started as a simple countryside school activity became his life's ambition. When he married Yishu, she was folded into the puppet painting process. While other rural families are processing cotton or spices in their down time, the Lu family has been perfecting every step of the multi-layered process for hand-making Tangshan-style shadow puppets.

When Master Lu started, he was only cutting leather shadows for puppet troupes. "They'd tell you whether you were any good or not," he said. Puppet troupes were very discerning customers back then, as a badly designed and cut puppet would not come alive behind the screen, no matter the puppeteer's ability. He became a great puppet maker through necessity. As of late, he and his family are producing puppets for sale at the local gift shop, usually copying popular designs by the dozens. Occasionally, Master Lu is asked to make a custom piece. There are no troupes that need his skills anymore.

While the supplemental income from shadow puppetry has seen them through some hard times, it's also been a great source of hardship and worry. They have personally felt the repercussions of shadow puppetry's inconsistent popularity and slow fade in the last half-century and, even now, their future seems tenuous. As machine-made shadow puppets start to flood the market, the demand for hand-made shadow puppets is steadily shrinking. And as the knowledge of shadow puppetry itself becomes distant in the collective memory of China, no one will know the difference.

Knowing that shadow puppetry has a risky future, Master Lu and Yishu stressed education for their two children. As their son, Tianxiang, approached high school graduation, he expressed his desire to continue on to college. As there was no money, his father suggested he learn to cut shadow puppets to earn tuition. He did so, and within a few years he was on his way to a three-year program in computer tech.

After graduation, he began working in the city at a small computer tech firm repairing computers and stopped cutting puppets. He didn't see the point—shadow puppetry is dying, isn't it? His parents didn't push him to continue either.

A few years later, he saw an interview his father did for the local television station about his puppet work. It was then, for the first time, that he learned his father's full story—everything from his father's driving passion, the hardships the shadow artists faced during the Cultural Revolution and making a living through the years, to the worries of how his work would continue after he was gone. When I asked him why his father hadn't told him before, he said his father had always answered probing questions with "*Mei shenma he shou.*" There's nothing to tell. "Probably," says Tianxiang, "because it was too hard to tell."

After seeing his father's interview, Tianxiang saw shadow puppetry differently. It wasn't just something his family did for additional income; it was the embodiment of their dreams, a tangible piece of China's identity and culture and an invaluable source of community building since the turn of the millennium.



TIANXIANG, YISHU AND MASTER LU

Tianxiang is now a link. For the past five years, he has taken up the form with gusto, trying to balance success and duty in much the same way China is having to balance development with preservation. He wakes up at 5:00 every morning to cut puppets, goes to a full day of computer tech work in the city, and buses back to cut some more after a quick family dinner. In his scarce free time, he innovates working methods, toils to publicize his father's work and keep them up to date with the rapidly changing shadow puppet scene.

Without Tianxiang, the tradition stops with his father. And to be clear, the Lu family is the exception to the rule and Tianxiang the anomaly.

As courageous as he is, without the demand for innovation and creativity or the opportunity to see his puppets alive behind a screen, will Tianxiang ever be able to achieve true mastery?

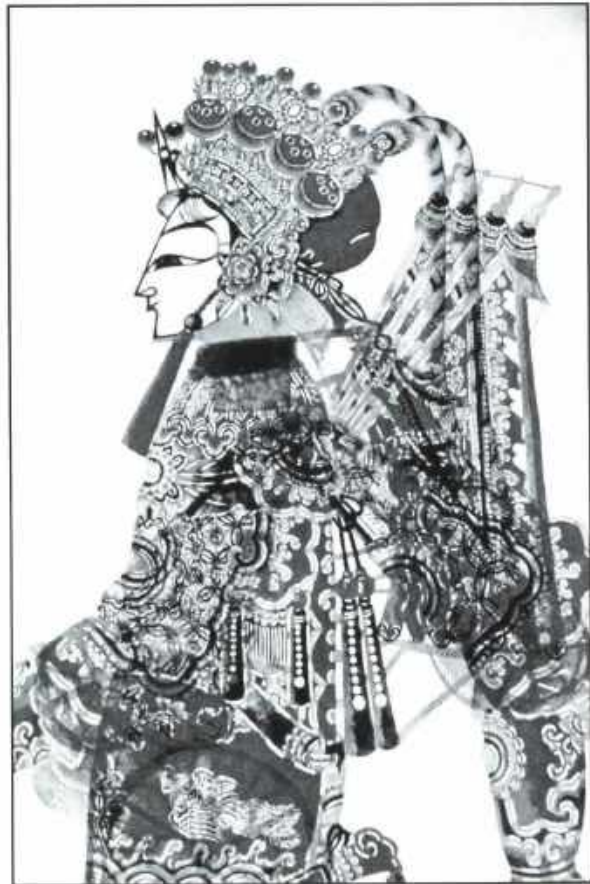
The hardest part is yet to come. As the developing country races towards its pinnacle, the fervor for self-made success could render this rare breed of folk culture masters a thing of the past— or it could be kept alive, just barely, by passionate and dedicated individuals who see the form as a link to China's past, its culture and people. Just barely is enough for now with hopes that, when China comes looking for its past, it will be there ready to be passed down as it always has been, through a few courageous hands and hearts.

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

TANGSHAN HEAD

TANGSHAN-STYLE SHADOW PUPPET

DETAIL OF MASTERFUL CUTTING



Annie Katsura Rollins is a freelance theatre and puppet designer in the Twin Cities area. She is a graduate of the University of Minnesota's MFA Theatre Design program and received a Fulbright Fellowship in 2011 to continue researching shadow puppetry in mainland China. For more information on Chinese shadow puppetry or Annie's Fulbright journey, please visit: www.annierollins.wordpress.com

Wayang Poo Tay Hie Chinese Puppetry of Indonesia

by Gaura Mancacaritadipura. Councillor, UNIMA Indonesia



WAYANG POTEHI PERFORMANCE

Indonesia has a very long history of puppetry culture, known as "wayang." The existence of wayang in Indonesia can be verified to have existed since at least the 12th Century,¹ although it is probably much older. Indonesian wayang received many cultural influences over the centuries, developing into its present sophisticated noble and beautiful forms. There are presently over sixty varieties or styles of wayang existing in Indonesia. Some of these styles are fading out, some are maintaining and some are developing, while new forms continue to be created. The traditional forms of wayang are associated with various ethnic communities in Indonesia. For example, the two dimensional leather puppets known as Wayang

Kulit Purwa, accompanied by an elaborate *gamelan* orchestra and *pesinden* singers, is associated with the Javanese communities in Central and East Java and Yogyakarta Provinces. The three dimensional wooden puppets known as Wayang Golek Sunda are associated with the Sundanese community in West Java and Banten Provinces. Other examples include several varieties of Wayang Bali in Bali, Wayang Palembang in South Sumatra, Wayang Banjar in Kalimantan, etc. One rather unique variety of wayang is known as *Poo Tay Hie* or *Potehi*, the puppetry of ethnic Chinese communities of Indonesia.

The word Potehi comes from the words *pou* (cloth), *tay* (bag/pocket) and *hie* (puppet). Potehi are doll-marionettes made of cloth and operated by slipping the hand and fingers into the bottom part of the puppet. Potehi is believed to have originated in China as long as 3000 years ago. According to a legend, Potehi was created by five prisoners who were awaiting execution. Four of the condemned prisoners were very depressed, but the fifth got a bright idea to cheer them up and created potehi puppets, with musical accompaniment using plates and kitchen utensils. Somehow the king heard and enjoyed the music created by the prisoners using kitchen utensils, so much so that he pardoned the five and ordered their release from prison.

Potehi was already in existence during the Jin Dynasty (3rd-5th Century), and developed further in the Song Dynasty (10th-13th Century). Ethnic Chinese people came to Indonesia from the 16th – 19th Century, bringing their art and culture, including Potehi puppetry. Formerly, Potehi only performed classic stories from mainland China, such as stories and legends of the dynasties of China. This was particularly the case when the performances were held in *klontong* (Chinese temples). However, presently stories from outside the classic tradition are also performed.



THE POTEHI PUPPET MASTER AND HIS ASSISTANT PERFORMING



WAYANG POTEHI MASTER THIO TIONG GIE (SEATED) WITH UNIMA PRESIDENT AMBASSADOR SAMODRA SRIWIDJAJA (STANDING, CENTRE) AND LEADERS OF INDONESIAN NATIONAL WAYANG SECRETARIAT (SENA WANGI) AND INDONESIAN DALANGS' UNION, FEBRUARY 28, 2010

Some of the stories performed include *Sie Tin Kwie*, *Hong Kiam Chiu Chiu*, *Cun Hum Ciuw Kok*, *Lo Thong Sau Pak* and *Pnni Si Giok*. Most of the puppets can be used to play several different characters. The exceptions are Koan Kong, Utti Kiong and Thia Kau Kim, because the color of the faces of these puppets cannot be changed.² The puppeteer, his assistants and the accompanying musicians perform behind a bright red cloth proscenium, decorated with Chinese motifs. The movements of the puppets are quite energetic, inspired no doubt by Chinese martial arts.

When Potehi was first performed in Indonesia, the language used was Hokkien. Later on, Potehi came to be performed in Indonesian language, or a mixture of Hokkien and Indonesian, so that the local people could also understand and enjoy the performances. Some of the characters of Potehi are the same characters as those in *Ketoprak* (traditional drama of Java). For example, the character *Sie Tin Kwie* has been adapted to become *Joko Sudiro*, while *Lie Sie Bien* has become *King Lisanpuro*. This is an example of cultural exchange between performing arts of different ethnic communities.

The instruments presently used to accompany Potehi include *gembeng*, *kever* (cymbal), flute, *gwik gin* (guitar), *rebab* (violin), drum, trumpet and *bek to* (wooden single drum).³

From the early 1970s till the late 1990s, the frequency of Potehi performances declined, due to an unfavorable political climate towards Chinese culture in Indonesia. However, since the reformation, which began in 1998, Potehi has reemerged. Performances can be held freely and openly, and enjoyed by everyone. One such performance of Potehi master Thio Tiong Gie was staged by UNIMA Indonesia on 28 February 2010 in the Harmony China Pavilion at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Kornelis Kurniadi in Jakarta. The performance was attended by many foreign diplomats as well as prominent citizens of Jakarta city, and was a great success.⁴

This performance was organized in collaboration between UNIMA Indonesia President, Ambassador Samodra Sriwidjaja, Indonesian National Wayang Secretariat General Chairman Solichin and Indonesian Dalangs' Union General Chairman H. Ekotjipto.

Master Thio Tiong Gie is well into his seventies. It is hoped that he will be able to transmit his skills to younger generations, so that the tradition may be continued. Many of the members of Thio Tiong Gie's troupe who performed are ethnic Indonesians. This is a good example of "friendship through culture" among puppetry artists. Wayang Potehi puppets are displayed in the Jakarta Wayang Museum, alongside varieties of Indonesian Wayang Puppets. The function of Potehi among the ethnic Chinese community of Indonesia is similar to the function of the various forms of wayang among Indonesia's ethnic groups; namely, not merely as an entertainment, but also for social functions, ritual, giving guidance and the transfer of moral and historical values.

Australian-born shadow puppeteer Gaura Mancacarita-dipura, now an Indonesian citizen, has mastered many if not most traditional Indonesian musical instruments. He is also part of the group trying to get such Indonesian crafts as batik recognized by UNESCO as one of the countries intangible cultural assets.

Endnotes

- ¹ *Arjuna Wiwaha*, 12th century manuscript in Old Javanese language, refers to wayang as "ringgit."
- ² Wikipedia, Bahasa Indonesia.
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ UNIMA Indonesia, Poo Tay Hie, Chinese Puppet, program notes.



WAYANG POTEHI ACCOMPANYING MUSICIANS

PUPPET:*An Essay on Uncanny Life*

by Kenneth Gross

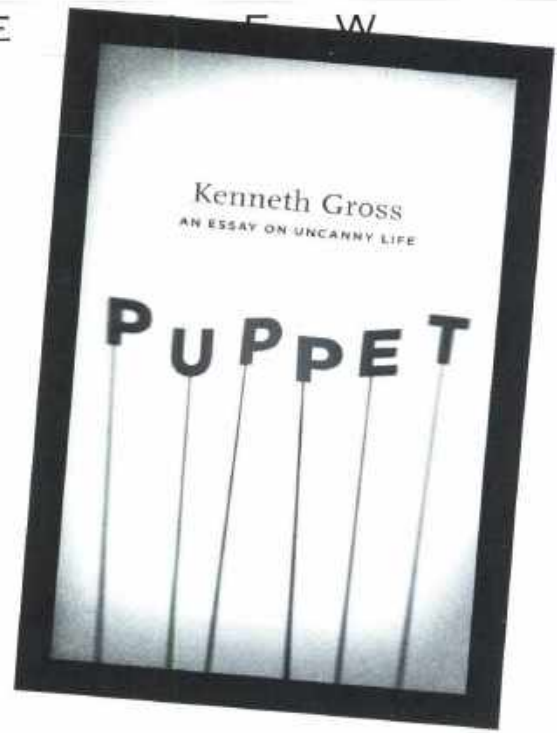
The University of Chicago Press
 Approximately 200 pages, 25 B&W photos
 ISBN: 9780226309583
 Price: \$25.00

What is this thing that I recognize, that seems to know me, when I come upon it on a street corner, in a park, or in the shadows of a theater, moving up on that small stage? What is this creature that burrows out of shadows, into the light, a remnant of something, hardheaded, often squeaking and ugly, moving with such odd, unpredictable motion, or just lying still, folded up on itself, a little warm, patiently gathering strength for some new movement?

These are some of the questions that Kenneth Gross poses in the prologue to *Puppet*, an extended essay in eleven chapters. Really, they all reduce to this: What are the particular qualities that determine one object should be a puppet, while another is simply a thing? Moreover, how is it that puppets have been so compelling and ubiquitous over such a long stretch of human history?

For me, there was an immediate realization that this was a book I could settle into like a comfortable chair. Readers are taking a journey with Gross—one with many curious side-trips and satisfying stopovers. I was immediately struck by the quality of Gross's prose, which, with different line breaks, would function nicely as poetry:

*Puppets are
 the size of things small enough
 to be left behind
 that hide themselves
 under beds
 behind walls
 or within drawers
 lost objects that are patient
 endlessly patient
 without need for the food
 of the human eye*



No surprise, perhaps, that Gross is a professor of English at the University of Rochester and references not only puppeteers but the poets W. S. Merwin, Charles Simic, Emily Dickenson and others, as well as many fiction writers, sculptors, playwrights, painters and theorists. This brings a rare richness to his consideration of such qualities of "puppetness" as scale, naughtiness, innocence, violence, grace.

In a chapter on the mysterious qualities of the puppeteer's hands and the way in which a part of a body can become a separate whole—"a thing with a will and a life of its own"—he evokes the memory of Obraztsov's real hands alongside the fictional hands of Mickey Sabbath—a potent satyr from Phillip Roth's imagination—and their ability to create characters, even short dramas, using little more than their own fingers.

In a chapter on "Wooden Acting," Gross begins with Kleist's "On the Marionette Theater," an 1810 essay that would constitute almost the entirety of writing in the field for the next century. At least he admits that it is "about other things" than we perhaps would wish. The chapter goes on to examine the effect of the acting and voice in the Mabou Mines production of *Peter and Wendy* and, from the Bunraku Theater, the plays of Chikamatsu Monzaemon, which ask "the puppets to represent human beings caught between conflicting demands, passions and fates, caught by compulsions that always exceed their individual mastery, moved and blocked by forces over which they have lost control..." The degree to which these puppets achieve the illusion of life is testimony to the decades-long training of the three-man teams that control them. "To see a puppet made angry, or driven to despair, or just made to adjust a veil, by the aid of manipulators at once visible and invisible, doubles of fate and instinct, is an astonishment and a truth."



PUPPET BY MARIA SIGNORELLI

A brief chapter six, "Fables for a Puppet Theater," is composed entirely of prompts from which a puppeteer might write, or improvise, a story: Animals take over a theatre; the whale instructs a drowning man; children plant a doll in the garden and wait for spring.... There is an unexpected, cumulative effect to these scenarios, presented without explanation, that sheds light on the profession and reminds us of the sort of storytelling at which puppets excel.

Later chapters feature the Palermitan Mimmo Cuticchio ("Destroying the Puppet Show"); Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* ("The Blackened Puppet"); and Janie Geiser, Paul Klee and Ilka Schönbein ("A Test of Innocence"). Each new topic is a treasure trove of glittering characters and precious stories.

Though not profusely illustrated, there are a few dozen photos. Thirty pages of detailed notes, suggested reading and acknowledgements deepen the experience and send the curious reader off in new directions.

Puppet is a dense, fascinating read. Gross is not only well read but well-traveled and personally acquainted with most of the puppetry artists featured in his extended essay. The one small criticism I have is that his own biography is limited to a single sentence on the back cover, in which we learn that he "teaches English at the University of Rochester, and is the author of *Shylock is Shakespeare*." Perhaps this is the result not so much of modesty, but of the same wisdom that keeps the master puppeteer in the shadow of his own creation.

www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/P/bo11674038.html

review by Andrew Periale

The Center for Puppetry Arts – Atlanta, GA

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A Haines marionette (circa 1940s) from an exhibit at the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry. Zachary Dorn, curator