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PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

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Intangible Heritage –

A year or so ago, there was a lot of buzz about “Intangible Cultural Heritage,” or “ICH,” though I confess I had only a hazy idea of what was meant by the term. Why not, I thought, devote an issue of *Puppetry International* to the subject? Why not harness the power of the hive mind? Why not, as Amanda Palmer once told me, “Invite all your friends over for a big party and see what happens?”

Welcome to our party! The guest list includes respected scholars in the world of puppetry research, but also an anthropologist, a puppet collector, a student, a journalist and a little help from a man who helped define “intangible cultural heritage” for UNESCO, the organization that awards this designation to cultural institutions that have come to exemplify cultural phenomena that we might characterize as fleeting, ephemeral or transitory.

Many ancient forms of theater, dance, puppetry, recitation and improvised music are known to us from written descriptions, paintings, decorative friezes on Grecian urns and so on, but we can only imagine what the experience must have been like for those who were in the audience at such performances. Today, we have video recordings of such events, but they can still only approximate the feeling of actual spectators at the moment when anything might happen – a clarinetist plays an inspired solo, a dancer twists an ankle but carries on, a puppet expertly puts a heckler in her place.

These are the sorts of things that fall under the aegis of Intangible Cultural Heritage – not individual performances, but traditions or institutions that produce such performances and that, furthermore, are in need of support, protection and the recognition that such a designation carries. Want to know more? *Read on!*

Kathy Foley and Nancy L. Staub honor the puppet traditions that have so far received this designation from UNESCO, as well as discussing the work of the Heritage Commission of UNIMA (our parent organization, page 4). Both of our peer-reviewed articles in this issue take on the idea of ICH: Annie Katsura Rollins shares her experience with a shadow puppet theatre in Shaanxi Province, China, as she learns the complexity of protecting an intangible form of theater that cannot be separated from its very tangible artifacts (page 10); Kyounghye Kwon discusses an ancient type of Korean puppet theater that illustrates the competing needs for preservation and change-over-time (page 14).

There are also examples of puppet traditions we would like to see designated as ICH: Neda Izadi tells us about the Persian tradition of Kheimeh Shab Bazi, or “night tent shows” (page 40), while Esther Fernández interviews Jesús Caballero about recovering a 17th century form of Spanish theater called Máquina Réal (page 29). There is a lot more, both here and on our website, where we honor Michael Meschke for his long career in puppetry, as well as for his great service to the field. Between 2005 and 2010 he made trips to South- and Southeast Asia, teaching, documenting and helping to preserve endangered puppetry traditions. He made a record of these trips, and now, for the first time in English, we make them available on our website (link on page 26). You will also find a complete list of the puppet traditions recognized by UNESCO as ICH and by ACCU (the Asian-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO), the full article by Greg Pellone on the Punch and Judy maker Joe Parsonage, and the entire article by Neda Azadi on the Ancient Persian tradition, Kheimeh Shab Bazi.

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A few notes about our last issue-

PI #44 Puppetry and Social Justice

We noted, in our editorial, the absence of Bread and Puppet Theatre in the issue, yet the puppet workshop with Palestinians that Clare Dolan wrote about was, in fact, a Bread and Puppet project. That was also an article that drew a concerned response from former UNIMA-USA president Mark Levenson, and we publish a portion of his email here:

While I very much enjoyed the social justice issue, it also left me troubled. Many problems plaguing the world today have clear villains and victims ... As Elie Wiesel said in the very apt quote you included in your editorial, “We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”

If Wiesel was right about this, perhaps he was also right about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, which is the backdrop to Clare Dolan’s “Playing with Dolls in the West Bank.” Wiesel expressly did not see this conflict in terms of oppressor and victim, tormentor and tormented. Instead, he wrote:

What we are suffering through today is not a battle of Jew versus Arab or Israeli versus Palestinian. Rather, it is a battle between those who celebrate life and those who champion death. It is a battle of civilization versus barbarism.

Do the two cultures that brought us the Psalms of David and the rich libraries of the Ottoman Empire not share a love of life, of transmitting wisdom and opportunity to their children? And is any of this discernible in the dark future offered by Hamas to Arab children, to be suicide bombers or human shields for rockets?

Palestinian parents want a hopeful future for their children, just like Israeli parents do. And both should be joining together in peace. But before sleepless mothers in both Gaza City and Tel Aviv can rest, before diplomats can begin in earnest the crucial business of rebuilding dialogue... the Hamas death cult must be confronted for what it is.

Please read Levenson’s entire response on our website.

– Andrew Periale

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AN OLD GERMAN PUPPET FROM THE COLLECTION OF BOB BOWMAN



NATIONAL MARIONETTE THEATER, *HANSEL AND GRETEL*

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND AMERICAN PUPPETRY

by Kathy Foley

The UNESCO 2003 Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Convention was ratified in 2006 and was the result of an extended international discussion that had begun in the organization in the 1970s on what could be done to succor local heritage performances facing modernity. After the 1975 “world heritage site” designation of UNESCO proved useful for places—bolstering local pride, marshaling resources, and branding sites as tourist “must sees,” conversations about how to highlight heritage performing arts began. This led in 1989 to a non-binding “Recommendation on Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore,” which then became a UNESCO list of “Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage” (2001-2008), and since 2008 has been dubbed Intangible Cultural Heritage. The developments focused on how intangible heritage—including performing arts

(as opposed to built or natural sites)—could be safeguarded. The global south, which often lacked the elaborate built sites of the north, felt that its rich living culture demanded equal valuation, and the usefulness in increasing local pride, garnering tourist dollars, and facilitating international cultural exchange was seen.

How might this idea of ICH be applied outside the context of UNESCO and fit to our American object theatre,¹ acknowledging, of course, that American arts valuation is more often given to being non-traditional: individual creativity and “newness” are a surer path toward financial support. Still, there is power in tradition, and some things are worth passing to the next generation. An organization like UNIMA-USA could potentially cultivate the concept of ICH in ways that might benefit our American puppet arts.

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

BACKGROUND: PUPPETS AND ICH

UNESCO declares:

The “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.²



GYPSY DANCER, HUBER MARIONETTES

Though the convention applies to a wide variety of cultural activities, from festivals (the Persian Nowruz) to foods (Mediterranean diet), as a scholar of Asian puppetry, I became aware of the enthusiasm that *dalang* in Indonesia had for ICH when *wayang* was recognized in 2003. While there were few tangible benefits for most of the puppeteers—monetary impacts for training/safeguarding seemed to mostly accrue to select Javanese (ethnic majority) groups in the national capital—but, none-the-less, my Sundanese or Balinese *dalang* friends were proud to be “world heritage” and “masterpiece” practitioners. Asian puppetmasters in general basked in the attention from the press at the time of inscription, and designation meant those arts could apply for UNESCO grants of up to \$100,000 for arts that were deemed in need of safeguarding. The convention obligates national officials to file periodic reports on the chosen practices, hence attention will be paid.

Each country participating in UNESCO can nominate one form every two years, and files take two years to be vetted. Of course, a political process decides which art a country nominates first. *Wayang* was a “no brainer” for Indonesia: it is treasured art of a number of ethnicities (particularly the majority Javanese’s *wayang kulit* shadows).

Among the about five hundred forms/practices declared internationally since 2001, puppetry has more than its fifteen minutes of fame. Sicilian Opera dei Pupi (2001/2008), which presents Orlando Furioso tale, was the first puppet form recognised in the then “Masterpiece” program. Japanese *bunraku* (2003/2008) and Indonesian

wayang (2003/2008) came next. Two years later was Khmer *sebek thom* shadow puppetry (2005/2008). The list has grown: Turkish Karagoz (2009), Chinese shadows (2011), Czech Republic/Slovakian puppetry (2016), Sri Lankan marionettes (*rukada natya*, 2018), Egyptian Al-Aragoz glove puppets (2018), and Syrian shadows (2018). Beyond these, puppets along with masks and/or parade figures are part of the *gelede* (Benin, Nigeria, and Togo, 2001/2008); Korean *namsadang nori* (which includes *kkodugaksi* puppetry with circus arts, 2009), and masks and puppets in Markala (Mali, 2014).³ Additionally, the UNESCO ICH website includes forms like lion dancing, festivals with parade puppets/floats, and hobbyhorse genres that include puppet-like figures.

Japanese models paved the way. From 1999-2009, UNESCO was led by Matsuura Koichiro (1937-), who helped define the program for international cultural preservation on models active in Japan.⁴ As early as 1871, Japan, impacted by the 1853 forced opening by the American “Black Ships” of Commander Perry, initiated laws protecting traditional sites. With the WWII westernization of the American Occupation, preservation status was created for first elite/urban performing arts (1950) such as *noh* theatre and later applied to folk genres (1975). This Japanese practice was then emulated by Korea in the 1960s and exported to other Asian countries with Japan’s cultural and economic clout in the 1970s.⁵ These developments provided a model for the UN convention by the century’s end. Though the ICH concept may have limitations, it also has positive traits of helping people value their artistic legacy.⁶

Since the advent of the convention, it has served some of the purposes that the framers sought. This included, firstly, documentation and assessment of the genre during the inscription process; secondly, the planning toward continuation; and, thirdly, incentivizing preservation and performance by stakeholders. The first two aims come in the inscription process (films, written reports, plans). Even if the documentation represents only the living practices and history understood at the year of inscription, this is a useful baseline for future reference. As other articles in this issue indicate, one can argue whether the designation uniformly helps forms from fading. Though impacts can be mixed, American puppeteers can still explore the ICH idea.

Admittedly, the US, while not part of UNESCO, has developed some analogous heritage programs. Traditional puppetry (along other “folk” arts, folk is itself currently a contested term due to class/ethnic implications) has been supported through various efforts such as the Smithsonian Folklife Festival (held each summer on the National Mall in Washington), and the Heritage Program of the National Endowment for the Arts which includes the National Heritage Fellowship recognition for artists of “traditional” performance and a somewhat linked apprenticeship program (which has,

for example, supported Sicilian puppetry of New York and Chinese rod puppetry of Oregon, among other arts).

So what might the convention mean in an American context if UNIMA-USA were, as a puppetry organization, to begin our inscription list?

POTENTIAL ICH FORMS

Nancy Staub (personal communication 2018) who has evaluated ICH UNESCO puppetry files shared a list of her best candidates for ICH. She pointed out Native American traditions that could very quickly be promoted: Shalako dance figures, Northwest masking/ puppets, Yup’ik figures of Alaska, and Hopi kachina, were on her list. Yet, in the current American cultural climate, I wonder if puppeteers of non-Native blood can participate fully in the promotion/performance, given the political sensitivities. Appropriation, colonialism, and orientalist/romantic uses of the “other” loom in a way that makes the heart palpitate. UNIMA-USA as an organization might help document indigenous arts, but any efforts would probably need to be spearheaded by someone of Native lineage. If one looks at how NEA Heritage or intern awards go, it is clear bloodlines largely prevail.

European immigrant arts would be perhaps less fraught and could probably be practiced across ethnic lines. Might our early efforts go to that vanishing art, the marionette? It was a prime form of puppetry in America from the nineteenth century until the birth of the “Muppet” in the Post WWII era. This is now a relatively rare method, preserved by groups like Tanglewood Marionettes (founded 1993), Philip Huber, David Syrotiak and a handful of others. Because of the complexity of manipulation and building, perhaps the marionette would be the first American ICH puppet genre for safeguarding.

And of course we should consider other genres that have come with our many immigrant groups: for example, solo European glove puppet traditions (Punch and his many swazzevoiced cousins); the Sicilian puppet tradition that prevailed until the last century in New York; Fujian and other Chinese traditions that came with immigrants from China and Karagoz of Ottoman descent. Of course Judy and Polly would need to be allowed their #MeToo moments and Punch might be banned from hitting as teachers admonish: “Use your words.”

Our various parade traditions (icons for Mardi Gras, floating balloons of Macy’s Thanksgiving parade, which began with Tony Sarg’s Felix the Cat (1927); the processional figures of Bread and Puppet, In the Heart of the Beast, and NYC Halloween Parade) harken back to European processional sculpture, like the *gigantes y cabezudos* (giants and big heads) of Spain and Portugal or the parade figures of Belgium and France (recognized by UNESCO in 2008). But these images of commercial, popular, and/or political culture are now of American cultural tradition.



CINDERELLA, TANGLEWOOD MARIONETTES

Vent figures, toy theatre, cantastoria, and allied visual performances should make our list, too. Perhaps even the Muppet-style figures first popularized by UNIMA-USA’s founding president Jim Henson should be thought of as “ICH-to-become”—the genre is now fully fifty years old with a third generation of practitioners proliferating. Isn’t that what it takes—three generations makes it “tradition.” Of course we must define our timeline that marks the border between individual invention and full entry into popular culture and heritage. Here we tread on the contentious ground of copyright, a large concern of Disney when they sought to maintain copyright on Mickey Mouse past the customary span.

Or should we just embrace techno-theatre that we devour daily from the small screen of our phone or pump up to large-scale digital theatre and figures during concerts and our Super Bowl halftimes? For a hundred years our theatre people have been plugging in the latest technology to make dead matter come to life and spin. The great Oz in Frank Baum’s story is merely a manipulator behind the curtain. Our stage managers, light boards ops and sound designers today are often our most impressive manipulators: our revolves often do more dancing than our dwarfed performers. Light installations play over cities and firework displays fill our skies—are these not too part of our American ICH puppet arts/performing objects and black light shows? Perhaps the “illusion” of our stage with spectacle ever grander is the tradition Americans have cultivated most assiduously. For the puppeteer, that the dead thing can live is the interest. For the human theatre perhaps it is significant that the live thing—the actor—is often the deadiest thing on the stage. Perhaps it is not the puppet per se but our puppetized stage machinery that is our premier American puppeteering heritage—our ICH.

KATHY FOLEY is a scholar of Asian puppetry. She is a professor of theater arts at UC Santa Cruz, and has performed as a dalang of *wayang golek* rod puppets and *wayang orang* dance drama for more than twenty years. She is the current president of UNIMA-USA.

Endnotes

¹ America is not part of UNESCO or the ICH program. American participation in UNESCO has been checked: Ronald Reagan withdrew in 1984, citing political bias and fiscal irregularity. George Bush rejoined in 2002, but Barrak Obama, due to the Israel-Palestine situation, put participation on temporary hold in 2011. Meanwhile, Donald Trump announced a complete withdrawal in 2017.

² See <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>, accessed 14 Oct. 2018. Explore the UNESCO ICH site for clips and materials on inscribed puppet traditions.

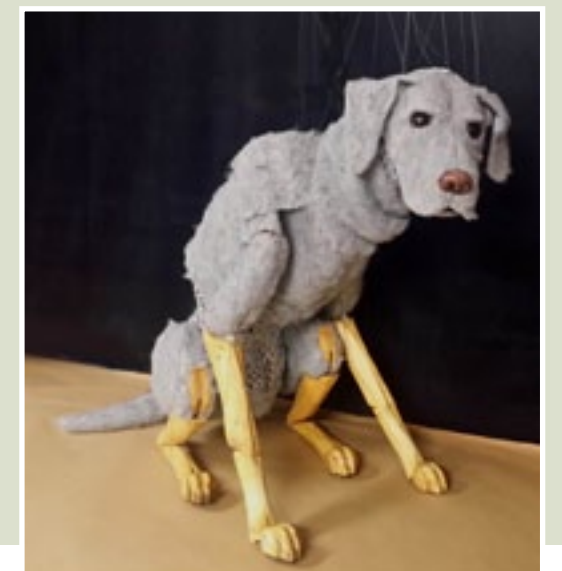
³ See <https://www.unima.org/en/commission/heritage/puppet-listed-by-unesco/>, accessed 30 Dec. 2018.

⁴ Matusua Koichro. 2004. “Globalisation, Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Role of UNESCO,” <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001400/140090e.pdf>, accessed 15 Oct., 2018.

⁵ Foley, Kathy. “No More Masterpieces: Intangible Cultural Heritage in Bordered Worlds,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 31, 2 (2014): 369-398.

⁶ The designation housed in the UN, which operates primarily on a national model, sometimes divided forms that are historically intertwined. For example, the *Wayang* of Indonesia has strong links to Malay shadow forms (*wayang kelantan*, *wayang gedek*, *wayang malayu*) and Southern Thailand’s *nang talang* shadows. Meanwhile the Khmer *sebek thom* with its large shadow figures (ICH 2005) has its strong analogue in Thai *nang yai*. The nation-based approach that UNESCO may not fully “fit” areas that, in the past, have been politically and culturally linked, or recognize the movement of genres and people along trade routes and through immigrations. While UNESCO welcomes joint proposals, countries may prefer to claim genres as their own, note, for example, the number of Kargoz-related puppet forms of the Middle East/Ottoman Empire heritage (Turkey, Syria, Egypt).

PAUL THE DOG, HUBER MARIONETTES





UNIMA HERITAGE COMMISSION

by Nancy L. Staub

Miguel Arreche, while serving as UNIMA General Secretary, conceived the idea of a Heritage Commission. The Executive Committee established it in 2012 at the UNIMA Congress in Chengdu, China. Miguel asked me to serve on the first commission. In a 2013 report he stated that his experiences collaborating with UNESCO to evaluate puppet traditions along with UNIMA President Margareta Niculescu, gave him the idea. He enlisted scholars to support the candidacy of the Sicilian Pupi presented by the Italian State, the Wayang presented by Indonesia, and Ningyo joruri bunraku presented by Japan. I personally took on the support documentation for the latter as no one more knowledgeable was available. I accepted only when a real expert, Dr. Michiko Ueno-Herr, promised to edit and correct my misconceptions and errors. We doubted the application would be denied anyway. (It was not.)

The Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, established under the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, through 2018 has inscribed 16 traditional performance traditions that include puppetry on its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. In addition, two were inscribed on the List of ICH in Need of Urgent Safeguarding and one in the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices for a total of 19. Information, slides, and video footage of these forms can be accessed at the UNESCO web site: www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00011. If you use the filter word "puppets," some of these will not pop up: The Oral Heritage of Gelede of Benin, Nigeria, and Togo, Hitachi Furyumono of Japan, and Nativity Scene (szopka) of Poland.

From UNIMA web site, www.unima.org, downloaded in 2014:

UNIMA Heritage Conservation Commission date of creation: 2012

Following the spirit of UNESCO about oral and intangible heritage of humanity, the goal of the Heritage Conservation Commission should be to identify, inventory, document, protect, promote and revitalize the endangered puppet art forms and expressions in the world. The Commission should work closely with the Research and Publications and Communication Commission.

Miguel suggested several projects aside from cooperating with UNESCO, which he outlined on the web site. He became frustrated as many activities relating to puppetry heritage occurred through other commissions without collaboration or communication between them. Sadly, Miguel passed away before he could realize his goals. The first Heritage Commission meeting was held in Saguenay, Canada at its 2015 International Puppet Festival. Jacques Trudeau took on the role of President of the Commission. The members agreed unanimously to award UNIMA diplomas of recognition to encourage heritage preservationists and practitioners, calling attention to them by UNESCO and other supportive organizations. Jacques delivered 3 at the first meeting of the UNIMA Africa Commission that took place in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, in March, 2016. Recipients included Yaya Coulibaly (Mali), Danaye Kalanfei (Togo), and Were-Were Liking (Ivory Coast). Another project endorsed was video recording of traditional performances. Jacques commissioned the first and showcased it at the meeting.

At the 2016 UNIMA Congress in Tolosa, as the next President of the Heritage Commission, Hamidreza Ardalan hosted its 2nd meeting apart from Congresses. It was held in Tehran, Iran in connection with the 6th International Seminar on Ritual and Traditional Performances, August, 2017. I could not attend, but I serve as a corresponding member until 2020.

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

I downloaded the new commission goals and strategies from www.unima.org on January 20, 2019:

GOALS

Conservation and restoration of ritual and traditional puppet theatre worldwide

Creating a connection between ritual and traditional puppet theatre with contemporary art and culture

Financial benefit for beneficiaries of ritual and traditional puppet theatre

Documentation and global inscription of ritual and traditional puppet performances as world cultural heritage

STRATEGIES

Expanding cooperation with influential figures in ritual and traditional puppet theatre in both private and public sectors

Support of education and research on ritual and traditional puppet theatre

Fostering interaction between theorists and experts on tradition and modernity

Preparing the ground for the launch of cooperatives and development funds in support of ritual and traditional puppet theatre

Plans to implement these goals and strategies include determining awards to be presented at the 90th anniversary celebration of UNIMA in Charleville-Mézières, France, this fall. Nominations would be for those active in different fields such as performance, research, and helping preserve and promote puppet theater heritage.

As an advocate for the value of official appreciation, I was pleased that the General Secretary of UNIMA, Idoya Otegui, created new guidelines for nominating members of honor that will include a centralized process to grant certificates of merit in several categories, which would include puppetry heritage. Certificates may be granted to organizations as well as individuals. With advice from the pertinent commissions, the Executive Committee members, elected officials of UNIMA, would cast the votes. She plans to present her proposal to the Executive Committee.

As Miguel Arreche noted, all of the UNIMA Commissions play roles in the documentation, presentation and continuation of puppetry traditions through publications, festivals, conferences and training programs. The Heritage Commission can serve as an originator, coordinator, communicator, and advocate of those efforts.

NANCY LOHMAN STAUB founded the puppet collection at the Center for Puppetry Arts (Atlanta) and is a longtime consultant for UNIMA-USA.

A special thank you to Frank Proschan, who worked for nearly a decade implementing UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.



PUPPETRY'S TANGIBLE INTANGIBILITY: THE COMPLEXITY OF SAFEGUARDING AN INTANGIBLE PERFORMANCE FORM WITH TANGIBLE PERFORMING OBJECTS

by Annie Katsura Rollins

In 2003, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) added a new category to their previously established heritage distinctions: *natural and tangible cultural heritage*. UNESCO's newest category, *intangible cultural heritage* (ICH), was created to fill a gap in categories to include "traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our

CHANGING TRADITIONS

In 2008, I spent the summer studying with the *Huaxian* Shadow Puppet troupe in the countryside east of *Xi'an* city in *Shaanxi* province, China.¹ The troupe, led by master *Wei Jinqian*, rehearsed daily in a repurposed technical school campus that had been purchased by a local cultural commodities company, *Yutian Culture*. The Yutian company had recently found success recreating and selling regional cultural heritage masterpieces like black pottery and shadow puppetry. In exchange for a base salary, the shadow puppet troupe was required to live and rehearse on site, acting as a kind of cultural ambassador for Chinese shadow puppetry when potential customers came to visit the company's campus. Master Wei and his troupe were freed up in the evenings and occasional weekend days for performances in their home villages. All in all, the contract struck between the troupe and Yutian seemed mutually beneficial. The base salary relieved members from spending their later years (the youngest members were then in their mid fifties) doing arduous farming work during the warmer months and instead freed them to fully dedicate themselves to the practice.

When I returned in early 2011, much excitement was brewing within the newly renovated walls of Yutian's company campus. The space had been given an inspired facelift in anticipation of Chinese shadow puppetry's official inclusion on UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage list, projected for the fall of that year.² The *Huaxian* Shadow Puppet troupe was still there and had been joined by a new team of leather carving apprentices now working in a dedicated puppet-making studio. Everything was buzzing with the promise of a bright future even as we settled back into old work routines together. But as the summer wore on, it became clear that the rising success of the cultural commodities industry was inversely proportionate to the decline of the traditional performance practice in situ. My expectation to catch a performance in the countryside that year during one of my many visits was based on the *Huaxian* Shadow Puppet troupe's 2008 schedule, which had them performing locally numerous times a week



MASTER WEI READIES THE SHADOW PUPPET TROUPE'S GEAR FOR THEIR EVENING PERFORMANCE IN A NEARBY VILLAGE, 2008. PHOTO: ANNIE KATSURA ROLLINS

descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts" (UNESCO "What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?"). Puppetry, as a performed traditional practice, qualifies best as an intangible cultural heritage within UNESCO's three categories. However, puppetry, a performed practice with a decidedly tangible physical element—the puppet or performing object—exposes the limits of categorical safeguarding theories and methods and shows us new ways to consider safeguarding our intangible cultural heritage.

between the months of July and September. But I never could catch a performance in 2011, as the troupe only had three the entire summer. The troupe members were greatly disheartened by their waning performance schedule and by the fact that they had no performance apprentices, while the leather figure-carving studio had many.

The reversal of fates between the performers and the puppet-makers at Yutian that summer accelerated upon inscription of the shadow puppet form to the ICH list in the fall of 2011, signaling a distinct shift in the trajectory of Chinese shadow puppetry within the last decade. In the early 2000s, the form and practitioners were supported by endeavors in commodification, using the proceeds of shadow figure sales to support traditional troupes' activities. The troupe was now almost solely there to support the sale of shadow figures. The *Huaxian* Shadow Puppet troupe's lack of performances for their own community that summer, perhaps partially triggered by their displacement and full-time employment with a cultural commodity company that kept them separated from their villages since 2005, signaled that the living performance was no longer necessary to contextualize and enrich the object that survived it.

A CONTRADICTION OF ONTOLOGY

The decline of performance and practice and the uptick in heritage commodity sales around China in the wake of the 2011 ICH inscription signifies a conflicting ontology within the form of puppetry that is exacerbated when it is pushed to preservation through bounded categories: the intangibility of its performance and the tangibility of its performing objects. Matthew Reason, a British scholar who focuses largely on issues of live performance in the archive, writes saliently in *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representations of Live Performance* about the issues of archiving performance. He begins, "more than simply being short-lived, or lacking permanency, ephemerality describes how performance ceases

to be at the same moment as it becomes" (Reason "Documentation" 1). According to Reason, such ephemerality is antithetical to mainstream methods of preservation, which aim to freeze an object or "thing" in its current state. And if the performance is unable to be captured and is considered intangible, then the performing object—in this case the leather shadow figure—appears ontologically contradictory. The object, far beyond the ephemerality of the performance, persists and persists beautifully. But, while the tangible performing object may physically persist, Chinese shadow puppeteers do not consider it "alive" when not being manipulated *in* performance. This difference in ontology can confuse categories as the materiality of the puppet object persists, but its "liveness" is as intangible as is its performance. Traditional methods of presenting ethnographic objects, such as exhibition and display, can be seen as a disservice to the puppet object, which requires animation to remain "living."

UNESCO and the ICH program remain responsive to continued feedback about their highly influential guidelines and policies, but a reconsideration of puppetry's complexity and the difficulties of straddling multiple categories has yet to happen.³ As a result, preservation efforts for puppetry are commonly pushed towards tangible cultural heritage methods, such as object exhibition and display or heritage object commodification. Strong policies for supporting live practitioners and performance, regardless of whether there are puppets or performing objects involved, is still an emerging discourse within the cultural heritage sector.⁴

Adding to the complexity of puppetry's place on the cusp between categories are the changes that a heritage designation can bring to a traditional performance form navigating survival:

Heritage, in this context, is the transvaluation of the obsolete, the mistaken, the outmoded, the dead, and the defunct. Heritage is created through a process of exhibition (as knowledge, as performance, as museum display). Exhibition endows heritage thus conceived with a second life. This process reveals the political economy of display in museums and in cultural tourism more generally... Heritage is a "value-added" industry (and) produces the local for export. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett "Destination Culture" 149)



YUTIAN'S SHADOW PUPPET CARVING STUDIO, NOW FULL WITH EIGHT APPRENTICES AND CUTTERS, 2011 PHOTO: ANNIE KATSURA ROLLINS



THREE OF MANY SHADOW PUPPET STORES THAT CAN NOW BE FOUND IN THE MUSLIM QUARTER, 2014 PHOTO: ANNIE KATSURA ROLLINS

Chinese shadow puppetry has, relatively speaking, ceased to be economically viable. The performance form is fading, and there are no full-time apprentices to inherit the practice.⁵ As China reaches for indisputable economic power and broader recognition of this power and their culture on a global scale,⁶ the government is increasingly looking for ways to turn cultural heritage into global capital and soft power.⁷ One of these ways has been to “transvalue” outmoded cultural forms and rebrand them as essential to China and Chinese culture. Once the heritage designation is given, however, the form and its practitioners are often forced to remain “traditional” in the sense that they never change. But, by never evolving a performance form alongside its community, vernacular performance practice becomes even more outmoded than it already was.

UNEVEN RESULTS

While apprenticing with the Huaxian Shadow Puppet troupe in 2008, I began to visit the largest tourist market in Shaanxi province to track the progression of shadow puppet sales. The Muslim Quarter has been a center of trade inside the old walled city in Xi’an since the Tang Dynasty (618-907CE). During my first visit in 2008, out of hundreds of stalls, there were only a handful of shops carrying a small selection of handmade shadow puppets from local makers. In 2011, when I returned to the market, the number of shops that carried shadow puppets had easily doubled, and all of those shops had begun to introduce machine-made shadow puppets to keep up with the increased demand. In 2014, the number of shops selling shadow puppetry had at least quadrupled from the 2008 numbers; now there were a dozen shops that sold *only* shadow puppets to an increasing range of local, national, and international tourists of all ages. The majority of shadow puppets in those shops were machine-made, with handmade puppets nearly impossible to find. And while machine-made shadow puppets are not inherently problematic, they do eliminate the puppet-maker in the commodification process and instead divert all proceeds to non-practitioners.

The proliferation of shadow puppets for sale, in places like the Muslim Quarter, and the accelerated decline of performance by practitioners in situ are a manifestation of puppetry’s competing elements (tangible and intangible) and the uneven outcome that the coveted heritage designation can sometimes produce. While an inscribed intangible cultural heritage practice as a whole is given a new valuation, it is often *not* the ephemeral performances and its practitioners that end up benefitting.⁸ The business entrepreneurs in the Muslim Quarter and other for-profit markets are capitalizing on the increasing popularity of the shadow puppet, while those who worked to make that object valuable have returned to farming and other labor as the demand for their artistry has faded.

SAFEGUARDING TRANSMISSION

All vernacular performance forms, traditional or not, are never fully free from political ecology or pure economics. Here, though, the scope and scale of interventions from UNESCO’s international influence and the local implementing government bodies are disturbing a system with diverse participants by creating a closed loop of cultural impetus and engine. Much of this intervention can be seen as positive as the policies and designations raise much needed awareness and cultural value of the inscribed form. However, the closed loop of governmental and commercial interventions in vernacular art traditions has meant that safeguarding initiatives are created top down, often from outsider cultures and institutions, and implemented without co-theorizing alongside a form’s practitioners, which increases the chances that blind spots in the policies remain.⁹ In the case of Chinese shadow puppetry, the most pressing issue is to take the focus off simply preserving or monetizing the tangible puppet artifacts, to refocus safeguarding efforts back onto the living practitioners, and to use the new valuation of heritage to support their efforts in continued transmission. Solutions may include regulating the commercial commodities market for shadow puppets to divert a portion of the profits towards supporting an ongoing apprenticeship system or including funding for traditional

troupes and their prospective apprentices in the healthy funding pools for government-funded provincial theatres.

Like so many traditional vernacular puppet forms around the globe, Chinese shadow puppetry and its practitioners have been navigating insurmountable pressures since the beginning of the 1900s. The comparable forms of Indonesian *wayang kulit* and Indian shadow puppetry have fared better in some regards, but most forms and practitioners are navigating the uneven results that a heritage designation and particular issues of safeguarding puppetry have brought with it.¹⁰ Within the theories and policies of UNESCO, puppetry remains under-theorized as a performance form on the cusp of two categories: tangible and intangible. It is possible, however, to better support vernacular ritual performance practice and its continued lineage by refocusing safeguarding efforts to support living practitioners, entrusting them to evolve and transmit the form. The practitioners in China, and so many other practitioners who have been working to keep inherited forms of puppetry going, deserve to be directly supported through future safeguarding methods and approaches.

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Endnotes

- ¹ For a thorough history and introduction to Chinese shadow puppetry as a form, see Fan Pen Chen’s *Chinese Shadow Theatre*.
- ² Chinese shadow puppetry was officially inscribed to the ICH list during the November 2011 UNESCO convention.
- ³ See Leimgruber “Switzerland and the UNESCO Convention.”
- ⁴ The closest UNESCO has come to creating a practitioner-centric safeguarding method is the “Living Human Treasures” program, which was retired in 2003, citing similar issues with the program “freezing” the chosen practice and politicizing the selection process of who may be considered a living human treasure. The program was never adopted by China.
- ⁵ Based on ethnographic research of active shadow puppet troupes and practitioners between the years of 2008-2016 in nine (historically the most active) provinces.
- ⁶ See Evans “Brand China.”
- ⁷ See Schreiber “Soft Power.”

⁸ See Foster “The UNESCO Effect,” 66.

⁹ Diana Taylor’s article “Performance and Intangible Cultural Heritage” relays her experience developing ICH recommendations with other scholars on behalf of UNESCO. Interestingly, while she critiques UNESCO for their methods in unconscious exclusion, she does not acknowledge her own part in it - as a university professor developing safeguarding policies for other “folk” artists.

¹⁰ For more information on the safeguarding efforts in Indonesia and India, respectively, see Claudia Orenstein’s “New Dialogues” and Matthew Isaac Cohen’s “Traditional and Post-Traditional” in *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance* and Cohen’s “Global Modernities.”

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KOREAN TRADITIONAL PUPPETRY AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE (ICH)

by Kyoungnye Kwon

ANSEONG NAMSADANG'S PERFORMANCE PHOTO: ANSEONG NAMSADANG

On January 10, 1962, in South Korea, “the Act for Cultural Property Preservation” was promulgated by the Cultural Property Bureau.¹ This Cultural Property Protection Law, which was modelled on the 1950 Japanese Cultural Properties Protection Law, was created to “preserve cultural properties and make the most of them in pursuance of the promotion of nationwide cultural aspiration, concurrently with the contribution to the cultural progress of the mankind [sic]” (Yang 33-34).² National-level initiatives, such as those of Japan and South Korea, influenced UNESCO, prompting the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which has in turn influenced UNESCO member states’ ICH policies (Deacon 21).

In the aforementioned legal context, theatre scholar Lee Duhyeon and musicologist Bak Heonbong submitted *A Research Report on Intangible Cultural Property* (Issue 1) on *kkokdugaksi noreum* (the representative Korean traditional puppetry), which resulted in this puppetry’s designation as Important Intangible Cultural Property #3 on December 7, 1964 (Kim et al. 11).³ This traditional rod puppetry, which was handed down orally for centuries and was actively performed during the late phase of Joseon (1392–1897 CE) (Korea’s last kingdom), dramatizes Joseon society satirically through such characters as Bak Cheomji (a nobleman poseur patriarch), Kkokdu Gaksi (Bak’s jilted first wife), Deolmeori-jib (Bak’s concubine), Hong Dongji (Bak’s muscular nephew), and the corrupt governor of Pyeong-an. Indigenous travelling performance troupes called *namsadang* (traditionally, homosocial male-only groups) would perform this play as one of six different kinds of performance, which also included farmers’ band music, disk-spinning, acrobatics, tightrope walking, and mask dance. In August, 1988, owing to the research of folklorist and actor Sim Woo-Sung and the activities of

namsadang, *namsadang nori* (all six repertoires of *namsadang*, including the traditional puppetry that was recognized solely in 1964) became part of Important Intangible Cultural Property #3 (later re-labeled “National Intangible Cultural Heritage” #3).⁴ In 2009, six years after UNESCO’s 2003 Convention, *namsadang nori* was inscribed on UNESCO’s representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This designation makes *kkokdugaksi noreum* one of about a dozen UNESCO-inscribed puppetry traditions in the world.

Korean studies scholar CedarBough T. Saeji has raised concerns about the laws and policies of ICH on Korean performing arts. Saeji has argued that the government’s heritage protection keeps the performing arts “insulated from capitalistic concerns related to supply and demand,” which in turn makes these arts not strive enough for further excellence or revitalization while “the audience for Korean traditional arts is eroding” (“The Audience” 5-6). She also expresses concerns about the commercialization of ICH-listed traditional performing arts that may not benefit, or be consulted by, heritage bearers, while citing the Gangneung Danoje Festival⁵ as an exceptional case in that heritage bearers are in control of the tradition (“Replacing Faith”). Further, she writes that government intervention brings problematic results to ICH-listed arts, for example, through laws that foreground “the primacy of protecting the *wonhyeong*”—“an archetypal form . . . fixed at the time the art was designated an item of intangible cultural heritage” because it leads to “endless re-runs” of the same performance that does not naturally evolve over time (“Protection and Transmission” 260-261). *Wonhyeong* literally means an “original form,” usually referring to the form set at the national ICH designation time, or even the pre-modern form (during late Joseon) for some.

With these concerns in mind, I would like to discuss some contemporary cases of *kkokdugaksi noreum*. Although seeing *kkokdugaksi noreum* performed live is still not easy, I have been fortunate to see some. In 2015, I had rare access to a Seoul Namsadang performance. The puppetry division of Seoul Namsadang, officially regarded as the authoritative group, is headed by Park Yong-Tae (the only current “national human treasure” for traditional puppetry) and is also connected to the Namsadang Nori Bojonhoe because Dr. Seha Kim, the president of this *bojonhoe* (preservation association), also guides Seoul Namsadang. According to Kim, Seoul Namsadang usually performs for pay upon invitation from the media or organizations, or for scholarly archival purposes. Based on the *bojonhoe*’s website, they used to perform *namsadang nori* (sometimes including *kkokdugaksi noreum*) at festivals as well as (probably free) annual performances in 2011 and 2012, but regular performances have not been offered in recent years (“Community”). When I attended Seoul Namsadang’s performance in 2015, the audience comprised Dr. Kim (a *namsadang nori* scholar and performer), two people from the National Folk Museum of Korea who came to archive the performance, myself, and several photographers and videographers. The main goal of this performance was to document it (via photos and film); whenever there were mistakes, Dr. Kim paused the performance to re-record it. Despite some improvisation and spontaneity as well as moments of rapport between the few archiving audience members and the performers, it was a controlled performance without a “real” audience. The completed video is meaningful in that it archives a performance by current *namsadang* members and the national human treasure (currently seventy-five years old), although I regret that there have not been more opportunities to see their performances in recent years.

What first drew me to *kkokdugaksi noreum* as a scholar, however, was an abridged performance by Anseong Namsadang (the regional *namsadang* group based in the city of Anseong) when this group was performing puppetry every weekend in 2008.⁶ This performance shortened the “standard” repertoire and added new content through a new human character, Jin Haengja, who mediated the play’s premodern content for the contemporary audience. Later, I was also able to see

the recordings of their 2009 and 2012 performances. All of these performances revealed a great level of energy and sense of fun from both performers and audiences.

Upon close examination,⁷ Seoul Namsadang’s version was closer to the nuanced realities of Joseon (though still a contemporary reconstruction), whereas Anseong Namsadang’s performances revealed more contemporary Korean socio-cultural realities, owing to newly added cultural components, such as pop culture and interaction with audience members. Both Seoul’s and Anseong’s approaches show gains and losses. Anseong’s performances, which emphasized physical components and slapstick comedy, were energetic, fun, and relatable, but these gains also resulted in reduced word play and satire as well as stereotypically simplified traditional puppet characters. Seoul Namsadang’s performance delivered the word play, satire, and witty banter from late Joseon, but contemporary Koreans’ access to premodern content and words would be undoubtedly challenging. Seoul Namsadang’s performance of the *wonhyeong*—the issue that Saeji raised—and their infrequent performances might affect their energy level and the connection with the audience, although I cannot accurately assess the impact of this group’s performance on a “real” audience at this point. At the same time, I also noticed that “endless re-runs” in the purist sense are always already unattainable because the performers (e.g., more women puppeteers participate now) and times (e.g., modern performance space) have changed and because there are multiple existing scripts.⁸

In past years, on the other hand, I have noticed creative uses of *kkokdugaksi noreum*. In 2016, I followed Theatre Group SaniNeomeo’s performances; this theatre group mixes Korean traditional and contemporary theatre aesthetics. I attended SaniNeomeo’s performances of *Bak Cheomji Returns*, a contemporary update of *kkokdugaksi noreum*, and *Fly Isimi*, an adaptation of *kkokdugaksi noreum*’s fourth scene (“Isimi Geori [The Serpent Scene]”). *Bak Cheomji Returns*, in particular, keeps *kkokdugaksi noreum*’s traditional structure and indigenous spirit of fun intact, while providing updated satire on contemporary issues. It also enlarges the puppet booth so that puppeteers can stand and move freely instead of sitting down. The performers’ dynamic energy was palpable, and the audiences seemed to



SANI NEOMEO'S *BAKCHEOMJI RETURNS* AT SEOUL NAMSAN GUGAKDANG PHOTO: SANI NEOMEO

respond accordingly. Also, in 2018, another theatre group, Eumma Gaengkaeng, staged *Kkokdu, Around the World in Eighty Days*—a family-oriented puppet play, drawing on *kkokdugaksi noreum*'s main character Bak Cheomji. This group wrote a whole new play so that Bak, a national traveler in the traditional repertoire, was turned into a global traveler.⁹

Although we may currently find more active performances, creative uses, and the exciting performance spirit that resembles that of *kkokdugaksi noreum* during late Joseon in groups other than the Seoul Namsadang/Namsadang Nori Association—the official group for national and UNESCO-ICH—I do not think that the preservation of the premodern forms itself or ICH-designation itself is problematic or detrimental. I believe that the key is to figure out *how* to deliver premodern forms to the audience and *how* to implement ICH policies. Some people have observed that government support, such as stipends for the *boyuja* (national human treasure) or *jeonsu kyoyuk jokyo* (heritage transmission teacher), has not been enough for them to concentrate fully on the preservation and education of next generations' artists (E. Kim). Most heritage bearers or those who want to learn cannot currently fully commit to heritage preservation and transmission because they need to find other sources of income (S. Kim). It is also important to understand that the desire for preserving the *wonhyeong* as they were at the ICH-designation time or even restoring them to the late nineteenth-century Joseon form derives from the fact that the transmission of Korean indigenous performing arts was severely obstructed by the censorship of Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945), the Korean War (1950–1953), and unprecedentedly rapid industrialization and westernization during the twentieth century. The preservation and restoration efforts did indeed contribute to the documentation and protection of many Korean performing arts that have survived today.¹⁰ To be able to revitalize art forms, it is important to be able to trace their roots. If the link to the centuries-old tradition is dying or obscure, this link to past memory needs to be documented, protected, and restored. Regular performances of the premodern forms¹¹ of *kkokdugaksi noreum* can be beneficial if they are done right, without the purist sense of one single and fixed archetypal form and with innovative measures to help the audience's understanding. Seosan Bakcheomji Nori Bojonhoe have recently offered performances regularly in connection with their local communities. I am interested in learning if *seosan bakcheomji nori* (a villagers' *kkokdugaksi noreum* repertoire), currently protected as South Chungcheong Province's ICH #26 (a regional ICH), provides a successful model.

As UNESCO's definition of "safeguarding" indicates,¹² the preservation, documentation, restoration, and creative revitalization of ICH are all important, and they can and should fuel one another, especially now that some of the foundational preservation work has been done in places like South Korea. Fortunately, realizing the pitfalls of the previous strict *wonhyeong* requirement and other ineffective practices of transmission, in 2016, South Korea issued a new law, specifically about ICH, called *Act on the Safeguarding and Promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, that calls for "creative transmission" of ICH ("Reason for the Promulgation"). Although the effective system for ICH-listed/-related arts will still need to be developed further,¹³ we can perhaps hope for a new chapter of *kkokdugaksi noreum* in the twenty-first century, given the growing interest in and performance initiatives about Korean traditional puppetry, in conjunction with this new South Korean law that matches the current UNESCO vision.

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DANCING PIJORI (YOUNG WOMEN) PUPPETS IN SANINEOMEEO'S *BAKCHEOMJI RETURNS* PHOTO: SANINEOMEEO

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Endnotes

- ¹ This bureau was later reorganized into the Cultural Heritage Administration. For more information: http://english.cha.go.kr/html/HtmlPage.do?pg=/aboutCha/history.jsp&mn=EN_04_04
- ² According to this act, "cultural property" was categorized into four types: material property, immaterial property, monuments, and folklore materials.

³ The 1964 national ICH designation was only about *kkokdugaksi noreum*. In the following, I explain how it was superseded by *namsadang nori* in 1988.

⁴ The term "Important Intangible Cultural Property" has recently been replaced by "(National) Intangible Cultural Heritage."

⁵ The celebration of a traditional holiday that falls on the fifth day of the fifth month according to the lunar calendar, probably stemming from a shamanistic ritual.

⁶ Beginning in 2013, Anseong Namsadang stopped performing *kkokdugaksi noreum* and instead turned to developing new projects inspired by this tradition to accommodate the changing audience's taste (Oh and Lee).

⁷ For more details, see my essay, "Women, Marriage, and Femininities."

⁸ Seoul Namsadang members seemed to be aware of the impossibility of achieving any "pure" *wonhyeong* and presented a *wonhyeong*-type performance.

⁹ Partly inspired by the motifs of Jules Verne's novel *Around the World in Eighty Days* (Eumma Gaengkaeng).

¹⁰ Sim Woo-Sung and other folklorists and scholars contributed greatly to the preservation and reconstruction of *kkokdugaksi noreum*.

¹¹ I use the plural "forms" here because there has been more than one repertoire of *kkokdugaksi noreum*.

¹² "Text of the Convention" on the UNESCO website states: "'Safeguarding' means measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage."

¹³ Haksoo Kim (SaniNeomeo's director), for instance, says that "a big surgery" is needed in South Korea's implementation of ICH policies.

MEET JOE PARSONAGE

by Greg Pellone

About a year ago, I read Robert Gregg's obituary, written by his friend Fred Putz, in the Winter/Spring 2016/17 *Puppeteers of America's Puppetry Journal*.¹ I was impressed and curious to find out more about Robert.

Like me, Robert was a Punch and Judy fan and an old set of Punch and Judy puppets purchased from "Uncle Ted" Raub, a Pennsylvania television personality, were among his favorites. Those puppets are now part of the Pellone/Barrett Puppet Collection with thanks to Robert and his wife, and to Mr. David Wilde, notable British Punch and Judy collector and historian, who positively identified them as Joe Parsonage's work.²

Punch and Judy are two names synonymous with a venerable hand puppet show that has been performed primarily in Great Britain by itinerant street performers, at fairs or festivals, and at seaside locations for well over 350 years. The traditional show includes a dynamic cast of various peculiar characters with Mr. Punch as the ever-present antagonist. Punch and Judy puppets and shows became more sophisticated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and astute businesspeople began selling ready-made puppets to aspiring performers. Puppet makers found a gainful niche and some performers, who were able, found it more convenient to purchase ready-made Punch and Judy puppets. Others, not so prosperous, continued to make their own puppets, which were often a source of pride and joy.

One purveyor of Punch and Judy puppets in Great Britain from 1953 until his death in 1992 was K.E. (Edwin) Hooper of The Supreme Magic Company. Edwin and his business partner, Ian Adair, found a ready market for puppets and soon the demand exceeded their supply. Their early inventory may have included puppets made by Wal Kent whose work is still avidly collected and prized. Edwin asked Joe Parsonage to begin making a line of Punch and Judy puppets for Supreme. Using Edwin's personal set of Punch figures, Parsonage copied Kent's general style with some subtle and often obvious differences, but Edwin still marketed them as "Wal Kent-like" puppets.³ Supreme Magic had been selling Parsonage ventriloquist dummies since the late 1950s⁴ and about 1968, give or take a few years, Parsonage also began providing his Punch and Judy character hand puppets to Supreme until he died in 1974.⁵

Those familiar with Punch and Judy tradition readily recall the name Joe Parsonage and his work; his puppets are prized by collectors and occasionally fetch substantial prices at auctions. However, there is very little biographical information available. Michael Dixon, curator of the *British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild* explains, "This was often the case for [puppet] makers; if they didn't perform, they remained relatively anonymous. It is the same of marionette makers and vent dummy makers too. These days we know everything about everyone, but years ago the makers were the ones behind the scenes and remain relatively undiscovered."⁶ During my research, Glyn Edwards kindly referred me to John Styles, both Punch and Judy Professors of considerable distinction and fame in the United Kingdom. John could only provide a little more general information, so I contacted Ian Adair, Edwin Hooper's former business partner. Luckily, Ian knew a little more, but the whole picture was still not clear. I kept asking myself, how is it that the life of a puppet maker whose work is still recognized and who made notable contributions to the material history of Punch and Judy puppetry is only vaguely remembered and not better documented? I decided to "find" Joe Parsonage and give him some much-deserved recognition. Now based on information and clues from various sources and people, a genealogical search by Christine Gregg, and details graciously provided by Parsonage's living relatives, here for the first time in Punch and Judy history is a more complete record of his life.

Joe Parsonage was born Timothy Edward Charles Parsonage on July 28, 1912 in Plymouth, Devon, England to Edward Llewellyn Parsonage (1872-1920) and Blanche Elizabeth Horrell (1888-1936). He was the oldest of five surviving siblings. Joe was only eight years old when his father died in 1920 leaving his mother to care for her five young children alone. She never remarried and had difficulty supporting the large family, so the children were split up. Joe went to live with his Aunt Ethel in Plymouth until he was 18.⁷ The family eventually moved to Redruth, Cornwall around 1924 and, except for his Army service, Joe seems to have lived and worked in Redruth for the remainder of his life. How did Timothy Edward Charles Parsonage become "Joe Parsonage"? We simply don't know. His daughter recalls her mother calling him



"Eddie" around the house. Perhaps he adopted the name "Joe" as his stage and puppet business name. Joe Parsonage married Edith M. Johns in 1935 in Redruth, and they remained married until his death. They were blessed with two daughters, Ursula and Edith, who both still live in the Cornwall area. Early on, Joe worked as a delivery man for a local grocer, but after WWII began, he served from 1939 to 1945 in the British Army in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Corps in both North Africa and Italy. It was then he started using ventriloquism to entertain his fellow soldiers. After the war, Joe worked for the South Western Electricity Board as a meter mechanic until ill health caused his early retirement at 58 years.

Joe also performed a ventriloquist act along with other entertainers such as magicians and singers at special events primarily in the Cornwall area. There were at least ten announcements of Joe Parsonage performing as a ventriloquist in local Cornwall newspapers between 1946 and 1950.⁸ In addition to these notices of Joe's popularity, we now know that it was about this time that Edwin Hooper read Joe's advertisement, "Second-hand own-make vent doll for sale" in the *Exchange and Mart*, a local weekly classified paper for buying and selling items. Edwin recruited Joe Parsonage to provide ventriloquist dolls for The Supreme Magic Company beginning in the 1950s⁹ and Parsonage made hundreds of them for sale. According to Ian Adair, "Throughout the years, Edwin Hooper never revealed the names of his makers, not even in adverts. He always kept them secret just in case other dealers might find out and use them."¹⁰ This is possibly another reason Joe Parsonage was less than well-known for his work. However, his skills did not go totally unrecognized. Just three years before his untimely death in 1992, Edwin praised Parsonage, Green and Clarke for their superb work as Punch figure makers in his book, *Edwin's Magic - Vol. 2*.¹¹

Joe's daughter fondly relates some amusing facts. "Dad's workshop was the dining room, but he was eventually banished to a small shed in the garden behind the house, to make his puppet heads as Mum was fed up with wood shavings in the house! Heads propped up on stands in various stages of painting were a common sight. Unfortunately there are no existing photos of the shed or his workshop. Mum made all the costumes for the vent dolls and the Punch and Judys were all made on her very old, hand-turned Singer sewing machine." Joe offered to buy his wife a treadle, and later an electric sewing machine, but Edith always preferred her hand-turned machine. Ursula also recalled that her father received a letter from the Governor of Dartmoor prison in the 1960s requesting a ventriloquist figure for a prisoner serving a life sentence. Her mother was not too keen on the idea, but finally consented to make the figure's clothing, which included a checkered jacket and pants and a black bow tie. The Governor guaran-

teed payment, but Joe refused and later received thank you letters from both the Governor and the prisoner.

Joe often performed his ventriloquist act on the same bill with singers and musicians, and Ursula tells us, "Dad was not a musician, but he loved classical music, especially Italian opera, and his favorite singer was Beniamino Gigli. Dad would have radios in all of his work places and it was nothing new for them all to be on at the same time, but tuned to different stations, it used to drive us all mad."¹²

Joe Parsonage's ventriloquist figures and Punch and Judy character puppets still occasionally resurface for sale, but many are likely ensconced and preserved in private collections. David Wilde relates that over the years he has seen quite a few for sale online, probably due to Parsonage's sizable output.¹³ His hand puppets generally range in size from 41.9 cm (16 1/2") to 66 cm (26") and are constructed from a variety of materials. The heads, hands and legs and feet are carved wood and can be identified by the method he used to carve facial features, especially the ears, eyes, and the shape of his figure's hands as well as his colors and method of painting the puppet eyes and mouth. His wife used various colorful fabrics to create the costumes and linings including different cottons, felts, calico, and red corduroy for Mr. Punch's outfits. Many of his puppets are accented with wavy trim, lace and upholstery tacks.

Edith recalls that her parents would go to rummage sales to buy various clothing with usable fabric then take them apart saving the buttons, fasteners and trimmings. The materials would be washed and pressed and used for the costumes as needed.

Some of Parsonage's first Mr. Punch figures for Supreme came to be marketed with larger heads. Chris Somerville of Colwyn Bay, Rhos-on-Sea, North Wales, relates: "... it is a fact that some of the Victorian shows did have Punch as a bigger figure than the others. Edwin was doubtless told by someone - it may have been Wal Kent - about Punch sometimes being bigger than the other dolls. When Edwin was in a position to sell Punch figures he probably remembered this and thought it a good selling point to claim he was recreating the 'traditional' Punch with a larger head than the others..."¹⁴ An advertisement for Supreme Punch and Judy puppets from the 1970 catalog during the Parsonage-era actually says, "MR. PUNCH. A really grand fellow in red velvet with yellow trim etc. Extra large head. Carved hands and feet."¹⁵



DOING GOOD WORK: VISITING THE O'NEILL PUPPETRY CONFERENCE

by Jessica Max Stein

A bunch of puppeteers hanging out in the woods: That's basically all I know about the annual Eugene O'Neill puppetry conference before I visit, but that's enough for me, especially with Muppet performer Pam Arciero as its Artistic Director. I trust that I'll find what I think of as a Jim Henson-inspired work environment: playful, respectful, collaborative, creative—and mind-bogglingly productive. And I trust that even the briefest visit will be good for my own work.

When I started writing the biography of Muppet performer Richard Hunt nearly a decade ago, I didn't know much about puppetry. I knew that I loved the Muppet sensibility of "affectionate anarchy" (Frank Oz's term); the Muppets were screamingly absurd and anything could happen, yet they shared a kindness, a basic sense of integrity. I soon found out that the performers were much the same behind the scenes. Henson assembled a troupe that added up to far more than the sum of its parts, with Richard Hunt as one of its "Original Four" performers (as Hunt put it, the other three being Henson, Oz and Jerry Nelson), collectively finding success beyond their wildest dreams with *Sesame Street* and *The Muppet Show*. The 1980s found the "old guard" Muppet performers passing on the craft to a whole new generation, including Arciero — and

just in time, too. Jane Henson founded the O'Neill puppetry conference in 1991, right in between the untimely deaths of her husband Jim Henson and her dear friend Richard Hunt. The Muppet lineage lives on at the O'Neill, a dream environment that fosters genuine creativity, as wacky and hardworking as any Henson production.

This sensibility is evident in spades at the "circle pitch" the first evening of the conference. Nearly everyone is gathered in the workshop, sitting in two concentric circles — Arciero and her associate Artistic Director Jean Marie Keevins, the teachers/guest artists, their fifty pupils/collaborators, the three emerging artists, various associates and interested observers like myself — with little sense of hierarchy, as people describe their various projects and try to coordinate their efforts. I'm impressed by how directly people ask for what they need: musicians, puppeteers, actors, set builders, videographers, whatever. The public nature of the event provides an external accountability, witnesses to the promises being made. The marionettes hanging on the walls watch, too, seemingly alive, as the meeting moves along with efficiency and focus, punctuated by bouts of laughter.

The Eugene O'Neill Theater Center feels like it's at the edge of the world, a cluster of homey Victorians encircled by lawns and trees, and beyond that nothing but the wide sweep of Long Island Sound, the clean air smelling like the ocean. The thoughtful staff in the Company Management ("CoMa") office have got hospitality down to a science, honed through hosting about a half-dozen such events throughout the year; the friendly cafeteria workers provide three meals a day, accommodating a variety of eaters. My room in the "Ruthie" dorm has a high twin bed and a comfortable desk overlooking the woods. Away from regular society, with one's needs taken care of, there's nothing left to do but work, and gladly.

Even at breakfast, most everyone is already on the job: reading scripts, discussing logistics, exchanging ideas. A stuffed animal of Bear from the Jim Henson Company show *Bear in the Big Blue House* sits in his own seat in front of a jar of Marmite. In this crowd, Bear is just another half-awake participant getting his morning meal. At least three people greet him as they pass: "Hi Bear." "Mornin', Bear." "Hey buddy." His companion, Teddy Dong, a genial Canadian, eventually sits down nonchalantly with his own tray.

From the time they bus their breakfast trays until well after the sun goes down, everyone is essentially hard at work — making for long days in high June just before the solstice, even with meal breaks. The guest artists produce new material in collaboration with their students, who get to learn on the job. Yael Rasooly's students sing together in the gazebo; Ronnie Burkett's group cooperates impressively as they work out how to manipulate a huge, 13-person marionette; and Martin Ketting and his writers hole up in the cozy library with their laptops.

I knock tentatively on the side door of the White House (actually more of a pale yellow), where emerging artist Lyon Hill, with two assistants/collaborators, is developing his puppet production of Poe's "Tell-Tale Heart." The three emerging artists have a sweet deal: creators on the verge of a breakthrough, they apply specifically for the position, and the conference gives them particular support. "A day at the O'Neill is the equivalent of two to three weeks at home," Hill tells me. "You just get so much done." He's got a full-sized humanoid old man marionette laid out on the bed, with a shock of grey hair, clouded blue eye, and detachable limbs for its eventual dismemberment. I am bowled over by his lazy Susan of intricate paper figures, which he plans to use as background in a live video feed.

But my favorite place is the workshop, which everyone just calls the "shop": a crafter's heaven in the basement of the barn, where master puppeteers Jim and Judy Rose hold tea parties each afternoon at 3:00. The circles of chairs from the initial pitch meeting have made way for long wooden tables, stacks of fabric, boxes of tools, anything you could need. The marionettes have been taken off the walls and put into action. Students are trying to walk them around the room, plucking



GLYNN BARTLETT, PERFORMING



AMELIA EARHART BY GEORGIE ROSE



RONNIE BURKETT'S "CRAVE" ALL PHOTOS BY RICHARD TERMINE



tentatively at their strings: Cher, Liza Minelli, and a tap-dancing dandy, among others, lurch jerkily forward, arms and legs flailing. “It’s hard not to make them seem like they’re drunk!” one girl says with a laugh. Though teacher Phillip Huber guides his pupils, he largely leaves them alone to practice, offering advice only when called over, as befits a Henson-type work environment, which helps the learner become independent, rather than just following directions. As it turns out, Huber worked with Hunt on *John Denver and The Muppets: A Christmas Together*. “Richard befriended me right away,” he says. He remembers Henson and Oz ad-libbing, sending Denver into fits of giggles.

Two students talk about how manipulating a marionette gets easier when you *become* it, rather than thinking of yourself as separate. “That’s where the magic happens,” Huber says. Georgie Rose demonstrates a marionette getting up from sitting on the floor; rather than just lifting up the whole doll all at once, a novice’s instinct, her marionette leans on one knee and arm and gets up from there, the way people actually do. Rose is building a gorgeous little “steampunk pilot” marionette modeled after Amelia Earhart, with a tiny bomber jacket, leather-strap hat and even teeny flyer’s goggles. Rose hails all the way from Australia; other people come to this pretty spit of Connecticut from as far as Thailand, Israel, Venezuela, and west coast Canada, as well as all across the US, with a sizeable Midwestern turnout (including two guys named Zach from different towns in Wisconsin) and a cool black-clad New York City contingent.

I pick up a big purple Muppet hand puppet, which has only eyes and a mouth. “I don’t have a nose,” I have the puppet say nasally to yet another Zach, this one from Georgie. “Then how do you smell?” he replies. “I don’t know, how?” I ask. He grins. “Terrible!”

I like it here.

On top of all this, various artists offer master classes, a chance to hear some ideas or try something different, such as practice improv with kindly puppet veteran Tyler Bunch; jam with resident musicians Melissa and Matt Dunphy; or learn how to photograph puppets from longtime *Sesame* photographer (and former conference artistic director) Richard Termine – a low-stakes way to grow in a new creative direction.

Though work officially knocks off for the day at 10 pm, most everyone piles into Blue Gene’s Pub for more mingling and schmoozing well into the night. It’s a luxury to hang out with such knowledgeable puppeteers, to not have to explain who Hunt is or why his story matters. The puppeteers here express a similar validation, not having to justify their seemingly obscure passion. Multiple participants tell me how nice it is to be among others who don’t assume that puppets are for kids, as well as to be part of the larger lineage of the field, passing on the craft. Even Hunt took a few years to recognize his own work, successful as he was, not fully proud of his skill until younger puppeteers like Arciero came along and looked up to him. I particularly appreciate how

everyone comes together at the O’Neill, respecting that they are each in different places. Arciero’s office displays a mantle of elders, a prominent row of photos of those who have come before, those who are invoked as the current puppeteers do their work.

Over the course of my visit, I realize that the Muppets are just the tip of the puppet iceberg. At an early guest artists’ performance, James Godwin visibly manipulates a full-body tabletop puppet; Tim Lagasse does shadow puppet presidential impressions, using just his hands behind a screen; and Huber’s marionettes seem truly human as they lip-sync, swing on a trapeze, *exhale actual vapor* from drags on an e-cigarette. I even learn about “non-verbal puppetry,” which makes me think of everyone in the outside world who asks me if Hunt “did the voices” for his characters, as if there is nothing else to it. I can’t wait to tell them there are puppets that don’t even *talk*. And I already can’t wait to come back to the O’Neill next year, to a place that so congenially feels like home.

JESSICA MAX STEIN is currently writing *Funny Boy: The Richard Hunt Biography*. The book’s proposal was shortlisted for the Hazel Rowley Prize from the Biographers International Organization. Stein’s work has been cited in the *New York Times*, received an Amy Award from *Poets and Writers* magazine and won an Independent Press Association Award. She teaches English and Media Studies at the City University of New York.

Sources

“Affectionate anarchy”: Frank Oz, various sources.
 “Original Four”: Richard Hunt Archival Interview, 1991, Jim Henson Company Archives.



RICHARD HUNT: THE JIM HENSON COMPANY



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Tom Lee & Lisa Gonzales
place (no) place

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Kimi Maeda
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The Object Group / Michael Haverty
L'Etranger

Paper Heart Puppets
Error Code 451

Rough House Theater Company
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(working title)*

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THE MESCHKE LEGACY

by Andrew Periale

Michael Meschke has long been an important figure in world puppetry. He began his studies of puppetry, mime and other theater subjects in the early 1950s, working with such masters as Etienne Decroux and Harro Siegel. In 1953 he established himself in Stockholm, Sweden, where he founded Marionetteatern, a company he led for much of the next five decades, creating many memorable productions and adapting the work of Brecht, Cervantes, Büchner, Jarry, Aeschylus, Euripides, Giradoux and others.

In addition, Meschke has supported the field in other ways, publishing books, serving on the executive committee of UNIMA, as well as directing the Third World Commission and establishing UNIMA-Sweden. He has also traveled broadly in order to direct, lead workshops and lecture.

Meschke has also contributed in a substantial way to our understanding of puppetry's intangible cultural heritage, particularly in South and Southeast Asia. Between 2005 and 2010 he received support from SIDA – the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency – and the Pro Suecia Foundation. During this period he made three trips to Thailand (2005), Burma (2007) and India, Thailand and Cambodia (2010). During these periods he paid particular attention to puppetry's intangible cultural heritage by documenting and encouraging the preservation of certain endangered traditions, notably the large shadow forms of Nang Yai (Thailand) and Sbek Thom (Cambodia). The three reports that Meschke wrote following these trips make for fascinating reading, and you can now read them all in English on our website: unima-usa.org/index. Look in the Table of Contents for PI #45.

During the first of these three trips, Meschke describes his initial encounter with Nang Yai, which, he tells us, originally simply meant “large pieces of leather”:

Two dramatic art forms are combined into one—shadow play and choreographed dance. Those who played the parts, i.e. manipulated the shadow figures, did so in front of the backlit screen rather than behind it, where it normally would be done. These performers were not only puppeteers, but also dancers. They made lively movements while holding shadow figures above their heads. They danced with their bodies, especially the legs, doing choreographed moves, rhythms and stamping. I have not come across the merging of two dramatic art forms like this anywhere else.

If he were to rewrite his adventures now, he might well rephrase that section to read: “I have not YET come across...,” for on a foray into Cambodia on his 2010 trip, he encountered Sbek Thom:

...It intrigued us because of the similarity with the Thai Nang Yai shadow theatre tradition, which we had studied and encouraged in recent years. Would both forms, Nang Yai and Sbek Thom, have the same originality in combining two arts – shadow play and dance – with shadow players appearing *in front of* the shadow screen, moving their own bodies with skillful dance movements and steps? What would be the connections, if any – the mutual inspiration – and which art would be the oldest?

At that time he also connected with the Sovanna Phum company in Phnom Penh, directed by Mann Kosal. This fascinating company and arts center works from a base of traditional Khmer culture, yet has also collaborated with Vermont-based Sandglass Theater to create a very contemporary version of a traditional folk tale.

I urge you to take a look at Meschke's reports, which are available on our website along with many images from his visits to South and Southeast Asia. www.unima-usa.org

Finally, in 2006, a prize was established in Meschke's honor:

The way winners are chosen is simply informal, following what we see and hear and suggestions from a few friends, Nancy Staub, the UNIMA President, Greta Brüggeman of Arketal and Raphaële Fleury in Charleville.

We have not yet established formal rules. The prize was a spontaneous way to place some money gifts for my 75th birthday. That inspired us to continue and gather money from private sources. I'm aware this has to be organized while I'm alive; we just have not yet come to this.

And about the philosophy behind the prize, there is only this elementary idea to encourage both traditions threatened to disappear (therefore the word preservation) and renewal, aiming to support young, not



SBEK THOM. SOVANNA PHUM THEATRE IN PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA

yet established talents. One exception was Bernd Ogrodnik, who in Iceland had set up a workshop of highest quality as a model to new generations and was teaching high quality puppet making.

BUT, on the other hand, I'm most interested in the theme of **intangible cultural heritage**. Studies and working in several Asian countries gave me an overview of the various present situations. [from *MM e-mail to author*]

HERE IS THE LIST OF RECIPIENTS OF THE **MICHAEL MESCHKE PRIZE** FOR PRESERVATION AND RENEWAL FOR PUPPETRY ARTS, TO DATE:

Dr. Antigoni Paroussi, teacher at the University of Athens, Greece, “for having introduced training in puppetry at university level, for promoting the search for quality amongst the young and for her assistance at the International Puppet Theatre Festival of Hydra, Greece.” 2008

The Nang Yai performers groupe at the Temple Wat Ban Don, Thailand, “for encouraging new generations to preserve faithfulness versus traditional performing, for caring and renewing the form of Nang-Yai big shadow puppets.” The prize included touring to Athens, Greece and Lund, Sweden. 2010

Mohammed Shameem, New Delhi, India, a puppet maker and performer at the Ishara Puppet Theatre Trust and founder of a company of his own “as an outstanding representative of development and renewal of Indian puppet theatre traditions.” 2012

Bernd Ogrodnik, Borgarnes, Iceland, “for his exemplary quality as well as the high level of handicraft as in, for example, the technical inventiveness in the film *Strings*.” 2014

Piewnam Chalermmyart, Sema Thai Puppet Theatre, Bangkok, Thailand, “for promoting puppet theatre in Thai society by their repertory of plays, and by initiating amateur activities throughout the country and for the Harmony Festival of Strings in Amphava.” 2016

Bashar Sahyouni, Syria and Solbacka Refugee Camp, Sweden, “for creating, together with other young refugees from Syria, a forum where individual experience could be expressed through artistic means resulting in a public puppet performance. 2016

Leksands marionett- och figurteaterförening. For the first time, the “*Prix Michael Meschke*” has been awarded to a group in Sweden: the Leksands marionett- och figurteaterförening “for the foundation of a new centre and its members' search for knowledge and quality.” 2018

continued from page 19

The Joe Parsonage Punch and Judy puppets that inspired this article include the larger Mr. Punch figure that Somerville mentions. In spite of being very large, the puppet is nicely made, but because of its size and weight, it's apparent it would be difficult to handle for any length of time and a frustrating experience for budding performers. This is probably why these larger "traditional" Punch figures didn't last long and why Parsonage only made a few.¹⁶ In spite of this minor drawback, Parsonage's prodigious supply of figures to Supreme for over twenty years made Punch and Judy puppets significantly more accessible to both aspiring and seasoned performers. Along with Wal Kent, Tony Green, Bryan Clarke and many others, Parsonage was a key player in a business that made it possible for those who couldn't make their own puppets to acquire a quality set of Punch and Judy figures. From his small workshop in the garden, Joe Parsonage made large contributions to the material history of Punch and Judy by preserving a British tradition that began long before his time, and we certainly hope will continue long after.



PUPPETS CREATED BY JOE PARSONAGE
FROM THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION
PHOTOS: BRIAN JAMES

GREG PELLONE is from Treasure Island, Florida. He is an artist, puppet collector, researcher, writer, and the curator and conservator of the Pellone/Barrett Puppet Collection, an accumulation of over 500 puppets and related artifacts from various countries worldwide.

Endnotes

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For the full article, including many historic photos of Joe Parsonage, please visit www.unima-usa.org/index, and find PI #45, Table of Contents.



We would like to note that in PI #44, page 2, we inadvertently misspelled Dragon Dance Theatre's "Katah" as "Kata."



RECOVERING THE INTANGIBLE ART OF BAROQUE PUPPETRY:



AN INTERVIEW WITH JESÚS CABALLERO by Esther Fernández



In 2002, a team of researchers and puppeteers in the town of Cuenca (Spain), led by Jesús Caballero, set the goal for themselves of recovering the *Máquina Real* [Royal Machine], a popular and traditional form of puppetry that was performed all through the 17th century but has been lost to modern society. The terminology *máquina real* refers to those companies that performed mainly *comedias de santos* [plays about the lives of saints] in *corrales de comedia* [17th-century Spanish playhouses], usually during Lent when live actors and actresses were banned from performing on stage. Although the exact origin and meaning of the expression *máquina real* remains unknown, Francisco J. Cornejo has interpreted the noun, "máquina," as meaning mechanism and the adjective, "real," as a reference to (1) the royal permission required by the artists in order to be able to perform with their puppets; (2) the "royal" locations where these companies could present their shows privately and by commission; and (3) the design of the stage, which had clear similarities to the Buen Retiro Palace in Madrid (2006: 17-20).

The *máquina real* is a purely Spanish tradition that was born on the Iberian Peninsula in the 17th century and died there in the 18th century when hagiographic plays lost popularity among the public. John E. Varey is one of the few historians who has mentioned this artistic tradition in his book, *Historia de los títeres en España* [History of Puppets in Spain] (1957), but it was not until Caballero set to work reconstructing it from the scarce historical data available that this type of production returned to life.

We could argue that Caballero has recovered an intangible Spanish heritage insofar as he not only reconstructs the most tangible aspects of these productions, but he also re-imagines the handling techniques and performances of the puppets based on historical sources. In collaboration with his team, he has been working for more than seventeen years to give form to a key entertainment feature in the dramatic history

ACTORS REHEARSING LOPE DE VEGA'S *SEEING IS BELIEVING*
PHOTO COURTESY OF JESÚS CABALLERO



Puppet Show] (2017), adapted from one of the most renowned episodes of *Don Quixote* (1605-15).

of Spain and Spanish culture in general. In 2009, Caballero and his company—called La Máquina Real—premiered *El esclavo del demonio* [The Devil’s Slave] (1612), by Mira de Amescua, a play based on the Portuguese legend of Saint Gil of Santarem and, in 2010, *Lo fingido verdadero* [Seeing is Believing] (c. 1608), by Lope de Vega, inspired by the life of Saint Genesius, the patron saint of actors. Since then, this company has toured the most prestigious theater festivals in Spain with new puppet theater productions, most recently having premiered *El retablo de Maese Pedro* [Master Peter’s

Esther Fernández: In the world of puppets, you occupy a unique position as a creator since, in contrast to other companies like the *Bonecos de Santo Alexo* (Évora, Portugal) or the *Títeres de la Tía Norica* (Cádiz, Spain), you have not followed a tradition but have reconstructed one from scratch. What led to your recovering and reconstructing the *máquina real*?

Jesús Caballero: My initiation into the world of puppets took place at the same time as I was finishing my studies in fine arts and was beginning to work on my doctorate, focusing on the restoration of art work using electrophotographic processes. During that period, I discovered Spain’s enormous artistic heritage and the tiny budget that is dedicated to its conservation, cataloguing and dissemination. I was also aware of the complete lack of any history of Spanish *teatro de figuras* [figure/puppet theater], that no physical remains had been conserved, except for a few religious figures used in liturgical dramas and the puppets of Tía Norica. When I met the professor and puppeteer, Francisco J. Cornejo, during a conference in Seville, he spoke to me about some documents found by his research group at the University of Seville in which there was a detailed description of a “*máquina real*,”

an invention mentioned by Varey in his *History of Puppets in Spain*. This conversation aroused my curiosity to know more about productions performed with a *máquina real* and I made the decision to reconstruct a *máquina*.

EF: How was the process of reconstructing this lost puppet tradition?

JC: The lack of documentation about the design of the stage made the job very difficult; there are no models in any museum of what the puppets used in the Baroque *máquinas* looked like, or information on how they were used. Why did some puppets have rods attached to their heads while others stood on pedestals and were operated from below? Was that for demonic and celestial apparitions? What machinery was used to produce these effects? If we are talking about the staging, how can we put together the actors, acrobats, musicians and puppeteers all on stage, with a *retablo* [framework] that measures twenty square meters? Every production is a new experiment. I think the *máquina real* companies were technically very advanced for their time as they combined, perfectly, what today we would call hybrid staging, the simultaneous combination onstage of all the performing and stage arts.

EF: What was most difficult and what was most gratifying about reconstructing the *máquina real*?

JC: What was most difficult was to understand how the *máquina real* performances might have really been according to the contracts found pertaining to the authors of the *comedias* [plays] used by the *máquinas*. We see that they hired women and men from other theatrical acting companies, mostly during Lent. They also hired acrobats to perform entire *comedias* including the interludes, the dances and the bullfight parodies in miniature. What was most gratifying was to see the public’s reaction when they came to our shows, performed in the iconic *corral de comedias* of Almagro. I felt as if I’d traveled four hundred years back in time.

EF: Why do you think we lost so completely both the intangible part as well as the tangible part of the *máquina real* in comparison with other puppet traditions?

JC: Starting with the tangible part, the *máquina real* companies were professional and their costs were very high. The puppeteers were hired for the entire year for a “job” or “production” by the director of the company—and also usually the owner of the *máquina*— who would also provide the puppets and costumes for the puppets and also, almost certainly, the machinery for the special effects and fly system, all of which were very common in hagiographic plays. This means that if in any given year a *máquina real* did

not obtain royal authorization to perform, or if the number of performances was not sufficient to cover the operating costs of the company, they would find themselves obliged to sell everything or else the *máquina* could be confiscated to cover their debts. To this situation has to be added the appearance of the new *teatros a la italiana* [Italian style theaters], such as the Coliseo del Buen Retiro in Madrid, which displaced the *comedia* theaters, and, finally, the arrival of new advances that adapted science to popular entertainment, such as the zoetropes, the magic lanterns, or the *mundi novis*... which found in the markets and fairgrounds a way to convey new discoveries in optics and physics to the citizenry. The intangible part—that of an art of oral transmission, such as the theater—is more fragile and ephemeral, in the moment that a company’s activity comes to an end. All that has been learned is lost. In Spain, there have never been centers specializing in documenting, conserving and transmitting puppet theater, which was developed over centuries of experimentation but hardly left a trace in our culture. Every company carried its knowledge away to another neighborhood. For this reason, it is imperative that schools for puppet theater be created for this task. When what belongs to us disappears, we copy from other countries, losing our cultural identity and heritage.

EF: In a city like Cuenca, considered one of Spain’s world heritage cities, what official aid have you had for recovering this cultural heritage that has been completely lost?

JC: I think that culture in Spain, and specifically in the town of Cuenca, is not considered an investment and, for this reason, there is no funding for it. On various occasions I have proposed a project for the creation of a center for research on puppet theater in Spain, with a special focus on Baroque theater, but there has been no response. The aid we have received has been limited to the production of shows, on a competitive basis.

EF: What was the initial reaction of the public, both in terms of the local audience of Cuenca and other national and international audiences, when they saw the *máquina real* for the first time?

JC: When they see the *retablo*, they all say: It’s enormous! When they see the puppets: How pretty, how heavy they must be! When they see the performance, they are moved. They don’t think a puppet can transmit the same feelings as an actor, and even in some cases to go beyond them. They also ask if they can come to Cuenca to see our other shows or to train with us, but... in Cuenca we don’t have a center for training new actors/ puppeteers or a theater where we can perform on a regular basis.

EF: What can be done today, in theory, so that this cultural heritage that you have recovered with so much work will continue and not be lost? Who should contribute today to maintain the *máquina real* active and alive and to pass it on to future generations?

JC: There has to be a center for documentation, research and training, with a permanent and long-term line of work that brings together actors, playwrights, historians, stage designers, musicians, dancers and acrobats to guarantee the recovery and consolidation of the *máquina real*.

The support should come from the National Institute for Performing Arts and Music [Instituto Nacional de las Artes Escénicas y la Música] (INAEM) and regional and local governments, as well as private sponsors and new artists who want to participate in establishing the project.

EF: In other words, you believe the *máquina real* could fall back into oblivion?

continued on p 39



FRONT VIEW OF THE MÁQUINA REAL’S STAGE STRUCTURE [RETABLO] MOUNTED IN THE CHURCH OF SANTA CRUZ (CUENCA) PHOTO COURTESY OF JESÚS CABALLERO

JESÚS CABALLERO OVERSEEING PUPPET MANIPULATION TECHNIQUES DURING A REHEARSAL OF LOPE DE VEGA’S *SEEING IS BELIEVING* PHOTO COURTESY OF LUIS CABALLERO

Two Personal Accounts of American Puppetry

GARY JONES, *SUBPLOT: MEMOIRS OF CHICAGO'S KUNGSHOLM GRAND OPERA*. GARDEN BAY, B.C.: CHARLEMAGNE PRESS, 2018. 137 PP. \$30

PAUL VINCENT DAVIS, *EXPLORING THE ART OF PUPPET THEATER*. GARDEN BAY, B.C.: CHARLEMAGNE PRESS, 2018. 167 PP. \$30

While the critical history and analysis of puppetry – what we modestly call puppetry studies – has slowly grown in the past three decades as an (almost!) legitimate field of academic research, that work has been preceded by scores of books, especially in the U.S., that in their own way have attempted to chronicle the nature of puppetry as it has developed in the 20th century. The vast majority of these books fall under the category of “how-to” manuals, which offer the neophyte puppeteer a complete introduction to the design, construction, and performance of marionettes, hand puppets, and (sometimes) shadow theater, mostly based on the author’s own particular experience. Tony Sarg, Helen Haiman Joseph, and Remo Bufano were early practitioners of this kind of puppet writing, but scores more puppeteers have followed in the past nine decades. A considerably smaller but equally rich field of puppet writing is puppet history. In the U.S., Paul McPharlin’s *Puppet Theatre in America* and Marjorie Batchelder’s *Rod-puppets and the Human Theater* (both published in the 1940s) set high standards for historical analyses of puppet history and a revelation of the richness of the field. A third, and equally diminutive, area of puppet writing is the first-person account of what puppet life is like. A small masterpiece of this form is Ralph Chessé’s 1987 *The Marionette Actor*, in which the author reviews his puppet work from the 1920s in New York City, the ensuing decades in San Francisco, the Federal Theater Project days of the 1930s, and the early years of West Coast television.

Chessé’s vivid, insightful, and enthusiastic portrayal of the modern possibilities of puppetry has been hard to match, but Gary Jones’s *Subplot: Memoirs of Chicago’s Kungsholm Grand Opera* might be the most animated revelation of the fascinations of puppetry since then. It is hard to pinpoint exactly why this is the case, because Jones approaches his tale of the final years of the Kungsholm Grand Opera in the late 60s from a highly personal perspective, and does not attempt to explain everything about that troupe. (Luman Coad, who has published *Subplot* through his Charlemagne Press, is reportedly writing his own history of the Kungsholm Grand Opera, which will likely offer a full and expansive account of this remarkable puppet institution, which began in 1936 and closed for good in 1971.) Gary Jones was present for the Kungsholm Opera’s final four years, and through his vivid writing we see what it was like to be part of a highly unusual

type of puppet theater for the U.S.: an established, almost high-class rod-puppet theater in the wealthy North Side of Chicago, whose popularity among the city’s opera lovers was only eclipsed by competition from the Lyric Opera, which featured live singers and musicians instead of foot-tall puppets.

Jones’s story is all the more remarkable because, as a young, middle-class African American teenager with artistic inclinations from Chicago’s South Side, he was like a fish out of water at the Kungsholm theater. Jones, who had been enamored of puppets as a kid, applied to work at the Kungsholm theater almost on a whim, but was soon enough hired, and, when the opportunity arrived, became the company’s main set designer, a job for which he had received no training, but which he embraced fully, to great success. Jones is a vivid chronicler of the life of the puppeteer, and *Subplot* is full of insights into the nitty gritty of backstage (and understage) details of three-show-a-day performances by a company of young Chicago puppeteers. The Kungsholm puppets were unusual in American puppetry because (similar to European traditions of *vertep* and *szopka* nativity plays) they were neither string marionettes nor hand puppets, but instead a very particular and somewhat complicated type of rod puppet which moved in slots on the stage floor, operated from beneath by puppeteers seated on wheeled stools. Jones’s recounting of the camaraderie of the puppeteers, and what it was like to perform the Kungsholm shows, is vivid and convincing. You really sense what it was like to be part of a tightly knit company (composed, like most puppet troupes, of often-unusual characters!) who worked hard, didn’t earn a lot of money, but loved what they were doing.

Jones’s four years at Kungsholm coincided with the turbulent 1960s. There were riots at the 1968 Democratic Party convention, and social and artistic turmoil was rife. Jones was super conscious of his position as the sole black puppeteer in the Miniature Grand Opera, and increasingly wondered what his role should be as an African American artist. He realized he was gay (as were most of his colleagues among the Kungsholm puppeteers), becoming increasingly comfortable with that identity; and also found a growing self-assurance about his artistic abilities, not only as a set designer (of *Porgy and Bess*, *My Fair Lady*, *The King and I*, *Gypsy*, and *Carmen*), but, outside his theater work, as a painter. Jones’s confidence led him to demand a pay raise for the whole company of Kungsholm puppeteers, permanently earning him their admiration.



PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

Subplot represents another writing genre as well: the portrait of the artist as a young man. Jones’s flowering into a young, self-aware, and confident black artist is a strong story, and Jones is able to present it as if the events are occurring as he writes. But his growing strength as an artist and a person is equally matched by the decline of the Kungsholm Miniature Grand Opera. The theater’s new corporate owners, the Fred Harvey Company, had tried to keep the enterprise afloat by presenting Broadway musicals rather than classic operas, but audiences continued to diminish and the Harvey Company suddenly called it quits. Jones, like the other young men of the Kungsholm troupe, was shocked and devastated, but had already started out on his way as a visual artist and puppeteer. He built and performed a wild Punch and Judy show in bars with his first boyfriend, Randy Bohn, and then created his own company, Blackstreet USA Puppet Theatre, which he moved to Los Angeles in 1984. Jones’s record of his four short years with Kungsholm is a brilliant revelation of what life is really like as a working puppeteer, and, even more important, what it is like to be an African American puppeteer.

Paul Vincent Davis’s *Exploring the Art of Puppet Theater*, also published by Luman Coad’s Charlemagne Press, continues in the vein of the puppet instruction manual, but Davis’s book has a particularly fascinating goal – it is not simply how to learn to become a puppeteer, but instead how to become a performing artist whose medium happens to be puppetry. Davis, who helped create the Puppet Showplace Theater with



Mary Churchill in Brookline, Massachusetts, and is now the theater’s Artist in Residence Emeritus, is consciously pouring into the pages of his book his artist’s credo about what theater does as an art. Like Peter Brook’s influential *The Empty Space* – which for many actors is a kind of bible for how to make modern theater – Davis’ book wants to get at the essence of theater as creative art; but instead of using the vessel of the actor’s body, Davis wants to use the hand puppet.

Like most puppeteers today, Davis is conflicted about the low status of puppetry. The unwanted, bastard offspring of the theater world, puppetry is neither acting, playwriting, set design, nor dramaturgy – and yet, paradoxically, it is also all of those arts. Davis decries “today’s often limited vision of this amazing art form,” and in *Exploring the Art of Puppet Theater* wants to argue that puppetry can be fine art (damn it!), although the road to that goal requires consistent rigor and attention to every detail.

Like every artist’s revelation of their methods, this one is clearly based on the writer’s own particular experience, despite Davis’s efforts to universalize his prescriptions as an ideal form. Much like Edward Gordon Craig in the first decades of the 20th century, Davis has a certain evangelical zeal about the goal of seeing “puppetry blossom again into a vital form of theater art,” and to no longer be seen as “a foolish or silly activity.” (The amazing thing is that, over a century after Craig’s groundbreaking puppet modernism, puppeteers still feel the need to justify and elevate their art!) Thus he begins by addressing the question of Art in general, probing the universal desires for it, its social and spiritual purposes, and then the particular nature of puppetry as a specific form, right up there with music, sculpture, painting, and drama. Davis began performing puppet shows in 1965 with Carol Fijan in Washington, D.C. (Fijan’s own book *Puppets & Politics* is another gem from Charlemagne Press) and their preferred subject matter was Shakespeare. The possibility of performing Shakespeare with hand puppets floats above all Davis’s precise and exact instructions as an ideal goal, even if the subject matter is a fairy tale or other children’s story.

Judged by the principles of puppetry outlined here, Davis seems like he would be a strict and highly focused teacher (one wishes it were possible to take a master class with him!). He explains the details of hand and finger exercises, how to breathe, how to move, and the precise process of achieving the high art of puppetry. Even if Shakespeare is not your particular goal, Davis wants *Hamlet* or *Richard III* to always be a possibility, something to aspire to. Davis’s prescriptions for the art of puppet theater dive into specific rules one “must” follow, and the seriousness of his approach leads him to take on the tone of Aristotle’s *Poetics* or other revered manuals of art-making and philosophy. Unlike Gary Jones’s account, Davis avoids discussing his own shows, even though the photographs illustrating the book’s pages offer tantalizing hints about what Davis’s shows are like. *The Leprechaun of Donegal? Folk Tales of Japan? Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp? Macbeth? Raccoon Tales?* One wonders what those productions were like! One day, at the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry, where I work, we discovered we had somehow come into possession of Davis’s puppets for *Richard III*. We realized that Davis had performed the scene where the evil king seduces Lady Anne right in front of the corpse of her husband, Henry VI, whom Richard had just killed. All three puppets were there, and they were majestic and beautiful. One could only imagine how Davis would have pulled off Shakespeare’s amazing dramaturgy, but I think – given the exactitude and rigor of *Exploring the Art of Puppet Theater* – that it would have fully achieved the goals of “puppetry as fine theater art.”

– review by John Bell

Bell is the Director of the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry, and is the book review editor for *Puppetry International* magazine.

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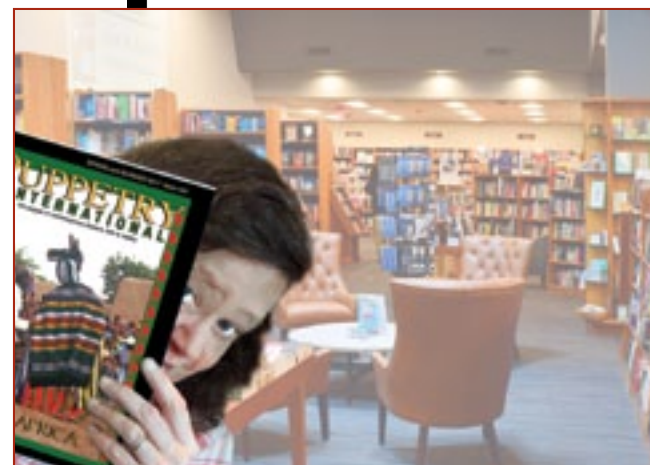
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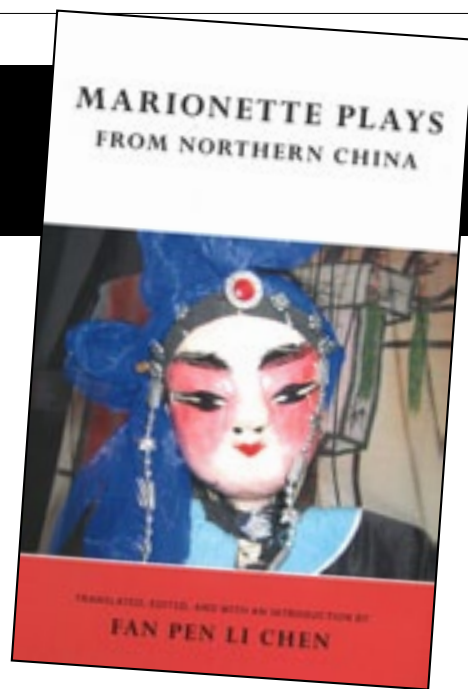
Chen, Fan Pen Li, trans. ed., and intro.
Marionette Plays from Northern China
 Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017

All Fan Chen's work gives Anglophone reader better access to Chinese traditional puppetry as was noted in a review of her *Journey of a Goddess: Chen Jinggu Subdues the Snake Demon*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017) by John Bell (*PI* 43, 2018, p. 42-43). Two earlier publications—*Vision for the Masses* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2004) and *Chinese Shadow Theatre* (Montreal: McGill Univ. Press, 2007) focused on Chinese shadow theatre. *Marionette Plays*, like *Journey*, deals with string puppets. Her formula remains the same in all four works: a general introduction that raises issues (gender and ritual are ongoing themes she favors); translations (with annotations on cultural implications); and an extensive bibliography (including many Chinese language sources for those who can follow). She supplies rich data, as good folklore scholars do, but those just beginning with Chinese religion (i.e. reincarnation) and narrative motifs (barbarian princesses in love with Chinese generals, Confucian family values) should expect mostly relatively brief introductions and interesting plays with notes that are largely left to speak for themselves.

This account of northern marionettes (Heyang-Shaanxi) has an introduction that touches on religion, ritual, politics, and gender issues but notes this repertoire is now in decline—Chen tells us that of the thirty-six companies of 1949 only three remained by 2004. Puppeteers were enduring even greater hardships during her 2009 visit. Chen's introduction focuses on history and repertoire. Some scholars trace the term for three-dimensional figures (i. e., *kuilei*) to Turkic languages' *kukla*, which might imply a source of three-dimensional figures in central Asian cultures. Other Chinese scholars see *nuo* (mask rituals) or ancient tomb figurines as antecedents. In the Song period (960-1279), marionettes were used "mainly to entertain the gods and exorcise evil spirits" (p. 11), but little of this remains in the north. Chen maintains puppetry was higher status than actors' theatre, especially in Heyang. She gives stories of puppet authors who passed the Confucian exam (*jinshi*) or were magistrates. Learning is also a trait that was associated with the glove puppetry of the South (i. e. Fujian's *budaixi*), but in that area we get stories of puppetry becoming the trade for scholars who flunked exams but later found fortune "in the palm of the hand." Hence the marionette tradition of Heyang was seen as higher status than many of China's traditional performing arts. Due to disruptions during the Cultural Revolution, and now with modernization and new media, Chen had difficulty getting complete scripts, but with the help of local experts has pulled together representative works of different genres.

Chen begins translations with a set of "Post-Midnight Skits" or comic excerpts from these plays, presented traditionally late at night after prudes have turned homeward. For example, *Baldy's Wedding Night* has a bridal couple disrobing to find each other hairless. Since "bald" and penis are associated, their dialogue is full of innuendo. Their battle of the sexes provides foreplay for consummation and acceptance of the spouse "as is" at the end of the play. Chen points out the persistence of comic characters and argues the saucy women score more points than their male counterparts in these witty works.

Three plays of "Historical Fiction" embroil the reader in a world of weak/evil rulers, upright military men banished to ward off barbarians, and evil court ministers plotting the heroic family's ruin at home. Confucian mothers command their dutiful sons to bind themselves for slaughter



rather than rebel. Barbarian princesses are kinder to Chinese heroes and help them, while muddle headed emperors allow their persecution. In one play, *Empress Lu Usurps the Throne*, we have the dragon lady personified: the eponymous empress (r. 241-180 BCE) murders her way toward the throne. Chen notes that the historical woman was more complex than the barbarous lady we see in the script. With dismembering, smashing, and punishing involved, we can see how puppets could trump actors for staging. Heroes die, children cry, but the arc of the story is toward justice. *Short Version of River Yang* has an added theme of reincarnation as Lord Guan (a hero who is worshiped as the god of puppetry) releases other heroes who like himself are part of the epic *Tale of Three Kingdoms* back into eternity.

Two "Romance" plays end the volume, allowing more sympathetic scope to young female characters. In *White Undershirt* a bright young lady attempts suicide, believing her impoverished fiancé has absconded with her jewelry rather than use the riches to marry her when her parents cancel the wedding because his family is impoverished. A clever judge sees through the misunderstanding. *Pavilion of the Immortals in Exile* has two spritely heroines who save themselves from attackers and pick their own spouses. Language is rich in the latter script: this author was both poetic and learned. Each play is an inscape into Chinese traditional theatre plots.

Collector Yang Fei and his family facilitated Chen's Heyang research. This local culture warrior worked to preserve China's intangible cultural heritage. He gave Chen ingress to important local material and now she shares it with us too.

— review by Kathy Foley, UCSC

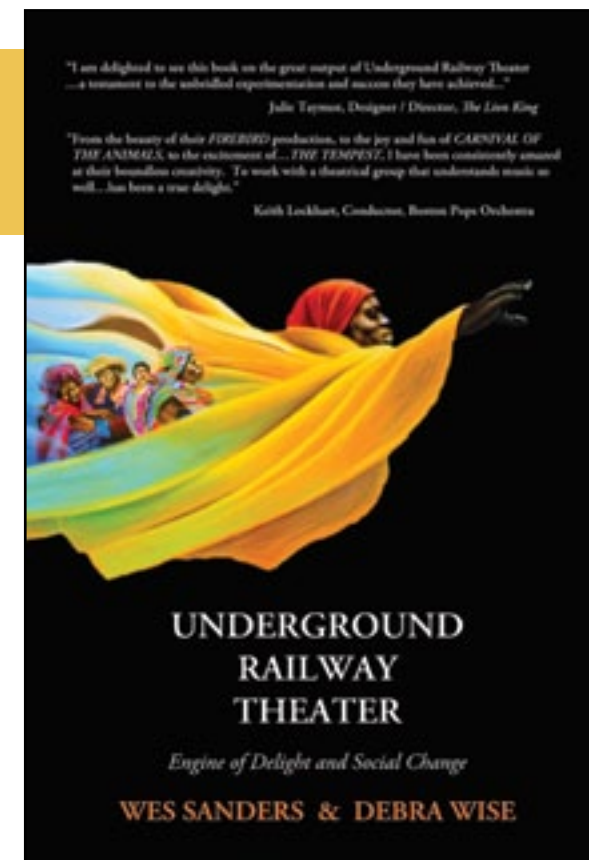
Underground Railway Theater: Engine Of Delight And Social Change

Wes Sanders and Debra Wise
 Copyright URT History Project, Inc. 2017
 Smashwords Edition ISBN 9781370222414

Having admired several productions by The Underground Railway Theater (URT), I enthusiastically explored the history and development of the company as documented by co-founders Wes Sanders and Debra Wise. Their commitment to racial diversity and social equality expressed by the phrase Underground Railway motivated their choice of name. Their engine delighted thousands and transported them happily along towards social change. The choice of e-book format with hyper-links to video clips of referenced performances brings the history of URT to life. Links to relative resource material add depth to understanding the progressive development of their creative process. Sanders' humorous prose, including similes, metaphors and witty comments, keeps the detailed chronicle from becoming overwhelming. He makes light of lessons learned through mistakes, poking fun – particularly at himself.

The company enlisted communities and colleagues to help choose themes to develop and solicited their direct involvement in resulting productions. One of my favorite URT productions, *Sanctuary*, dealt with the irony of African-American hostility to Latin American immigrants. Local church choirs provided the choral music. I have poignant memories of a giant Harriet Tubman puppet suspended over the scenery that transformed into a maternal Mayan.

URT began as a touring theater and after 25 years transitioned to a company in residence at Central Square Theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The URT development began with the co-founders, Wes Sanders and Debra Wise, taking part in an experimental ensemble under the tutelage of Herbert Blau at Oberlin College in 1974. Professor Sanders led the actors, including students Debra Wise, Julie Taymor and Bill Irwin, in an improvisational collaborative process. After that experience, Sanders decided to equalize input of all participants rather than following only one vision, adding a writer to the mix. Concern for social change lead Sanders and Wise to immerse themselves in German to better experience Brecht in Berlin. There they became acquainted with significant puppeteers Peter and Benita Steinmann who applied the theory and practice of Brecht's "epic theater" to their puppetry. Returning to the USA, they participated as puppeteers in Julie Taymor's production of *The Haggadah*



COVER ART BY DAVID FICHTER

at The Public Theater and began their own ensemble in which they explored the actor-puppet relationship. They continued experimentation with collaboration, improvisation, and audience participation. They were part of a trend that included some well-known ensembles: Jerzy Grotowski's Laboratory (poor) Theatre, the Living Theatre of Judith Malina and Julian Beck, and Peter Schumann's Bread & Puppet Theater. This method of performance development became known as "devised theatre."

From small productions including one multi-talented musician, John Lewandowski, to collaborations with the entire Boston Symphony Orchestra, the URT contributed to the evolution of "devised theatre" and the actor-puppet relationship. This e-book enriches an understanding of the process for practitioners, historians and enthusiasts alike. URT productions always delight, but my favorites are those that reaffirm the concept that theatre can also inspire social change.

—review by Nancy Lohman Staub

Nancy Lohman Staub is a longtime consultant for UNIMA-USA.

A New Documentary Series

Títeres: en el Caribe Hispano:
Cuba (1), Dominican Republic (2), and Puerto Rico (3)
 (45 min each). Dir. Manuel Morán, Kristian Otero. NY:
 Manuel Morán Group; SEA. 2016-2017

Understanding puppetry heritage requires oral interviews, archival and newspaper research, and contextualizing places, faces, spaces. Manuel Morán follows dense histories in his and Kristian Otero's three episodes on Caribbean puppetry. Viewers walk away feeling that, were they to visit any island, they would know what happened. Stories highlight different trajectories—Marxist Cuba, Latin-impacted Dominican Republic, and American-inflected Puerto Rico.

Cuba's cold war interface meant Marxist models of "people's" puppetry (even Obratzov's company) were examples. Though smaller in size, multiple state-supported theatres developed technical training, and the child-education focus endures, giving Cuba a vibrant puppet tradition. Glove puppetry, firmly anchored to the manipulator's body and persona, is preferred. Contributions of Dora Alonso (1920-2001) and the Camejo family are noted. In the 1960s' "golden period," theatre and TV puppetry flourished. The 1970s brought persecutions with ideological and homophobic shakeups (*Parametración*). Later, an economic downturn came as the USSR dissolved, cutting earlier support. Still, a rich tradition continues to the present. Rubén Darío Salazar (whose troupe presented in 2017 for Puppeteers of America Festival) joins other important puppeteers, sharing visions of past, present, and future in this well-charted segment.

Segment two notes that contemporary Dominican Republic puppetry started in the late 1970s due to Anahilda García's energy. Influences came from Latin America: Eduardo di Mauro was an important mentor of the 1980s for Dominican puppeteers. *Gayumba*, established by Manuel Chapuseaux (1976), was followed by many more companies in the 1980s. Puppetry was seen as part of the right of children to art and culture. Elvira Taveras, who founded her troupe in the 1990s, accented puppet dramaturgy (*Titiriturgia*) and Reynaldo Disla and others highlighted Dominican folklore. A government puppet theatre was developed in the 1980s, but then declined. Artists migrated to TV political satire or used puppets to teach Dominican history.



Puerto Rico's models, discussed in segment three, parallel educational puppetry that evolved in the US. Librarian/ authoress Pura Belpré began contemporary puppetry while working in New York libraries. Then, Leopoldo Santiago Lavandero of University of Puerto Rico taught from the 1940s, becoming the father of educational theatre on the island. His 1960s' touring Mini-Rural Theatre for Children (El Minitheater Infantil Rural) developed a generation of puppeteers. Americans George Latshaw (former Editor of *The Puppetry Journal*) and Bruce Chesse, as well as Peter Schumann of Bread and Puppet Theater and Spain's Angela Gasset helped train puppeteers and model directions. For example, Schumann's model for political activism has been adopted by Pedro Adorno (*Agua Sol y Sereno*) who presented at New York Puppet Fringe Festival (2018). The troupe manipulated brown paper to show the 2017 hurricane that devastated the island. New Zealander Deborah Hunt – a twenty year Puerto Rico resident – leads workshops in political activist puppetry and has trained an energetic group that uses puppetry to protest or express its ideals. Morán's film shows the wide range, from religious puppetry to Morán's own Society of the Educational Arts, Inc. (Teatro SEA).

continued from page 31

The varied stories of each island allow the viewer to understand different colonial/neo-colonial histories. In each instance, the video addresses the same sets of questions. The responses take us from beginnings (now forgotten traveling puppeteers or international companies on world tours), through puppetry in children's educational theatre or TV in the late 20th c, to the present. We get short profiles of companies and artists, clips of major productions, and festivals. Each segment ends with puppeteers expressing their dreams for the future.

The core is interviews with the main figures of each puppetry tradition. Presenters are a lively group. One sometimes hears notes of nostalgia (for the energy of youth and support that government or allowed). Changes had diminished the activity in most places. But we also get the visions of emerging groups. Younger puppeteers, designers, directors, dramaturgs acknowledge the legacy of their elders/teachers (who are sometimes their own parents). We get the enthusiasm of this next generation, but it seems their spaces to perform and fiscal resources are often constrained. Puppetry for most is a part-time job. But the use of puppetry for artistic, educational, and political expression is continuing.

These films grow, in part, from Morán's Ph.D. dissertation, *The Development of Teatro Escolar* (NYU, 2005), on the educational puppetry legacy of Leopoldo Santiago Lavandero. The Puerto Rican segment even has footage of Morán interviewing this now dead master teacher. Perhaps this footage was a part of his earlier research. Santiago Lavandero was a visionary who made puppetry a tool. He inspired a generation to use puppetry as their art. The Puerto Rican documentary shows Morán and his Teatro SEA designer José López, both of whom watched Lavandero's shows in their schooldays. They now further the art themselves.

The films note the impact of UNIMA and documents the local heritage of the arts. Would for every country in UNIMA we had a similar puppetry documentary. Important parts of puppet history with links that crisscross the hemisphere and span the globe are here. Each episode allows us time with articulate practitioners and theorists who share their wisdom, disappointments, and dreams for puppetry arts.

—review by Kathy Foley

Kathy Foley is a professor at University of California Santa Cruz and current president of UNIMA-USA.

JC: If we are unable to create a generation of artists to continue what we have started, then that is how it will be.

EF: I don't want to end on a pessimistic note and, of course, since your project has come into the spotlight, both researchers and puppeteers have tried to give visibility to your work and continue exploring this tradition. What does Jesús Caballero have in store for us in the future? How do you plan to continue sharing this cultural heritage?

JC: At this time, I'm working on the text of *La selva sin amor* [The Lovelorn Forest], by Lope de Vega (performed in Madrid in 1627), and the construction of an operatic stage for puppets as well as creating a whole new set of puppets, with the goal of premiering this opera in 2020. I'm also looking for European partners to set in motion a creative cultural project on the presence of the *máquina real* in other countries, such as Italy, Belgium and Portugal.

ESTHER FERNÁNDEZ is Assistant Professor at Rice University. Her research principally attended to eroticism and the Spanish *comedia*; visual and material culture; and performance analysis of classical theater's most contemporary adaptations. She is currently working on a monograph on animated props in ceremonial and theatrical contexts, where material representations of religious and "non-religious" worlds took place in pre-modern Iberia and their contemporary legacies.

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KHEIMEH SHAB BAZI

by Neda Izadi

Iran is an ancient country with a vast cultural heritage. We see evidence of this in the continued performances of Kheimeh Shab Bazi puppet theatre. Though it is a unique contribution to Iranian culture, it has not yet been given the recognition it deserves. It is our belief that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) should recognize Kheimeh Shab Bazi as an under-represented cultural heritage.

A DESCRIPTION OF KHEIMEH SHAB BAZI

Kheimeh Shab Bazi is a type of Iranian musical show that has been performed with marionettes or hand puppets in different parts of Iran for many years. What is the meaning of Kheimeh Shab Bazi in English? *Kheimeh* means tent, *Bazi* means show and *Shab* means night: an evening show performed in a tent outside. In my research I have also discovered that the word *Loebat Bazi* had been used instead of Kheimeh Shab Bazi in some poems. *Loebat* is an ancient word for puppet, so *Loebat Bazi* translates as “puppet show.”

The performance space of Kheimeh Shab Bazi looks like a tent. Performers assemble poles together to create a cube-like structure that is covered by a large piece of fabric to create the puppet stage within it. This stage is simply referred to as the “Kheimeh.” In this manner, the stage is portable and performers can travel rather unencumbered around the country to perform their show.



A KHEIMEH SHAB BAZI PERFORMANCE

In Esfahan, a large city in the center of Iran, Posht-e-Parde is another name for Kheimeh Shab Bazi. Translated into English, Posht means behind and Parde means curtain. This title describes the style of the performance that is usually done with hand puppets, which the performer manipulates from behind a curtain. In the city of Shiraz, in the southwest of Iran, Kheimeh Shab Bazi is titled *Jiviji* and is also performed with hand puppets. This title describes the high-pitched language of the puppets that is created by puppeteers with a *safir* (in English, a swazzle), the traditional reed noisemaker played from the back of the mouth. This unusual aspect of Iranian puppetry is used to create the voice of the trickster character Mobarak.

There are numerous parallels between puppet traditions in Iran and the Italian Commedia dell’Arte. Iranians have no idea where Persian puppet characters came from, but it seems likely that, during the Ottoman Empire’s occupation of Italian states, they saw masked Commedia dell’Arte performances and took these ideas and stock characters back to Persia where they were translated into puppet characters.

GENERAL SPECIFICATIONS OF KHEIMEH SHAB BAZI AND STOCK CHARACTERS:

Kheimeh Shab Bazi is almost always performed with marionettes or hand puppets. The height of the marionettes is usually around 20 inches. The puppets’ costumes are inspired by realistic costumes for each character. Female puppets have colorful traditional women’s costumes, like long skirts and kerchiefs. Male puppets have traditional men’s costumes, like blue or red shirts and loose black pants.

The construction of the marionettes is very simple. They do not have complicated mechanisms. Usually the puppets are carved out of wood and small pieces of leather are used for the joints. Each marionette just has three strings and a puppeteer manipulates them with a very simple control from the top of the stage.

Please read the full article at unima-USA.org/PI/index

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL



THE FIRST

International Puppet Fringe Festival NYC, held in New York City August 8-12, 2018, was the brainchild of Manuel A. Morán, CEO and Artistic Director of Teatro SEA. The ten performances featured emerging and established puppeteers from the United States and Puerto Rico, Canada, Costa Rica, and France working in a variety of styles, as well as two puppet cabarets, two film series—including Morán’s *Titeres en el Caribe Hispano: Cuba, República Dominicana, Puerto Rico*, and Heather Henson’s *Handmade Puppet Dreams*. The festival also included an exhibit of Teatro SEA figures, “artist talks,” and a symposium from UNIMA-USA.

From Canada, La Tortue Noire performed *Le Grand Oeuvre (The Great Work)*. This 20-minute object theatre piece without words by Martin Gagnon (acting onstage) and Dany Lefrançois (manipulating behind the scenes) presents a mysterious monk-alchemist who creates the impossible. Against an inky black background, tiny figures, “magical” objects, and fire appeared out of nowhere, at times evoking the creation of the world and at others a future where abuse of science leads to annihilation.

The French company Les Anges au Plafond performed *Le Cri Quotidien (The Daily Scream)*, told through manipulated newsprint. Performer Camille Trouve is a woman ostensibly reading the daily paper, as the news “comes alive.” Trouve created puppets, 3-D characters, and entire townscapes from the increasingly complex buildup of newsprint. The pop-up book format continually transformed as the news unfolds with devastating stories from the local, economic, and international pages. Newsprint was ripped and twisted into the objects, with events becoming ever more violent and horrific. Cellist Sandrine Lefebvre sonically augmented the drama in this gripping show.

Compañía La Bicicleta from Costa Rica presented *Nana Raíz*, a charming no dialogue piece for very young children by Kembly Aguilar, which equally delighted older audiences. A tired mother tries to get her active baby to sleep—action unfolded with soothing cooing, “baby talk,” and Costa Rican lullabies sung by the performer, with accompaniment composed and performed live by Jonathan Albuja. Toys “come alive” and are “performed” by the mother as she attempts to soothe her wakeful infant (a puppet baby). Toddlers in the audience were mesmerized.

New York-based Chinese Theatre Works, using shadow figures on a light table, presented *Tiger Tales*, based on Chinese folklore about a small rabbit who outsmarts the powerful tiger. Kuang-Yu Fong was principal manipulator of the well-executed, colorful images, while Stephen Kaplin was storyteller in this entertaining piece.

Drama of Works, another New York City-based company, directed by Gretchen Van Lente, presented *Sleepy Hollow*, Washington Irving’s ghost story. This was cleverly performed on a large shadow screen with hundreds of complex cut out characters and sets, while live performers cast their own shadows. A haunting musical score composed by Vivian Fung complemented the performance.

Brad Shur of Paper Heart Puppets from Poughkeepsie, New York, performed four entertaining stories collectively titled *Cardboard Explosion!* The performer’s medium was cardboard, imaginatively manipulated with audience help, to create characters and their worlds.

Red Herring Puppets from Asheville, North Carolina, offered the moving multi-media *My Grandfather’s Prayers*, based on the life of Jewish Ukrainian Cantor Izso Glickstein (1889-1947), a fourth-generation cantor, child prodigy, and

operatic tenor, as told by his granddaughter, Lisa Sturz. The audience was led through the vicissitudes as Glickstein survives pogroms and wars, tours with his music, and migrates to Boston. This highly detailed production, perhaps overlong, utilized scrolling scenery, shadow puppets, marionettes, oversized props, animation, digital compositing, a poetic text, and the moving presence of storyteller-granddaughter Sturz.

WonderSpark Puppets from Astoria, New York, presented *Fox Fables* by Chad Williams, with glove puppets, based on a combination of *Aesop's Fables* and works of 12th century storyteller Rabbi Berechiah ha-Nakdan. A fox loses his tail and, with it, his identity. The story takes on themes of bullying and its devastating impact on self-esteem and the importance of self worth for well-being.

Agua, Sol y Sereno from USA/ Puerto Rico performed, mainly in Spanish, its 45-minute production, *Corazón de Papel: A Hurricane Story*. Senior artists Pedro Adorno Irizarry and Cathy Vigo led a young cast in this passionate portrayal of survivor stories from post-Hurricane María Puerto Rico. Paper is the "heart" of the production. Large sheets of brown paper were twisted to create characters as well as show the devastation. Smaller figures were created out of papier-mâché. Like paper, human lives are fragile when Nature sweeps with hurricane force and insensitive politicians fail vulnerable survivors.



FROM THE FRENCH SHOW, *LE CRI QUOTIDIEN*, PERFORMER IS CAMILLE TROUVE



TEATRO SEA'S PRODUCTION, *SUEÑO*

Teatro SEA's own *Sueño*, a rousing Latino-Caribbean take on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with text by Norge Espinosa, was directed by Manuel Morán and performed in English and Spanish. It played outdoors to packed audiences free of charge. The show's multi-racial cast of over twenty-five created characters, fairies and beasts, as actors, puppeteers, dancers, stilt walkers, and singers, accompanied by a live orchestra playing original Afro-Caribbean music (by Manuel Calzada and Alejandro Zuleta). Performers were from several Latin American countries and Spain, as well as the USA/ Puerto Rico. Dance was by Colombian choreographer Daniel Fetecua, of the Limón Dance Company. José López

Alemán created the multi-sized puppets, including a giant Oberon and Titania needing multiple manipulators. Titania morphed into an enormous Earth goddess, body parts entering separately and coming together in a mammoth figure. Around sixty-five carnival puppets and masks, including *vejigantes* and *cabezudos*, Puerto Rican folkloric characters connoting cultural identity, resilience, and resistance, contributed to the high-energy production.

Two Puppet Cabarets – Great Small Works hosted a Spaghetti Dinner, followed by short performances by the company. The following night, the Puppetry Guild of Greater New York, with emcee Joshua Holden, presented *NYC Women of Puppetry*.



MANUEL MORAN



MY GRANDFATHER'S PRAYERS, RED HERRING PUPPETS PERFORMER IS LISA STURZ

Festival sponsors were many: The Jim Henson Foundation, UNIMA-USA, UNIMA Three Americas Commission, NYC Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment, Hudson Ferris, El Diario, Telemundo, Art Works, NYC Council Member Carlina Rivera, NYC Council Member Margaret Chin, NYC Office of Cultural Affairs, Graphitech, ConEdison Partnerships. Seven local restaurants partnered with the festival. We look forward to the return of this event in summer 2020.

– review by Karen Smith

Karen Smith is a former president of UNIMA-USA

Sources:

Teatro SEA on-line advertising materials and festival Program. Elizabeth Rosales, Associate Marketing Director of Teatro SEA (e-mail to Karen Smith).

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Puppet company websites.

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL WELCOMES SUBMISSIONS

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UNIMA-USA is happy to announce our annual scholarship of \$1,000 that will be awarded to American puppeteers to attend training work-shops abroad. The deadline for applications is December 1st for study in the following year.



For more information, go to:
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Read about past recipients such as 2018 scholarship winners, Valerie Meiss and Liz Oakley:

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VALERIE MEISS STUDIED WITH HACHIOJI KURUMA NINGYŌ, A PUPPETRY TROOP FROM JAPAN, LED BY KORYU NISHIKAWA V. KURUMA NINGYŌ.

Chicago International Puppet Festival

What happens if we think about puppetry as a dance? The Third Chicago International Puppet Festival, which took place January 17-27, 2019, provoked me to consider this. This biannual festival, which launched in 2015, offered over 100 events this year, collaborating with more than 20 institutions around the city. In addition to performances, the festival included Catapult, a program that consisted of three multiple-day sessions, each offering up-and-coming puppet artists an opportunity to participate in workshops and to attend performances, supporting these artists in advancing their work as puppeteers.

In an 1810 essay, German writer Kleist describes a conversation with a dancer about marionettes. The dancer describes the line between puppeteer and marionette as tracing “nothing less than *the path of the dancer’s soul*; and he doubted whether it could be found except by the puppeteer transposing himself into the center of gravity of the marionette; or, in other words, by *dancing*.”¹ I had read this passage before, but had focused on the idea of transposition, rather than the question of dance. However, during the festival, I found myself returning to this idea, as I observed the choreographed movements between artists, objects, and audiences around the city.

The festival included, of course, many musical pieces, from the occasional songs popping up amidst dialogue or monologue, in *How to Build a Flying Machine* by Moonbull Studio and Yael Rasooly’s *Paper Cut*, to sustained engagements between puppeteer and musician, such as found in Compagnie la Pendue’s *Tria Fata* or Plexus Polaire’s *Chambre Noire*. The last of these was especially impressive. Yngvild Aspeli animated a life-sized puppet of Valerie Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto* author and the woman who shot Andy Warhol. On her deathbed, Solanas is visited by visions of her mother, played by Aspeli. The relationship that emerged between mother and daughter, and puppet and human, was strikingly poignant, contrasted by the show’s slick stylization, featuring projections onto curtains of fringe and the energetic score of percussionist Ane Marthe Sørlien Holen.

However, it was *Pescador*, by Chilean troupe Silencio Blanco, that impressed me as a sustained dance between artists and objects onstage. If we are accustomed to thinking about puppetry as a skill of hands, Silencio Blanco goes further, offering entire bodies as useful surfaces for objects to traverse. The narrative of *Pescador* is simple – a man going out to sea to fish – but a storm comes. The artists moved the boat with their bare feet, from below, so that the audience could watch the small vessel rise and fall, turn to the side with the winds. *Pescador* struck me as a dance among the puppeteers, between

SHANK’S MARE PHOTO: AYUMI SAKAMOTO

humans and objects they moved across the stage and across one another, and between the fisherman, his boat, and the sea that the puppeteers created. Silencio Blanco researched the show through participant observation in a fishing village, as a way of telling a story about a profession both solitary and marginalized. With only one human character in the show, the troupe worked together to treat the title character with care and respect.

Comparing puppetry to a dance with objects, however, risks overlooking the way puppetry can highlight disparities in power, which drew Mariano Pensotti to incorporate puppets into his multi-media play, *Arde Brillante en los Bosques de la Noche*. Following each performance of Jeghetto’s *Just Another Lynching*, a dialogue was held to discuss this tale of racism in the South. Andy Gaukel knew puppetry was the proper medium for *Schweinehund*, his delicate play about a Frenchman deported to a concentration camp on suspicion of homosexuality, when reading the memoirs of Pierre Seel, the inspiration for the piece, who described himself as feeling like a puppet.

Whether or not the comparison to dance always worked, the festival pushed me to think about puppetry beyond my usual considerations of animation, for some shows didn’t bring objects to life. Each Saturday morning began with the Ellen Van Volkenburg Symposium at the Museum of Contemporary Art, in which artists and scholars discussed “The Puppet’s Role in Contemporary Theater” and “Puppetry: Staging the Historical and Political.” In the latter, Agnès Limbos (of Gare Centrale) described her process of choosing an object that intrigued her, studying it carefully, and building a show around it. Her collaboration with Thierry Hellin (Une Compagnie)

to create *Axis: The Importance of Human Sacrifice in the 21st Century*, was one of the most memorable and disturbing pieces in the festival, as the audience laughed at a strange, expressive couple onstage, before we gradually realized that these amusing characters were horrible people.



PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

Theater always involves a certain transfer of energy between performers and audiences. However, at least as early as 1923, with Petr Bogatyrev’s study of Czech puppetry, scholars have noted the increased interaction that often occurs between puppets and children.² In Ixex Puppetry’s *Ajijaak on Turtle Island*, actress Joan Henry led the audience in a song to guide the protagonist puppet, a young crane, on her quest to find her parents. In the meantime, *Ajijaak* encounters other animals, and from First Nations communities – Ojibwe, Ho-Chunk, Lakota, and Cherokee Nations – as she learns about the delicate balance between these species and their environment.

The festival, dispersed around the city, extended this notion of interaction not only across the proscenium but also beyond the walls of any single theater. Around the city, Gaspare Nasuto (from Italy) and Poncili Creación (from Puerto Rico) offered free performances, attracting families to see the traditional Neapolitan puppet form of Pulcinella, followed by Poncili Creación’s playful theater of masks and foam figures interacting with the audience with synth-pop accompaniment. I met Gaspare in Kazakhstan in 2013; it was a joy to watch his mastery of timing and his ability to let one hand know something that was a secret from the other, so that Pulcinella could sneak up on dog, or so that Death could sneak up on Pulcinella while he was sleeping.

We could merely call these various points of encounter “interactions,” but to describe the festival as a dance underscores the careful coordination that goes into movements between humans and nonhumans, creating a thing of beauty for spectators and an intimate relationship for the dancers. Had I watched Compagnie Non Nova’s *L’après-midi d’un foehn version 1* during the festival, I certainly would have added it to bolster my argument for puppetry as a dance, for the piece involves the enchanting choreography of plastic shopping bags, made to fly with the help of simple fans. But I had already seen this piece back in 2015, in a high school gym in Michigan. It was perfect.

– review by Meghanne Barker

Meghanne Barker is a linguistic anthropologist at the University of Chicago.



CST LAPRES BY JEAN-LUC BEAUJALUT



Yael Rasooly, *Paper Cut* PHOTO: BOAZ ZIPPOR



GARE CENTRALE, *Axis* PHOTO: ALICE PIEMME

Endnotes

¹ Kleist, Heinrich von. 1982 [1810]. “On the puppet theatre.” In *An abyss deep enough: letters of Heinrich von Kleist, with a selection of essays and anecdotes*, edited by Philip B. Miller, 211-216. New York: Dutton.

² Bogatyrev, Pyotr. 2001 [1923]. “Czech Puppet Theatre and Russian Folk Theatre.” Trans. by Michele Minnick. In *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects*, edited by John Bell, 87-104. Cambridge: MIT Press.

The 2018 Puppet International Festival

According to Michael Kelley and Alissa Mello's *Puppetry International* review, it was the Dutch puppeteers who made the biggest splash at the 17th World Festival of Puppet Theatre in Charleville-Mézières. I had the pleasure of attending the Dutch-produced Puppet International Festival in Meppel this fall, and can bear witness that there is, indeed, something special happening in the Netherlands.

A small town in the province of Drenthe, Meppel is home to the internationally renowned Henk and Ans Boerwinkel of Figuretheater Triangel, famously featured in Jim Henson's *World of Puppetry* documentary series back in 1984. Meppel hosted the 14th edition of its Puppet International Festival this past October featuring Henk himself and over 45 artist-companies, presented in the historic town center.

The legacy of Dutch puppetry was an evident part of the festival's spirit. In celebration of Henk Boerwinkel's 80th birthday, Jeroen and Laura Boerwinkel of Meppel's *Theater van de Droom* presented two new pieces, extending their family's signature style of visual poetry with elements of mask and mime. Most notably, their *Ingelijst* performance thoughtfully framed several of the mini-plays of enchanted figure animation with a mysterious human character emerging out from behind the puppet theatre to silently call forth little beings from his hat and cloak.

A number of other Dutch puppetry artists worked with an evocative style common to European puppetry that employs hybrid human-scale figures whose legs, arms, and/or some combination of both, are performed by the puppeteer's own body. Neville Tranter (Stuffed Puppet), Fred Delfgaauw, and Harriet Stroet (Duda Paiva Company) each brought particularly compelling solo performances in this strain to the festival. In *Babylon*, a touching and energetic new play about refugees, the Australian-born Tranter lent his rich, gravelly voice to an astonishing range of figures (including – notably – a principal character of color). Tranter's puppeteering beautifully communicated unutterable feelings of loss and yearning when he stopped to hold a puppet's gaze just-so in elongated moments of silence. In *Paradijsvogels*, Fred Delfgaauw acted in scenes with, inside, and around a group of hauntingly realistic memory-characters from his childhood. At one point, a widower puppet – who shared the actor's hand – slowly removed the earrings, eyelids, and other colorful relics of his departed wife's face from his own puppet-

mask, revealing the bare and plain visage of a man alone. Harriet Stroet's *Duivenstront* (Bird Shit) presented a trio of urban neighbors – all single women – their humanoid faces designed in the shapes of a bird, a rabbit, and a pig. Stroet's sudden lending of her own arm and/or legs to each character, handled with expert physicality, enhanced the semi-autobiographical feel of this play about loneliness.

Extreme innovation was also featured in the Dutch offerings, most notably by the touring musical group, BOT. In an object concert entitled *LEK*, these four musicians played with and on an assortment of strange noise-making things, fashioned from musical instruments and non-musical tools (such as a sewing machine, dentures, and several clocks). Those attached to electrical sources sometimes moved quite suddenly of their own volition, creating rhythms for the men to sing, drum, and play by in a variety of beautifully arranged, innovative compositions. The performance ended with a blending of the mechanical and organic as the audience joined the players in a feedback loop, singing the word "Ja" (yes) over and over, in a sound that reverberated from the rear of the theatre to the stage, and back again.

The festival also presented some of the best acts from elsewhere in Europe. Each biennial festival edition focuses on a different region – this year, it was Catalonia. The region was well-represented by the famous puppet master Jordi Bertran, who performed several virtuosic solo shows (particularly dazzling was his bubble-blowing marionette during the *Masters@Work* performance). Barcelona's Zero en Conducta brought two buzzed-about performances: *Eh man hé* and their exquisite mime-dance-puppetry piece, the wordless *Bridgette's Last Dance*. The Ferrés brothers, who ferried kids aged 5 to 80 in their parachute-like air balloon in *Tripula*, were so stupendously charming that I wanted to pack them in my suitcase and take them home to the States. Highlights from elsewhere in Europe included Britain's Hijinks Theatre (in association with Blind Summit), presenting the festival favorite *Meet Fred*, and Plexus Polaire (the company of Franco-Norwegian puppeteer Yngvild Aspeli), who treated us to an hour with a lusty clairvoyant crone in *Opera Opaque*.

Some shorter performances were offered in groups of three at different locations as ambulatory "Routes." Particularly enjoyable was the "Hapas-Route," a site-specific tour of food-themed puppet shows with samplings of local cuisine. I found the middle performance, staged in



JORDI BERTRAN PERFORMING PHOTO: JAQUELINE DAMMING



HENK BOERWINKEL IN MASTERS@WORK PHOTO: ROBIN OLINGA

what appeared (at first glance) to be a food truck, particularly surprising and delightful. As we approached the town square, the truck revealed itself to be a doll-butchery, run by the blood-splattered Belgian duo of Pikz Palace company performing the interactive *Boucherie Bacul*. The couple greeted us as customers, and commenced lighthearted, earnest demonstrations on how to get the best cuts of meat from various stuffed animals (old, used, and no longer loved – we were reassured). They went on to skin a stuffed Bert [of "Bert and Ernie" fame, Ed.], pull the legs off of several Barbies, and butcher all manner of dolls and stuffies, expertly packaged and offered to us with recipes, or for immediate tasting. Recalling artists like Paul Zaloom with their comically irreverent use of objects, *Boucherie Bacul* was one of the most interesting, ironic exercises in material performance I'd seen at the festival (and certainly among the funniest).

The puppet masters of tomorrow had a place at the festival with "10 Containers, and 10 Young Makers." For the duration of the festival, each artist/company inhabited one of a semi-circle of refurbished rectangular sea shipping containers in the field behind Meppel's Ogterop Theatre (the festival's well-appointed hub). The experience of filing into these metal cubbies was itself a thrill, and the work was promising, ranging from innovative shadow play (Joy Slaats) to Hugo & Ines - like body puppetry (Smoespot Theatre), to theatre in the palm of an audience member's hand (Trunk Puppeteers).

The festival also featured puppet-themed films, seminars, talks, and workshops. Leaders and Councilors from NVP-UNIMA presented lectures and symposia, with a particular focus on applied puppetry. NVP-UNIMA Councilors Ron Holst and Frans Hakkemars (along with his partner Joanne Oussoren), Alexander Bauwens (Chairman), and Anke van Vliet (Secretary) were particularly helpful in taking time to talk with me and bring me materials (including several issues of their impressive quarterly magazine, *De wereld van het poppenspel*).

There is much to look forward to with the Puppet International Festival in the future. In addition to the aforementioned performers, Tristan Vogt (Thalias Kompagnons) of Germany presented his exquisitely masterful *Kasper in Teufels Küche* at this 2018 edition – and I expect the most talented of his fellow countrymen/women will join the Deutschland-themed festival in 2020.

– review by Colette Searls

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PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

More from the 2018 Puppet International Festival in Meppel



BOT PERFORMING LEK PHOTO: ROBIN OLINGA



PLEXUS POLAIRE PHOTO: ROBIN OLINGA



HARRIET STROET
PHOTO: JAQUELINE DAMMING



TONEELGROEP DAPPER PHOTO: ROBIN OLINGA