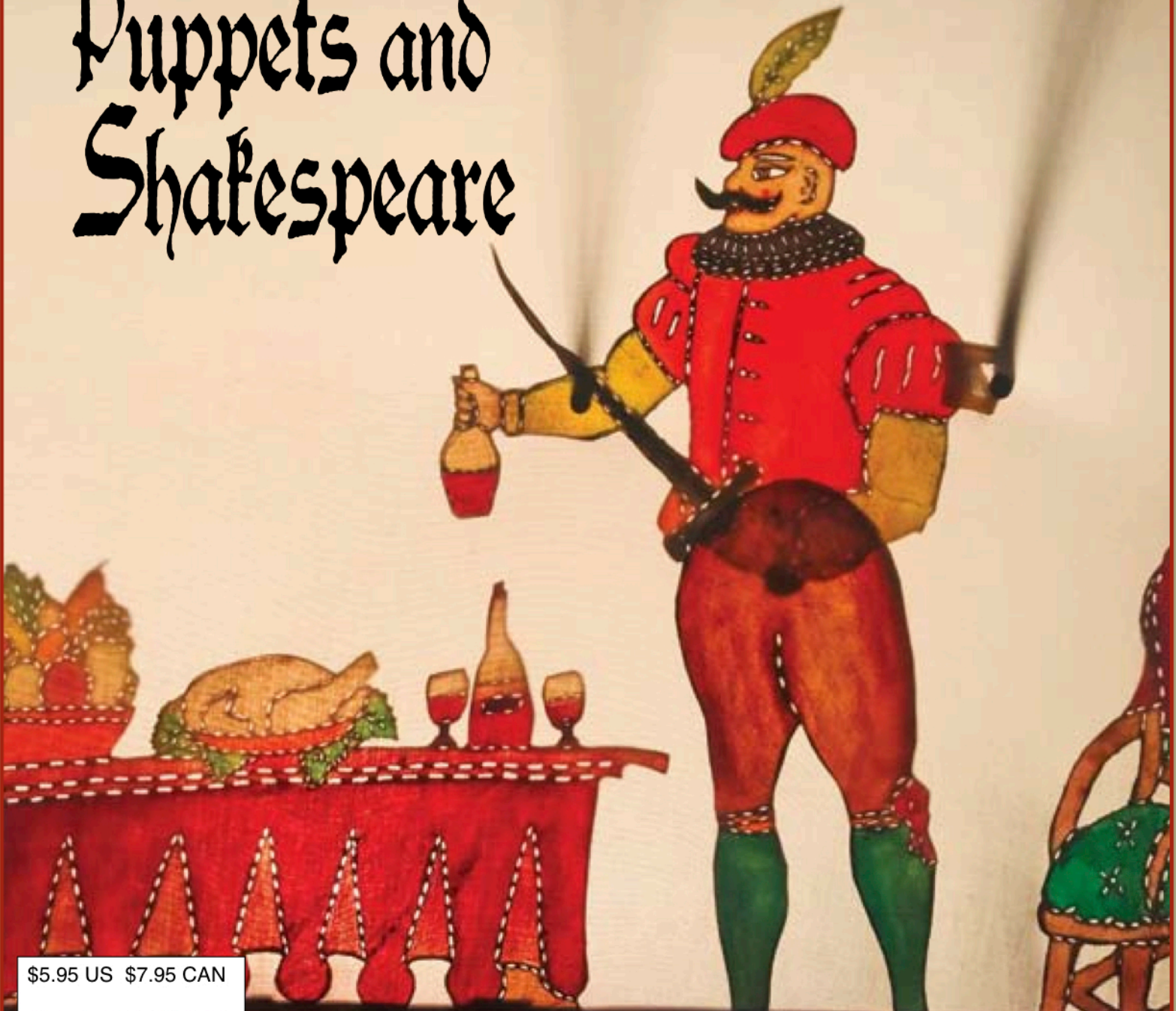


SPRING and SUMMER 2020 Issue #47

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

Puppets and Shakespeare



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The Editor dips his quill

Puppetry International Spans the Globe*

Yes, the long-awaited "Puppets and Shakespeare" issue is here at last. We'd begun work on it about five years ago when the British UNIMA publication beat us to the punch. Having put it

off until tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, our time has come at last to share news of midsummer nights and tragic loves, tempests and tyrants, poisons and potions, performed to great acclaim by figures small as a thumb or big as a house.

Shakespeare wrote thirty-seven plays, and it is remarkable that the overwhelming majority of productions done with puppets, or in a visual theater style, are *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. We are not quoting a scientific study, and of course we are generalizing: We've seen a riotous hand puppet version of *Romeo and Juliet* from South America, and in this issue Davis Robinson recalls an *Antony and Cleopatra* that he directed using puppets. Also, Paul Vincent Davis remembers the years in which he and Carol Fijan worked on scenes from Shakespeare including comic scenes from *The Taming of the Shrew* and several bits from *Richard III*, but by and large it is the "big four" that continue to provide inspiration to puppet companies. We suppose that we'll now be hearing from troupes around the globe about their celebrated puppet productions of *Pericles* or *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and, frankly, I hope we do.

On offer here is Lawrence Switzky's appreciation of Barry Purves's *Next*. This is a remarkable short animated film in which Shakespeare himself acts out all 37 of his plays as a series of silent, 7-second actions. We'll have a link on our web site or you can search for [Purves *Next*] on YouTube.

Peter Schumann produces a *Hamlet* spectacle with a large cast and even larger puppets, while Ayhan Hülagü retools Hamlet in the style of the Turkish Karagöz shadow theater. Manuel Morán takes us through the process of Latinizing Shakespeare for his production of *Sueño*, based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. All of which goes to show that Shakespeare, whose too, too solid flesh resolved itself into a dew more than four centuries ago, remains the most adaptable and popular playwright the world has ever known.

Mind you, this is not the first time we've covered Shakespeare performed with puppets. In our very first issue we had an interview with Fred Curchack, well-known deviser of solo shows, including his takes on *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Now, 25 years later, he is back for a reprise, with an update on his work with the Bard.

In issue #4, we ran an article on famed Canadian Director Robert LePage. Among other things, he talked about his *Hamlet*, in which actors were suspended from cables and only able to express themselves through the musculature of their backs.

**The Globe Theatre, that is*



Issue #8 featured our review of Jon Ludwig's *Wrestling Macbeth*, a brilliant re-imagining of the Scottish play as a night of pro wrestling. Issue #21 covered Tiny Ninja Shakespeare—a one-man operation that performs *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* with little ninja figures acquired from a gumball-type vending machine. Issue #26 featured two very different *Tempests*: one performed on a shadow screen in the Balinese wayang kulit tradition, the other a large cast, international collaboration performed at NYC's La Mama. #33 brought a review of yet another *Tempest*: an intimate reworking called *The Feast*, a collaboration between Redmoon and the Chicago Shakespeare Theatre.

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In Issue #42, our review of Québec's *Festival international des arts de la marionnette* (FIAMS) featured two productions by Shakespeare: *Macbeth Muet* (*Silent Macbeth*) by La Fille du laitier, a bloody tale performed with many objects by two actors who end up splattered with both raw eggs and vast amounts of stage blood (at once hilarious and horrifying); and Pier Porcheron's Hamletic variation *Il y a quelque chose de pourri* (*There is Something Rotten*)—a breathtaking display of fast-paced comedic acting and object puppetry.

Finally, in issue #43, Jieun Lee reviewed *Hamlet Cantabile*, written and directed by Yo-seop Bae. It renders the audience witnesses to, if not participants in, a Korean shamanistic ceremony, which bridges the world of stage and that of the audience.*

—Andrew Periale



* "Oh dear," thou cryest, "How ever shall we access all those backissues to which the editor doth refer?" But be thou of cheerful mind, dear reader, for soon all backissues shall be online, for free. Thy membership dollars at work.

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A ROYAL MARIONETTE TOWERS OVER A MERE HUMAN PUPPETEER AND EVEN A HIGH-HATTED POINTER PUPPET IN BREAD & PUPPET'S PRODUCTION OF *TOTALLY OUT OF JOINT HAMLET*.

PHOTO: JOSEPH GRESSER

Out of Joint Hamlet

BY PETER SCHUMANN

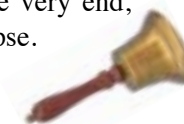
Custom-tailored to fit the newly built Greensboro Arts Center (gifted to the little town of Greensboro in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont by a philanthropist) performed by dedicated friends, Bread and Puppet geezers and neighbors young and old (8-84) made themselves available as much as they could afford for four rehearsals and one dress rehearsal with everybody attending, in April 2018 while the resident company was on tour.

The urgency of the production was rooted in the out-of-joint politics of the day that resulted in Trump's out-of-joint kingdom and needed to be compared to this classic tale of another out-of-joint kingdom. Greensboro's Stratford-upon-Avon imitation theatre replaces the sky of the original with a very high ceiling graced with several excellent catwalks that inspire giant marionettism.

Since our business as well as our no-business-at-all is puppetry, we took the cue from the catwalks to launch 30-foot cardboard giants into the above-the-heads-of-the-audience space. Puppetry traditionally mocks the legitimate theatre's life-sized, lifelike reality with its under- and oversized irreality and thereby replaces the dramatic arts life-imitation ambition with the genuinely fake cardboard life that rises from the garbage bins of our civilization like Venus from the mist of the ocean. Limited rehearsal time required truncating the play and pasting the text excerpts together willy-nilly.

King, Naked Ghost, Death and Ophelia were selected to be giants. Hamlet, his mother, Polonius, Laertes, Guildenstern and Trump are fist puppets performing in a peepshow-sized box-stage.

Besides Shakespeare, we quoted a high school textbook, Emily Dickinson and Trump. The play is organized into nine scenes, one orchestral interlude with a Hamlet soliloquy and an epilogue. The show is situated in front of a starry sky pierced by falling bodies and topped by a row of upside down baby-sized citizens that hang above it all till the very end, when they descend and collapse.



Scene 1: The Hamlet Syndrome

Alternate voices reading "To Be or Not To Be" while young and old cardboard winged puppeteers fly over the stage.

Scene 2: Naked Ghost

Fist puppet guards in small box-stage comment on the appearance of the Naked Ghost giant as it rises and collapses.

Scene 3: Death

To a concert of trumpet and vacuum cleaner, giant Death, tattooed with the "O that this too, too solid flesh would melt" soliloquy, rises, while a high school textbook interprets Hamlet's mind and a seven foot pointer-puppet singles out the appropriate lines on the body of Death.

Scene 4: The Dumb Show

Introduced by 3 girls dancing an Irish jig and then playing fiddles to accompany the clowns miming of the King's murder.

Scene 5: How to Play a Flute

With the help of flute and cloud fist puppet, Hamlet proves Guildenstern and Polonius to be fools.

Orchestral Interlude

Conducted improvised orchestra alternates with recital of Hamlet's soliloquy, "I have of late lost all my mirth."

Scene 6: Hamlet and His Mother

A fist puppet murder mystery, featuring Hamlet, his mother and Polonius who is murdered by an oversized wooden sword, followed by recital of Emily Dickinson's, "I'm nobody! Who are you?"

Scene 7: Two Realities

Hamlet's existentialist reflections alternate with Trump's (a rooster) election campaign boasts.

Scene 8: Ophelia

To the music of "Sing willow, willow, willow" and the Queen's description of Ophelia's suicide, cardboard Ophelia rises, traverses the stage and collapses into her grave.

Scene 9: The Gravediggers

Two miming clowns re-enact the grave-digger text followed by King puppet's rising and Laertes' call for uprising and crowd running wildly all over the place.

Epilogue

The Out of Joint Dance Company performs the U.S. Congress's favorite incompetence dance—a series of jerky, staccato steps and grabbing movements that pull down and discard the giant Death puppet.

The play ends with three girls singing a beautiful ancient Serbian love song high above the scene of destruction below them.

—Find the 2018 cast list on the web—

Bread & Puppet Theater's

Hamlet

by Joseph Gresser,
for the *Chronicle* 4-11-18



HAMLET DISPATCHES POLONIUS WITH A THRUST OF HIS MIGHTY SWORD AS THE QUEEN LOOKS ON.

GREENSBORO — Peter Schumann, founder and director of the Bread and Puppet Theater, has long proved himself adept at adapting his shows to the dimensions of any given performance space. He is less well known for staging plays from the canon of English theater. So it was more of a surprise to hear Mr. Schumann planned to tackle *Hamlet*, perhaps the most revered of Shakespeare's plays, than to learn he would put on his production at the new Highland Center for the Arts.

As the near capacity crowd learned Saturday evening, Mr. Schumann and his 26-member company were more than ready to meet the challenge with a ravishingly beautiful version of the classic play that uncovered its buried political subtext. Mr. Schumann used the center's tall cylindrical hall, itself based on Shakespeare's Globe Theater, to full advantage, stringing immense cardboard figures from the catwalks overhead, and using them as marionettes, controlled by the members of what was called The Bread & Puppet Friends and Neighbors String Pulling Company.

The show lived up to its official name, *Totally Out of Joint Hamlet*, a title referring to how Hamlet sees his own time, but also to Mr. Schumann's methodology. The director took apart Shakespeare's text and reassembled it to highlight the out-of-jointness of the present political moment.

Mr. Schumann, who served as conductor for the performance, was first to appear on stage, wandering out to a position at the side of the thrust stage. There he sat, for most of the show, ringing a bell to signal the start of each scene and calling its title.

The first toll of the bell called the white-clad company from the darkness to stand, spread out across the stage, under a mural-sized canvas depicting people falling head first from a starry sky.

A skewed grid of strings that fell from the theater's ceiling sliced the stage picture, much as performers carved up the traditional order of the play.

The first words delivered by the performers were "To be or not to be," from Hamlet's Act III soliloquy. Under Mr. Schumann's direction, they were spoken by individual players and groups in a kind of canon.

Solo voices occasionally overlapped or interrupted each other as they spoke the familiar words. The performers sometimes jumbled the sequence of the speech. At other moments they repeated key phrases.

The effect of the opening scene, like that of the entire performance, was to pull the audience from a comfortable evening with a familiar play and force it to hear Shakespeare's words anew.

A hand puppet theater was rolled on stage for the second scene. The tiny stage's proscenium was decorated with a selection of mouse traps, a witty reference to the play-within-a-play in Shakespeare's original, which Hamlet titles "The Mousetrap."

The first set of puppets seen on the little stage was delivered by a quartet of bare hands who related the appearance of a ghost on the ramparts of Elsinore castle and then discussed by Hamlet himself in the form of a flat cardboard hand puppet.

Death himself, depicted as a large a giant flat marionette skeleton with a cartoonish face, made his appearance early in the show. Inscribed all over Death's body was Hamlet's soliloquy beginning "O God! O God! How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this world."

PHOTOS: JOSEPH GRESSER

MacNeil, a puppeteer and member of the Highland Center staff, served as Death's herald, walking slowly behind the audience and wielding a backpack vacuum cleaner, followed by his accompanist, Ralph Denzer on trumpet.

Shakespeare would have recognized the style in which Bread and Puppet played the dumb show, intended by Hamlet to expose King Claudius' guilt in his father's murder.

The prelude of the play within a play featured puppeteers Ava Purdy and Beatrix Avery who played a violin duet followed by an Irish step dance.

Three white-masked clowns then took the stage as Eva Lander accompanied their actions on her fiddle.

The clowns used simple props to take on the identity of characters in their little play. One, for instance, pasted a cardboard crown onto his hat to assume the role of king.

Assassination was transformed into comedy when the killer uses a pair of oversized props to show how he put

poison into the king's ear. He went on to seduce the new widow with help from a bit of U.S. currency.

When the hand puppet Hamlet appeared in the next scene, the 30-foot-tall marionette of the king knelt to watch him.

Hamlet out-manuevered Rosencrantz, a fellow student from college, and the courtier Polonius, both of whom tried to get the prince to speak with his mother.

In his scene, Polonius allowed himself to be led around by the young prince as Hamlet kept changing his mind about what animal he saw in a cloud. As his superior claimed to see first a camel, then a weasel, and, finally, a whale in the cloud, the older man dutifully followed, claiming to see what Hamlet claimed to see.

Polonius perished at Hamlet's hand in a morbidly hilarious scene. The courtier, who hid behind a curtain to eavesdrop on the conversation between the queen and her son, made a noise. The suspicious prince grabbed a sword (one five or six times his height) and ran the old man through much to the audience's delight.

While most of the performance was built around the Bard's words, Mr. Schumann added some other elements to the mix.

At one point, Ms. Lander again took the stage in company with Maria Schumann and Emily Gletsos. Ms. Lander read Emily Dickinson's poem, "I'm nobody! Who are you?" followed by a song performed by Ms. Schumann and Ms. Gletsos.

The entire cast showed up on stage at another point, saying "chairs, chairs, chairs." When enough chairs were in place, the company sat down and played an improvised piece as Mr. Schumann conducted.

Even the tweets of Donald Trump, delivered in deadpan fashion by Meredith Holch, were interpolated into the show as if coming from the mouth of a puppet chicken.

The drowning of Ophelia was presented as a ballet between a large marionette and a clown, as Shakespeare's description of her discovery floating near a grove of willows was read.

For all of Hamlet's talk of suicide, it was Ophelia who actually took the fatal step, an action carefully analyzed by a pair of clown grave diggers in a later scene.

The two are very interested in the question of why a person who took her own life should be allowed a Christian burial. They investigate the issue from the point of view of theology as well as logic, but can only explain it by saying "she was a gentlewoman."

That is, the two comic characters come to the conclusion that rules, even those of the church, do not apply to those at the top of society.



A SERENE EVA LANDER PLAYS AS THREE CLOWNS ACT OUT THE MURDER OF A KING IN THE DUMB SHOW SCENE.



Mr. Schumann left the viewer with a suggestion that such a society cannot endure.

At the end of his adaptation of *Hamlet*, a crowd of ordinary people rendered in painted cardboard join the mural's falling figures and press down on the struggling clowns and king alike, pressing them to the earth.

A chorus of children standing in the musician's balcony high above the stage sang a Georgian song as the stage went black.

As so often happens in a Bread and Puppet play, the audience was startled to realize the show was done, but enthusiastically applauded when they realized it was time to recognize the performers.

Mr. Schumann was clearly pleased with his company and the show, but was uncertain whether it would be presented up the road at Bread and Puppet's farm on Route 122 in Glover.

"I'll have to cut the legs off the puppets," Mr. Schumann mused, as he thought of putting on the show at the company's home theater with its lower ceilings.

Those who missed the Greensboro performances would be well-advised to keep their eyes peeled in case Mr. Schumann figures out a way to recreate the work in a less glorious setting than the Highland Center.

JOSEPH GRESSER is a reporter for the *Chronicle*, a weekly newspaper published in Barton, Vermont. In a previous life, he spent nearly a decade making paintings of Bread and Puppet rehearsals and performances, then toured with the company for several more years.

BREAD & PUPPET



PETER SCHUMANN AND CLARE DOLAN WATCH FROM THE SIDE OF THE STAGE AS OPHELIA IS LAID TO REST.

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Next:

The Infinite Variety Show

by Lawrence Switzky

So Shakespeare dies and goes to heaven, which looks like a theatre. And Saint Peter, who resembles the great English Shakespeare director Peter Hall, is out in the audience. They both understand that this is an audition. But because Shakespeare is a puppet, he puts on a puppet show, all of his plays slimmed to a single iconic moment of around eight seconds (or 160 frames of film). He performs his complete works with a dummy, some props and some stage magic. It works; Saint Peter is won over. He says, “What fools these mortals be.” Credits.

Barry Purves’s 1989 stop-motion short, *Next*, is a nearly wordless treatise on puppetry and on Shakespeare’s theatre as twinned arts of lending animacy. It’s as though at the instant of death, Shakespeare clings to two forms, compressed and various, that endow objects and persons with life. (Film, the medium that reanimates that animation, quietly presides as a third.) *Next* advances a perverse argument for the plays as artworks that survive and flourish when they’ve been sheared of their glorious language. These compressed Shakespeares remind us how much of the drama depends

on the inter-animation of persons and things, and that language is only one means of distributing liveliness. The plays become a pageant of crowns exchanged, mirrors broken, cups of sack drunk, thrusting swords, yellow garters, masks, a ring, a handkerchief, a fake bear, a blanket that suggests a fairy lover and then the brook where Ophelia drowns. Even Saint Peter has a bell that summons Shakespeare to action.

Next was the first film that Purves wrote and directed by himself after a decade working for Aardman Animation. Commissioned by Channel Four for their *Lip Synch* series, the brief was to compose a short piece about language. Purves, inspired by the challenge of the budget (which only allowed one complex puppet) and mime Nola Rae’s *Handlet: Hamlet*, a performance told with anthropomorphic hands in expressive gloves, chose to explore body language. He endows Shakespeare’s hands with unusual expressive power, little puppets on a larger puppet. *Much Ado about Nothing* is a heated palaver between hands that stand for Beatrice and Benedick. Donning an elaborate headdress for *Antony and Cleopatra*, one of puppet-Shakespeare’s hands is made to serve as an asp that bites him/her in the breast.



Those protean, improvising hands can’t help but recall the hands we don’t see between the frames, shaping, exploring, ensouling a compact and artificial world. The spirit of makeshift flows between the trunk on the puppet stage and the puppeteers in a film studio in Bristol. In *Richard III*, puppet-Shakespeare uses a scuttling hand to enact the murderers who creep into the Tower of London to kill his nephews. In the production studio, according to the liner notes to *His Intimate Lives*, the DVD collection that contains *Next*, Purves found two blown-up condoms to represent the princes.¹ Puppet-Shakespeare conjures the two Dromios in *The Comedy of Errors* out of a clown’s nose and a mirror. In the spectacular final tableau from *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare descends from the sky, amid thunder and lightning, dressed as an eagle in the middle of a sunburst. That elaborate setting was fashioned out of a clock Purves found in the trash on the morning of the shoot.

In *Stop Motion: Passion, Process and Performance*, his witty and illuminating treatise on filmed puppetry, Purves insists again and again on the importance of “Letting a gesture read”: “The eye needs a few seconds to think about something before it is ready for the next image.”² But much of the rough magic of *Next* comes from the sheer momentum with which one play, held only for one count in every eight, injects life into the next. The onrushing continuity of motion (“Next”) structures the film. The dummy Desdemona, strangled in *Othello*, is dismembered and baked into a pie in *Titus Andronicus*, and then miraculously resurrected as one of the disappointed guests at the second banquet in *Timon of Athens*.

These casual transformations, these moments when people become things that then become people again, this animistic whirligig, evokes the sheer promiscuity with which agency circulates between human characters and the object world in Shakespeare’s plays. In a characteristic Purves *mise en*

abyme, puppets become the operators of other puppets; the dummy in the *Macbeth* scene operates a witch puppet, but the witches are themselves puppetmasters. Kenneth Gross, who has surveyed the “puppet moments” in Shakespeare’s drama, notes how frequently the plays ask us to “reflect on just how much the actors onstage, or the characters they play, control or are controlled by others, by manifest or unseen forces, invisible hands and strings.”³ This universal irony, one that applies to Shakespeare as much as to puppetry, does not allow us to forget how death will finally put a stop to the capacity to animate or be animated in turn. The Shakespeare of *Next* musters this wild spectacle as he exhausts his last puff of mortality. But that’s also not quite the end. Even in the credits, after Shakespeare has been saved and etherealized, Purves casts members of the crew (“supporting company of assorted craftsmen, bawds, spear carriers, and attendant fairies”) in roles they might play in other Shakespeare projects—Peter Quince in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Mistress Overdone in *Measure for Measure*—after they’ve cashed their meager checks and moved on to other gigs. At the beginning of his career as an independent filmmaker, Purves seizes on Shakespeare’s example to express a puppet artist’s credo: that created motion, even stop-motion, never really ceases. In *Next*, Purves gives the last word to Shakespeare; and perhaps it’s best to give the last word on this appreciation, too, to Shakespeare in his Sonnet 18: “So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,/So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.”

LAWRENCE SWITZKY is Associate Professor of English and Drama at the University of Toronto. His most recent publication is the collection *Shakespeare’s Things: Shakespearean Theatre and the Non-Human World in History, Theory, and Performance*.

¹ Barry Purves: *His Intimate Lives*. Directed by Barry Purves. Potemkine, 2008.

² Barry Purves, *Stop Motion: Passion, Process and Performance* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2008), 221.

³ Kenneth Gross, “Shakespeare’s Puppets” in *Shakespeare’s Things: Shakespearean Theatre and the Non-Human World in History, Theory, and Performance*, edited by Brett Gamboa and Lawrence Switzky (New York and London: Routledge, 2020), 176.

Shakespeare Puppeteer

Adapting *Tempest* and *Dream*

by Fred Curchack

Of my 78 original performances, five were adaptations of Shakespeare. I used many theatrical techniques, particularly puppetry and mask, to perform Shakespeare's transcendent language and also to confront the cultural assumptions and myths associated with the plays.

I frequently play with the original texts, giving the puppets free reign to make comments to each other, to the audience, or to me (the puppeteer/actor). At times the puppets speak asides in the voices of their characters, but they can also break character and speak as actors. I also alternate between playing multiple Shakespearean roles and playing the role of the actor.

Stuff As Dreams Are Made On follows a solo performer's attempts to play all the roles in *The Tempest*. At the end of Shakespeare's play, Prospero says, "I will retire me to my Milan, where every third thought shall be my grave." Having attained a depth of awareness, Prospero can renounce his "rough magic" and prepare for death.

On one level, the characters in the play can be understood as embodying various aspects of a human being. Caliban, who is concerned with food and sex, could be seen as the body, Miranda: emotion, Ariel: spirit. Prospero is the rightful ruler, a real "I," who could create a harmonious relationship between these aspects, but is living in exile while a false Duke sits on the throne. The false ruler is one's own artificially constructed personality, which obscures inner life. "Persona" means "mask" and I use masks and puppets as symbols of our divided selves, noumena/phenomena, individuality/personality.

Some consider *The Tempest* to be Shakespeare's "farewell to the theatre." As his last major work, it is a distillation of central concerns.

Why does Prospero renounce his "rough magic"? Actors are challenged to see and give up their "tics" and "tricks". In various awareness practices, one observes one's habitual reactions. The "tricks" in my play are not only the "stuff" of theatrical craft but also the "stuff of dreams," the stuff of unconscious tendencies and the play of consciousness.

Some modern interpretations make a case for *The Tempest*'s colonialist theme wherein the indigenous islanders Ariel and Caliban are enslaved by the imperialist Prospero. I consider my work to be extremely political, but Shakespeare writes on multiple levels and a merely political interpretation misses some of the subtler ideas.

Each character in the play yearns for freedom, but each one understands freedom differently. The slave Caliban screams, "Freedom! High day, freedom!" as he plans to kill his master. Ariel asks Prospero for, "My liberty." Miranda tells Ferdinand, "I'll be your servant whether you will or no." He responds that he'll be her husband "with a heart as willing as bondage e'er of freedom." In the play's final line, Prospero asks, "As you from crimes would pardoned be, let your indulgence set me free."

Touring in countries with authoritarian governments, I observed that most people saw my adaptation as a political statement. Although questions of political freedom, social justice, gender equality are there, my deepest concern, often unnoticed, is inner freedom. When Prospero says of Caliban, "this thing of darkness, I acknowledge mine," we are reminded that this shadow aspect is part of our psyche. If we aspire to freedom for all, we need to liberate ourselves from the tyranny of our own unconsciousness.

The core action in *Stuff* follows an actor who is imprisoned by acting, enslaved by all his roles/masks/puppets. He is not capable of acting with consciousness or conscience. It is the story of our everyday lives. Performing this struggle is part of my work on myself.

In addition to playing Shakespeare's characters, I also play myself, an actor named "Fred." One strategy of the play is to interrupt Shakespeare's text with dialogue between the actor and puppets and with the audience. Some of the scenes use shocking imagery to jolt the spectators out of their passivity and to provoke questions, not solely "Brechtian" political confrontations, but also questions about inner life.

PHOTOS: ALISA EYKILIS



Two examples of actions which reflect on some of the sexualized language in *The Tempest*:

I sculpted Caliban, combining motifs from two Japanese Noh demon masks, Tengu (with a phallic nose) and Hannya. In one scene, Caliban picks up the Miranda doll, attempting to rape her. He knocks off her wig, revealing her almost bald scalp. The doll/actress screams, "Get my wig, you savage deformed nincompoop." The boundary between the characters and the actors/puppets becomes confused. The attempted rape scene resumes but is again subverted by me looking up at the appalled audience and telling them, "It's a valid interpretation." Still wearing the Caliban mask, I attempt to justify myself using academic jargon: "I'm trying to create a dialectic to infuse the image with a kind of self-referential, anagogically inflected taxonomy of performance icons which in its self-reflexive hermeneutic, deconstructs the postmodern, metaphrastic metaphoresis ... I'm not sexist!"

I play Ferdinand wearing a small mustachioed doll head/mask on my forehead. The romantic encounter of Miranda and Ferdinand is subverted as their kissing leads to him sticking his hand up her dress. While



sexually violating the doll, who sits on a stool, I knock over the stool. My finger gets stuck in the doll's crotch and I violently try to shake it free, finally using the stool to pry the doll loose. The outraged doll/actress screams, "Exit Ferdinand!" I accidentally step on the cloth hanging from the mask and my face is briefly revealed before I cover it with my hand. I say a pathetic little, "Sorry" and exit behind the scrim. Audiences worldwide have howled with laughter at this scene. The doll actress/Miranda interrupts their laughter screaming, "Do you find that funny? Do you find something artistically justifiable about that?!" This usually leads to more laughter, hopefully making them reflect on their complicity in the abuse.

A 1950s doll plays the role of Miranda. I sculpted masks for Ariel, and Caliban, and for the magician Prospero, I made a white latex "death mask" of my face. I see these masks as the various aspects of a human being, sometimes co-existing harmoniously, often in conflict.

There are influences from Balinese topeng masked performance and wayang kulit shadow puppet show. In the solo form of topeng, as in my show, the masked dancer/



actor enters and exits from behind a curtain and performs various roles. Royal characters speak in classical Balinese, while clowns speak in contemporary language and improvise with the audience. As in *The Tempest* and also my adaptation, contemplation of esoteric philosophy and the sacred is woven together with political commentary and profane jokes.

In wayang kulit, the dalang puppet-master speaks in different voices and operates each puppet. The shadows include characters from scripture/ mythology, and also clowns who comment on the action. I use my own body as a puppet, holding a flashlight to project the shadows. The shadows are windows into the subconscious, evoking ancient rituals like the Eleusinian Mysteries which are said to have informed Plato's idea of the shadows that we mistake for reality. Spectators' brains are taxed with translating three-dimensional body movements into two-dimensional shadow images, while trying to interpret the images' relationship to the text. I hope this opens up complex and deepening levels of perception.

When Prospero says, "gentle breath of yours, my sails must fill, unless my project fails," for me the "sail" is the white curtain on which I project shadows. The curtain is the tabula rasa of pure awareness, consciousness, the nature of mind itself.

Toward the end of the show, I speak Shakespeare's "We are such stuff as dreams are made on" monologue while removing four layers of latex masks, finally attempting to remove my bare face. My association for this unmasking is the discarding of layers of identification and illusion that will inevitably cling at the time of death, attachments which also are obstructions to the wish to awaken in any moment of everyday life.

Ten years after creating *Stuff...*, I made *What Fools These Mortals Be*, using texts from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I was in the midst of an anguished dissolution of a 16-year marriage. I thought that *Midsummer...* would be a powerful mirror to reflect upon my personal myths, expectations, and infantile illusions about love.

My earliest childhood experience of performing was giving puppet shows in the garage. For the play, I found replicas of the Howdy Doody and Jerry Mahoney ventriloquist dummies that I had when I was little. These dummies were TV superstars in the 50s. The image of a solo actor playing with toys seemed a good vehicle for exploring Shakespeare's vision of the childish, narcissistic beliefs and expectations that we foolish mortals bring to relationship and marriage.

The dark, psycho-sexual side of Shakespeare's comedy has been depicted in many modern productions. The Greek hero/rapist Theseus has subdued Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, in battle and is now preparing to marry her. I wear a mustached doll's head mask on my forehead to play Theseus. Hippolyta is portrayed by a doll's head mounted on a small broom. Under a bridal veil, her face is black and blue from domestic abuse. Theseus says, "I wooed thee with my sword and won thy love doing thee injury..." while repeatedly thrusting his sword through the broom, and then dog-humping the broomstick. On the line "... but I will wed thee in another key ..." Theseus, magician-like, sticks his sword through the head of the doll while the Titania/actress says, "God, I hate this scene."

When Hermia runs away with her love, Lysander, they get lost in the woods. In Shakespeare's comic banter about whether he can "lie" with her, the dummy Lysander tries to date rape her but she knocks him down and yells in her thick NY accent, "You ain't getting nothin' till I got that little ring on my finger!"

In a donkey mask, I operate the Titania puppet. She says, "Bind up my lover's tongue, bring him silently." Here the repeated motif of males subduing and silencing females is inverted, while a new twist is given to the phrase, "Go screw yourself."

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

The scene where the two couples fight in the woods leads to the puppets arguing about whether Shakespeare or others actually wrote the lines that they are speaking. Hermia insists, that the "only man who could have written this arch-ironic radical feminist perspective on the re-patriarchalization of society was a woman: the Virgin Queen." This leads to a violent Punch and Judy fracas in which the dummies try to rape Helena (me wearing a doll's head/mask). In the struggle, the mask falls off and the dummies are shocked to see my face revealed and they realize that, "It's a man!"

This gender-bender, while referencing women's roles being played by Elizabethan male actors, engenders a confrontation with notions of sexual identity and violence against women. Audiences howl with laughter at this scene, although the comic representation of rape creates a cruel dialectic in which the spectators' hilarity makes them complicit.

The dummies violently attack the unmasked man while he pleads for his life. His screaming transforms into a primal birth cry, then silence, and he soberly realizes, "I'm the changeling

boy, and these are my toys, and now it's time for me to put them to bed."

A puppet lacks consciousness and conscience. It is controlled by a puppeteer. Are we mere puppets? Psychology, philosophy and religion debate whether we have free will, agency, or are we subject to forces beyond ourselves: deities, devils, spirits, planets, genes, acculturation, socialization, education, destiny, kismet, karma, fate? Is it possible for the puppet to awaken? Can we shed our masks and liberate ourselves from our puppet-ness? Shakespeare offers rare insights into this challenge.

FRED CURCHACK teaches at the University of Texas at Dallas.

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Dream of Hamlet



PHOTO: KRISTOPHER JOHNSON

A modern interpretation of Shakespeare's Hamlet

text by Ayhan Hülagü and Huseyin Sorgun, directed and performed by Ayhan Hülagü

The show's thesis is as unlikely as it is rife with comic possibility. After moving to America and settling down there, Karagöz sets up a theatre with a close friend and decides to stage Shakespeare's immortal piece of work. When the characters of *Hamlet* are reincarnated in different costumes and shapes in the style of a Karagöz performance, hilarity ensues: a colorful and robust piece of experimental theatre full of laughter, quick-witted humor and irony. In this lively show, the Anatolian puppet theatre Karagöz, a living tradition with 700 years of history, brings a modernist approach to Shakespeare's signature play by re-imagining its characters and theme in an entirely different context.



Karagöz and Hamlet, the defining cultural hallmarks of two diametrically opposed traditions, come together on the same stage in this new play, thanks to the creative storytelling and boundless imagination of Ayhan Hülagü, a promising young artist living in the U.S.

All the characters in the play have been re-designed as two-dimensional puppets. As in the traditional shadow theatre, the figures representing characters are made of the leather of camel and water buffalo. They are adapted into the play after being painted with special tools. While presenting a modern story, *Dream of Hamlet* uses all the subtleties of traditional art. What distinguishes this special occasion is the fact that the entire play is performed by a single artist. With over 30 puppets in the show, this is no small feat!

AYHAN HÜLAGÜ is a journalist, actor and puppet master, having studied with one of Turkey's last living Karagöz masters. Since moving to the US, he founded the Karagöz Theater Company in Washington, DC.



Latinizing Shakespeare

by Manuel Antonio Morán, Ph.D.

I always aspired to direct a play by William Shakespeare.

The first play I saw by the renowned Englishman was *King Lear*, and I was very impressed with the actor who played the old king. I also vividly remember the stage design: many levels created with platforms and on them, a gigantic map. After that, I gave myself the task of getting to know Shakespeare, reading and seeing all the works I could. I especially remember productions at the University of Puerto Rico in San Juan; a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by ISA students in Havana, Cuba; by the Public Theater in the open-air Delacorte Theater in Central Park, New York; and even the modern and classic productions of the Royal Shakespeare Company in London and Stratford-upon-Avon. All of these theatrical experiences nurtured that original desire, and I was certain I would direct a play by Shakespeare.

My career, my artistic work and that of my company, Teatro SEA (www.teatrosea.org) has been characterized as being dedicated to theater for children, youth, family, Latino and bilingual audiences. We produce, mostly, musical theater with a combination of actors and all kinds of puppets. Our mission is to promote development and self-esteem in children, and to disseminate, strengthen and preserve Latino culture through theater. This is why we perform in two languages (English and Spanish) and showcase original works and adaptations of "Latinized" classic stories. What is a "Latinized" classic story? The answer is simple: We take a classic text (usually very well-known) and add cultural elements of different Latin American idiosyncrasies. In our repertoire, you may find a Cinderella who loves to tango or a Pinocchio (Pino Nacho) who is a Mexican immigrant.

I decided I would celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of my company with a play by Shakespeare.

I chose *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—a fantasy that includes a variety of characters and a plurality of fantastic worlds: humans (humble artisans and aristocrats), fairies, beings from pagan mythology and animals—the same sort of characters as those used in Children's Theater. My concept was to bring to the production all the elements that define my work: Latino culture, puppets and original music converging with different spatial and stage elements. I also wanted to experiment with other scenic resources I rarely use, such as dance theater and modern dance. I wanted to tell the already-famous story in a different way, in the form of a celebration—a party. This is how I decided to set it in a carnival atmosphere in the Caribbean, and more specifically, adapting the piece to an Afro-Caribbean environment. I decided to "Latinize" the Englishman William Shakespeare as "Guillermo."

I recruited a creative team that reflected and understood this cultural reality. Productions dealing with a specific culture or ethnicity are regularly staged by creative teams that do not include people from the cultures represented. This is how monumental mistakes end up in the production and design, often promoting the stereotypes and prejudices that cause so much damage.

Norge Espinosa—poet, theater critic and one of Cuba's great contemporary playwrights—would adapt the text. I recruited two extraordinary composers: Alejandro Zuleta (Colombia) and Dr. Manuel Calzada (Puerto Rico), both with extensive knowledge of Afro-Caribbean and symphonic-classical rhythms, the combination I envisioned for this production. I invited Daniel Fetecua (Colombia), choreographer and member of the world famous José Limón Dance Company. My great collaborator for years, José López (Puerto Rico), would be puppet and stage designer, and Ingrid Hamster-Harris (Dutch-Canadian) would design the costumes of both actors and puppets.



PHOTOS: GEORGE RIVERON

The dreams of "Sueño"

The story would take place in a tropical forest, on a Caribbean island. I wanted that universe to be completely white—scenery, the props, costumes—everything as white as snow. The only exception would be the actors-puppeteers-dancers and the puppets, who would be mulatto or Black, representing the Afro-descent of the region. The final production had over 65 puppets, masks, big-heads, "vejigantes" and body puppets combined with actors, modern dancers and live music. Together they represented the story and additional dreams set in a Caribbean and Latin magical realism environment.

I would like to illustrate an example of the dreams represented in our play: this one reinterpreted for our specific adaptation. In the original piece, Oberon sends Puck to look for a magical flower, to bewitch the lovers.

OBERON: Well, go thy way. Thou shalt not from this grove

Till I torment thee of this injury.

My gentle Puck, come hither.

Fetch me that flow'r; the herb I showed thee once:

The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid

Will make a man or woman madly dote

Upon the next live creature that it sees.

Fetch me this herb.

PUCK: I'll put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes. *[Puck exits]*



In our version, Puck is going to look for the auspicious flower at the bottom of the sea, among mermaids and marine animals. In this scene, in addition to Puck (a human-sized puppet attached to the puppeteer's body and animated with head and arm rods), seven other rod puppets join him, ranging from 2' to 5' puppets: schools of fish, a manatee, an octopus, a swordfish and a shark, the magic flower and a mermaid. They all move to the rhythm of a sweet, playful and dreamy melody, in a choreography where Puck swims among the marine animals and plays with the mermaid, until he manages to get the flower she carries and even gets a tender and magical kiss from her. The kiss is the catalyst for a change in rhythm into Bomba music, the first autochthonous music of Puerto Rico, created in the sugar plantations by slaves more than 400 years ago. The scene is transformed into an explosive and sensual dance, with movements that almost lead to trance, anticipating the confusing moments that lie ahead in this comedy of errors, where in the end, love triumphs.

The cast

To represent *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, you need to have a vast cast. In our production, the characters would be puppets, reducing the number of actors required. However, my concept was to create a visual spectacle where, through dance, music and puppets, the Shakespearean text would come to life: a Latino life. Then there was the challenge of finding mulatto or Afro-Latino actors-puppeteers-dancers who were also bilingual. That's when I decided to rethink the production. The result of my reflection: two actor-readers would interpret the voices of the almost 30 characters in the story,

while the puppeteer-dancers would animate the puppets, interpreting the story via movement and dance. The result was a highly talented, inclusive and diverse cast—26 people: 2 actor-readers, 8 puppeteer-dancers, 2 stilt walkers, 2 singers and 12 musicians representing eleven Latin American countries, Ibero-Americans and African-Americans. Likewise, the creative and production team consisted of a diverse staff. This contributed an abundance of creative wealth and exchange of ideas to the process.

The puppets of "Sueño"

As I said, this production had 65 puppets. The human characters were mostly depicted with rod puppets of various sizes, ranging from 1'6" to 5' tall. There were two versions for each of the four lovers, a human-sized puppet and a small puppet. We also included puppets used during the Caribbean carnivals, giant **body puppets** 18' high and "big-heads." Oberon and Titania, our protagonist gods, are represented in several ways, each with its own big-head and another giant puppet version. Giants and big heads are a popular tradition celebrated in many festivals in Spain and Latin America. The big heads are commonly called "cabets" around Valencia, "muñecons" in Cuba.

López designed Oberon after Spain's "gigantones" or giants: rigid and tall, worked much of the time by a single puppeteer. Titania, on the other hand, is a giant puppet with many articulations in arms, torso, head and legs, requiring six puppeteers. The limbs entered as independent objects, joining to form, right in front of the spectators, a giant naked Titania, eliciting applause and a chorus of "Bravo!"



We included masks of animals, divine beings and fairies, designed in the tradition of "vejigantes," (Puerto Rico) or "diablos cojuelos," (Dominican Republic). These hail from a Spanish tradition dating back to the 17th century—demons used in processions for the purpose of terrorizing people into returning to Church. In the Caribbean, this tradition was influenced by Taíno, African and Creole customs. Since the original Shakespeare story includes animals, gods and fairies living among humans, these Caribbean carnival beings could enrich the stage with their movement and dance.

Even the hand or glove puppet tradition is integrated into the play. "Títere de cachiporra" is the popular name in Spain for glove puppets. In the fun scenes with the "mechanicals," where Bottom is the main character, I decided to alter the scene order and open the show on a tableau with glove puppets. The tableau, supported by two stilt walkers, arrives in a parade of actors, dancers and musicians.: Lucrecia Novoa (Chile), Chris Williams (USA), Keith Sarri (USA), Daisy Payero (Dominican Republic), Edward Cardenales and Luis Villafañe, both from Puerto Rico.

Materials, storms and shipwrecks

The original idea to create this "army" of puppets, of many sizes and styles, was to use regular corrugated cardboard. Many mistakenly think that the Caribbean is a simple and poor region or ethnic group, however, it accomplishes much and expresses itself culturally achieving the extraordinary, the sublime. That analogy made a lot of sense to me and was part of what I wanted to express. We also chose corrugated cardboard because we wanted the puppets to be light and textured. But the pieces could not be made of fragile materials, due to the possibility of inclement weather during a show. We decided to give the cardboard pieces a liquid plastic bath, a technique we had not used before, but that would help make the cardboard more durable. However, we realized that not all pieces would be achieved because of time and budget constraints. We decided then to use foam rubber, a material José dominates almost perfectly and manages quite quickly. The final product had its own specific beauty and was applauded, but it was not what I had visualized; I was never satisfied with the final result.

The presentations

The piece premiered with great success in the summer of 2015, outdoors, in the parking lot where SEA Theatre, is located in Lower Manhattan. Thousands of people attended and the reviews were highly favorable. The production won 14 awards from the Asociación de Cronistas de Espectáculos (ACE), the Hispanic Organization of Latin Actors (HOLA) and the Asociación de Artistas Independientes (ATI).



Within a few months, the production was selected to be part of the 51st International Theater Festival of Puerto Rico. The festival was going to be dedicated to the celebration of our company's 30th anniversary and would pay tribute to my career. We traveled from New York and were fortunate to have actors from the Island and the Puerto Rico Philharmonic Orchestra join us. Thousands of spectators accompanied us in the three shows (offered free of charge).

On our return to New York, the shipping company lost two of the five giant boxes transporting the production. Unfortunately, these boxes contained 65% of the puppets. Lost, nobody knows where. I prefer to think that, as they came by boat, my puppets are celebrating a similar carnival somewhere in those beautiful waters.

Three years later, on the premiere of our inaugural edition of the *International Puppet Fringe Festival of New York*, we took *Sueño* to the stage once again with puppets of cardboard and liquid plastic, as originally conceived. This time, I was very pleased.

MANUEL ANTONIO MORÁN-MARTÍNEZ (San Juan, Puerto Rico), former President of UNIMA-USA, is currently Vice-President of UNIMA (Union Internationale de la Marionnette), where he also chairs the Three Americas Commission. More than 35 years ago, Morán founded SEA, Society of the Educational Arts, Inc. www.teatrosea.org

Performing Shakespeare as Puppet Theater

by Paul Vincent Davis

Performing works by Shakespeare, or other classic playwrights of former times, is a frequent and strong desire and an amazing challenge to skilled puppet theater producers and performers. Shakespeare's plays were written to be performed by well-trained and professional actors. Even the young boys playing the women's roles were superbly trained.

The prologue to Shakespeare's tragedy *Henry VIII* begins with the opening line: "I come no more to make you laugh." The line suggests that the Prologue speaker has been on stage doing something humorous prior to the beginning of the play, but that is not included or even mentioned in the script. It is a seemingly out of place line to our more modern ears. The actors, in Shakespeare's time, did perform songs, dances or other variety and comic pieces to entertain the public as the audience came into the theater waiting for the play to begin and waiting for the late arrival of the nobility to take their places in the more central seating with the best view. In later times, when women were included as actors, it was

still in the classic tradition to have the actors and actresses perform variety acts before the plays began. These variety acts were eliminated during the Victorian age and Shakespeare was often rewritten to eliminate what they felt was cruel. *Romeo and Juliet* did not die in rewritten 17th and 18th Century variations of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Many theater companies today, performing Shakespeare, especially the comedies, may still offer variety acts prior to the production. Because these acts are theatrical, they must appeal to contemporary audiences and might "suggest" antiquity, but are often done to entertain contemporary audiences, rather than to be an imitation of times long past. What one decides to present is now a more personal choice.

A solo performance by an English puppeteer who once appeared at the Puppet Showplace Theater, used shadow puppets with a carefully edited and well-performed version of "*Henry V*." Not only was the acting and puppetry extremely well done, it was also inventive in using shadows that allowed for many special effects behind the action to enhance the play visually.

In the final battle scene, the puppeteer, using an overhead projector, dropped a bit of red dye into a pan of water. Projected on the screen behind the shadow figures, that bit of red coloring spreading out on the shadow screen, symbolized the spilling of blood in the ferocious battle, wonderfully enhancing the sense of a battle with much loss of life.

Shakespeare's plays have been done as ballet with no words to tell the story, but with magnificent dancers performing and expressing the emotions of the scene through designed and practiced movement.

His plays have been performed as Operas for singers to display their fine vocal talents. Where Shakespeare's lines and meter are not appropriate for Operatic musical language, the plays are changed to fit the art form in which they are performed.

When Carol Fijan and I were discussing our early thoughts of doing Shakespeare with puppets, as a National Theater of Puppetry Arts production, there was much talk, argument, creative, controversial and inventive thinking. We debated whether or not to create a series of short scenes, monologues and dramatic pieces rather than one full-length play or an edited and shortened version of a single play.

We decided on performing various brief scenes to contemporary American audiences. We strongly felt that our production was, in its own way, a variety show of comedy and drama, and that adding variety acts of song and dance on top of that would be far too much.

Among the pieces performed were: Lady Macbeth's Sleepwalking scene, comic scenes from *Taming of the Shrew*, *Richard III*'s opening monologue and the scene of Richard's marriage proposal to Lady Anne the day after he killed her husband and her Father-in-Law in the War of the Roses.

There is no right or wrong way to do fine puppet theater, whether abstracted from Shakespeare or any other of those grand old works by the masters. They must be performed using puppets with skill and wise intent in presenting the works as the wonderful art that they are—not by "imitating" human actors but by recreating them for the artistry of puppet theater.



Ms. Fijan and I worked on well-known speeches and short scenes rather than attempting one entire single play edited to fit our performance needs. Our final production lasted about one and a half hours including a fifteen-minute intermission. We planned to perform shorter versions for high school assembly programs—offering scenes or pieces selected from Shakespeare that would work in all situations—and our longer program, selected for adult audiences.

Among other discoveries was that Ms. Fijan and I each had some surprising and unnoticed vocal problems. In a tape recording of the two of us reading Shakespeare, we realized that Carol Fijan had a strong New York twang, and I still had a slight but definite Southern drawl in my vocal work. While our emotional acting was well accomplished, our vocal techniques did not jibe with performing Shakespeare.

Since both Ms. Fijan and I wanted to do our best in the performance, our own local accents would be out of place. We also had no intention of using a faked and phony English accent. We studied what is known in theater and film as "American Theater English," trained with professional voice teachers and learned to change our accents to a better form of correct American English in our acting and speech techniques.

When we first began working on vocal enhancement, and to keep it constant and consistent we decided to speak, even in idle conversation, in the new vocal technique. Many people and friends said we sounded phony and pretentious. After much study and constant practice, we were later told that we were both "very well spoken"—just right for performing works of Shakespeare in North America.

By then we were deeply ensconced in our working for the perfection we wanted in all of our performances. This new speaking technique improved the way we spoke in public, in private and invigorated the acting and performances in our on-going puppet theater for young audiences.

We also focused to improve our puppet manipulation and other puppet theater needs, as well as Shakespearean meanings and intents. Our acting skills were greatly enriched by all of this new and studied vocal work. Our entire production required only two performers, but we had neither time, energy, nor desire for any distractions such as turning on and off tape recorded music or sound effects (much in use in those older days), locating hand props or doing special lighting effects. We selected a young student of puppetry to work with us in those areas to prevent our being distracted from our performances.

Our production included a very short Prologue culled and heavily edited from the "*Henry V*" play. I personally felt that the brief introduction was not the right one, but, in our frantic deadlines of finishing the production on schedule, we settled on that one. It was not terrible, but, in my personal opinion, an imperfect opening for the whole production.

We used hand puppets for most comic scenes with hand-and-rod puppets for the more dramatic scenes. Strong Puppet Theater was our goal, and there were many places when dialogue "adjusting" and script "editing" had to happen. We worked hard to both change

or eliminate words or phrases to suit our needs but also to keep the iambic pentameter correct and, of course, Shakespeare's own meaning as true to form as possible.

I have also, and often, wished we had not made the puppet figures as physically realistic as they were. Our production was a fine and enriching modern puppet performance using Shakespeare's poetry for the script, and puppets in a more modern design would have suited my taste rather than our more realistic Elizabethan characters.

Great puppet theater for adults is much needed in these United States, and inventive puppet performances of works by the Old Master playwrights offers a wonderful potential for attracting adult audiences to puppet theater.

I strongly believe that those who wish to perform the works of Shakespeare (or other great writers for theater) remember that they are creating a fantastic performance of Puppet Theater using the works of those great writers, rather than doing Shakespeare, using puppets instead of human actors. Fine puppet productions performing classical theater is never easy, but can be magnificent when well done.



PAUL VINCENT DAVIS is the Artist in Residence (Emeritus) of the Puppet Showplace Theater. His work has inspired many puppeteers and has received numerous UNIMA Citations for excellence in the art of puppetry. He is the recent author of *Exploring the Art of the Puppet Theater* (Charlemagne Press).



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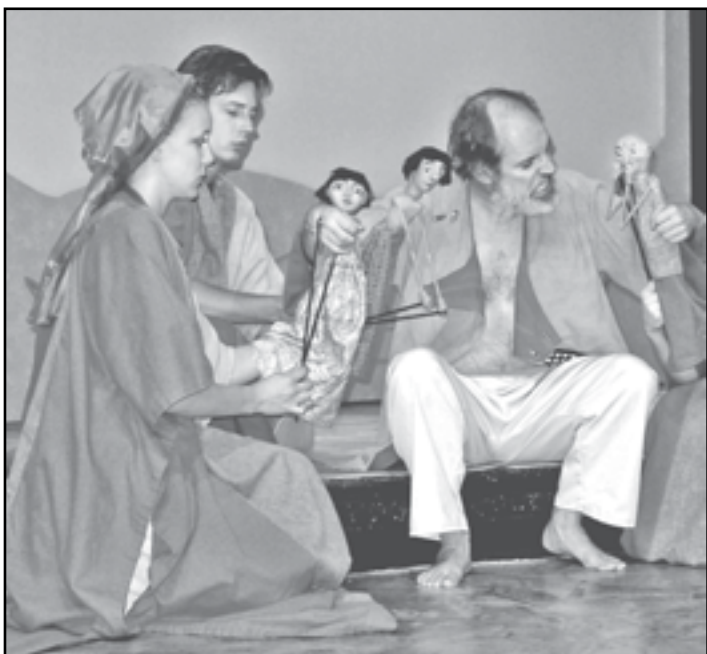
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Using Puppets in *Antony and Cleopatra*

by Davis Robinson with Libby Marcus

In 2004, I was invited to direct a production of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* for The Shakespeare Theater at Monmouth (now known as The Theater at Monmouth), a theater in rural Maine.

The small, summer stock company is a mix of Equity professionals, local non-union actors, and acting interns with varying degrees of skill who are cast in all four shows at the same time and often double or triple up on roles. The season is performed on a small stage at the beautiful, eclectic Cumston Hall, which also houses the administrative offices and library for the town of Monmouth. The theater operates on a repertory schedule, doing a different show almost every night once the summer season gets underway.



Since the company's founding in 1970, many of Shakespeare's more popular plays have been staged several times, but *Antony and Cleopatra* has rarely been produced. When I was asked to direct it, I read it through and could see why it was problematic for a summer's night of entertainment on a tiny stage. It is one of Shakespeare's longest plays. It has a large, confusing array of characters. There are several battle scenes, some just described, some staged. Locations jump from place to place quickly, and the story is hard to follow. And while there are a number of servants, guards, soldiers,

and subplots, the action of the play depends heavily on strong acting from Antony, Cleopatra, Enobarbus, and to a lesser extent, Caesar.

Originally I had not considered puppetry as a staging possibility. Then, while reading Enobarbus' monologue describing Antony's first meeting with Cleopatra on her barge pulled by a purple sail, the image leapt out at me as ideal for doing as a shadow play.

After consulting with puppet designer and maker Libby Marcus, it made sense to integrate rod and shadow puppets throughout the production, borrowing (very loosely) from the traditional Indonesian rod and shadow puppet forms, wayang golek and wayang kulit, because the epic sweep of the *Antony and Cleopatra* echoes the sprawling nature of the Hindu myths for which the wayang golek and kulit puppets are used. A Balinese-style shadow screen would serve as a central scenic element.

Puppetry could help to clarify the story, create a rich visual landscape, and aid the small acting company in playing several roles by putting the focus on the character archetypes and less emphasis on individual actor choices. Puppetry was a way of making what some would consider one of Shakespeare's more tedious history plays into a compelling evening of visually poetic, romantic tragedy.

The producers liked the idea, and we went through the script deciding what roles would be live actors, what roles were rod puppets, and what roles or scenes were played in silhouette. This led to a kind of hierarchy where the lowest servants, those who were beaten by the Queen, were rod puppets. The Soothsayer was a large shadow figure. And most of the battle scenes were staged on the shadow screen upstage with live actors speaking offstage or in the two onstage opera boxes that are part of the design of the theater.

The result was that the audience had a clear and visceral sense of identification with the main story line as Mark Cartier and Janis Stevens, the two excellent actors who played Antony and Cleopatra, were surrounded by a world of small-scale puppets. Shadowy oracles and distant battles played on the horizon while their love story stayed in real-world focus at all times. I remember the actress Janis looking at me doubtfully when we began rehearsals saying, "So you want me to say that to a puppet while strangling him?" But soon everyone got on board with the idea, and actors loved the flexibility of being able to do quick transitions and play multiple parts.



Once audiences knew a character as a puppet or silhouette, different actors could operate it and keep the storyline going while other actors transitioned or did costume changes. The move between real-life action and shadow play on the screen kept the audience's eyes engaged and gave them a different way of hearing the language, freed from the focus on the actor in front of them. It kept the story moving briskly. Baroque battle descriptions became easier to understand when the imagery was illustrated in real-time on a shadow screen. And the scenes that integrated the puppet world with human actors further enhanced the subliminal sense that Antony and Cleopatra were larger-than-life, mythic personalities who inhabited a world of their own desires.

The local paper, *The Morning Sentinel*, reviewed the production and said "...the company was victorious, and the workings of it clever and fascinating...What sets this dramatically apart from previous *A & C's* I have suffered through is the interesting and unusual staging. Robinson employs the traditional bare staging of Shakespeare's time and adds a dashing touch of Japanese Bunraku puppet theater, where actors arrive on stage holding

puppet characters and ancient Balinese shadow puppets dance behind screens. Robinson enhances a bare stage with a huge background screen, behind which actors voice-over the handheld characters. The result is magical and enchanting...Not enough can be said of the puppetry of Abi Van Andel. It is enchanting and delightful work. She has clearly studied her art. Libby Marcus's designs are flawless."

DAVIS ROBINSON is founder and artistic director of the Beau Jest Moving Theater, and professor of theater at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine. He is author of *The Physical Comedy Handbook* and *A Practical Guide To Ensemble Devising*. He studied in Paris with Jacques Lecoq and in the United States with Tony Montanaro at the Celebration Barn Theater, where he teaches ensemble devising, improvisation, and physical comedy, every summer.

LIBBY MARCUS earned her MFA from Goddard College and also studied at the Institute of Professional Puppetry Arts (IPPA) at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center.



Curating Shakespeare Puppets

A new exhibit at BIMP runs through June 7

I began to have an interest in William Shakespeare and puppetry in 2004 when I assisted Lyndie Wright as a puppet maker for a production of Shakespeare's narrative poem *Venus and Adonis*, co-produced by the Little Angel Theatre (LAT) and the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC). Gregory Doran, who is now RSC's artistic director, saw a Bunraku performance in Osaka and approached LAT to create a puppet show of Shakespeare's erotic poem. Before working on this show, I understood puppetry as a visual theatre medium. I was skeptical about puppets taking roles in performances in which literature is the main focus. Since then I have sought out and witnessed great puppetized Shakespeare plays, undertaken research in archives and collections in the US and Europe, edited a special issue of *Puppet Notebook* (the organ of British UNIMA) on Shakespeare and Puppetry, and curated the exhibition with the same title at the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry (February 29 to June 7, 2020).

Some might think that the pairing of the world's most important literary giant's work with an art form wrongly considered to be lowly and marginalized is not appropriate, even comical. The Shakespeare and Puppetry exhibition is intended to demonstrate how they can work together in synergy. It is well known that Shakespeare's plays lend themselves well to a wide variety of interpretations and settings and accommodate diverse aesthetic strategies and political messages. Puppets are able not only to take on the literary giant but also give his texts unique possibilities for expression that only non-human actors are capable of bearing.

In curating this exhibition I exclusively selected shows that have puppets or objects in main roles. There have been countless productions of Shakespeare and other canonical playwrights in which puppets are used for solutions of the roles that are tricky to cast, such as animals and children. Puppets are also often cast as supernatural beings because they have a magical edge over human actors. However there have been numerous puppet artists who see the capacity of puppets to take on more meaty dramatic roles. The exhibit assembles a wide variety of puppets and objects. Visitors encounter things that act Shakespeare in different forms, aesthetics, and scales in order to celebrate the diversity of modes in which Shakespeare has been embodied.

In the course of my research, I found that *Macbeth* is one of the most popular of Shakespeare's texts selected by modern and contemporary puppet artists. The exhibition presents five pairs of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Three of these are British productions. The oldest is the work of Hogarth Puppets, best known to the British public as the creators of the hit BBC children's television show, *Muffin the Mule* (1946-1954). These puppets (from a 1959 production) are traditional marionettes in form, but with sculpted heads inspired by Cubism. Lyndie Wright created puppets for The Little Angel Theatre's production of *Macbeth* (2013). All puppets in the show are anthropomorphized birds, with Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as a rooster and hen. Since 2015, a major repertoire item for Forced Entertainment, a leading contemporary theatre company in the UK, has been a series of 50-minute-long storytellings of 36 of Shakespeare's plays, using household objects as actors, under the title *Complete Works: Table Top Shakespeare*. The objects in the *Macbeth*



FROM *MACBETH*, BY TINY NINJA THEATRE (2000)

PHOTOS: A PERIALE



installment are things from workshop shelves such as glue bottles, spray paint canisters, nails, and a faucet. Macbeth is a half-filled, boiled linseed oil bottle and Lady Macbeth is a jar covered with gray paint. Puppets can bring humor to the dark Scottish play as when Tiny Ninja Theatre casts gumball machine ninja figures Mr. Smile and Mrs. Smile in the roles of the Macbeths in a 2000 production, or when puppet director Jon Ludwig transfers the action of the play to a wrestling ring in his *Wrestling Macbeth* (2000).

Hamlet, Shakespeare's best-known play, has also often been tackled by puppet artists—its psychological themes and interior drama are gauntlets thrown down to challenge the capacities of puppet artists. The exhibit includes a 1990s reworking of George Speaight's toy theater rendition of Laurence Olivier's 1948 film *Hamlet* by Great Small Works, interweaving the tragedy of the prince of Denmark with excerpts from Olivier's memoirs. Bread and Puppet's signature-style giant cardboard cut-out of Ophelia from *Totally Out of Joint Hamlet* (2018) is accompanied in the exhibition by hand puppet-size cardboard puppets and a puppet booth decorated with mousetraps.



MACBETH FROM THE LITTLE ANGEL THEATRE (2013)

A Midsummer Night's Dream and *The Tempest* are plays that often use puppets for the roles of non-human characters and the child known only as the Indian boy. In Larry Reed's shadow play, *A (Balinese) Tempest* (2005) and Fred Curchack's *What Fools These Mortals Be: Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream Re-Visioned* (1992), puppets play more complex roles, mediating human and non-human realms. Both artists have clear Asian influences. Balinese shadow puppetry colors Reed's *Tempest*: the play's remote island is

essentially Bali, with gamelan music playing an important role. The puppets in Curchack's production are modified Western dolls and store-bought puppets, but his training in Japanese Noh, Indian Kathakali, and Indonesian Topeng mask performance comes through in his performance style and movement.

The exhibition is not exhaustive. For various reasons, we were unable to include the inspiring Shakespeare plays of Handspring Puppet Company, Neville Tranter, and many others. But in presenting non-human actors of Shakespeare, the exhibit aims to reveal metaphorical substrates of the plays and cast new light on Elizabethan dramatic characters and situations. This exhibition celebrates objects as legitimate actors for dramatic literature and the capacities of Shakespeare's plays as frameworks for exploring relations among people, things, and the world.

—by Jungmin Song

JUNGMIN SONG is a performance artist and researcher who edited a special issue of "Puppet Notebook" on Shakespeare. She has taught in the fields of theater and fine arts at the University of Roehampton, University of Connecticut, and the University of Kent.



THESE PUPPETS, FROM A PRODUCTION OF *RICHARD III*, ALTHOUGH NOT PART OF THE "SHAKESPEARE AND PUPPETS" EXHIBIT, ARE IN AN ADJOINING ROOM AS PART OF THE "PAUL VINCENT DAVIS AND THE ART OF PUPPETRY" EXHIBIT.

-Editor

Finding Nemo in Vietnam

by Claudia Orenstein



Phan Tuấn-Quốc, (above) who commonly goes by Nemo, with his emblematic long black pony tail and thin build, in T-shirt and jeans, projects an unassuming presence. But don't be fooled. He is a Vietnamese puppetry maverick, continually dreaming up new schemes to make puppetry a central player in contemporary Vietnamese life. I am not talking here about the traditional Vietnamese water puppets that now garner international fame and play daily to tourists in Hanoi's National Theatre. Nemo is concerned, instead, with the creativity sparked by building and performing new kinds of puppets, especially those that engage children's imaginations and address pressing contemporary concerns. Originally part of a troupe called Baby Style, that performs muppet-style figures and comical body-puppets for young audiences, Nemo has expanded his franchise to a project that brings international artists into schools throughout the lower Mekong Delta for workshops and performances. The In and Out Peace Arts Festival, inaugurated in October of 2018, strives to be an annual event. Sometimes it even occurs more often, as when Nemo organized another edition, ostensibly for my benefit, when I visited Vietnam in January 2019.

The planning of this enormous endeavor, that Nemo seems to run single-handedly, begins with a call for international artists to apply. They must pay their own transportation to Ho Chi Min City, where the performance tour begins, but, once there, are fully

THE AUTHOR WITH STUDENTS AT THE KINDY TOWN PRESCHOOL PHOTO: SCHOOL STAFF

and generously hosted. Nemo sees the event as an opportunity to promote local Vietnamese culture and offers participants unique local dishes and takes them to historical sights, temples, and picturesque parks. Accommodations range from truly basic (mats on the floor) to lodging at a traditional historic village, where one sleeps in a sumptuous wood-framed, net-canopied bed. While the touristy aspect of the festival is lovely, the real value is the connection artists makes with each other and Vietnamese children.

Along with myself and my Hunter College student Mari Rogers (who trained with her father in Robert Rogers Puppet Company), our group included two artists from Thailand, Preechayut Chang, who goes by Art, and Dao Prakaidao Kantawong, two from Singapore, Terence Tan and his wife, of Australian background, Jodi Thiele, three young men from Cambodia, Bun Heng Soth, Sum Sothy, and Mao Kim Orn, specializing in traditional *sbeK thom* shadow puppetry, and, 王绍森 Wang Chaosen (aka Ah Sen), a master of Chinese shadow puppetry, and his assistant, who were only able to participate for the first two days. The rest of us spent a full week together, becoming close as we rehearsed, performed, and lived communally.

We visited 1-3 schools each day. These were private schools, usually dedicated to strengthening students' English language skills along with their other subjects, although the level of English comprehension was decidedly mixed, as were the ages of the kids we saw. We never knew quite what to expect until we walked into a classroom. In the end we gave workshops to kids anywhere from toddler age (including one 15-month old) to high-



SHADOW PERFORMANCE ARTISTS AT CANADA-VIETNAM KINDERGARTEN PHOTO: AUTHOR

school level. The simple paper-plate puppet workshop Mari and I had prepared, (generously suggested to us by long-time UNIMA-USA member Carol Sterling), continually morphed with each new encounter as we adjusted it to the interests of each group. Thankfully, it proved to be surprisingly flexible. Younger kids used their puppet mouths to eat each other or sing the



VIETNAMESE CHILDREN LEARN ABOUT KHMER SHADOW PUPPETS FROM BUN HENG OF THE WAT BO LEATHER SHADOW TROUPE PHOTO: FUTURE SCHOOL STAFF

alternately joyful and insufferable children's mega hit *Baby Shark*, while the older ones made their plates into unique characters with additions of glasses, hair, noses and anything else they could think of. Surprisingly, the oldest students were most deeply engaged with the chance to express themselves creatively, even in this simple way. It is exactly the dearth of opportunities for creative expression for young people that Nemo tries to address.

At every location, we also did a performance, with each team contributing around 10 minutes worth of their art. Dao and Art's piece, which combined masks, puppets, and physical theatre, was a reliable hit, the youngest kids actually falling off their seats with laughter. The *sbeK*

thom performance was a rousing event, capitalizing on the form's strong dancing and puppet battles rather than shadow projections.

At each location the school offered us delicious meals and gifts and attended to all our needs, setting up chairs, hooking up microphones, organizing building materials. Taking group photos with the teachers and the children was an essential part of every stop. These schools were joyful spaces, each with its own style and ethos. One had an organic garden that provided food for school lunches, another had rocks, shells, branches, and other natural objects set out as exploratory fare for its young charges.



PHAN TUẤN-QUỐC & MEKONGAHOOLICS WON FIRST PRIZE IN "THE ART OF RECYCLE" BY UNESCO OFFICE IN VIETNAM & COCA-COLA FOUNDATION 2018-19 WITH "SEA TURTLE PUPPET MADE FROM RECYCLED WASTE."

Another of Nemo's recent puppet intervention involved working with Mekongaholics—a Mekong-based social, not-for-profit enterprise, which promotes peace and sustainability through cultural and social collaborations and uses applied arts in emotional and creative education—

and the Board of Cu Lao Cham Sea Conservation Area to build a large sea turtle out of recycled waste. Their design won first prize in a recycled art contest sponsored by UNESCO Vietnam and the Coca-Cola Foundation in 2018. The turtle will be used for on-site performances and in educational programs on protecting marine environments. His new dream is to create a Sesame Street style project for Vietnam.

Nemo is also an avid soccer fan. Traveling around the country and abroad, dressed all in red, he cheers on the Vietnamese team. Invested in both celebrating and expanding Vietnamese culture, Nemo is a tireless organizer, singlehandedly making new inroads for puppetry in Vietnam. While official organizations and their support go primarily to Vietnam's water puppets, a wonderful and



THE VIỆT ANH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL, HER FRIENDLY STAFF, ARTISTS & VOLUNTEERS SMILE FOR THE CAMERA.

deserving art, Nemo is, on his own, creating new infrastructures to bring puppetry and storytelling to the next generation. Vietnamese puppet lovers may not have known they were looking

for Nemo, but they should be glad that Nemo has been looking for them.

CLAUDIA ORENSTEIN is a professor at Hunter College, New York City.

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[Taming of the Shrew: IV, 3]

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OF SHADOWS

Yi Cui's *Of Shadows* opens with a long take. The camera perfectly frames a Chinese shadow puppet screen that glows with warm light from behind. A discussion is overheard somewhere offscreen and then you feel the performance coming on. The music swells, colorful shadows fly in front of you, and the belting voices hit you like a blast of fresh air. This opening take rolls out long enough to have you question its length and then forget your questioning as you settle into the gratitude you feel for being able to watch a traditional Chinese shadow puppet troupe do what they do best: put on an enchanting performance.

The documentary unfolds in the style of cinéma-vérité, which avoids the talking head interview approach and heavy exposition, and instead lets you sink into the feeling of truly being there—a virtual fly on the wall. You are with the *Huanxian* shadow puppet troupe in *Gansu* province as they motorcycle up a long hill to a village gig, rehearse in their courtyards for an upcoming show, or prepare for a collaborative performance at Huanxian city's massive Shadow Theatre and Folk Festival. Cui's preference for wide shots also means that you aren't just focused on the performers or their performance, but on the rich and equally enigmatic scene that surrounds them, whether that be a lively village festival or a relaxed *yaodong* cave home where they practice. By expanding the typical doc film framing, the audience feels pulled into the entire world of shadow puppetry in Gansu, China.



Directed by Yi Cui
79 minutes / color
Mandarin / English subtitles
Icarus Films, 2019

While no theme is directly expressed, a stark juxtaposition emerges between the troupe's home life in the village and their work in the city as the film unfolds. The scenes at home are warm, relaxed, and conversational. The troupe rehearses while kids run around livestock, and wives call from the houses, and it's only here you catch a glimpse of the artists' personal impressions. The scenes in the city are focused solely on preparations for the shadow theatre festival, in which the troupe endures long rehearsal periods with other local puppeteers for an original song that they will perform to an audience of dignitaries and officials. Throughout their rehearsals, a gruff official barks orders at the troupe members, making them feel small and unseen in the mass of performers. And outside, rehearsal for the festival's opening show is also underway. Hundreds of performers move through giant scenery to celebrate the region's famous shadow puppetry to blaring music, even while the shadow puppeteers are being barked at indoors.

Snippets of the troupe's interviews are inserted here and there, but they are never included in full. Most often, Cui leaves the bulk of the interview out and gives us just the outtakes, the flubs, and the sections with terrible sound. It is in this way we catch the members truly unguarded for just a moment, unconscious of the camera and therefore just themselves - they are an optimistic crew whose livelihood is slowly fading away. While those unfamiliar with Chinese shadow puppetry's history and current struggle to remain relevant in a quickly shifting cultural and economic landscape may miss the facts of the form's predicament, the feeling of this struggle comes through with the utmost clarity. *Of Shadows* is a beautifully captured moment in the tumultuous history of Chinese shadow puppetry.

—by Annie Katsura Rollins

PhD, Concordia University, Montreal

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TRADITIONAL INDIAN PUPPETRY IN AN URBAN LANDSCAPE:

DHAATU INTERNATIONAL PUPPET FESTIVAL, BANGALORE, INDIA

While many traditional forms of Indian puppetry struggle to find new audiences within India's growing urban populations, Anupama Hoskere's puppet company, Dhaatu, meaning "roots" in Sanskrit, has successfully attracted Bangalore spectators and scoped out new ways to bring India's middle class to traditional arts. Her own work draws primarily on Karnataka's *mudalpaya* style puppets, which rely on a mix of rods and strings for manipulation. On her return to India years ago, having completed a degree in engineering in the US, Hoskere studied puppetry with local master M. R. Ranganatha Rao. From him, she—along with family and friends she roped in to round out her troupe—learned to carve wooden puppets and perform with them. She has implemented some changes to the form, adding inspiring lighting designs, creating new shows on traditional themes, and applying classical aesthetics from her *bharata natyam*, Indian classical dance training, and received many awards and accolades for her work. But among Hoskere's numerous impressive endeavors, one of her biggest accomplishments is the international puppetry festival she hosts each year in early January. I was fortunate to attend the first edition in 2015 and enjoyed the festival once more in 2019.



MAHISHAASURA, BORN AS A FIERCE BUFFALO FROM THE CURSE OF A SAGE, SETS OUT FOR BATTLE IN SRI DEVI MAHATMA FROM SRI GOPALAKRISHNA YAKSHAGANA BOMBAYATTA SANGHA.

The Dhaatu International Puppetry Festival has several important features that are now annual expectations. One is a scholarly conference. In 2015 the theme was Exploring Classical Roots and Living Traditions in Puppetry. Hoskere is committed to integrating puppetry into Indian discourses on classical performing arts in an attempt to shift the often negative view it bears as a beggar's art or unpolished folk practice. The 2019 theme was Puppets and Sets: Set Design and Lighting. It brought the discourse out of traditional paradigms to investigations in new technologies. The conference papers are published in a beautiful volume printed in time for the festival, full of lush photos and information about the performances.

Another Dhaatu tradition is the puppet parade. A lively group of those involved in the festival carry their various puppets and instruments down Bangalore's central, bustling streets, to bring public attention to the upcoming program and promote puppet arts generally. In 2015 Hoskere convinced local officials to let her and her husband, Vidyashankar Hoskere, an engineer and architect, rebuild the bus stop near their home, Dhaatu's home base, to turn it into an educational resource on Karnatakan puppetry. Its glass sides now encase beautiful puppets and a map of Karnataka with markers showing all the spots where puppetry has flourished, along with the name of each local form. Hoskere challenges festival guests to build puppet bus stops in their own communities.

The main highlight of the 3 to 4 day festival is the shows. Each year international guests are included. In 2015 Dimitri Jagenau from Beligum's Royal Peruchet Theatre and Dikushina Olga from Russia's Sumara Puppet Theatre took part. In 2019 Nadia Imperio of Italy's Under the Strings performed as did Cengiz Özek, a specialist in Karagöz shadow theatre from Turkey. Along with their Indian colleagues, international artists become part of a welcoming, temporary community, eating an abundant number of lavish Indian meals and snacks together in the tented rest area next to the JSS Auditorum hall where the performances take place. The Dhaatu company is a supremely generous host.

The unique richness of the event is its line-up of traditional Indian performers. The variety and depth of their artistry amazes. Often coming from rural areas where their practices are losing patrons, these master performers, caretakers of India's indigenous heritage, enchant a new generation of spectators. The festival draws middle-class families, a following Hoskere has spent years cultivating. Shows originally done outside adjust to the indoor proscenium stage. Most of the puppets, beautifully carved in wood, are sumptuously attired and ornamented. The 2016 festival, however, was entirely devoted to shadow forms.



DANCER DIVYA HOSKERE PERFORMS ALONGSIDE BEAUTIFUL STRING PUPPETS IN DHAATU COMPANY'S MĀLAVIKĀGNIMITRAM. PHOTOS: THE AUTHOR

All the shows are accompanied by music, usually, though not always, performed live. Tales from the Hindu Ramayana and Mahabharata epics and other traditional sources abound. In 2019 Shri T. N. Sankaranathan's Boomalatam, traditional string puppets from Tamil Nadu, performed *Vali Trumanan*, about Lord Muruga's courtship and marriage to Valli, with a theme of bhakti devotion. The Mothe Shankar team from Warangal in Andhra Pradesh, under the direction of Mahavilatha, showcased their large wooden puppetry form with *Lavakusha*, a story about Sita, King Rama's wife, and her two sons. Their strikingly painted and decorated figures are 4-5 feet tall and require enormous strength to operate from above. Panduranga Bombeyatada Tanda, a company that, like Dhaatu, is trained by Rao, performed *Mulbaagal*. The Karnataka rod and string form requires the performer to wear, on the head, a ring with strings attached to lift the weight of the puppet and control its swinging motions with the head and neck, while operating the figure's arms from a metal rod in each hand. Tripura Puppet Theatre, under the direction of Prabhitangsu Das, by contrast, used a contemporary mix of rod, shadow, and bunraku-style figures for its *Chandalika*, a tale condemning prejudices against people from "untouchable" backgrounds.

Dhaatu company always presents a number of its own plays, sumptuously realized with painted backdrops and gorgeous puppets. In 2019 they premiered *Malavikagnimitram*, based on a classical Sanskrit play by Kalidasa, in which a rivalry between two dance teachers and their disciples is a central event. In a new experiment, Divya Hoskere, Anupama's daughter, a talented *bharata natyam* dancer, performed in the show alongside the puppets and competed with a puppet dancer in the competition scene. Spoiler... the human wins. The most elaborate production the company has created, it toured the United States the following summer.

The highlight of the 2019 festival, however, had to be *Sri Devi Mahatma* from Gopalakrishna Yakshagana Gombeyata Sangha, under the direction of Ramesh Kasargud, featuring squat-figured string puppets from Karnataka. This form parallels the Yakshagana human dance-drama tradition in the puppets' style of dress, their repertoire, and their mimicry of Yakshagana dance movements. Notably, all the traditional Indian puppet shows at the festival begin with a prayer to Ganesh, the elephant-headed Hindu god, who, as "remover of all obstacles," insures a smooth presentation. Puppets carrying offerings, which include a live

flame, dance at the beginning of each presentation. Even while appreciating this Hindu practice, it is still startling to see puppets of wood and string, in flowing fabrics, surrounded by curtains, precariously toting wavering flames. But the Yakshagana Gombeyata performers take this skill to a new level with a battle sequence that features a fearsome character bearing a torch with live fire, who then sets a house aflame. While all the artists in the festival demonstrated amazing skill, the lighting and burning of the house, with the live flames lapping up against the puppet's strings, was a stand-out, startling, thrilling, and, let's face it, slightly terrifying, feat.

Dhaatu's annual puppet festival is a rich gathering of puppetry events and importantly defies the often dour predictions for traditional Indian arts through its attendance by Bangaloreans, young and old. In 2019, young puppeteers drawn from this demographic and trained by Dhaatu also performed, offering another promising path for Indian puppetry's future.

—by Claudia Orenstein
UNIMA-USA board member

FIAMS, a glorious biennial festival in Québec filled with both natural and man-made wonders



AMITIÉ (FRIENDSHIP), BY COMPAGNIE NAMA, MALI

FIAMS has been around for thirty years, and as with other glorious festivals with a track record (the “Festival Mondial” in Charleville-Mézières, “Puppets in the Green Mountains” in Putney, Vermont), this festival has been reviewed many times. Such essays usually begin with an enumeration of the natural or man-made wonders of the place, the storied hospitality of the local populace and an accounting of nearby landmarks of cultural or historical significance.

But how many times do we have to be told that Charleville-Mézières, for instance, is the birthplace of Rimbaud? For the “travel guide” version of FIAMS, I refer you to my own reviews of both the 2019 and 2017 iterations of this festival.¹

Let’s get right to the meat of the matter, the marrow, the nitty-gritty, the nuts and bolts of the true significance of FIAMS (an acronym, by the way, that stands for Festival International des Arts de la Marionnette à Saguenay). I’m talking about good administration and its efforts to promote the region’s puppetry and its puppeteers as both artists and successful businesses. They are not just mounting a festival in

Saguenay, they are developing a brand as they push the art of puppetry (and its practitioners) in new directions. The festival organizers have developed a local audience for puppetry, they have developed partnerships with government ministries, cultural organizations and businesses, and they have made sure that performers at the festival (as well as other puppet artists from Québec) are seen by journalists, festival organizers and presenters from around the globe.

To the first point—a local audience for puppetry. FIAMS began in 1989 in Jonquière, one of the several small towns that eventually grew and merged to become “Saguenay.” Children who went to the first festivals are now of an age where they are bringing their own children to see puppet shows. The festival has gradually grown to so a size where 45 companies from many countries are presenting multiple performances at many sites both indoors and out in several of Saguenay’s boroughs. These performances are supplemented by several well-curated museum and gallery exhibits as well as spontaneous “happenings.”



The audiences are large, in part because FIAMS (and other events) have fostered a culture in which art, theater and music are integral to the local psyche. This is a perfect example of the “creative economy” we keep hearing about.

I imagine it took a lot of work to get grants, sponsors and even audiences for the first iterations of FIAMS. Creating a festival like this requires vision, patience, and the willingness to put in a lot of work without any assurance of success. The effort and canny programming achieved critical mass at some point and began to draw attention from funders and collaborators. Success breeds success, and while I know that the FIAMS staff still works incredibly hard on every aspect of the festival, they are certainly helped by the reputation they’ve developed as an entity that is both culturally and economically important. Puppet companies want to be a part of FIAMS because it enhances their reputation. Funders want to have their names associated with the festival. Government ministries see the importance of FIAMS to their puppeteer constituents around the province, who gain a growing network of collaborators, increased visibility and expanded opportunities to perform both in the province and abroad.



LE CIRQUE ORPHELIN LES SAGES FOUS



EUGENIO NAVARRO AFTER PERFORMING *RUTINAS*

Finally, there is the group of invited professionals. This was my second FIAMS representing *Puppetry International* and (in addition to the many professionals from Canada) there were also journalists, festival organizers and theater center directors from Scotland, the Netherlands, France, Italy, Brazil, South Korea, Mexico, Mali, Israel, India, France, the US, Spain and China. FIAMS organizers seek grant funding well in advance of the festival to support bringing these people to the festival, and the investment is a smart one. It guarantees that articles and reviews about FIAMS will appear in foreign newspapers, theater reviews, blogsites and newsletters. Festival organizers and those programming events at puppet centers see performers they might not be able to see elsewhere, get to know them both on and off stage and form relationships that might lead to performance contracts, artistic residencies or even international collaborations. There are events co-sponsored by UNIMA and by AQM (the Association québécoise des marionnettistes). Panel discussions, roundtables and lectures promote conversations around topics that move the art form forward, and the nightly cabaret gives performers, programmers, journalists and other professionals a chance to know each other outside of the theater setting. This is true service to the field.

The strategy is not without risk. If invited guests find that the event is not well organized or that the performances are second rate, word of that will also get out to the wider world and FIAMS will stop expanding. The organizers of FIAMS, however, are more than just talented event coordinators: They are theater people. Co-directors Benoit Lagrandeur (Théâtre La Rubrique) and Dany LeFrançois (La Tortue Noire) head up an administrative team of over twenty. They know that the show must go on, and that the show needs to grab people and not let go, to astonish, delight, and leave its spectators changed.

The next FIAMS will be in July, 2021—plenty of time to plan your vacation and brush up your high school French (but don’t worry, most *Québécoises* speak more than enough English to get you to the correct theater, the darkest coffee and the best croissant). See you there!

—by Andrew Periale

Endnotes

¹ Periale, Andrew: “Saguenay: a City, a Fjord, a Festival,” *Puppetry International* #42, fall/winter 2017, p 44.

----- “FIAMS: Un festival pour tout le monde! (A Festival for Everyone!),” *The Puppetry Journal*, fall 2019, vol. 70, no. 4, p 6.

Making Marvels: Science and Splendor at the Courts of Europe

Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York City

The title of the exhibit, “Making Marvels: Science and Splendor at the Courts of Europe,” at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, doesn’t sound like it promises anything of unique interest to puppeteers. However, if you make your way past the highly ornamented ewers and game boards, the jewel-and-shell-encrusted curios, and the other expensive and sometimes gaudy wonders that European nobles kept in their courts to display not only their wealth, but their knowledge and power (enticing as these objects might be), you will find some inspiring

‘puppetesque’ treasures. First of all, as the title does say, the exhibit reveals that European courtiers from 1550-1750 had a great interest in the latest scientific discoveries, and beautifully crafted scientific and mechanical objects were prized alongside other decorative things. All kinds of Renaissance and later gadgets including telescopes, sundials, globes, planispheric astrolabes, surveying tables, encryption devices, Petrus Apianus’ *Astronomicum Caesareum* (a book with moveable disks to “demonstrate astronomical measurements”), an aeolipile (an object that creates steam and can also appear to spit fire if heated), and a portable diptych are on display. One unique large wooden object, Mechanical Paradox, the size of a small spinet piano, is purely for the purpose of demonstrating an action of physics in which a large brass cone appears to roll uphill along the sloped wooden panels on which it rests.

The simultaneous interest of the period in beauty and mechanics expressed itself in the building of clocks of every kind, and one gallery is devoted to a diversity of these, whose moving parts often go beyond clockworks to set other figures in motion. One small gold clock here is encased within a model of a chariot ridden by the Roman goddess of the hunt, Diana, her bow and arrow at the

ready. An accompanying video helpfully shows this automaton clock in motion: the heads of the two leopards pulling her chariot turn slowly as the animals rise. Diana’s eyes shift back and forth while the chariot rolls forward and, eventually, finding her mark as the chariot stops, Diana’s fingers release the bow, sending the small arrow flying.

Across the room is a Musical Automaton Clock with Spinet and Organ. The accompanying label describes this unusual object as “a combination of clock, musical instrument, and automaton” and notes that the *commedia dell’arte* figures at the top of the item spin and dance to the music and “jump on the hour.” In the display case, the elaborate mechanism that fits inside the object, to make the music, has been pulled out and placed next to the clock frame to disclose its cogs attached to a wooden frame encasing an instrument of pleated cloth folds. Again, a helpful video shows the object, fully assembled, in motion, and we can enjoy for ourselves seeing the little figures cavort to their tunes.

One highly unique piece is Magic Lantern “Zapper” Clock, which projects images painted on glass slides onto a wall. In the display case, next to the decoratively ornamented clock, which sports a huge projection lens above its clock face, lies an array of the glass slides, painted with the portraits of friends and relatives of the clock’s owner. The back of the timepiece is open so we can see where these slides can be set inside to create the projections. The museum label also tells us that “the dial itself” can be projected on a wall

ATTRIBUTED TO JUANELO TURRIANO, SPANISH, 1500–1585. THE MOVING MONK, MID-16TH CENTURY. WOOD, IRON. FIGURE: 16 . 5 . 6 IN. (40.6 . 12.7 . 15.2 CM). THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY.

PHOTO CREDIT: ARCHIVE CENTER, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION



at night making it “possible to see the time from bed.” Among some of the other interesting clocks in this room is an object called Two Spherical Clocks, which consists of two golden clock orbs held out by a sculpted hand—the hand of God—emerging from the wall. A unique feature of this style of object is that “the body of the timepiece itself serves as the weight that drives it.”

The following room takes visitors further into the period’s fascination with automatons, “mechanized figures based on the same self-moving gear systems that powered clocks.” In this room are several objects used in what seem to be fairly popular courtly drinking games. For these, an elaborately designed figure of some kind—a turtle with Neptune riding on its back, a deer, Bacchus in his chariot — has a cup cleverly incorporated into it. The automaton moves across the table to a guest who must drain the cup of wine before sending the mechanical object on to another guest. There are also table centerpieces that spout fountains of wine or water. This gallery likewise contains Friedrich von Knaus’s 1760 Miraculous Writing Machine: A small metal figure sits on top of a globe, (itself on a large marble pedestal), quill in hand. It can be programmed to write up to 107 different words onto a white paper next to it by rearranging various pegs within the works contained inside the globe. This room also houses Automaton in the Form of a Monk, a fairly well-known Spanish figure of a monk who, when set in motion,

THE DRAUGHTSMAN-WRITER, CA. 1800. BRASS, STEEL, WOOD, FIBER. 58 . 34 5/8 . 22 3/8 IN. (147.3 . 87.9 . 56.9 CM, 181437G). THE FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, PHILADELPHIA, PA.

PHOTO CREDIT: HISTORICAL AND INTERPRETIVE COLLECTIONS OF THE FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, PHILADELPHIA, PA. PHOTO BY CHARLES PENNIMAN

as the museum video shows, “beats his chest in penitence and regularly lifts his hands toward his lips,” in a gesture of kissing his rosary.

Even two-dimensional paintings here get mechanized into movement. Mechanical Painting with Scene Changes, attributed to Antoine Watteau, shows a gathering of nobles in a great hall. Their salon is decorated, in turn, with three imposing painted images of their own. A series of gears at the back of the artwork moves panels to shift and change the paintings within the painting, redecorating the nobles’ surroundings. Animated Painting of Saint-Ouen has a mechanism in the back that allows the boats and other figures in this idyllic setting to glide across the scene.

The exhibit ends with two famous androids: a 1975-2005 reproduction of the Chess Player (The Turk), the original built ca. 1769, and Henry Maillardet’s The Draughtsman-Writer

(ca. 1800). The Chess Player, promoted as a machine that could play and win chess against human opponents, was celebrated throughout the courts of Europe, but later revealed to be a hoax. The object features a bearded figure, clad in exoticized dress, set on top of a large cabinet whose doors open to reveal several gears. The video accompanying the piece here is from Raymond Bernard’s 1927 silent film, *The Chess Player*, and features an actor playing the object’s creator bringing a Hollywood facsimile of the marvel to perform at a court gathering. The Draughtsman-Writer was the inspiration for Brian Selznick’s book, *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, made into the film *Hugo* in 2011. It has a subtly painted, handsome face, but its body, except for its fleshed-out hands, is predominantly a simple metal frame. It sits at a desk, a white paper before it, writing implement in hand. It has the capability to write or sketch out three different poems and four different drawings. The museum label offers that this object made its creations “through a technology that foretold the computer.” This android, then, is both the culmination of Renaissance Europe’s enchantment with science and splendor and the gateway to our own contemporary interests and obsessions.

Puppeteers may also enjoy in this exhibit the wonderful tools on display, used to craft some of these amazing objects. Especially captivating is Leonhard Danner’s Wire Drawing Bench of the Saxon Electors, which was used for making thin wires out of various metals. It was built for Prince Practitioner Augustus, Elector of Saxony who, like some nobles, apparently, actually enjoyed trying their own hands at ornamental crafting and who, with his wife, “sought out activities...



to help improve the Saxon economy.” The long wooden bench is decorated all along its sides with images of jousting tournaments—one of Augustus’s favorite pastimes—made in marquetry or inlaid woods. Its legs are lavishly sculpted, and it appears here with all the accompanying tools and parts brought together for the exhibit from a number of different collections.

During the two-hundred-year period that the exhibit covers, the need for the wealthy and powerful to display their status and influence through objects resulted not only in lovely decorative items, but in experiments to draw science and art together, and ultimately in the attempt to bring movement and the illusion of life to inanimate matter—the work, of course, of the puppeteer.

While puppetry has often been seen as an also-ran in the great cultural movements of Europe, this exhibit demonstrates that European courtiers’ obsessions and desires led these great nobles straight to the main occupation of puppetry, animating the inanimate.

— by **Claudia Orenstein**
Scholar, dramaturg, director, actor



November 25, 2019–
March 1, 2020

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**Fie, fie! you counterfeit,
you puppet, you!**

[Midsummer Night’s Dream: III, 2]

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Puppets in the Green Mountains Festival:

Roots and Wings September 8-13, 2020



HA-ISH VEHaTEIVA



NOS VOLVIMOS BÚFALOS COMPAÑIA BANYAN DE MARIONETAS
PHOTO: DAVID STECK



THE DAY MY FATHER BECAME
A BUSH

There are two things parents should give their children: roots and wings. Roots to give them bearing and a sense of belonging, but also wings to help free them from constraints and prejudices and give them other ways to travel (or, rather, to fly). —Goethe

How does our work model the society we wish to live in and the better world we are reaching for? Sandglass acknowledges that this work is in the way we practice our art, in how we curate and present other artists, and in assembling the colleagues and partners that we know can help us achieve this goal and expand our resources. As Sandglass looks forward to the next generation of artists, community leaders, and global citizens, Goethe’s words take on a contemporary urgency, and we want to leave a foundation from which we can all build and fly.

September 8th-13th 2020, Sandglass Theater, in Vermont, is presenting the 11th biennial Puppets in the Green Mountains International Festival (PGM): Roots and Wings.

With performances for all ages as well as shows specifically for adults, the Festival will welcome artists from Kenya, Israel, Germany, Mexico, France as well as performers and other guests from around the US and Indigenous Nations. “Roots & Wings” marks our third consecutive Festival created around a social justice theme.

All venues in the Puppets in the Green Mountains festival are wheelchair-accessible. Two shows will be offered with ASL interpretation: Flushing September 10th at 7:30pm and The Day my Father Became a Bush September 12th at 11am. Sandglass welcomes people of all abilities, and strives to provide programming that is inclusive and accessible to all.

This festival is made possible, in part, with the generous support of Sandglass Theater’s funders, sponsors, board members, and volunteers. Funding is also provided by The Clowes Fund, The National Endowment for the Arts, The New England Foundation for the Arts, Puppeteers of America, and the Vermont Humanities Council.

puppetsinthegreenmountains.net

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If you don’t see it,
ASK FOR IT.



FESTIVAL MONDIAL DES THEATRES DE MARIONNETTES

CHARLEVILLE-MÉZIÈRES
ARDENNES - FRANCE

Every second year for ten days in September the Renaissance city of Charleville-Mézières in northeastern France hosts *Festival mondial des theatres de marionnettes*—*The World Festival of Puppetry*. The 2019 event was the 20th annual, and I was lucky enough to be there with my critic’s notebook. Here are a few of the highlights of the festival.

Old Trout Puppet Workshop (Canada) treated us to a mostly wordless piece called *Famous Puppet Death Scenes*. It consisted of perhaps 16 short, unrelated vignettes depicting the oh-so-tragic death of a puppet, e.g.:

- In a recurrent motif, a poor fellow at the opera is repeatedly pummeled by a huge fist, as much as he tries to avoid it;
- An innocent boy is lured into a villain’s home by a lollipop—and eats the evil old man;
- Puppets (puppets of what?) on a German game show have to choose the Ja door or Nein door—and either way, the ogre eats them;

This play skims the tragedy off life and then tosses it away—Grand Guignol meets Feydeau. Old Trout Puppet Workshop exploits puppets’ remarkable ability to trivialize. They make us superior to death, and we can laugh at it, as if today were The Day of the Dead.

La potion de reincarnation (*The Potion of Reincarnation*) is a brilliant puppet show from Jin Kwei Lo Puppetry Company (Taiwan), presented in Chinese.

In Buddhist-Taoist mythology, a soul is reborn only after meeting Old Lady Meng and drinking from her cup of forgetfulness. In this play, a woman is reincarnated three times without finding happiness.

The puppets are small, delicate hand puppets, elaborately dressed. The puppeteers dress them on stage with ritualistic, meticulous care. We can see that this is a *ceremony*.

Some scenes are spooky, heavy with shadow, and the play ends with Old Lady Meng telling the woman that if she cries, she’ll forget her life. What a mournful thought! Let no one say puppetry is just for children. This production is mystical and profound.



FAMOUS PUPPET DEATH SCENES PHOTO: JASON STANG PHOTOGRAPHY

Leyly et Majnun, produced by Baku Marionette Theatre (Azerbaijan), is an exquisite marionette opera written by the great composer Uzeyir Hajibeyli, sourcing Western and Eastern musical traditions. Its story is based on a narrative poem from the 16th century that echoes *Romeo and Juliet*.

The small marionettes are gorgeous, elaborately designed. The music, recorded, is lovely and varied, graced by a haunting solo female voice, nearly wailing in, I assume, Azerbaijani.

The seven puppeteers are integral to the presentation. They move with slow deliberateness. To call this production a show is to trivialize it—it’s a *ritual*, mystical theater: mysterious and universal.

Garage is a wordless play from Cirka Teater (Norway). It calls itself “objects theatre,” and the two mechanics we find tinkering in their garage are indeed joined on stage by a crowd of objects large and small, electrical and automatic: pulleys, levers, wheels... They’re all put industriously to work, one action triggering the next. The story concerns literally blowing a fuse and then reviving the elaborate mechanism.

Garage is fascinating to watch, complex and kinetic, a fascinating extended metaphor. It’s animated by the moment-to-moment life of the actors. Their expressive flow of emotion highlights the lifelessness of the mechanism looming about them. Objects don’t overwhelm people in this garage. Men are in control, but they don’t recognize the power of mechanics.

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

La Poussière et la Couronne (*Dust and the Crown*) is paper theater, presented by the company Yase Tamam (Iran). Its paper puppets arise animated by two puppeteers seen against the endless, backless black of the stage. The paper puppets—full figures, profiles, crowns—are connected to a grid of elastic bands on the floor, and this grid itself becomes a sort of puppet when the puppeteers raise it at the end. It’s all meticulously lit.

The story concerns ambition, murder and power, with references to *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. There’s no mistaking the recurrent phrase (*Je suis mort*) or the Shakespearean allusions such as Hamlet’s poison cup. Sometimes the puppeteers become the characters, speaking themselves.

The stage picture is eerie and expressionist, and the entire effect of *Dust and the Crown* is one of sad resignation, enhanced by the delicacy of the puppets.

Macunaima Gourmet is a large puppet show—the cast is large; the stage is large; most of the puppets are large, complex and beautiful. It comes from the company Pigmalhão escultura que mexe (Brazil). It’s poetic and political, using both puppets and human actors. This is puppet as cultural symbol.

The puppets are varied. Some are marionettes. One actor has a puppet of a man tied in front of him; another has a puppet in front of him from the waist up. The human-sized, free-standing puppets are sometimes manipulated by multiple puppeteers.

The story is based on Mário de Andrade’s 1928 novel *Macunaima*. The title character is a native, born



BAKU MARIONETTE THEATRE, LEYLY ET MAJNUN

the hero of the people in Brazilian myths. In *Macunaima Gourmet* he’s played by a large brownish puppet that has been fattened up and sold as canned meat. He’s ultimately fed to an obese puppet whose features resemble Jair Bolsonaro. But nature triumphs: The fat puppet dies from overeating and the ants, the symbol of transcendent nature, carry him off.

Its opening is stunning: We hear the sounds of the rain forest—rain, chirping—and the forest is bustling with people, ants and other creatures. The actors don’t speak much, and when they do, they speak a few different languages and a muffled gibberish that’s the puppetry equivalent of vocalese.

At the end, we’re presented with a list of exploiting parties, including the Catholic Church, USA and Donald Trump. Finally, the cast unrolls a banner saying, “Lula Livre.”

Macunaima Gourmet is superb, exemplary work using puppetry’s unique political voice. *Viva para Pigmalhão escultura que mexe!*

—by Steve Capra

Actor, critic, playwright



CIRKA TEATER, GARAGE PHOTO: LARS OPSTAD

Chicago's Miniature Grand Operas

Luman Coad, *Chicago's Miniature Grand Operas: Chicago Miniature Opera, Kungsholm Miniature Grand Opera, Opera in Focus*. Garden Bay, B.C.: Charlemagne Press, 2019. 142 pp. \$40.

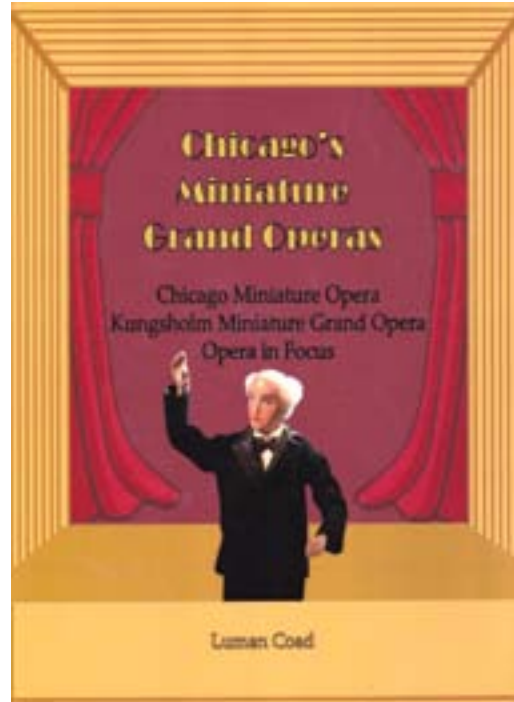
Prodigious puppet publisher Luman Coad and his Charlemagne Press continue their admirable series of books about American puppetry with the first comprehensive history of Chicago's unique form of rod-puppet opera, which Ernest Wolff and his mother Esther initiated in the mid-1930s, and which still, amazingly, lives on today. Coad's loving attention to *Chicago's Miniature Grand Operas* clarifies the history of this particular—and particularly popular—form of American puppetry that has managed to survive as a self-supporting enterprise and cultural lodestone of a major American city. The Turnabout Theatre survived for 15 years (1941-56) in Los Angeles; Bil Baird's Barrow Street Theater lasted for 21 years in New York (1966-87); and New York's Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre has been active since 1947 (in part due to its support from the city's Parks Department), but the Chicago miniature opera tradition stands out for its endurance.

Chicago has long had a rich and dynamic puppet history since Ellen van Volkenburg began her puppet experiments with the Chicago Little Theatre in 1912. This continued with Burr Tillstrom's pioneering television work beginning in the late 1940s, followed by a series of puppet enterprises currently crowned by Blair Thomas's Chicago International Puppet Theater Festivals. Chicago's miniature grand opera tradition is less well known, but no less important as a landmark of Chicago—and American—puppet practice in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Coad points out that the Chicago miniature grand opera style, while it appears to be highly idiosyncratic, is actually related to eastern European rod-puppet nativity plays (*vertep* in Ukraine, *batleyka* in Belarus, and *szopka* in Poland), in which diminutive puppets whose control rods pass through a slotted stage floor are operated by puppeteers below. Coad surmises that upper-middle-class Chicago housewife Mrs. Esther T. Wolff may have seen such puppet shows as a child in Czechoslovakia; at any rate, this *vertep* tradition, as well as a 19th-century-style toy theater for which her son Ernest Wolff created three-dimensional clay figures, seems to have influenced the first grand opera shows in Chicago.

Puppet opera has a longstanding history going back to the 17th century, and it has long offered tantalizing opportunities to re-create opera's spectacle combination of music, drama, dance, and visual art on a miniature scale. Ernest Wolff was a self-described "opera addict for life" from a young age, and his enthusiasm for miniature rod-puppet opera productions, with recordings of actual opera companies providing the sound, soon found appreciative audiences outside his immediate family. By the mid-1930s Wolff, his mother, and as many as three other puppeteers, as well as a lighting and a sound technician, were performing *Carmen*, *Aida*, *Die Walküre*, and other classic works on a travelling puppet stage at "ladies' clubs, musical societies, lodges, social groups, and schools" in the Chicago area. By 1939 the 24-year-old entrepreneur and his company were performing for 1,800 people every day at the New York World's Fair, and Wolff had secured sponsorship from the RCA Victor Company, a major distributor of opera records.

The second phase of Chicago miniature opera began in 1941, when Wolff headed overseas to serve in the Second World War, and Chicago restaurateur Fredrik Chramer wanted to install the opera puppet theater in his Kungsholm Restaurant, a classy joint ensconced in the old McCormick mansion on Chicago's North Side. Here the story gets complicated and nasty, because when Chramer opened his Kungsholm Miniature Grand Opera that year, he claimed full credit for inventing the concept, much to the Wolffs'



dismay. (Why the puppet opera theater was given the Swedish name Kungsholm remains a mystery.) By 1943, Chramer's puppet company was performing a repertoire of 14 different operas, with over 300 puppets operated by a company of almost exclusively women puppeteers.

Kungsholm's post-war period was marked by a costly 1947 fire that destroyed "puppets, costumes, scenery, props, stage, and lights"; in addition, Ernest Wolff filed and won a lawsuit against Chramer about the rights to Wolff's work. Chramer had to pay Wolff \$15,000, but won the right to continue performing puppet operas. Wolff, his mother, and their company then continued to perform their own puppet operas on a travelling basis, but by 1949 retired from the field for economic reasons.

In 1952 Chramer opened a newly built Kungsholm theater adjacent to the McCormick mansion, and this remained the home of the puppet company until it closed in 1971. The Kungsholm Miniature Grand Opera thrived in Chicago during this time, and it attracted mainstream opera fans (dressed to the nines in tuxedos and formal gowns) as well as celebrity opera stars. One of the riches of Coad's history is his inclusion of several facsimiles of press accounts of the Kungsholm phenomenon, which marvel at the ingenuity of the slotted puppet stage, the novelty of its

all-female puppet company, and the high-class pretensions of the mansion-based restaurant and its after-dinner opera spectacles.

Fredrik Chramer died in 1960, and the Kungsholm theater was taken over by the Fred Harvey restaurant company, but the changing culture of the 1960s made it harder for a puppet grand opera to survive. A very different insight into this period of Kungsholm history is offered by another Charlemagne Press book, *Subplot: Memoirs of Chicago's Kungsholm Grand Opera*, by Gary Jones (see *PI* #45). Jones complements Coad's over-arching historical view with a detailed, behind-the-scenes autobiographical look at what it meant to work as a Kungsholm puppeteer and designer, as well as a young, gay, African American artist in the often raucous late sixties. As Jones recounts, the puppet companies in the declining years of

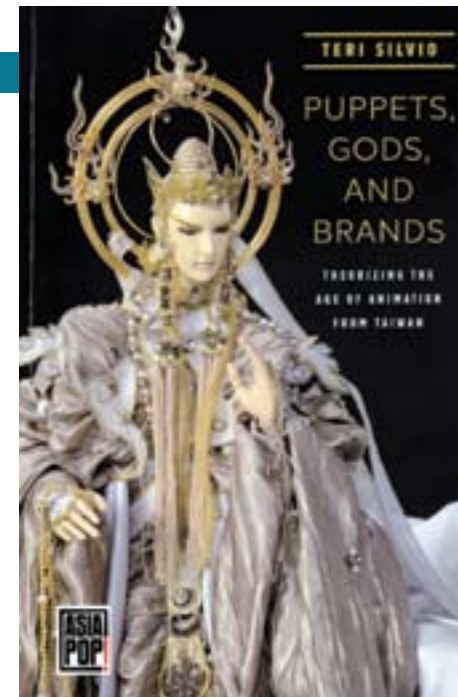
Kungsholm were mostly male, and the repertoire shifted from classic operas to Broadway musicals, in an ill-fated attempt to attract new audiences. In 1971, the enterprise folded; a Paul Harvey vice president, according to Coad, said "the theater cost us \$6,000 per month, and nobody came to see the damn thing."

But even this was not the end. William B. Fossier, who had worked with Ernest Wolff in the 1940s, started his own rod-puppet company, Opera in Focus, in 1955, and invented an improved design of Kungsholm-style rod puppets, which he patented 1961. He began working for Kungsholm Grand Opera in 1964, but left contentiously three years later. Fossier seems always to have been in search of a permanent home for his work, which he finally found in the Chicago suburb of Rolling Meadows in 1993, and maintained until his death in 2006. The Opera in Focus company has since continued under the aegis of brothers Shayne and Jason Snyder, whose current repertoire includes the classic operas *Pagliacci*, *Madame Butterfly*, and *Tosca*, as well as such musicals as *Showboat*, *South Pacific*, and *Carousel*.

For many puppeteers and puppet aficionados, the story of Chicago's miniature grand opera has been hard to piece together, or perhaps unknown altogether. One might be aware of its existence, but the details have been tantalizingly murky. Coad's lovingly assembled book, which is also rich in period illustrations and scores of contemporary puppet portraits, finally allows us to understand the achievement of this particularly important and unique aspect of American puppetry.

- review by John Bell

Bell is the Director of the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppet



Puppets, Gods, and Brands

Teri J. Silvio, edited by Allison Alexy.
Puppets, Gods, and Brands: Theorizing the Age of Animation from Taiwan.
Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2019

might intimidate a reader concerned with questions of puppetry and not necessarily well-versed on Taiwanese culture. However, *Puppets, Gods, and Brands* calls on us, as scholars of puppetry, to attend to the form's interconnection with other forms of animation. It makes puppetry relevant to scholarly discussions of animism. It helps us to think through cultural contexts in which puppet forms unfold. Moreover, Silvio conveys to a broad audience the relevance of considering puppetry as illuminating a host of other issues.

The theoretical framework that Silvio builds surrounding what she hails as the "Age of Animation" is crucial to this project. Chapter 1 is dedicated to the distinction of animation versus performance, arguing that the latter half of the twentieth century found

tropes of performance to be productive in exploring service work. Silvio notes that this shift from performance to animation as a model of social interaction does not diminish the emotional labor of service work, but this work is carried out in a more fractured manner. In the twenty-first century, interactions are increasingly mediated. In developing this theoretical frame, Silvio draws from anthropologists concerned with similar questions on the semiotics of animation and related issues of characterization. Here, she is in conversation with anthropologists and with theorists of media, animation, and anime. Silvio makes productive use of psychoanalytical questions of projection and object relations, drawing in particular from the theories of D.W. Winnicott.

Having laid this theoretical frame, Silvio grounds her discussion in contemporary Taiwan, where she points to a particular “mode” of animation, arguing that a “mode of animation connects specific forms of animation art, ritual practice, scientific project, and so on by virtue of what they share in the different parts of my broad definition of animation” (53). To characterize a particularly Taiwanese mode of animation in Chapter 2, Silvio points to the *ang-a*, a specific type of object that is a three-dimensional, anthropomorphic figure that is “invested with specific human qualities (personality, affect, and charisma) through specific types of actions (ritual, iconographic, and communicational practices)” (55, italicized in the original). Silvio relates parallels between practices of idol worshippers and fans of a digital “knights-errant” puppetry series. This series, produced by the Pili International Multimedia Company, is a complex remediation of the traditional hand puppetry of Taiwan, *po-te-hi*. Silvio contrasts the Taiwanese mode of animation to that of Japanese manga and anime using recent anthropological schematizations of ontological systems. While, as other scholars have noted, Japanese manga and anime show parallels with an animist worldview, the Taiwanese mode of animation fits into the analogist one. In this worldview, Silvio explains, there is less of a clear separation between the real and the fantasy. Characters are psychologically believable and possess real-world counterparts (85). This argument is significant to scholars of puppetry in illustrating the need to ground beliefs about animation in wider cultural systems.

In Chapter 3, Silvio turns her attention to issues of folk religion, commercialization, and cuteness by examining the rise of Daoist and Buddhist deities sold as cute figurines, at a Taiwanese convenience store and then in other sites. Silvio considers the semiotics of cuteness at play as they intersect with marketing campaigns and with collectors’ beliefs about the abilities of such figurines to serve as vessels for divine presence and to cultivate relations of intimacy between the figurines and the collectors. Chapter 4 looks at efforts to expand Pili popularity to global audiences and the issues that come up when spectators view the form based on their own experiences with puppetry or animation.

Chapter 5 examines cosplayers of Pili. Here, Silvio finds animation and performance intertwined. She notes that as Pili puppetry styles change, so that the puppet is increasingly humanized in the series, human beings doing cosplay become “puppetized” (162). Cosplayers are mostly women, though male fans comprise the majority of *passive* viewers. Many cosplayers focus on cinematic poses to recreate scenes from the series, treating their bodies as 3-D puppets (166). While this chapter thus focuses on how a person can become like a puppet, the final body chapter considers how an animated figure can stand in for an entire nation. Chapter 6 examines a cell-animated cartoon, *Axis Powers Hetalia*, to consider the politics of animation and the ability of animation to personify national character. Silvio argues that *Axis Powers Hetalia* offers an example of taxonomic (rather than dyadic) stereotype, in that each character is a stereotype of a country, but they are all on an equal power footing, more or less.

In her conclusion, Silvio invites us to “ask what it might mean to think of the future in terms of animation—that is, how we remake the world by projecting and materializing parts of our selves” (205). Such a provocation should be exciting to the puppet community, as it invites us to consider puppetry as a way of broadly conceiving of political work. In sum, while not every chapter focuses solely or explicitly on puppetry, the book theorizes issues of animation, materiality, performance, and related issues masterfully, offering exciting new theorizations of animation that will give any scholar of puppetry much to consider. Methodologically, it is impressive in its use of interviews with a wide range of individuals, from artists and designers to fans, collectors, and cosplayers. Silvio mentions that it is a work fifteen years in the making. This was clearly time well spent, and we all stand to benefit from the work’s brilliant theoretical and ethnographic breadth and depth.

—review by Meghanne Barker

Barker is a linguistic anthropologist at the University of Chicago.

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