



Achilles Orlando Quixote Ulysses Rivista di epica

L'epica e il teatro di figura mondiale

World Epics and Puppet Theater

IV, 2

2023

a cura di Jo Ann Cavallo

Università degli Studi di Milano
Dipartimento di Studi letterari, filologici e linguistici

COMITATO DI DIREZIONE: Guglielmo Barucci (Università degli Studi di Milano), Sandra Carapezza (Università degli Studi di Milano), Michele Comelli (Università degli Studi di Milano), Cristina Zampese (Università degli Studi di Milano)

COMITATO SCIENTIFICO: Alvaro Barbieri (Università degli Studi di Padova), Roland Béhar (Sorbonne Université), Anton F.H. Bierl (Universität Basel), Matteo Bittanti (Università IULM), Gabriele Bucchi (Universität Basel), Maria Cristina Cabani (Università di Pisa), Alessandro Cassol (Università degli Studi di Milano), Jo Ann Cavallo (Columbia University, New York), Cristiano Diddi (Università degli Studi di Salerno), Marco Dorigatti (University of Oxford), Stefano Ercolino (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia), Bruno Falcetto (Università degli Studi di Milano), Danielle Feller (Université de Lausanne), Fulvio Ferrari (Università di Trento), Luca Frassinetti (Università della Campania Luigi Vanvitelli), Massimiliano Gaggero (Università degli Studi di Milano), Massimo Gioseffi (Università degli Studi di Milano), Giovanni Iamartino (Università degli Studi di Milano), Dennis Looney (University of Pittsburgh), Rita Marnoto (Universidade de Coimbra), Cristina Montagnani (Università degli Studi di Ferrara), Franco Tomasi (Università degli Studi di Padova), Martina Venuti (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia)

COMITATO DI REDAZIONE: Angela Andreani (Università degli Studi di Milano), Chiara Casiraghi (Università degli Studi di Milano), Ottavio Ghidini (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore), Maria Maffezzoli (Università degli Studi di Siena), Barbara Tanzi Imbri (Università degli Studi di Milano)

In copertina: da sinistra a destra, in alto: *The fight between Ram and Ravan* (da *About Ram*, foto cortesemente concessa da The Katkatha Puppet Arts Trust, © 2010), *Simorgh tells Zaul it's time to leave the nest* (da *Feathers of Fire: A Persian Epic*, foto cortesemente concessa da Hamid Rahmani, Fictionville Studio, © 2016); da sinistra a destra, in basso: *Kumagai Naozane challenges Atsumori* (da *Ichinotani Atsumori*, foto cortesemente concessa da Hachioji Kuruma Ningyo The Koryu Nishikawa Troupe, © 1992), *Incontro tra Organtino del Diavolo e Ramondo d'Arborea* (da *Rinaldo imperatore di Trebisonda*, foto cortesemente concessa dalla Marionettistica dei Fratelli Napoli di Catania, © 2021)

«AOQU» IV, 2 (2023)

Open Access online: <http://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/aoqu>

ISBN 9791280664747

ISSN 2724-3346

DOI 10.54103/2724-3346/2023/2



Copyright © 2023

Volume pubblicato con il contributo del Dipartimento di Studi letterari, filologici e linguistici dell'Università degli Studi di Milano

Questo volume è stato co-sponsorizzato dalla "Humanities War and Peace Initiative, through the Division of Humanities in the Arts & Sciences", Columbia University

Grafica di copertina: Shiroi Studio
Via Morigi 11, 20123 Milano
www.shiroistudio.com

Stampa: Edizioni Museo Pasqualino
Piazzetta Antonio Pasqualino 5, 90133 Palermo
www.edizionimuseopasqualino.it

AOQU

Achilles Orlando Quixote Ulysses **Rivista di epica**

Indice

Jo Ann Cavallo, *Introduction* pp. 7-11

EUROPE

Anna Carocci, *Metamorfosi del tema dell'esilio: tradizione, rivoluzione e continuità dai romanzi cavallereschi all'Opera dei Pupi* pp. 13-39

Alessandro Napoli, *Dolori e trionfi di Rinaldo imperatore nel poema "Trabionda" e nell'Opera dei Pupi siciliana* pp. 41-64

Yanna Kor, *The Carolingian Epic in Traditional Liège Puppet Theatre: A Case Study of "Huon de Bordeaux" and "Quatre fils Aymon"* pp. 65-93

Flora Mele, *"Don Quichotte Polichinelle": parodie pour marionnettes de "Don Quichotte chez la duchesse" de Favart* pp. 95-119

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Elisabeth den Otter, *The Legend of Biton and Faaro: A Reinterpretation of a Creation Myth from the Epic of Bamana Segu Performed with Puppets and Masks in Mali* pp. 121-133

Brunhilde Biebuyck, *A Boastful Man Borne by a Brave Woman: The Mubila Epic of the Lega (Democratic Republic of the Congo)* pp. 135-148

THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA (MENA)

Yassaman Khajehi, *A Fearless Hero: The Puppet in the Socio-political Context of the Middle East* pp. 149-171

EAST ASIA

Claudia Orenstein, *Japanese Epic Puppet Tales at New Year: The Fukaze Dekumawashi and Higashi Futakuchi Performance Traditions* pp. 173-203

Elizabeth Oyler, *Shunkan on Devil Island: Domesticating Political Exile in the Japanese Puppet Play “Heike nōgyo no shima”* pp. 205-226

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Matthew Cohen, *Ramayana and Animism in “Wayang” Puppet Theatre* pp. 227-247

Kathy Foley, *Traditional Puppetry, Changing Times: The Ramayana in Indonesian and Malay Puppetry* pp. 249-274

SOUTH ASIA

Anurupa Roy and Paula Richman, *Tradition and Innovation in the Making of “About Ram”: A Contemporary Indian Puppeteer and a Ramayana Scholar in Conversation* pp. 275-287

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

pp. 289-294

INTRODUCTION

This issue of «AOQU. Achilles Orlando Quixote Ulysses» stems from my project entitled *World Epics in Puppet Theater: India, Iran, Japan, Italy*, co-sponsored by the Humanities War and Peace Initiative, through the Division of Humanities in the Arts & Sciences, Columbia University. The initiative aimed to foster «the study of war and peace from the perspective of scholars in the Humanities, in conversation with colleagues from around Columbia and the world [...] with an ultimate goal of perpetuating a more peaceful world».

The first event of the project was an online mini-symposium dedicated to the theme of exile, held on November 12, 2021, hosted and co-sponsored by the International Puppet Museum Antonio Pasqualino of Palermo, and moderated by Rosario Pericone, the Museum's director and professor of cultural anthropology at the Academy of Fine Arts of Palermo. The mini-symposium, part of the Museum's annual *Festival di Morgana* (edition XLVI), was followed by a performance of *Rinaldo, imperatore di Trebisonda* staged by the Marionettistica dei Fratelli Napoli. Three essays in the current issue, by Anna Carocci, Alessandro Napoli, and Elizabeth Oyler, were developed from papers presented at this event.¹

The subsequent three events comprising the project were online screenings of puppet plays adapting Iranian, Japanese, and Indian epics, all hosted and co-sponsored

¹ Video recordings of the mini-symposium and the puppet play are available on the *World Epics* website <<https://edblogs.columbia.edu/worldepics/worldepicsinpuppettheaterindiairanjapanitaly/#mini-symposium>>.

by the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry, University of Connecticut, in May of 2022. Each screening was followed by a conversation with the master puppeteer and one or more scholars in the respective tradition, moderated by John Bell, the Museum's director and professor of dramatic arts at the University of Connecticut. The final contribution in this issue is developed from the May 25, 2022, conversation between the puppeteer Anurupa Roy and professor emerita Paula Richman.²

The aim of this volume was to extend out from the Indian, Iranian, Japanese, and Italian epic traditions to explore epic narratives in popular oral performance, particularly puppet theater, worldwide. The twelve contributions thus explore this subject matter as manifested in several countries across three continents, beginning with Europe, where the «AOQU» journal is based, and then shifting attention to Africa and Asia.

The section dedicated to Western Europe opens with two essays on Italy's Opera dei Pupi tradition by the aforementioned scholars Anna Carocci and Alessandro Napoli. Carocci's essay first explores both continuity and originality in stories of exile in the Italian chivalric literary canon, and then goes on to focus more specifically on the trajectory of Malaguerra, Rinaldo's adopted son in Giusto Lodico's nineteenth-century *Storia dei paladini di Francia* and subsequently a popular character in the Opera dei Pupi repertory. Napoli investigates the vicissitudes of Rinaldo – most notably, his persecution by Charlemagne leading to his exile from France and his rise as the emperor of Trebisonda (Trabzon) – in the fifteenth-century poem *Trabisonda*, in Lodico's *Storia dei Paladini di Francia*, and in the Opera dei Pupi tradition. The third essay, by Yanna Kor, examines Carolingian epic in the lesser-studied puppet theater tradition of Liège, Belgium, analyzing in particular textual and dramatic adaptations of the medieval French *Huon de Bordeaux* and *Quatre fils Aymon*. Flora Mele concludes the section with an analysis of the vaudeville puppet play *Don Quichotte Polichinelle*, a parodic treatment of Charles-Simon Favart's comedy-ballet *Don Quichotte chez la duchesse* that may provide insights into both societal attitudes and theatrical aesthetics in eighteenth-century France.

² All three conversations and videoclips from the plays, as well as further information about the *World Epics in Puppet Theater: India, Iran, Japan, Italy* project, such as bibliographical resources, links to documentaries and videoclips of puppet plays staging epic narratives, and a list of additional co-sponsors, can be found on the *World Epics* site through the homepage <<https://edblogs.columbia.edu/worldepics>> and the project's webpage <<https://edblogs.columbia.edu/worldepics/worldepicsinpuppettheaterindiairanjapanitaly>>.

The issue next turns to the epic narratives of sub-Saharan Africa. Decades of field research have brought to an international public an ongoing oral tradition of relating imperialist struggles among the African empires predating European colonialism.³ This section features the epic of Bamana Segu from Mali and the Mubila epic from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, examined by Elisabeth den Otter and Brunhilde Biebuyck, respectively. Den Otter's contribution calls attention to Bamana farmers and Bozo fishermen who use puppets and masks to reimagine an episode from the Bamana Segu cycle in which the historical king Biton (Bitòn Coulibaly) acquires power thanks to the water spirit and creator god Faaro. Biebuyck's essay focuses on the boastful protagonist Mubila and his enterprising wife Kabulungu in the version of the epic recounted, sung, and dramatized by Kambala Mubila over several days and recorded in writing by Daniel P. Biebuyck in 1953.

In the subsequent section, Yassaman Khajehi uncovers the epic dimension of puppet theater in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). After historical and theoretical considerations linking past and present puppetry in the region, Khajehi draws on recent examples from Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Palestine, and Egypt, to envision the puppet as a contemporary hero who can go beyond the limits imposed on the rest of society by speaking truth to power.

The two essays dealing with East Asia are both devoted to episodes based on the *Heike Monogatari* (*Tale of the Heike*) in Japanese puppet theater. Claudia Orenstein first offers an overview of traditional puppetry in Japan and then discusses the results of her fieldwork with two companies that despite substantial obstacles continue their unique centuries-old traditions of *bun'ya ningyōn* (puppetry combined with the *bun'ya* style of chanting) in the Hakusan area of Japan's Ishikawa Prefecture. Elizabeth Oyler analyzes the episode of Shunkan on Devil Island from Chikamatsu Monzaemon's early modern puppet play *The Heike on the Island of Women*, finding it to be a critique of the Tokuga-

³ For recent scholarship, see the chapters by Frederick Turner, John William Johnson, and Thomas A. Hale on the epics of Mwindo, Sun-Jata, and Askia Mohammed, respectively, in *Teaching World Epics*, edited by Jo Ann Cavallo (New York, Modern Language Association, 2023). For further bibliography, see my "African epics" section in the Resources chapter of the same volume.

wa shogunate's increasing regulation of social and commercial life in the early eighteenth century.

The two essays in the subsequent section address the changing landscape of performing the Ramayana in Southeast Asia. Matthew Cohen reflects on the traditionally animistic qualities and shifting theatrical styles of the Ramayana narrative performed in *wayang* puppetry in Indonesia and concludes with the account of a 2023 Ramayana production at the University of Connecticut in which the epic is retold from the perspective of the trees and forest in a format combining *wayang* with the *tholpavakoothu* shadow puppet tradition of Kerala, India. Kathy Foley reflects on how transnational religious and political forces, including the Hindu revival in India and the Islamic revival in the Muslim world, have rendered Indonesian and Malaysian puppet adaptations of the Ramayana narrative problematic in different ways since the 1990s.

The final contribution, under the South Asia section, is the aforementioned conversation in which Anurupa Roy, director of a troupe of puppeteers in Delhi, India, discusses with Paula Richman, emerita professor at Oberlin College (USA), her creative and interpretative choices in designing and preparing the multimedial *About Ram* (2006). Roy sought to convey the regional diversity of the Ramayana tradition as she developed an embodied language for contemporary puppet practice in India.

The epic genre characteristically consists of long-cherished stories of memorable deeds by larger-than-life characters whose actions have significant and wide-ranging consequences. Although such narratives span the centuries, encompass different religions, and originate in cultures thousands of miles apart, all with their own multifaceted political, social, linguistic and literary histories, they nevertheless contain many parallel features that invite comparative analysis and critical thinking on a number of themes related to the human condition that remain utterly relevant today. Epic stories remained at the forefront of many societies through oral retellings and dramatic performances, most notably, puppet theater, until the advent of mass media entertainment. Indeed, even today we can find puppeteers from across the globe who continue to refashion heroes and heroines from canonical epic narratives – or who invent new ones – amidst myriad challenges. As in the past, this latest generation of puppeteers may use the platform to question collective confrontations, resist political repression, articulate regional identity, critique con-

ventional societal attitudes, or, more generally, probe human nature. As the contributors to this issue make evident, the dramatization of epic stories in puppetry arts is both a genuinely local and quintessentially global art form that merits closer attention.

I would like to thank the «AOQU» Editorial Board for their support, in particular, Guglielmo Barucci and Michele Comelli for the attentiveness with which they undertook the peer review and publication process, respectively, as well as Barbara Tanzi Imbri (University of Milan), Claudia Antonini (Columbia University), and Angelica Modabber (Columbia University) for their editorial assistance.

Jo Ann Cavallo (Columbia University)

METAMORFOSI DEL TEMA DELL'ESILIO: TRADIZIONE, RIVOLUZIONE E CONTINUITÀ DAI ROMANZI CAVALLERESCHI ALL'OPERA DEI PUPPI*

Anna Carocci

Università degli Studi Roma Tre

ABSTRACT: Chivalric literature is characterized by a long-lasting imagery, which links medieval and Renaissance literary texts and nineteenth- and twentieth-century forms of popular theater (Opera dei Pupi and cunto). A recurring feature of this imagery is the exile, which leads the knight to clash with power and go to distant lands. The paper will firstly examine the macroscopic features of exile in the chivalric imaginary, trying to highlight its elements of continuity and innovation, and then it will focus on a specific case: the story of Malaguerra, adopted son of Rinaldo, which Giusto Lodico created in his *Storia dei paladini di Francia* by mixing traditional texts and components and which has known new life in the scripts and performances of the Opera dei Pupi. It is a particularly representative case for observing the mixture of tradition and innovation in the chivalric exile.

KEY-WORDS: Chivalric literature, Opera dei Pupi, exile, rebellion, Malaguerra

RIASSUNTO: La letteratura cavalleresca è connotata da un immaginario di lunga durata, che accomuna i testi letterari medievali e rinascimentali e le forme di teatro popolare otto-novecentesche (Opera dei Pupi e cunto). Un tratto ricorrente di questo immaginario è il tema dell'esilio, che porta il cavaliere a scontrarsi con il potere e ad andare in terre lontane. Nella prima parte del lavoro si esamineranno le caratteristiche macroscopiche dell'esilio nell'immaginario cavalleresco, cercando di metterne in evidenza gli elementi di continuità e di innovazione. Nella seconda parte ci si concentrerà su un caso specifico, la storia di Malaguerra, figlio adottivo di Rinaldo, che Giusto Lodico, nella *Storia dei paladini di Francia*, ha creato mescolando testi e ingredienti tradizionali e che ha

* Per le loro letture e i loro consigli, ringrazio Nicola Catelli, Jo Ann Cavallo e Luca Ferraro.



conosciuto nuova vita nei copioni e negli spettacoli dell'Opera dei Pupi: un caso particolarmente rappresentativo per osservare la mescolanza di tradizione e innovazione nell'esilio cavalleresco.

PAROLE CHIAVE: letteratura cavalleresca, Opera dei Pupi, esilio, ribellione, Malaguerra

Un legame potente unisce le forme di teatro popolare otto-novecentesche del sud Italia – Opera dei Pupi e cunto – ai testi della letteratura cavalleresca. Da un lato, una continuità narrativa estremamente specifica, che si basa sulla ripresa dei personaggi e delle situazioni topiche, ma soprattutto della trama delle storie dei singoli romanzi in prosa e ancora di più in versi, fin nei più minuti dettagli. Dall'altro, una continuità ideologico-morale, perché, a dispetto dei secoli che li separano, i cantari tre-quattrocenteschi e gli spettacoli dell'Opera dei Pupi costruiscono le proprie narrazioni sugli stessi ideali e gli stessi valori e suscitano nel pubblico lo stesso tipo di reazioni. Un immaginario condiviso.

Nella prima parte dell'intervento esaminerò l'esilio all'interno di questo immaginario, che accomuna, in un gioco di specchi, letteratura di età medievale e rinascimentale e spettacoli di età moderna, cercando di mettere in evidenza gli elementi di continuità e di rottura nella trattazione del tema; nella seconda parte, mi concentrerò invece su un caso specifico di eroe in esilio, che mostra come la continuità si alimenti sempre e comunque anche di innovazione.

1. All'interno dell'immaginario cavalleresco, l'esilio costituisce un tema caratteristico e costante: presente già nelle *chansons de geste* e nei poemi francoveneti, occupa un largo spazio nei romanzi in prosa e in ottava rima, fino alle loro rielaborazioni nelle forme di teatro popolare siciliano. I termini in cui viene declinato hanno un sapore particolare: non sono quelli intimistici e malinconici della lirica di impianto ovidiano, e sono molto lontani anche da quelli eroici dell'epica virgiliana; rientrano invece nel codice – tipicamente cavalleresco – dell'avventuroso e del magico.¹ Un'avventura, bisogna dirlo subito, non a

¹ La letteratura cavalleresca è quindi essenzialmente estranea alla trattazione dell'esilio in quanto «caratteristic[a] primari[a], quasi genetic[a], della condizione letteraria italiana», cioè quel «modo d'essere o sradicato

senso unico, perché, a differenza che nel grande modello virgiliano, la condizione dell'esiliato non è permanente, non ha come soluzione obbligata la fondazione di una nuova patria, ma si conclude di regola con il ritorno dell'eroe nella propria casa – magari dopo essersi assicurato un regno, o una sposa, o entrambe le cose. Del resto, in una letteratura in cui anche il viaggio oltremondano non è che un'avventura tra le altre, e perfino la morte può essere una condizione reversibile,² è più che naturale che l'esilio non abbia nulla della dimensione tragico-patetica tanto centrale in altre forme letterarie. In molti casi di esilio cavalleresco, invece, alla componente avventurosa (immancabile e determinante) si associano altri due aspetti: definibili, in senso lato, come politico e sociale.

La componente politica è ben presente nella tradizione tre-quattrocentesca italiana, e da lì arriva fino alle sue rielaborazioni nel teatro popolare siciliano: in tutte queste forme di narrazione, l'eroe viene cacciato dalla corte di Francia oppure si allontana di sua iniziativa perché è stato offeso o sa di trovarsi in una situazione di estremo pericolo; in ogni caso, il suo allontanamento dalla corte avviene sempre perché è vittima di un'ingiustizia da parte di chi detiene il potere (quando non è addirittura oggetto di un vero e proprio tradimento). È l'avvio di quello che è stato chiamato il motivo della partenza dell'eroe.³ E, se tutti i grandi personaggi cavallereschi possono essere costretti o scegliere di prendere la via dell'esilio (perfino Orlando, paladino dell'ordine per eccellenza), la più tipica figura dell'esiliato è senz'altro quella dell'eroe ribelle: in primo luogo Rinaldo, povero, dedito al brigantaggio, nemico giurato della casa di Magonza e in particolare del traditore Gano, dei cui raggiri e inganni è spesso la vittima designata. Soprattutto, quando si trova davanti a comportamenti erronei e scorretti, a soprusi e ingiustizie, Rinaldo non si fa scrupoli a

o inospitale o aspramente conflittuale che [...] aveva disegnato nei secoli il rapporto anomalo e sregolato di un gran numero di letterati italiani nei confronti del loro luogo d'origine»: una caratteristica che unisce il letterato e la sua opera e che – come tante altre – ha i suoi massimi esempi in Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio (cfr. ASOR ROSA 2011: 7). È per questo che i testi cavallereschi non sono quasi mai oggetto d'indagine specifica negli studi su esilio e letteratura.

² L'esempio più celebre è ovviamente il viaggio di Astolfo nell'Inferno, sul Paradiso Terrestre e poi sulla Luna tra XXXIV e XXXV canto dell'*Orlando furioso*; ma, in particolare dopo Ariosto, sono molti i viaggi oltremondani degli eroi cavallereschi, soprattutto di ambientazione infernale (cfr. BETTIN 2006: 1255-1260) e può anche capitare che uno dei grandi eroi muoia, vada nell'oltretomba ma poi ritorni in vita: è quanto accade nella *Morte del Danese* di Cassio da Narni (1521), in cui Rinaldo viene ucciso in battaglia, condannato all'Inferno tra gli omicidi e riportato tra i vivi da Alcide.

³ Cfr. MONTAGNANI 2011 e PASQUALINO 1986.

scontrarsi con l'autorità, perfino nella persona – in teoria sacra e inviolabile – dell'imperatore.⁴ E proprio per questi motivi Rinaldo è il grande beniamino del pubblico, il quale, dal XIV al XX secolo, si identifica con lui, partecipa alle sue avventure, trema quando lo vede in pericolo, e in generale lo predilige a tutti gli altri personaggi, perfino all'eroico cugino Orlando.⁵

Per Rinaldo come per tutti gli altri eroi ribelli, all'origine della partenza c'è sempre lo scontro con un potere ingiusto – che non viene dall'esterno (un nemico conquistatore) ma dal proprio stesso governo: ecco perché, pur non avendo nulla della carica tragico-esistenziale che ha in tanta altra letteratura, la componente politica costituisce un ingrediente tipico e centrale del tema dell'esilio nelle narrazioni cavalleresche. In effetti, è solo nei capolavori quattro-cinquecenteschi – poemi d'autore, frutto della stagione più matura e complessa di questa letteratura – che Carlo Magno, il personaggio simbolo del potere, può assumere una fisionomia sfaccettata e nell'insieme positiva; in tutte le narrazioni cavalleresche tradizionali (dai cantari all'Opera dei Pupi) non c'è figura più debole dell'imperatore, troppo spesso visto come incarnazione di un'autorità capricciosa, dispotica, suscettibile alle lusinghe, e perciò non solo inaffidabile ma, proprio perché volubile,

⁴ L'inimicizia tra Rinaldo e Gano è ben presente già nel *Rinaldo da Montalbano*, e costituisce uno degli assi portanti di tutta la produzione – in prosa e in versi – che ruota intorno al paladino; ancora in PULCI, *Morgante* [Ageno], XI, Rinaldo viene bandito dalla corte a causa degli inganni di Gano e si dedica al brigantaggio finché, messi in fuga sia Gano che Carlo, viene addirittura coronato imperatore (cfr. ivi, XII 32-36).

⁵ Il successo di Rinaldo è evidente già da un punto di vista meramente quantitativo: come sottolinea Villoresi, «gran parte delle avventure cavalleresche giunte sino a noi lo vede protagonista assoluto» e intorno a lui, a partire dalle *Storie di Rinaldo da Montalbano*, è stata costruita una «interminabile saga» (VILLORESI 2000: 86). Non è un caso se proprio Rinaldo sia usato come personaggio simbolo dell'amore del pubblico per i paladini: si pensi all'aneddoto dell'Aretino, secondo il quale «Non so chi disse al buon Zoppino, che nel dì a venire aveva promesso al popolazzo di ammazzare Ranaldo: “Deh, togliete questi cinque carlini e non lo ammazzate”» (ARETINO, *Le carte parlanti* [Casalegno - Giaccone]: 338). A una distanza di tre secoli e mezzo, la stessa predilezione si ritrova tra artisti e pubblico dell'Opera dei Pupi: in merito mi limito a riportare le parole di Nino Canino, puparo di Partinico: «La maggior parte [degli spettatori] gli piace Rinaldo perché è più astuto, più dilettevole [...] sia nei scherzi, sia nell'amore, sia nelle sventure e tutto; lo hanno descritto così bene. C'è chi dice che non esiste, ma intanto...» (citato in PASQUALINO 1977: 117). Mi sembra anche significativo il modo in cui il puparo palermitano Nino Mancuso, nel 1970, mette in rapporto la divisione del pubblico tra seguaci di Orlando e seguaci di Rinaldo con la maggior divisione politica del suo tempo: «c'è sempre il fatto... come si vuole dire... della democrazia cristiana e del comunismo. Rinaldo è comunista e Orlando è della democrazia cristiana» (intervista rilasciata ad Antonio Pasqualino, Museo Internazionale delle Marionette Antonio Pasqualino, mediateca, bobina 286, lato a). Come a dire che Orlando, paladino dell'ordine, si poteva identificare con la difesa dei valori tradizionali e degli equilibri del potere, mentre Rinaldo, paladino ribelle, con la rottura dello *status quo* in favore di un sistema nuovo.

anche difficile da comprendere.⁶ L'unico momento in cui Carlo è un personaggio simpatico (in senso etimologico: che riscuote la *sympatheia* del pubblico) è proprio quando lui stesso deve assumere le vesti dell'eroe esiliato; ma si tratta di un Carlo molto giovane, non ancora diventato imperatore e dunque detentore del potere, costretto dal complotto dei fratellastri e dall'assassinio a tradimento del padre a scappare in Spagna e anche a cambiare identità, fingendosi pagano e assumendo il nome di Mainetto.⁷

La seconda componente connessa con il tema dell'esilio – la componente sociale – affiora soprattutto nelle forme di spettacolo popolare otto-novecentesche, l'Opera dei Pupi e il cunto: forme di spettacolo che prendono vita in un'epoca di migrazione e per un pubblico di persone quasi sempre povere e non di rado emarginate, per cui lasciare la propria terra era spesso una dura necessità. Per questo tipo di spettatori, vedere il proprio eroe a sua volta costretto ad abbandonare la sua casa e vagare in terre lontane, affrontare mille pericoli, ma poi ricoprirsi di gloria e tornare in patria più ricco e rispettato di prima non poteva che costituire uno spettacolo confortante. Ancora di più: «uno specchio esaltante per chi doveva partire».⁸

2. Che si tratti del giovanissimo Carlo o del già adulto Rinaldo, la partenza porta l'eroe in terre lontane. Lontane in primo luogo culturalmente, perché si tratta sempre di terre abitate dai cosiddetti pagani, dunque da non cristiani: l'estraneità religiosa è il tratto che conno-

⁶ Sulla rappresentazione di Carlo Magno e le sue evoluzioni nella letteratura cavalleresca italiana si vedano BENDER 1961, EVERSON 2005 e soprattutto EAD. 2023. Rispetto alla tradizione, l'imperatore è una figura più complessa e meno negativa nei poemi di Boiardo e Ariosto, nell'ultima parte del *Morgante* e nel *Mambriano* del Cieco da Ferrara.

⁷ Sulla storia di Carlo-Mainetto dai testi letterari (le storie francesi e franco-venete e i *Reali di Francia* di Andrea da Barberino) all'Opera dei Pupi si rimanda a PASQUALINO 1986. Diverso è il caso in cui, in PULCI, *Morgante* [Agenò], XII 32-36, Carlo viene deposto da Rinaldo ed è costretto a lasciare Parigi: lungi dall'essere un eroe con cui il pubblico si può identificare, qui Carlo subisce la giusta punizione per il comportamento scorretto e ingrato verso i suoi paladini del cantare precedente, giudicato dall'autore con particolare severità in un lungo intervento in prima persona che si apre con la significativa esclamazione «O Carlo imperador, quanto se' ingrato!» (ivi, XI 74, 1).

⁸ PASQUALINO 1992: 94. E non si dimentichi il successo che il teatro dei pupi continua ad avere presso le comunità di siciliani emigrati, come testimoniano gli studi di Jo Ann Cavallo su Agrippino Manteo a New York (cfr. in particolare CAVALLO 2023a) e di Valentina Venturini su Achille Greco e sua moglie Carolina Ligotti a Buenos Aires (VENTURINI 2018).

ta maggiormente la dimensione “altra” di questi luoghi, che non sono descritti come particolarmente esotici e in cui le consuetudini sono le stesse delle corti cristiane: dalla gerarchia del potere, sempre di tipo monarchico, allo stile di vita del palazzo, alle regole che governano le giostre o i combattimenti. La mancanza di descrizioni particolareggiate delle terre esotiche visitate dall'eroe o



Fig. 1. Paesaggio orientale. Fondale catanese di Emilio Musmeci, anni Sessanta del Novecento, 3,27x1,56 m. Museo Internazionale delle Marionette Antonio Pasqualino, inv. D 446.

di dettagli che mettano in risalto le differenze tra mondo d'arrivo e mondo di partenza accomunano, ancora una volta, i testi cavallereschi e gli spettacoli dell'Opera dei Pupi: scorrendo l'inventario del Museo Pasqualino,

si può notare che sono pochi i cartelli e i fondali in cui viene rappresentato l'Oriente [Figura 1], e si tratta quasi sempre di scene di interni di sontuosi palazzi; magari dalle finestre si possono intravedere sabbia, palme e cammelli, oppure strutture dall'aspetto orientale [Figure 2-3]. E bisogna anche dire, per questi ultimi casi, che l'architettura arabo-normanna a Palermo fa sì che sia difficile distinguere tra palazzi orientali e palazzi che imitano i tipici tratti architettonici dei più famosi monumenti della città.

Anche i problemi di lingua – e quindi di comunicazione – sono di regola virtualmente inesistenti: al massimo si può sottolineare che l'eroe possiede una certa abi-



Fig. 2. Interno di palazzo, con tre archi fra due colonne, sullo sfondo città. Fondale palermitano del Teatro Nicola Crisalfi, 1930, 18,7x10,2 m. Museo Internazionale delle Marionette Antonio Pasqualino, inv. D2104.



Fig. 3. Interno di palazzo con veduta di deserto con cammelli. Fondale palermitano del Teatro Nicola Crisalfi, 1930. Museo Internazionale delle Marionette Antonio Pasqualino, inv. D1357.

lità linguistica, è cioè capace di parlare la lingua dei pagani. Il maggior cambiamento nella sfera (in senso lato) linguistica riguarda il nome dell'eroe, che, a seconda dei casi, può scegliere di non rivelare la propria identità se non alla fine delle sue imprese oppure può adottare un nome falso.⁹ In questo caso, in genere, il protagonista adotta anche un travestimento, vestendosi da “moro”: l'unica reale differenza di queste terre rispetto a quelle cristiane, nelle descrizioni scritte come nelle rap-

presentazioni, appare in effetti quella dei vestiti, soprattutto nel caso dei cosiddetti pupi in paggio, che rappresentano i soldati semplici o i personaggi ancora troppo giovani per indossare l'armatura [Figura 4]. Da tutti questi punti di vista – paesaggistico e linguistico, culturale e religioso – non c'è una particolare differenza tra la vicina Spagna e località ben più esotiche, come Trabisonda e la Macedonia. In tutti i casi, il fatto che la terra dell'esilio sia caratterizzata quasi esclusivamente come terra pagana ne fa un polo obbligatoriamente negativo: l'eroe vi può vivere trionfanti avventure, può conquistare la mano della figlia del re e diventare re a sua volta; ma tutte le persone che lo aiutano e lo assistono – tutti i “buoni” della storia – alla fine decidono sempre e comunque di convertirsi al cristianesimo. E anche questo, a ben vedere, doveva costituire un tratto rassicurante per un pubblico

⁹ La conoscenza della lingua “pagana” è una caratteristica costante del personaggio di Orlando che, com'è noto, si capovolgerà in un elemento svantaggioso quando gli permetterà di leggere facilmente i versi d'amore di Medoro per Angelica: cfr. ARIOSTO, *Orlando Furioso* [Bigi - Zampese], XXIII 108-110 e, sul poliglottismo di Orlando, da ultimo PEZZINI 2022. Sul *topos* dell'identità celata e l'uso di identità fittizie da parte dei paladini in terre pagane si veda invece PERROTTA 2012.



Fig. 4. Soldato saraceno bianco. Pupo palermitano in paggio del Teatro Canino, ossatura e armatura di Liberto Canino, anni Venti del Novecento, altezza piede-ferro 117 cm. Museo Internazionale delle Marionette Antonio Pasqualino, inv. 165D.

che sentiva il peso della minaccia musulmana, e per cui l'“Altro” costituiva sempre, per definizione, un'entità sconosciuta e in quanto tale pericolosa.

3. Finora si è seguito il filo dell'esilio nelle narrazioni tradizionali – che rispettano pienamente, cioè, i parametri e le convenzioni della letteratura cavalleresca italiana, codificatasi in forma stabile tra la fine del Trecento e il primo Quattrocento. Ma la tradizione, si sa, è fatta anche di infrazioni alle regole, sovversioni e veri e propri terremoti, che sconvolgono il vecchio mondo narrativo e lo ricodificano in forme nuove. Nella letteratura cavalleresca – non c'è bisogno di cercare lontano – questo ruolo di rottura e rifondazione è svolto da Matteo Maria Boiardo e, sulla sua scia, da Ludovico Ariosto.¹⁰ Raccontando la *bella storia dell'Orlando innamorato e poi furioso*,¹¹ i loro due capolavori cambiano senza possibilità di ritorno il volto del mondo cavalleresco, ma al tempo stesso diventano il più importante e imprescindibile punto di riferimento all'interno di questo mondo: per gli autori che si sforzano di imitarli, e per i lettori che si aspettano

e desiderano trovare, all'interno dei nuovi testi, le innovazioni di temi, personaggi, forme narrative, modelli letterari cui Boiardo e Ariosto li hanno abituati. E così la loro rottura viene riassorbita all'interno della tradizione – una tradizione apparentemente uniforme, e in realtà profondamente mutata –, ne diventa una componente indispensabile e al tempo

¹⁰ Non c'è bisogno di specificare che un'analogia posizione di «oper[a] di rottura» e «picc[o] artistic[o] del diagramma storico del genere cavalleresco» (VILLORESI 2000: 156) è svolto dal *Morgante* di Pulci; ma, sia perché la sua rivoluzione si svolge in primo luogo sul piano stilistico, sia perché è un'opera quasi impossibile da imitare, che mantiene quindi una posizione isolata negli sviluppi successivi del genere, il suo ruolo è molto diverso da quello dei due capolavori ferraresi.

¹¹ Riprendo il titolo di PANZINI 1933.

stesso il punto di partenza per altre innovazioni.

Questo processo è esemplificato con grande chiarezza dal teatro popolare siciliano, o meglio dal libro che ne costituisce il fondamento: la *Storia dei paladini di Francia* di Giusto Lodico (1858-1860),¹² punto di partenza obbligato di tutti i copioni dei pupari, che lo riprendono con un grado di fedeltà più o meno assoluta a seconda delle diverse tradizioni.¹³ Com'è noto, nella sua lunghissima *Storia* l'autore seleziona una ventina e più di poemi cavallereschi – alcuni famosissimi, altri oggi sconosciuti o quasi agli occhi di un pubblico non specialista – e li riscrive in prosa, disponendoli in sequenza in modo che raccontino le gesta dei paladini dall'infanzia alla rotta di Roncisvalle.¹⁴ Lodico è insieme narratore e riscrittore: il suo lavoro è perlopiù fedelissimo agli originali, arrivando addirittura quasi a una parafrasi verso per verso; ma, dovendo trasformare tante opere scritte da persone e in epoche diverse in un'unica narrazione senza soluzione di continuità, in altri punti invece interviene: aggiunge degli episodi che fungano da nesso tra un poema e l'altro, ne taglia altri che costituirebbero delle contraddizioni, ne modifica altri ancora per eliminare ogni traccia di ironia e parodia e adattare anche i poemi più dissacranti (come l'*Orlandino* di Folengo e il *Morgante* di Pulci) al tono serio, epico e altisonante della sua narrazione. E, dal momento che la letteratura cavalleresca è un territorio dai confini elastici e dagli schemi che si ripetono, in cui è sempre possibile aggiungere una nuova storia (magari sfruttando personaggi e meccanismi narrativi già noti), interviene anche senza motivazioni apparenti, a suo gusto.¹⁵

Nella *Storia* non possono mancare i poemi di Boiardo e Ariosto. Ma Lodico va molto oltre il loro semplice inserimento: proprio queste opere, che si ponevano consape-

¹² LODICO, *Storia dei paladini di Francia*. Sulla figura di Lodico si vedano CAVALLO 2012, PASQUALINO 2018 e CAROCCI 2019.

¹³ Per tutti gli artisti dell'Opera dei Pupi, dal momento della pubblicazione fino alla metà del Novecento (ma in molti casi anche ai nostri giorni), la *Storia* di Lodico (in genere conosciuta attraverso il rifacimento di Giuseppe Leggio, la cui prima edizione è del 1895-96) è la *Bibbia* o *'u libru*, il libro per antonomasia, che usano come base per i propri copioni. Semplificando, in base all'analisi dei copioni si può dire che si vada da una fedeltà assoluta alla *Storia* nell'Opera dei Pupi di tradizione palermitana a un massimo grado di innovazione in quella di tradizione pugliese, passando per Catania. In merito rimando a CAROCCI 2019.

¹⁴ Nella *Storia*, Lodico va dalla riscrittura dei grandi capolavori a quella dei poemi di Vincenzo Brusantino o Lodovico Dolce, fino a quella di opere anonime. Per l'elenco completo delle fonti di Lodico note fino a questo momento si veda ivi 2019: 50.

¹⁵ Per il lavoro di Lodico rimando a ivi e PASQUALINO 2018.

volmente come un'infrangimento e una rottura degli schemi tradizionali, diventano il vero cuore della *Storia*, il suo centro nevralgico. Se molti altri poemi vengono franti, smembrati e modificati, il nucleo Boiardo-Ariosto è riprodotto in modo fedele, seguendo la peculiare gestione narrativa dello spazio-tempo degli autori senza variazioni, spostamenti o tagli. Non solo: tutti i testi che precedono o seguono questo nucleo devono adattarsi ad esso, anche a costo di subire delle modifiche, sia dal punto di vista narrativo (la trama e la caratterizzazione dei personaggi) sia da quello delle tecniche narrative (ed ecco quindi che Lodico mescola fili appartenenti a opere diverse in modo da introdurre l'*entrelacement* anche nei poemi che originariamente non ne erano dotati). Nella *Storia*, insomma, si ripete il processo che già aveva caratterizzato la ricezione dei due *Orlandi* nel Cinquecento: la rivoluzione diventa tradizione.

Che ne è del tema dell'esilio nei poemi di rottura, e come evolve nel processo di riscrittura e adattamento di Lodico? Boiardo, il grande rivoluzionario, capovolge gli schemi anche per quanto riguarda l'esilio. Nell'*Inamoramento*, nessuno viene esiliato: la bella Angelica e suo fratello arrivano alla corte di Carlo Magno raccontando di essere stati ingiustamente cacciati dal loro regno, ma si tratta di una menzogna, un inganno per conquistare Parigi; Orlando, innamoratosi di Angelica, lascia la corte per mettersi sulle sue tracce e si reca in luoghi esotici e lontani (come Albracca, città in cui la bella principessa pagana viene assediata) oppure in luoghi magici (il Giardino di Falerina, il Regno di Morgana, la Fonte del Riso); e per una serie di circostanze Rinaldo, l'eroe ribelle e quindi l'esiliato per eccellenza, si assume la responsabilità dell'esercito francese e, lungi dall'essere cacciato da Carlo, ricopre il ruolo tradizionalmente affidato ad Orlando di difendere Parigi da un'invasione nemica.¹⁶ Anche nell'*Orlando furioso* l'esilio non è presente nella sua connotazione tradizionale, ma assume una forma affatto diversa: l'eroe parte non perché costretto ma per una sua propria decisione, per esplorare terre ignote. Non è un esiliato

¹⁶ Angelica racconta la finta storia dell'esilio suo e del fratello in BOIARDO, *Inamoramento de Orlando* [Tissot-Benvenuti - Montagnani], I 1 25; Orlando lascia Parigi per seguirla (I II 27) e, dopo innumerevoli avventure di cui varie di stampo magico, arriva ad Albracca (I XIV 56); le principali – anche se non le uniche – avventure di Orlando nei regni incantati sono: nel Giardino di Falerina (II IV), nel Regno di Morgana (II VIII-IX) e nella Fonte del Riso (II XXXI e III VII). Al contrario Rinaldo, reso insensibile all'amore dalla Fonte di Merlino (I III 31-39), rimane a Parigi alla testa dell'esercito finché non viene portato via suo malgrado da un incantesimo di Angelica (I V 46-47).

ma un viaggiatore. E infatti gli altrove più esotici sono quelli raggiunti dai cavalieri in sella all'ippogrifo, la creatura metà fantastica e metà reale che più di ogni altra è stata identificata con la fantasia e la composizione poetica: sull'ippogrifo, Astolfo esplora il mondo conosciuto e quello sconosciuto (il mitico regno del Senapo) e arriva perfino nel regno dei morti, prima di salire sulla luna con il carro infuocato di Elia; e sempre dall'ippogrifo Ruggiero viene portato nell'isola magica di Alcina, di cui, nonostante gli ammonimenti di Astolfo, cade incautamente prigioniero.¹⁷

Già da questa rapidissima rassegna emerge come l'altrove sconosciuto e lontano che è la tipica meta dell'esiliato venga sostituito, in Boiardo e poi in Ariosto, dall'altrove magico. E non soltanto perché i regni di fate e maghe costituiscono uno sfondo esotico e affascinante in cui ambientare le avventure dei personaggi tradizionali, ma perché il percorso che i cavalieri protagonisti compiono in questi luoghi magici è molto simile a quello dell'eroe in esilio. Anche in questo caso si tratta di un mondo "altro" nel più completo senso del termine, frequentemente descritto in termini più accurati e perfino più esotici delle terre straniere dell'esilio; e vi si arriva attraverso un momento di passaggio analogo al viaggio, l'attraversamento di una frontiera – che spesso è una frontiera acquifera, proprio come la maggior parte degli spostamenti che portano i cavalieri in Oriente implica il viaggio per mare. È un mondo abitato da pagani, con la differenza però che in genere il signore del luogo è una donna, dotata di poteri magici (come molte donne pagane della tradizione cavalleresca): l'Altro è sostituito dall'Altra, un simbolo di alterità ancora più assoluta, che all'estraneità di religione e di cultura aggiunge l'estraneità di genere.¹⁸

In questo mondo il cavaliere vive delle avventure di stampo sia bellico che amoroso, supera delle prove, e infine ritorna a casa. L'eroe, tuttavia, non si è scontrato con il po-

¹⁷ I viaggi di Astolfo sono narrati in ARIOSTO, *Orlando Furioso* [Bigi - Zampese], X e XV e poi XXXIII (il regno del Senapo) e XXXIV-XXXV (l'Inferno, il Paradiso Terrestre e la Luna). Ruggiero, portato via in volo dall'ippogrifo (IV 44-46), raggiunge l'Isola di Alcina (VI 17); la vicenda si sviluppa poi nei canti VII, VIII e X. Vale la pena di notare che lo stesso Ruggiero, una volta compiuto il suo percorso di formazione, è protagonista di una vicenda più simile a quella di un tradizionale eroe in esilio: la vicenda che si snoda tra i canti XLIV e XLV, quando il giovane, rifiutato dai genitori di Bradamante come futuro sposo della donna (e quindi, a tutti gli effetti, vittima di un'ingiustizia), sceglie di lasciare Parigi e di andarsene lontano, in volontario esilio, e vive una serie di avventure che gli varranno la conquista di un regno.

¹⁸ Con le uniche eccezioni di Melissa e Logistilla nel *Furioso*, maghe e fate sono sempre pagane. Si ricordi che anche per i cavalieri cristiani in Oriente l'avventura amorosa con una bella fanciulla pagana è quasi una tappa obbligatoria.

tere e non è stato forzato a partire: la sua è una libera scelta, su un cammino di esplorazione dell'ignoto che in molti casi – da Orlando nell'*Inamoramento* a Ruggiero nel *Furioso* – implica anche un temporaneo abbandono dei propri doveri. A parziale giustificazione dei loro personaggi, in queste circostanze gli autori possono invocare proprio la magia, che



Fig. 5. Maga Alcina. Pupo palermitano in paggio a tre teste del teatro di Gaspare Canino, XIX secolo, altezza piede-ferro 127 cm. Museo Internazionale delle Marionette Antonio Pasqualino, inv. D226.

con i suoi inganni altera la realtà, annebbia i sensi dei cavalieri e spesso è la causa diretta del loro amore per la maga: sappiamo che nel *Furioso*, quando cade il velo della magia, Ruggiero scopre che Alcina non è una donna bellissima ma un'orrenda vecchia, che «Pallido, crespò e macilente avea / [...] il viso, il crin raro e canuto; / sua statura a sei palmi non giungea: / ogni dente di bocca era caduto». ¹⁹ Il costruttore di un pupo palermitano dell'Ottocento, appartenuto alla famiglia dei Canino, ha dato una rappresentazione particolarmente vivida a quest'inganno realizzando Alcina come un

pupo a tre teste: bella fanciulla, diavolo e scheletro, simbolo della morte [Figura 5].

Nonostante tutti i punti di contatto tra i due schemi narrativi, la riconversione del tema dell'esilio nell'avventura nei regni incantati operata da Boiardo e Ariosto non sembra abbastanza per Lodico. In nome del suo assoluto rispetto per i grandi capolavori estensi, nella *Storia dei paladini* la rinarrazione di questi passi non viene alterata; ma, subito prima di dare avvio alle vicende dell'*Inamoramento* e del *Furioso*, Lodico aggiunge

¹⁹ ARIOSTO, *Orlando Furioso* [Bigi - Zampese], VII 73, 1-4. Agli effetti di un incantesimo si deve anche il comportamento di Orlando nella Fonte del Riso (cfr. BOIARDO, *Inamoramento de Orlando* [Tissoni Benvenuti - Montagnani], II xxxi 48 e III vii 9); ma naturalmente sono moltissimi i casi in cui la magia non può scusare i cavalieri: si pensi soltanto alle *avances* di Ruggiero ad Angelica in ARIOSTO, *Orlando Furioso* [Bigi - Zampese], X 112-115.

di sua iniziativa una storia d'esilio declinata secondo gli schemi tradizionali. A partire dal protagonista: che, se non è Rinaldo, è una sua diretta reincarnazione – il figlio adottivo Morbello, soprannominato Malaguerra. A questa vicenda, frutto in massima parte della creatività dello stesso Lodico, dedicherò la seconda parte dell'intervento.

4. La vicenda di Malaguerra occupa l'intero *Libro sesto* della *Storia*, per un totale di ben venti capitoli. Ha ancora più spazio nel rifacimento della *Storia* effettuato da Giuseppe Leggio a fine Ottocento, che arricchisce la vicenda di nuovi episodi di sua invenzione.²⁰ E naturalmente occupa parecchie serate negli spettacoli tradizionali di Opera dei Pupi, di cui ci sono giunte notizie attraverso un notevole insieme di copioni, alcune registrazioni e molte testimonianze – tutte concordi nel sottolineare che Morbello-Malaguerra ha sempre riscosso la più grande simpatia sia tra il pubblico che tra gli artisti dell'Opera dei Pupi.²¹ Oggi il repertorio degli spettacoli ruota intorno alla messinscena e anche alla rielaborazione in forme originali delle storie dei poemi più famosi, non di rado con un rapporto diretto con i capolavori quattro-cinquecenteschi che aggira il tramite della *Storia dei paladini*. In questo contesto Malaguerra – come tutti i personaggi che non partecipano alle vicende raccontate da Pulci, Boiardo o Ariosto – dovrebbe essere automaticamente escluso dalle rappresentazioni, e infatti alla metà degli anni Novanta era stato definito «una figura sbiadita», quasi priva di una «marionetta propria».²² Sembra invece che in anni recenti si stia riconquistando uno spazio sulla scena: «Le vicende del cavalier Mala-

²⁰ Cfr. LEGGIO, *Storia dei paladini di Francia* e la nota 27.

²¹ Le avventure di Malaguerra sono presenti in tutti i copioni tradizionali (cioè che seguono la *Storia* di Lodico) di area catanese, palermitana e pugliese che ho potuto esaminare presso il Museo Pasqualino e la Biblioteca di Palazzo Branciforte a Palermo; per quanto riguarda le testimonianze del successo riscosso dal suo personaggio, si va dalla già citata intervista di Nino Mancuso del 1970, in cui il «fatto di Malaguerra» viene definito «bellissimo», all'intervista rilasciata dal puparo di Monreale Enzo Rossi a Jo Ann Cavallo nel 2002, secondo cui Malaguerra era un personaggio che «faceva simpatia» proprio perché «ribelle» (<<https://edblogs.columbia.edu/eboiardo/interview-with-enzo-rossi/>>) e alla dichiarazioni di Salvatore Olivieri per cui «Lui [Malaguerra] è dotato di una forza straordinaria, è un avventuriero, dove mette piede non cresce l'erba, sembra suo padre giovane. Ecco perché il personaggio è molto amato dal pubblico di allora» (comunicazione del 2019, ora in CAVALLO 2020: 284).

²² Così Felice Cammarata in LODICO, *Storia dei paladini di Francia* [Cammarata], vol. VI, *Introduzione*.

guerra” sono ad esempio uno dei cavalli di battaglia di Enzo Mancuso, *oprante* e direttore della compagnia palermitana Carlo Magno [Figura 6].²³

Quella di Morbello-Malaguerra è una tipica storia mitico-fiabesca (che, come tutte le storie mitico-fiabesche, è anche in parte un percorso di formazione): Morbello



Fig. 6. Morbello/Malaguerra. Pupo costruito da Enzo Mancuso e Antonino Guarino nel 2005 per lo spettacolo “Morbello distrugge l’incanto della maga Uriella”, Palermo, Teatro Carlo Magno.

è un bambino abbandonato in una cesta nel mare, che viene adottato da Rinaldo e che, crescendo, si dimostra abile nelle armi e tendente alla ribellione come il padre adottivo, tanto da guadagnarsi il suo soprannome parlante. Jo Ann Cavallo dice giustamente che Malaguerra incarna, quanto e più di Rinaldo, il prototipo dell’eroe antistatale, che si batte contro lo Stato e l’autorità dello Stato quando questa autorità è ingiusta.²⁴ Infatti, pur essendosi già coperto di gloria, a causa delle macchinazioni di Gano Malaguerra provoca l’ira di Carlo e sceglie la via dell’esilio; via che si conclude, secondo lo svolgimento tradizionale, con

²³ Mancuso ha costruito il suo pupo di Malaguerra nel 2005, con la collaborazione di Antonino Guarino, e da allora lo spettacolo è entrato a far parte del suo repertorio; pupi di Malaguerra sono presenti anche almeno nella compagnia di Franco Cuticchio e in quella di Salvatore Olivieri (che ha costruito il pupo in tempi recentissimi, nel 2019, per sostituirne un altro che aveva venduto): cfr. CAVALLO 2020: 284-285.

²⁴ Cfr. *ivi*; dello stesso parere è Antonio Pasqualino, secondo il quale Malaguerra «non si accontenta della ribellione come viene praticata da Rinaldo, che è sempre pronto a riconciliarsi con Carlomagno purché gli venga resa giustizia, ma vorrebbe portare il suo rifiuto del potere statale fino alla completa delegittimazione del sovrano» (PASQUALINO 1992: 100; cfr. anche *Id.* 1977: 123).

la conquista e la conversione di un nuovo regno e la riconciliazione con l'imperatore di Francia.

La storia di Malaguerra rappresenta uno dei casi più vistosi in cui Giusto Lodico, più che riscrittore, si dimostra narratore: non segue pedissequamente un unico modello, ma riprende da più fonti, contamina e inventa, fino ad ottenere un racconto originale. Il nucleo di partenza della storia (il tema del figlio ribelle e le prime prove del giovane, compiute per amore) proviene infatti dal *Mambriano* del Cieco da Ferrara; ma lì Malaguerra (che si chiama Ivonetto) è un figlio biologico di Rinaldo. La parte delle sue origini misteriose e soprattutto la lunga e complessa vicenda dell'esilio sono state aggiunte da Lodico, intrecciando pezzi di altri due poemi (l'anonimo *Ajolpho del Barbicone* e il *Palmerino d'Oliva* di Lodovico Dolce) e saldandoli con particolari di sua invenzione.²⁵ Interrogarsi sulle motivazioni alla base delle scelte di un narratore – di qualsiasi livello – è sempre un terreno scivoloso; ma, come si è già accennato, non sembra troppo improbabile che a questo punto della *Storia dei paladini*, nell'imminenza della lunga porzione di testo dedicata alla riscrittura dell'*Inamoramento* e del *Furioso*, Lodico avverta che il tema dell'esilio sia troppo vistosamente assente, e decida di introdurlo alterando – o meglio riscrivendo – la sua fonte.

L'esilio di Malaguerra si può dividere in tre avventure in tre diversi luoghi orientali, tipiche ambientazioni delle imprese dei cavalieri lontano dalla propria patria: la Macedonia, il regno di una maga, l'impero di Trabisonda. Lodico dota la storia del personaggio da lui creato di tutti gli ingredienti della tradizionale declinazione del tema dell'esilio nella letteratura cavalleresca (dalle avventure di Carlotto nei romanzi in prosa di Andrea da Barberino a quelle di Rinaldo in Oriente nei poemi Quattrocenteschi); ma, a riprova

²⁵ I tre personaggi alla base di Malaguerra non hanno molto in comune a parte la giovinezza, e i tre poemi che Lodico usa come fonti sono molto diversi per epoca di composizione, ambiente e qualità, oltre che per il trattamento che ricevono nella *Storia dei paladini*: il *Mambriano* del Cieco da Ferrara, composto tra la corte di Mantova e quella di Ferrara e pubblicato postumo nel 1509, è uno dei migliori esiti della letteratura cavalleresca tra Boiardo e Ariosto, e viene rinarrato per intero nella *Storia* di Lodico; l'*Ajolpho del Barbicone* (1516) è un rifacimento in versi anonimo dei *Reali di Francia* di Andrea da Barberino; il *Palmerino* (1561) del Dolce è una delle imprese tipografico-letterarie dell'autore, che si riallaccia a un lungo e articolato ciclo di grande successo, in castigliano (il primo libro del ciclo, il *Palmerin de Oliva*, è del 1526) e poi in italiano. A differenza del *Mambriano*, l'*Ajolpho* e il *Palmerino* non sono riscritti per intero da Lodico, che ne riprende solo delle parti: in particolare, il poema di Dolce costituisce la fonte dominante per le avventure di Malaguerra dopo essere andato in esilio. Sulle fonti di Malaguerra cfr. CAROCCI 2019: 45-48.

dell'influenza di Boiardo e di Ariosto, si può anche notare la tendenza a mescolare e sovrapporre l'altrove lontano e l'altrove magico, e quindi la forte presenza di avventure di stampo magico-meraviglioso.

Lasciata Parigi per evitare di essere ingiustamente imprigionato da Carlo Magno, costretto a separarsi dalla sua promessa sposa, solo, Malaguerra se ne va «vagando per piani e monti [...] in traccia della sua fortuna»: ²⁶ il tipico incipit del motivo della partenza dell'eroe, che per gli spettatori dell'Opera dei Pupi si associa all'incomprensibilità dell'autorità e alla necessità dell'emigrazione. ²⁷ Incontra un Nano, canonica figura cavalleresca di aiutante magico, che gli propone una grande impresa: la conquista di un'acqua miracolosa, unico rimedio per guarire il re di Macedonia da una terribile malattia. La sorgente dell'acqua è «consacrata a tre maghe» che vi si recano per bagnarsi e raccogliere le erbe per le loro pozioni, e la fanno custodire da una serpe mostruosa, «di tal grandezza che invano vi si opporrebbero Alessandro ed Artaserse coll'infinito loro esercito». Alla vista del mostro, «che affamato rodeva le misere ossa di altri sventurati», Malaguerra esita per tre volte (come non c'è bisogno di sottolineare, la ripetizione del numero tre è un tratto tipicamente fiabesco), ma alla fine lo combatte e lo uccide. Già alla conclusione di questa prima impresa Malaguerra si potrebbe assicurare un regno e una moglie, perché la figlia del re di Macedonia si innamora di lui; ma resta fedele alla sua promessa sposa e si rimette in viaggio per mare.

La sua imbarcazione fa naufragio e il giovane viene soccorso da tre maghe, che gli chiedono di scegliere quale tra loro sia la più bella: ancora un contesto magico, ancora tre maghe, ma con un'ovvia ripresa del motivo del giudizio di Paride. Malaguerra sceglie la secondogenita Sordanella e la accompagna nel suo castello. Questa parte della storia si svolge quindi proprio all'interno di uno di quei regni o giardini incantati che in Boiardo e Ariosto rappresentano il corrispettivo dei viaggi in Oriente dei cavalieri in esilio,

²⁶ Tutte le citazioni provengono da LODICO, *Storia dei paladini di Francia*, vol. II, capp. xvi-xx.

²⁷ Colpevole solo di essersi difeso dal tradimento dei Maganzesi, Malaguerra sceglie la via dell'esilio su consiglio addirittura di Orlando, che sa bene che Carlo arresterà e forse ucciderà il ragazzo per il suo attacco a Gano e ai suoi uomini. Nella riscrittura ampliata della *Storia* effettuata da Giuseppe Leggio questa parte è molto amplificata: prima di andare in esilio Malaguerra attacca e abbatte un gran numero di paladini e alla fine prende prigioniero lo stesso Carlo Magno e ne misconosce esplicitamente l'autorità: a Carlo che lo minaccia di morte per la sua ribellione risponde infatti «Io non sono soggetto a nessuno» (LEGGIO, *Storia dei paladini di Francia*, vol. II, cap. xxxiv). Cfr. CAVALLO 2020: 272-277.

ed è declinata secondo la falsariga di tanti episodi analoghi nei poemi post-boiardi e post-ariosteschi: ammalato dalla bellezza della maga, Malaguerra «ad un tempo obliò l'onore delle sue imprese e l'amore di Rosana; e colla benda d'amore si pose a seguire la damigella»; dopo un certo periodo, però, viene richiamato al dovere da un sogno ammonitore, ricorre all'inganno per uscire dal regno incantato e abbandona Sordanella incinta, carica di pensieri di odio e di vendetta.²⁸ È una variazione sul tema di un altro motivo mitico fondamentale: il motivo di Enea e Didone, per cui l'eroe in esilio, nel corso dei suoi vagabondaggi, incontra un'altra donna, avvia una relazione, costruisce con lei una nuova casa, per poi lasciarla e tornare al proprio destino. Ma si tratta anche di un tipico tema cavalleresco, dove maghe e fate – a dispetto dei loro poteri magici – non sono diverse da qualsiasi altra fanciulla pagana che un cavaliere cristiano incontra mentre esplora terre ignote: ben di rado sono in grado di conservarsi l'amore del cavaliere, e lui regolarmente le abbandona per far ritorno al suo mondo, il mondo della guerra e anche della religione. Ancora una volta, l'immaginario dei poemi cavallereschi continua quasi senza soluzione di continuità fino al mondo dell'Opera dei Pupi: come ha notato Pasqualino, infatti, i pupari e il loro pubblico accettavano con grande equanimità le avventure amorose dell'eroe lontano dalla patria perché costituiscono una parentesi temporanea, dopo le quali l'eroe torna dalla moglie o dalla promessa sposa, restaurando un accettabile *status quo* anche sotto il profilo domestico.²⁹ In più, non bisogna dimenticare che la scelta del cavaliere ha anche una ricaduta sul piano narrativo, perché, lasciando la compagna pagana, apre le porte a un possibile *sequel* della storia: le vicende di cui è protagonista la donna abbandonata (che può scegliere la via del suicidio oppure quella della vendetta) e del suo quasi immanicabile figlio. Sordanella, per esempio, scoprendosi impotente nell'immediato, decide di «riserbare a miglior tempo la vendetta, onde conservando di nuovo quel libretto che faceala terribile [il libretto magico] si pose a vivere da disperata. Trascorso il giusto termine

²⁸ Qui Lodico sembra prendere ispirazione dagli episodi iniziali del *Mambriano*, vissuti prima dall'eroe eponimo e poi da Rinaldo: Mambriano fa naufragio, è soccorso dalla maga Carandina e se ne innamora; ha anche un sogno ammonitore che lo richiama ai suoi doveri; ma è poi Rinaldo, dopo aver vissuto per un certo periodo con la maga nel suo regno incantato, ad abbandonarla con l'inganno. Episodi analoghi sono comunque frequentissimi nella letteratura cavalleresca, soprattutto dopo Boiardo: in merito cfr. CAROCCI 2018: 421-439.

²⁹ PASQUALINO 1992.

[...] diede a luce uno dei più famosi eroi, che ella stessa appellò Farabax, che in lingua di quel paese suonava *figlio della sciagura*».

Infine, c'è la terza avventura, in cui la componente magica cede il posto a un più tradizionale andamento cavalleresco: Malaguerra sconfigge un terribile gigante, è vittima di un tradimento da parte del sovrano di Trabisonda e lo uccide; ma scopre poi che si tratta di suo padre, che aveva cercato di farlo assassinare da bambino dopo che un indovino gli aveva predetto che il figlio «a diciotto anni ti dovrà uccidere stando a lauta mensa» [Figura 7]. Troviamo qui un'altra serie di motivi mitici – dall'avvertimento dell'indovino al mito



Fig. 7. Morbello Malaguerra uccide suo padre. Illustrazione di G. Mattaliano, in Giusto Lodico, *Storia dei paladini di Francia*, libro VI, cap. 19; la stessa scena è rappresentata nel cartello catanese di Rosario Napoli, Catania, Collezione Marionettistica dei fratelli Napoli (1928-1929 ca.).

edipico dell'uccisione del padre –³⁰ ma anche di alcuni dei temi cavallereschi più amati dall'Opera dei Pupi. Da un lato c'è ancora il tema della lotta all'autorità: Malaguerra si conferma un eroe che, come tutti i veri eroi, combatte il potere ingiusto, perché Arimondo, imperatore di Trabisonda, era un sovrano crudele e traditore. Dall'altro lato c'è il tema dell'identità, tipico dei cavalieri in terre lontane, che, per i più svariati motivi (dall'esigenza di proteggersi alla volontà di diffondere la religione cristiana), tendono a presentarsi sotto falso nome: in tutte le sue precedenti avventure Malaguerra aveva orgogliosamente proclamato la propria identità di figlio di Rinaldo – un'identità falsa, anche se lui non poteva saperlo; adesso scopre le sue vere origini, e così rimedia al torto compiuto dal pa-

³⁰ Nel repertorio dell'Opera dei Pupi c'è un'altra storia di parricidio involontario: l'uccisione del padre Ricciardetto da parte di Guido Santo, raccontata da Giuseppe Leggio sulla base di un romanzo di Emanuele Bruno (cfr. LEGGIO, *Il figlio di Ricciardetto*). Come nota PASQUALINO 1977: 123, autori e pubblico dell'Opera dei Pupi non giudicano negativamente queste vicende, perché «sfuggono al giudizio morale le colpe inconsapevoli».

dre biologico nei suoi confronti e si conquista un regno. Inoltre, secondo un altro tratto tipico del motivo dell'eroe in terre pagane, fa convertire l'intero popolo di Trabisonda al cristianesimo. A questo punto, il suo percorso di crescita e formazione è compiuto: con l'approvazione di Rinaldo e di tutti gli altri paladini, è libero di farsi raggiungere dalla fidanzata Rosana, sposarla e diventare imperatore di Trabisonda, ormai un regno cristiano in terra straniera.

5. «Duro destino è l'averne un destino», diceva Italo Calvino a proposito del Ruggiero ariostesco.³¹ Il motto è applicabile a quasi tutti i grandi eroi – da quelli epici a quelli moderni – e di certo a quasi tutti gli eroi cavallereschi. Per i veri eroi, infatti, l'*happy ending* non è quasi mai di lunga durata; e, dal momento che sono troppo forti per essere sconfitti e uccisi in un duello corretto, in genere muoiono a causa di un tradimento: così accade ad Orlando e alla maggior parte dei paladini a Roncisvalle; così accade, in un contesto diverso, anche a Rinaldo; così accade a Ruggiero, che nella versione ripresa dalla *Storia* non muore neanche sul campo di battaglia ma avvelenato nel proprio letto. Su Malaguerra Lodico si limita a un accenno; ma in base a quest'accenno anche a lui è riservato lo stesso destino di tradimento: perché, impauriti dalla nuova religione, i sovrani pagani sottoposti al suo impero «sacrificando immense ricchezze lo uccisero di veleno».

Come si comportano gli artisti dell'Opera dei Pupi davanti a casi del genere – casi non solo in cui la storia volge in tragedia, ma in cui il racconto è appena accennato, e ha bisogno di essere sviluppato autonomamente? Ancora una volta, si possono chiamare in causa le parole d'ordine di tradizione, rivoluzione e continuità. La maggior parte delle compagnie di Opera dei Pupi di cui ci sono giunti i copioni, dopo aver seguito fedelmente Lodico fino a questo momento, se ne distacca e lascia Malaguerra felice nel suo regno: così, ad esempio, fanno il puparo palermitano Gaspare Canino e il puparo catanese attivo a New York Agrippino Manteo.³² Una scelta logica da più di un punto di vista: perché l'accenno alla morte di Malaguerra nella *Storia* di Lodico è rapido, marginale e può facil-

³¹ CALVINO 1970: 61.

³² Ho potuto esaminare personalmente i copioni di Canino presso il Museo Pasqualino; su Manteo, rimando invece a CAVALLO 2020 ed. EAD. 2023a.

mente sfuggire all'attenzione, inserito com'è non in chiusura di capitolo ma all'interno di un capoverso in cui si stanno ancora celebrando la vittoria e l'incoronazione del giovane imperatore; ma anche perché un ingrediente essenziale del successo della letteratura cavalleresca è il meccanismo di soddisfazione delle attese, in cui il lieto fine gioca una parte importante. Il pubblico sa che i suoi eroi (o almeno la maggior parte) devono morire a Roncisvalle; ma, fino a quel momento, nello spazio narrativo estendibile a dismisura che li separa dal compimento del loro destino, essi sono di fatto invulnerabili: sempre sul punto di soccombere, e sempre destinati a uscire vincitori dalle più varie avventure. Sono i personaggi secondari (gli avversari, ma anche gli amici o i compagni di viaggio dei cavalieri, soprattutto se di origini pagane) a morire improvvisamente; gli eroi no. L'Opera dei Pupi ha ereditato in pieno questa predilezione per le storie a lieto fine: è noto che il pubblico tradizionale, pur considerandola la climax del ciclo carolingio, non amava la messinscena di Roncisvalle, in cui più la storia progrediva più si versavano calde lacrime per la morte degli eroi. Sono rimaste celebri le parole con cui Giuseppe Pitrè descrive «il silenzio», «il raccoglimento», «la tristezza» degli spettatori durante questi spettacoli, quando «il rosticciaio stesso tra atto et atto non vocia, non ischiamazza, non fa neppure uno zitto» e, «al benedir che fa Turpino il conte Orlando, tutti si scoprono il capo come la sera del Venerdì santo».³³

Ma ci sono anche compagnie che scelgono di sviluppare l'accento di Lodico: per esempio, un copione pugliese ceduto al Museo Pasqualino dalla compagnia di Anna dell'Aquila e originariamente appartenente alla famiglia Luigini-Lippolis, dedica un intero spettacolo in tre atti alla *Morte di Malaguerra avvelenato dai Re alleati* [Figura 8], in cui due re di regni vicini – che già al momento dell'incoronazione tramano contro il nuovo imperatore, di cui non vogliono accettare gli ordini e la religione – arrivano a corte con il pretesto di consegnare i propri tributi a Malaguerra, ne ricevono gentile accoglienza e lo ricambiano avvelenandolo e uccidendolo.³⁴ Passando di mano in mano, il copione riporta

³³ PITRÈ 1889: 147. Secondo la testimonianza di Pasqualino, queste reazioni rimangono invariate fino agli anni Cinquanta del Novecento, poi, nei decenni successivi, «assottigliandosi il pubblico degli spettatori abituali, mi accadde di assistere a una rappresentazione della morte di Orlando durante la quale alcuni spettatori occasionali ridevano, con grande indignazione e umiliazione del puparo», cfr. PASQUALINO 1992: 140.

³⁴ Il copione fa parte di un fondo di 347 copioni, di cui 142 sulla *Storia dei paladini di Francia*, scritti a mano su quaderni bianchi di 23x31 cm. Precedentemente appartenuti a Luigi Luigini e Antonio Lippolis (di cui



Fig. 8. Copione della serie di "Orlando" originariamente appartenuto alla famiglia Luigini-Lippolis ed ereditato dalla compagnia Anna Dell'Aquila, anni Venti del Novecento, Museo Internazionale delle Marionette Antonio Pasqualino, s.c.

varianti e modifiche: in apertura della vicenda, ad esempio, Malaguerra è turbato da oscuri presagi per la sorte di Rinaldo, di cui dice di non avere più notizie ormai «è molto»; un intervento successivo corregge la notazione temporale in «sono già due anni», specificando l'intervallo di tempo in cui il giovane può godere della sua condizione di meritata felicità. Analogamente, in origine il copione terminava con la moglie e la madre di Malaguerra che, dopo la sua morte, vengono condotte in prigione tra i clamori del popolo, «per poi decidere della loro sorte»; un'aggiunta stabilisce invece che le due donne vengono uccise subito dopo Malaguerra.

I copioni Luigini-Lippolis di questa parte della *Storia* ci dicono molto sulla logica dei meccanismi narrativi che regola la preparazione degli spettacoli dell'Opera dei Pupi (e che ri-

prendono, ancora una volta, analoghi meccanismi di produzione di testi cavallereschi). Da un lato, il tradimento e la morte di Malaguerra permettono di sfruttare le consuete strategie del *sequel*, facendo tornare Trabisonda (che è una delle più tradizionali ambientazioni delle avventure dei cavalieri in Oriente) nelle mani dei pagani e di aprire un nuovo fronte di avventure: un copione successivo si intitola infatti *La guerra fatta dai sovrani di Trabisonda contro Carlo*.³⁵ Dall'altro lato, il frontespizio del copione *La morte di Malaguerra avvelenato dai Re alleati* contiene la testimonianza di un diverso tipo di manipolazione

compaiono le firme), sono poi passati alla compagnia pugliese Anna Dell'Aquila e nel 1980 sono stati venduti a Janne Vibæk e Antonio Pasqualino; oggi sono custoditi presso il Museo internazionale delle marionette Antonio Pasqualino. Cfr. PASQUALINO 1995.

³⁵ Trabisonda è al centro di un omonimo poema tardo-quattrocentesco, che racconta l'ultima parte della vita di Rinaldo, in cui non soltanto l'eroe è esiliato ingiustamente (come tante altre volte) ma in cui muore addirittura in esilio, senza riconciliarsi con Carlo Magno: cfr. PERROTTA 2019. La vicenda raccontata nel copione *La guerra fatta dai sovrani di Trabisonda*, però, è diversa, e segue direttamente la morte di Malaguerra.

della storia originale: non la continuazione ma la rielaborazione, in base agli ingredienti più noti (e quindi più amati) al pubblico delle storie cavalleresche. In una mano diversa, sotto il titolo dello spettacolo si può infatti leggere «Sbagliato. Solo che si rifarà il libro e correggerà che Gano ucciderà Malaguerra e Rossana»: in altre parole, la versione della vicenda che si legge nel copione (spesso chiamato dai pupari *libro*) non è quella che va portata sulle scene, bisogna modificarla. Nel passaggio di mano in mano di questi copioni (da una generazione all'altra della stessa famiglia o anche da una famiglia all'altra), chi li ha ereditati progetta di riscrivere la storia e di riscriverla in senso ancora più tradizionale, facendo sì che Malaguerra cada non per un tradimento esterno, a opera degli alleati del suo nuovo regno, ma – proprio come la maggior parte dei paladini – per un tradimento interno, ordito dal traditore per eccellenza di tutte le storie cavalleresche, Gano da Magonza. Il motivo dell'esilio viene insomma ricondotto a dei parametri completamente “interni” alla declinazione tradizionale della storia.

È un'idea di riscrittura che rispecchia un'altra tendenza tipica dell'immaginario cavalleresco, ancora una volta accomunando testi letterari e Opera dei Pupi: spesso e volentieri non è il colore della pelle e neppure la religione a fare la differenza tra “buoni” e “cattivi”, ma piuttosto una questione di ideali, di rispetto o rifiuto di un codice basilare di comportamento, per cui da un lato ci sono gli eroi, che credono e praticano l'onestà e l'onore, dall'altro ci sono i traditori, spinti a volte dal tornaconto personale, altre volte da un odio inestinguibile, ma più spesso dalla pura e semplice malvagità, da una brama di distruzione che non si ferma neanche davanti al rischio di essere a propria volta distrutti. Da qui deriva anche il particolare sapore avventuroso e politico dell'esilio nelle narrazioni cavalleresche: l'eroe può essere vittima di un'ingiustizia che lo costringe ad andarsene in terre lontane, ma lì sarà sempre capace di riscattarsi e (come dai regni magici) farà ritorno vincitore; il più grande e terribile pericolo non è rappresentato dai pagani che incontra durante le sue peregrinazioni, che sconfigge grazie alla sua forza eccezionale e con cui, se si condivide il rispetto per un certo codice di comportamento, è sempre possibile trovare un'intesa, ma a casa, nei traditori che minano l'ordine e l'armonia della patria e che, grazie alla debolezza del sovrano, hanno accesso ai vertici del potere. Ecco quindi che anche i cavalieri pagani sono eroi che è possibile ammirare e con cui ci si può perfino identificare, mentre i traditori (e le figure del potere, quando diventano involontariamente loro alleati),

di qualsiasi religione siano e a qualsiasi schieramento appartengano, simboleggiano il male assoluto. È una divisione a suo modo riprodotta nella tradizionale disposizione dei pupi “a riposo”, cioè quando non sono impiegati sulla scena ma devono essere pronti per essere presi dal puparo al bisogno, nel corso dello spettacolo: i cavalieri cristiani sono appesi alla sinistra degli spettatori – tutti tranne Gano e Carlo Magno, che stanno invece a destra, con i nemici pagani. Ed è anche una divisione enunciata a più riprese nella letteratura cavalleresca. Boiardo – forse l'autore che le dà il massimo risalto, dipingendo i grandi avversari pagani come personaggi eroici ed onorevoli quanto i cristiani – la esemplifica perfettamente in due soli versi, proprio in apertura del suo poema: «Et era ciascaduno assicurato, / che non sia traditor o renegato».³⁶

³⁶ BOIARDO, *L'inamoramento de Orlando* [Tissoni Benvenuti - Montagnani], I 1 9, 7-8; sono i criteri di inclusione ed esclusione dalla grande giostra che dà il via al poema, in cui i pagani sono i benvenuti con le uniche eccezioni, appunto, dei traditori e dei cristiani che hanno cambiato religione. Sulla rappresentazione particolarmente positiva degli eroi pagani in Boiardo si veda almeno CAVALLO 2017; sulla molteplicità di possibili rappresentazioni dei pagani nell'Opera dei Pupi rimando invece a EAD. 2023b.

BIBLIOGRAFIA

BIBLIOGRAFIA PRIMARIA

Ajolpho = Aiolpho del Barbicone [...], Venezia, Marchio Sessa, 1516.

ANDREA DA BARBERINO, *I reali di Francia* [Roncaglia - Beggiate] = Andrea da Barberino, *I reali di Francia*, introduzione di Aurelio Roncaglia, note di Fabrizio Beggiate, Roma, Casini, 1987.

ARETINO, *Le carte parlanti* [Casalegno - Giaccone] = Pietro Aretino, *Le carte parlanti*, a cura di Giovanni Casalegno - Gabriella Giaccone, Palermo, Sellerio, 1992.

ARIOSTO, *Orlando Furioso* [Bigi - Zampese] = Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, commento di Emilio Bigi, a cura di Cristina Zampese, Milano, BUR, 2012.

BOIARDO, *L' innamoramento de Orlando* [Tisisoni Benvenuti - Montagnani] = Matteo Maria Boiardo, *L' innamoramento de Orlando*, edizione critica a cura di Antonia Tisisoni Benvenuti - Cristina Montagnani, introduzione e commento di Antonia Tisisoni Benvenuti, 2 voll., Napoli, Ricciardi, 1999.

CASSIO DA NARNI, *Morte del Danese* = Cassio da Narni, *La morte del Danese* [...], Ferrara, Lorenzo Rossi, 1521.

CIECO DA FERRARA, *Mambriano* = Francesco Cieco da Ferrara, *Libro d'arme e d'amore nomato Mambriano*, Ferrara, Giovanni Mazzocchi, 1509.

LUIGINI - LIPPOLIS, *Copioni* = Luigi Luigini - Antonio Lippolis, *Copioni della "Storia dei paladini di Francia"*, 5 faldoni, Palermo, Museo internazionale delle marionette Antonio Pasqualino, s.c.

DOLCE, *Palmerino d'Oliva* = Lodovico Dolce, *Palmerino d'Oliva*, Venezia, Giuseppe Antonelli editore, 1846.

LEGGIO, *Storia dei paladini di Francia* = Giuseppe Leggio, *Storia dei paladini di Francia cominciando dal re Pipino alla morte di Rinaldo. Lavoro di Giusto Lodico con l'aggiunta di altri famosi autori*, 3 voll., Palermo, Giuseppe Leggio editore, 1895-1896.

- LEGGIO, *Il figlio di Ricciardetto* = Giuseppe Leggio, *Il figlio di Ricciardetto, ovvero Guido Santo e i discendenti di Carlo Magno. Seguito della rotta di Roncisvalle*, Palermo, Giuseppe Leggio, 1897.
- LODICO, *Storia dei paladini di Francia* = Giusto Lodico, *Storia dei paladini di Francia, cominciando da Milone conte d'Anglante sino alla morte di Rinaldo*, 4 voll., Palermo, Gaudiano, 1858-1860.
- LODICO, *Storia dei paladini di Francia* [Cammarata] = Giusto Lodico, *Storia dei paladini di Francia*, a cura di Felice Cammarata, 13 voll., Trapani, Celebes, 1971-1972.
- PULCI, *Morgante* [Ageno] = Luigi Pulci, *Morgante*, a cura di Franca Ageno, Milano - Napoli, Ricciardi, 1955.
- Storie di Rinaldo da Montalbano* = mss. Riccardiano I 904, Pluteo XLII 37, Pluteo LXI 40, Pluteo LXXXIX 64 inf., Mediceo Palatino 101⁴.

BIBLIOGRAFIA SECONDARIA

- ASOR ROSA 2011 = Alberto Asor Rosa, *La letteratura italiana e l'esilio*, in «Bollettino di Italianistica», 2 (2011), 7-14.
- BENDER 1961 = Karl-Heinz Bender, *Les métamorphoses de la royauté de Charlemagne dans les premières épopées franco-italiennes*, in «Cultura neolatina», XXI (1961), 164-174.
- BETTIN 2006 = Giancarlo Bettin, *Per un repertorio dei temi e delle convenzioni del poema epico e cavalleresco: 1520-1580*, Venezia, Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2006.
- CALVINO 1970 = Italo Calvino, *Orlando furioso di Ludovico Ariosto raccontato da Italo Calvino. Con una scelta del poema*, Torino, Einaudi, 1970.
- CAROCCI 2018 = Anna Carocci, *La lezione di Boiardo. Il poema cavalleresco dopo l'«I-namoramento de Orlando» (1483-1521)*, Manziana (Roma), Vecchiarelli, 2018.
- CAROCCI 2019 = Anna Carocci, *Il poema che cammina. La letteratura cavalleresca nell'opera dei pupi*, Palermo, Edizioni Museo Pasqualino, 2019.

- CAVALLO 2012 = Jo Ann Cavallo, *Giusto Lodico*, in *The Literary Encyclopedia*, 2012, <<https://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=13068>>.
- CAVALLO 2017 = Jo Ann Cavallo, *Il mondo oltre l'Europa nei poemi di Boiardo e Ariosto*, trad. it. di Corrado Confalonieri, Milano, Bruno Mondadori, 2017.
- CAVALLO 2020 = Jo Ann Cavallo, *Malaguerra: The anti-state super-hero of Sicilian Puppet Theater*, in «AOQU», I, 1 (2020), 259-294.
- CAVALLO 2023a = Jo Ann Cavallo, *The Sicilian Puppet Theater of Agrippino Manteo (1884-1947): The Paladins of France in America*, London, Anthem, 2023.
- CAVALLO 2023b = Jo Ann Cavallo, *Sicilian Puppet Theater: Alterity or Diversity?*, in *Representing Alterity through Puppetry and Performing Objects*, ed. by John Bell - Matthew Isaac Cohen - Jungmin Song, The Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry, <https://digitalcommons.lib.uconn.edu/ballinst_alterity/14>.
- EVERSON 2005 = Jane E. Everson, *The epic tradition of Charlemagne in Italy*, in «Cahiers de recherches médiévales», XII (2005), 45-81.
- EVERSON 2023 = *Charlemagne in Italy*, edited by Jane E. Everson, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2023.
- MONTAGNANI 2011 = Cristina Montagnani, *Lontano da sé: i cavalieri in Paganà*, in «Rassegna europea di letteratura italiana», XXXVIII (2011), 61-71.
- PANZINI 1933 = Alfredo Panzini, *La bella storia di Orlando Innamorato e poi Furioso*, Verona, Mondadori, 1933.
- PASQUALINO 1977 = Antonio Pasqualino, *L'opera dei pupi*, Palermo, Sellerio, 1977.
- PASQUALINO 1986 = *Dal testo alla rappresentazione: le prime imprese di Carlo Magno*, a cura di Antonio Pasqualino, Palermo, Laboratorio antropologico universitario, 1986.
- PASQUALINO 1992 = Antonio Pasqualino, *Le vic del cavaliere: epica medievale e memoria popolare*, Milano, Bompiani, 1992.
- PASQUALINO 1995 = Antonio Pasqualino, *L'opera dei pupi a Roma a Napoli e in Puglia*, Palermo, Associazione per la conservazione delle tradizioni popolari, 1995.
- PASQUALINO 2018 = Antonio Pasqualino, *Rerum palatinorum fragmenta*, a cura di Alessandro Napoli, Palermo, Edizioni Museo Pasqualino, 2018.

- PERROTTA 2012 = Annalisa Perrotta, *Paladini in Pagania. Vero e falso, bugie e camuffamenti nei personaggi cavallereschi tra Quattro e Cinquecento*, in "D'un parlar ne l'altro": *Aspetti dell'enunciazione dal romanzo arturiano alla "Gerusalemme liberata"*, a cura di Annalisa Izzo, Pisa, ETS, 2012, 51-70.
- PERROTTA 2019 = Annalisa Perrotta, *Rinaldo conquista l'Oriente: figure antiche e storia contemporanea nella "Trabisonda" (1483)*, in «Critica del testo», XXII, 3 (2019), 235-248.
- PEZZINI 2022 = Enea Pezzini, *Le lingue di Orlando. Storia e rifunzionalizzazione del topos del poliglottismo di Orlando dall'"Entrée d'Espagne" all'"Orlando furioso"*, in «Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana», CXCIX, 665 (2022), 79-96.
- PITRÈ 1889 = Giuseppe Pitrè, *Usi e costumi, credenze e pregiudizi del popolo siciliano*, 4 voll., Palermo, Lauriel, 1889.
- VENTURINI 2018 = Valentina Venturini, *Il teatro di Gaetano Greco*, Napoli, Editoriale Scientifica, 2018.
- VILLORESI 2000 = Marco Villoresi, *La letteratura cavalleresca. Dai cicli medievali all'Arrivosto*, Roma, Carocci, 2000.

DOLORI E TRIONFI DI RINALDO IMPERATORE NEL POEMA *TRABISONDA* E NELL'OPERA DEI PUPI SICILIANA

Alessandro Napoli

Marionettistica dei Fratelli Napoli di Catania e Museo internazionale delle Marionette "Antonio Pasqualino" di Palermo

ABSTRACT: The story of Rinaldo exiled and then emperor in the East is the subject of a fifteenth-century poem titled *Trabisonda*. Giusto Lodico incorporated these events in his *Storia dei Paladini di Francia*, a prose narrative that combined the plots of many Carolingian poems and that became the direct source of inspiration for the Opera dei Pupi. The adventures of Rinaldo as emperor, recounted in the poem and then reshaped by Lodico and the puppeteers, constitute an example of the transformation in meaning that chivalric narratives have undergone over time in relation to different historical contexts. In the fifteenth century, when the Christian West felt the Ottoman threat, we see how the story of Rinaldo had both a polemical and a propagandistic function. Many centuries later, in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Sicily, we see instead how the episodes concerning Rinaldo as emperor represented the acme of that aspiration to re-establish a more just world order that Antonino Buttitta and Antonio Pasqualino identified as the essential reason for the success of chivalric stories among the Sicilian subaltern classes in the pre-consumer era. Rinaldo, humiliated and despised in the West by Charlemagne and Gano and glorified in the East by the Saracens, became the tangible example of the fact that sometimes things can go right in the world as well as a model of social mobility that invited consideration of the pressing need to emigrate for work as a real possibility of redemption from poverty.

KEY-WORDS: Chivalric Literature, Rinaldo, exile, East, *Trabisonda*, Giusto Lodico, *Storia dei paladini di Francia*, Opera dei Pupi

RIASSUNTO: Rinaldo esule e imperatore in Oriente costituisce la materia del poema quattrocentesco intitolato *Trabisonda*. Queste vicende furono poi inserite da Giusto Lodico nella *Storia dei Paladini di Francia*, narrazione in prosa in cui egli riunì le trame di molti poemi carolingi che diventò la diretta fonte d'ispirazione per l'Opera dei Pupi. Le avventure di Rinaldo imperatore, come

narrate nel poema e come poi riplasmate nella *Storia dei Paladini* e dai pupari, costituiscono un esempio delle trasformazioni di significato che le vicende della letteratura cavalleresca hanno subito nel tempo in relazione ai contesti di fruizione. Nel Quattrocento, quando l'Occidente cristiano avvertiva la minaccia ottomana, si vedrà come le vicende di Rinaldo abbiano rivestito sia una funzione polemica che propagandistica. Molti secoli dopo, nella Sicilia dei secoli XIX e XX, vedremo invece come i fatti di Rinaldo imperatore rappresentassero l'acme di quell'aspirazione al ristabilirsi di un ordine del mondo più giusto che Antonino Buttitta e Antonio Pasqualino hanno individuato come le ragioni profonde del successo delle storie paladinesche per i ceti subalterni siciliani in era preconsumistica. Rinaldo, in Occidente umiliato e disprezzato da Carlo Magno e Gano e glorificato in Oriente dai saraceni, diventava l'esempio tangibile del fatto che qualche volta al mondo le cose si rimettersero a posto e anche un modello di mobilità sociale che spingesse a considerare la stringente necessità di emigrare per lavoro come una reale possibilità di riscatto dalla miseria.

PAROLE CHIAVE: letteratura cavalleresca, Rinaldo, esilio, Oriente, *Trabisonda*, Giusto Lodico, *Storia dei paladini di Francia*, Opera dei Pupi

1. Le vicende che provocano l'esilio in Oriente di Rinaldo e poi i suoi personali trionfi che lo conducono a cingere la corona di un vasto impero sono materia del poema anonimo quattrocentesco in ottava rima intitolato *Trabisonda*.¹ I sedici cantari, incentrati su Rinaldo da Montalbano, sono il risultato di un buon artigianato letterario: l'anonimo poeta con coerenza narrativa e ben dosati colpi di scena riprende alcune vicende della saga rinaldiana già presenti in altre fonti e altre ne sviluppa con maggiore originalità.

I fatti della *Trabisonda* saranno poi inseriti da Giusto Lodico nella sua *Storia dei Paladini di Francia* (1858-1860),² vasta narrazione in prosa in cui l'autore riunisce in sequenza le trame di molti poemi famosi e non famosi di soggetto carolingio, seguendo le vite dei paladini dalla loro nascita fino alla loro morte a Roncisvalle. Questo romanzo popolare diventò per tutti i pupari siciliani e per il loro pubblico abituale la diretta fonte

¹ L'*editio princeps* del poema è del 1483. In alcune edizioni successive esso è erroneamente attribuito a Francesco Tromba da Gualdo di Nocera. Si contano una ventina di edizioni tra la fine del sec. XV e il sec. XVII.

² LODICO, *Storia dei Paladini di Francia*.

d'ispirazione per gli spettacoli dell'Opera dei Pupi, fino a essere considerato unanimemente una *Bibbia* e a essere indicato come *'u Libru*, 'il Libro', per antonomasia.

Le avventure di Rinaldo imperatore di Trebisonda, così come sono narrate nel poema quattrocentesco e come poi vengono di nuovo riplasmate e raccontate nella *Storia dei Paladini di Francia* di don Giusto Lodico e nelle messinscene dei pupari siciliani, costituiscono un esempio interessante delle trasformazioni narrative e di significato che personaggi e vicende della letteratura cavalleresca carolingia hanno subito nel tempo e in relazione ai contesti storico-sociali. Tema d'indagine questo assai caro al mio maestro di studi Antonio Pasqualino, le cui orme mi sforzerò di seguire in questo contributo.

Su questa strada, considererò la materia del poema nel contesto originario di fruizione: la penisola italiana nella seconda metà del Quattrocento, al tempo in cui l'Occidente cristiano avvertiva la minaccia dell'espansione ottomana. Vedremo poi - molti secoli dopo - quali trasformazioni narrative abbia subito la materia del poema per veicolare nuovi significati ed essere fruita dai ceti popolari siciliani dell'Ottocento e del Novecento in età preconsumistica.

Nel primo periodo storico si noterà come le vicende di Rinaldo, esule in Oriente e lì propagatore del Cristianesimo, abbiano rivestito da un lato una funzione polemica riguardo all'ambivalente condotta dell'Occidente cristiano di fronte all'espansione ottomana, dall'altro una funzione propagandistica intesa a esortare i cristiani d'Europa a un contrasto ben più energico dell'avanzata turco-islamica.

Nel secondo segmento temporale vedremo invece come i fatti di Rinaldo imperatore rappresentassero l'acme di quella aspirazione al ristabilirsi di un ordine del mondo più giusto e di quel riscatto mitico dalla propria condizione di subalternità che Antonino Buttitta³ e Antonio Pasqualino⁴ hanno acutamente individuato nei loro studi come le ragioni profonde dell'importanza e del successo delle storie dei paladini per i ceti subalterni siciliani dell'Ottocento e del Novecento prima dell'affermarsi del consumismo.

Dirò subito che, per quanto riguarda il contesto di fruizione della *Trabisonda* nel Quattrocento, oltre alla personale lettura del poema, le mie osservazioni sono in gran

³ BUTTITTA 1977: 12-13.

⁴ PASQUALINO 1977: 117-119.

parte fortemente debitrice di un bel contributo di Annalisa Perrotta.⁵ Per quanto concerne invece la fruizione della materia del poema in Sicilia e nell'Opera dei Pupi, le mie osservazioni nascono da un lungo (e amorevole) lavoro di ricerca condotto confrontando il poema quattrocentesco sia con le due maggiori redazioni della *Storia dei Paladini di Francia*, quella originale già ricordata di Lodico 1858-60 e quella ampliata edita da Giuseppe Leggio nel 1895-96,⁶ sia con la tradizione di messinscena dell'Opera dei Pupi, particolarmente quella catanese, che chi scrive conosce meglio e pratica in quanto componente della Marionettistica dei Fratelli Napoli di Catania, storica compagnia di pupari che nel 2021 ha celebrato cento anni di ininterrotta attività.⁷

2. La *Trabisonda* presenta una trama troppo complessa per poter essere riassunta in maniera efficace. È tuttavia utile, ai fini del nostro discorso, suddividerne il materiale diegetico in tre sezioni narrative.

La prima parte del poema (canti I-V) - quella che Perrotta definisce «*pars destruens*»⁸ e che lo scrivente ama chiamare “la passione di Rinaldo” - è ambientata in Francia. Un iniziale e pretestuoso tradimento di Gano provoca la condanna di Rinaldo all'impiccagione, ma il paladino viene salvato dal negromante Malagigi suo cugino (canto I). Seguono il “vantamento” dei paladini (canti II e III), l'assedio e la distruzione del castello di Montalbano (canti III e IV), la resa di Rinaldo sotto la città di Tremogna, la consegna della moglie Clarice e dei figli in ostaggio a Carlo Magno e infine l'esilio in Oriente imposto all'eroe dal Sacro Romano Imperatore per istigazione di Gano (canto V). Questa

⁵ PERROTTA 2019.

⁶ LODICO, *Storia dei Paladini di Francia* e ID., *Storia dei Paladini di Francia* [Leggio].

⁷ I Fratelli Napoli il 12 e il 13 novembre 2021, in occasione del *XLVI Festival di Morgana* e del convegno di studi *L'epica mondiale nel teatro di figura: Italia, India, Iran, Giappone*, hanno presentato lo spettacolo intitolato *Rinaldo imperatore di Trebisonda*, che mette in scena secondo la tradizione catanese le vicende di cui qui ci occupiamo. Insieme a Fiorenzo Napoli, direttore artistico della Marionettistica, chi scrive ne ha elaborato il copione, basandosi non solo sui canovacci di tradizione e sulla *Storia dei Paladini di Francia* lodichiana, ma anche sull'anonimo poema quattrocentesco. Chi volesse vedere questo spettacolo può collegarsi al link seguente: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4r-kuyXEmV0&t=19s>>.

⁸ PERROTTA 2019: 241.

prima sezione del poema è dipendente da fonti più antiche: la *chanson de geste* francese *Renaut de Montauban* e in Italia i *Cantari di Rinaldo da Montalbano* che ne derivano.

La seconda sezione del poema, più originale, definita da Perrotta «*pars construens*»,⁹ si snoda dal canto VI al XIV e racconta le opere di guerra che in Oriente consentono a Rinaldo la sua ascesa al soglio imperiale di Trebisonda con l'aiuto del Gran Khan di Damasco e di molti giovani cavalieri sia cristiani che saraceni, quasi tutti figli di amici e aiutanti di Rinaldo apparsi come personaggi in altri poemi: Sorganello, Ramondo di Arborea, Rinaldo Aquilotto, Costantin Selvaggio e, da ricordare non ultimo, Organtino del Diavolo, figlio di Malagigi. Rinaldo diventa imperatore di Trebisonda vincendo molte battaglie, ma conquista anche col suo carisma, la sua saggezza e la sua magnanima clemenza la fiducia di molti sovrani saraceni, che spesso da acerrimi nemici diventano i suoi più strenui campioni e difensori: fra tutti, qui è d'obbligo ricordare il possente Balano. Rinaldo conquista terre saracene, ma rispetta il valore dei sovrani musulmani e non abbatte moschee, né impone conversioni forzate. Con le parole di Perrotta, «Nella strategia di Rinaldo l'elemento religioso non è determinante: vige una sostanziale tolleranza per le differenze dell'altro e il legame è fondato sul riconoscimento reciproco del valore».¹⁰

La terza parte del poema (canti XV e XVI) è più breve e crepuscolare: vengono narrate la morte in prigione di Clarice, la conseguente abdicazione di Rinaldo in favore di Balano, la morte da martire dell'eroe penitente durante la fabbricazione della cattedrale di Colonia. Il poema si conclude con un'appendice consolatoria: Balano e tutti i sovrani di Trebisonda minacciano guerra a Carlo Magno, costringendolo così a liberare i figli di Rinaldo ancora in ostaggio e a riedificare il castello di Montalbano.

Il poema nella seconda metà del Quattrocento veniva fruito in un contesto storico in cui l'Occidente europeo subiva la pressione dell'espansione ottomana. I pontefici, da Pio II Piccolomini (1458-1464) a Sisto IV Della Rovere (1471-1484), cercavano con scarsi risultati di indirizzare le potenze cristiane verso una nuova crociata. Ma grandi monarchie e piccoli stati europei, o perché coinvolti in contese di supremazia fra loro, o perché intrattenevano relazioni diplomatiche, commerciali e mercantili importanti con l'impero

⁹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰ Ivi: 243.

ottomano (in questo contesto sono interessanti le posizioni della signoria fiorentina¹¹ e delle Repubbliche di Genova e Venezia),¹² rispondevano assai tiepidamente alle sollecitazioni dei papi.

Qualche data ci aiuterà a comprendere meglio questo contesto storico. Il 29 maggio 1453 il sultano ottomano Maometto II conquistava Costantinopoli, ponendo fine all'impero bizantino. Nel 1458 Hasan Beg Bahador Khan, detto Uzun Hasan,¹³ sultano di Armenia, Persia e Mesopotamia, sposava Teodora Comnena, figlia dell'imperatore cristiano di Trebisonda Giovanni Comneno: il matrimonio veniva celebrato per cementare un'alleanza in funzione antiturca. Ecco dunque apparire sul nostro orizzonte l'impero di Trebisonda, retto dall'inizio del secolo XIII dalla dinastia dei Comneni, che signoreggiava la città sul Mar Nero, importantissimo porto commerciale e crocevia dei traffici col Medio Oriente. Ma nel 1461 Trebisonda cadeva in mano turca. Negli anni 1473-1475 le diplomazie occidentali e soprattutto vaticane tentavano di scatenare Uzun Hasan con-

¹¹ In Occidente serpeggiavano fondati motivi per imputare alla signoria medicea intelligenza col nemico ottomano. Il sultano aveva voluto fare un gradito regalo al Magnifico premurandosi di arrestare Bernardo Bandini, l'assassino di Giuliano nella congiura dei Pazzi. Inoltre la reciproca simpatia tra Firenze e la Sublime Porta poggiava su basi di reciproca convenienza. La Repubblica del Giglio, a differenza di Venezia o Genova, non possedeva alcun dominio territoriale che potesse essere minacciato dall'avanzata ottomana nel Mediterraneo orientale e una politica di negoziazione commerciale con i Turchi era auspicabile per l'economia di Firenze e per lo sviluppo della sua giovane flotta mercantile. I porti ottomani avrebbero aperto un vasto e promettente mercato alle produzioni di pannilana, in cambio di quantitativi imponenti di seta grezza, nella cui trasformazione le industrie toscane stavano acquisendo una posizione prioritaria nell'Europa occidentale. La tessitura di buoni rapporti diplomatici era stata insomma preferita scientemente alla difesa in armi contro l'espansione ottomana: per questo, la risposta fiorentina agli appelli crociati del papato era fredda. Su ciò si legga BIANCHI 2016: 58-60.

¹² I Genovesi ebbero piena libertà di commercio a Costantinopoli conquistata dai Turchi. Venezia nel 1454 firmava un trattato di pace con Maometto II che le assicurava libero commercio con i Turchi (ORVIETO 2022: 11). Dopo la caduta di Caffa in mano turca (6 giugno 1475), «Genova si consolava puntando dritta a recuperare nell'Africa settentrionale, in termini commerciali, quello spazio che aveva irrimediabilmente perduto in Oriente: e le relazioni con l'emirato di Tunisi, garantite dall'appoggio diplomatico e politico di Ludovico il Moro, proseguirono fiorenti nonostante i numerosi e inevitabili episodi di violenza. La pace del 1479 tra il sultano e Venezia non modificò quasi nulla nell'economia generale dei rapporti fra cristiani occidentali e musulmani. La repubblica del leone inviò sul Bosforo il pittore ufficiale dei dogi, Gentile Bellini, affinché ritraesse il Gran Signore, la cui fede religiosa, in linea concettuale, proibiva la riproduzione dell'effigie umana: e il sultano ricompensò con gratitudine l'artista. Il famoso ritratto, datato 25 novembre 1485 – il Gran Signore, all'epoca, era già defunto da quattro anni e mezzo –, è oggi alla National Gallery di Londra» (CARDINI 1999: 201-202).

¹³ Il turcomanno Uzun Hasan (1420 ca.-1478), della dinastia degli Akkoyunlu ('Montone Bianco'), costituì una seria minaccia per i Turchi proprio nel cuore del sultanato ottomano (BABINGER 1957: 323-400, SCARICIA 1974: 419-438, MESERVE 2008: 223-231).

tro i Turchi. Nell'agosto del 1480 una flotta turca al seguito di Ahmed Pasha occupava Otranto e in questa circostanza, tra maneggi politici e colpevoli ritardi, si raggiungeva il culmine della tiepidezza di quasi tutte le potenze occidentali nell'intervento compatto contro i Turchi.¹⁴ Dal quadro appena delineato emerge dunque la conferma di quanto detto *supra*: la reiterata volontà dei papi di realizzare una decisa crociata armata contro la minaccia ottomana si infrangeva contro la ripetuta vanificazione del progetto da parte degli stati occidentali, impegnati in questioni di supremazia territoriale e già legati da proficue relazioni commerciali con la Sublime Porta. In mezzo a queste due opposte tendenze si poneva la figura di Uzun Hasan, seria minaccia contro gli Ottomani "sul terreno", che veniva perciò considerato un possibile campione dell'Occidente e una grande opportunità per i cristiani di riconquistare territori.

In questo contesto la *Trabisonda*, dove si immagina attraverso la figura di Rinaldo una riconquista cristiana del regno perduto sul Mar Nero e anche un'estensione della sovranità del paladino in Oriente, sembra in linea con la fervida attività di propaganda che con mezzi diversi puntava al sostegno di una politica aggressiva contro i Turchi, in particolare durante gli anni Settanta e Ottanta del secolo XV. Il poema viene stampato per la prima volta nel 1483, ma probabilmente la vicenda era già circolata precedentemente. La seconda parte del poema soprattutto costituirebbe da un lato una polemica nei confronti dell'ambivalente e ambigua condotta delle potenze cristiane riguardo alla necessità di impugnare le armi contro i Turchi, dall'altro un'indiretta esortazione propagandistica a quella crociata necessaria a frenare l'espansione ottomana.

Più analiticamente, l'esitazione degli stati d'Occidente contro gli Ottomani, le loro reciproche rivalità e le ambigue relazioni col nemico sarebbero rispecchiate nel poema

¹⁴ «Ma sui "fatti di Otranto" restano molte ombre: quale fu l'autentico ruolo di Firenze e di Venezia, interessate a mettere in difficoltà l'una il pontefice, l'altra il re di Napoli? Non era strano che una città appartenente al nemico storico dei veneziani venisse assalita dai turchi proprio l'anno successivo a quello della pace tra la Serenissima e la Porta? Quello contro Otranto fu un "assalto su commissione"? E fu poi davvero una feroce bravata di Ahmed Pasha, il capo della flotta? Otranto avrebbe potuto diventare il fulcro di un'*enclave* nelle Puglie che, se avesse retto, avrebbe significato il controllo ottomano sul canale tra Adriatico e Jonio. Da Otranto, finché la tennero, i turchi compirono scorrerie su Brindisi, Taranto, Lecce. Si è informati del fatto che Andrea Gritti, "bailo" veneziano a Costantinopoli, fu incaricato di far sapere al sultano come il suo governo ritenesse che egli poteva a buon diritto impadronirsi della Puglia, regione che un tempo apparteneva all'impero di Bisanzio del quale egli era ormai signore» (CARDINI 1999: 203).

dalla figura di Carlo Magno e dalla sua corte: il Sacro Romano Imperatore, sempre mal consigliato da Gano, esilia Rinaldo e non lo soccorre quando questi gli chiede aiuto militare per consolidare il suo potere minacciato dai sovrani saraceni che gli si ribellano (canto VIII). Gano, dal canto suo, oltre a sconsigliare l'invio di un esercito, prima manda suoi emissari in Oriente su una galea per avere miglior contezza della situazione e poi non esita a partire egli stesso per la Paganìa per infiammare ancor di più contro Rinaldo i sovrani saraceni ribelli e aiutarli.¹⁵ Nota Perrotta¹⁶ che la debolezza della corte di Francia (e dunque della Cristianità) viene stigmatizzata proprio da un personaggio saraceno, Marsilio re di Spagna, tradizionalmente ostile a Rinaldo, che dialoga col Gran Khan di Damasco, altro saraceno invece ammiratore, grande amico e nel poema "aiutante" di Rinaldo. Marsilio così descrive i cristiani al Gran Khan:

La invidia che tra loro e li dispecti
e i tradimenti ch'elli vano usando
e i mal voler che han dentro a li pecti,
che l'un l'altro voria andar devorando
se sto non fusse, seriano sugetti
assai più che non siamo seguitando
(*Trabisonda* III 50, 1-6)

La figura di Rinaldo viene celebrata nel poema come un novello Alessandro Magno: significativo a questo proposito è l'episodio in cui il paladino nella città di Quintavalle doma e conquista una nuova cavalcatura, poiché in Oriente non ha potuto condurre con sé il cavallo Baiardo. Questa cavalcatura è

Un diverso corsier ch'era salvagio,
ismesurato e grande de avantagio.

Un corno quello haveva in su la testa
senza fallo un alicorno paria
(*Trabisonda* IX 46, 7-8 e 47, 1-2)

¹⁵ *Trabisonda* IX 63-64 e XII 120 e ss.

¹⁶ PERROTTA 2019: 241.

Le caratteristiche del corsiero domato da Rinaldo richiamano quelle del cavallo Bucefalo di Alessandro Magno: la testa provvista di un corno sulla fronte, la necessità di essere domato, la mansuetudine di fronte al suo nuovo signore. Ma perché c'è questo accostamento tra Rinaldo e Alessandro Magno? Come acutamente dimostra Perrotta attraverso una fitta trama di documenti,¹⁷ il già ricordato alleato dei cristiani Uzun Hasan, legato in virtù del suo matrimonio all'impero di Trebisonda, era spesso simbolicamente paragonato ad Alessandro Magno. Perciò, accogliendo considerazioni esposte da Perrotta,¹⁸ il Rinaldo della *Trabisonda*, assimilato come lui ad Alessandro Magno, rispecchierebbe la figura di Uzun Hasan, che si poneva come campione in Oriente contro l'espansione ottomana.¹⁹

3. Vediamo ora quali nuovi significati veicolassero i materiali narrativi della *Trabisonda* riletti e reinterpretati in Sicilia in era preconsumistica attraverso la *Storia dei Paladini di Francia* di Giusto Lodico²⁰ e attraverso le messinscene che ne derivavano all'Opera dei Pupi.

Lodico utilizza la materia della *Trabisonda* nell'ultima parte della sua *Storia dei Paladini*, il libro XIII e ultimo, montandola con gli ultimi cantari del *Morgante* di Luigi Pulci che, come è noto, raccontano la rotta di Roncisvalle e la morte di Orlando. Don Giusto non utilizza pedissequamente il racconto della *Trabisonda* limitandosi a volerlo da ottave in prosa, ma vi introduce alcune importanti e significative modifiche. Alcune di queste dipendono da esigenze di coerenza narrativa con quanto precedentemente raccontato nella *Storia*; altre invece dipendono da personali scelte di adattamento operate dall'autore in relazione al nuovo contesto di fruizione delle vicende.

Le principali varianti dipendenti da esigenze di coerenza narrativa sono le seguenti.

¹⁷ Ivi: 246-247.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ Il personaggio storico di Uzun Hasan, come figura simbolica di una rivalse occidentale contro l'espansione ottomana, si nasconderebbe con ogni probabilità anche dietro il personaggio di Altobello, eroe eponimo del medesimo poema carolingio stampato a Venezia nel 1476 (PERROTTA 2019: 245). Per una lettura in chiave politico-propagandistica dell'*Altobello* si veda EAD. 2017: 43-103.

²⁰ Su don Giusto Lodico e la sua opera si consultino almeno PITRÈ 1889: 183-189, PERRET 1954-1956: 110-113, LI GOTTI 1957: 109, PASQUALINO 1977: 66-70, CAVALLO 2012, PASQUALINO 2018, CAROCCI 2019: 29-64.

Nella *Storia dei Paladini di Francia* l'impero di Trebisonda riconquistato da Rinaldo era stato usurpato al legittimo sovrano Morbello Malaguerra, figlio adottivo di Rinaldo le cui vicende sono state raccontate da Lodico nel libro VI della sua *Storia* elaborando e riplasmando materiali di ben quattro fonti narrative diverse.²¹ Malaguerra e la sposa Rosana sono stati proditoriamente assassinati²² e perciò la riconquista dell'impero da parte di Rinaldo viene presentata come una legittimistica restaurazione. Ai tempi dei fatti di Malaguerra, sempre per coerenza narrativa, Lodico fa risalire anche l'origine dell'amicizia di Rinaldo col Gran Khan di Damasco,²³ ben raccordandosi così alla *Trabisonda*, nella quale il sovrano saraceno è il principale *kingmaker* del paladino esiliato da Carlo Magno.

Seconda variante dipendente da esigenze di coerenza narrativa è l'eliminazione della figura di Bradamante, presente nel poema quattrocentesco ma soppressa da Lodico perché nella sua *Storia* l'eroina è già stata fatta morire in seguito al dispiacere provocato dall'assassinio di suo marito Ruggiero dell'Aquila Bianca.²⁴

La terza variante, anch'essa imposta dalla coerenza narrativa interna, è l'eliminazione dell'episodio della morte di Ricciardetto, che nella *Trabisonda* viene ucciso da Bala-

²¹ CAROCCI 2019: 45-48 ha dimostrato che, per costruire la storia di Malaguerra, Lodico ha utilizzato suggerimenti e materiali narrativi derivanti non solo da CIECO DA FERRARA, *Mambriano* (1509) come già aveva appurato PASQUALINO 1977: 68, ma anche dall'*Ajolpho* (1516) e da DOLCE, *Palmerino* (1561). Alle fonti individuate da Pasqualino e Carocci chi scrive suggerisce di aggiungere almeno come fonte ipotetica la *Storia di Ajolfo del Barbicone e di altri valorosi cavalieri*, romanzo in prosa quattrocentesco di Andrea da Barberino (Napoli in PASQUALINO 2018: 125-126).

²² N. B.: qui di seguito e negli altri luoghi si citerà il testo a stampa lodichiano conservandone gli eventuali errori nell'ortografia degli accenti. «Malaguerra giurò fedeltà al suo popolo, e questo in contraccambio giurò fedeltà a lui; indi dovette giurare di difendere la Santa Chiesa Cattolica Apostolica Romana a prezzo del proprio sangue; e dopo uno dei primi vescovi stabiliti all'esercizio della nuova religione, pose sul capo del giovane il diadema, che infelicemente poco potè godere, perchè i sovrani sottoposti a quell'impero, tenendo a proprio scorno la nuova religione introdotta a quegli stati, sacrificando immense ricchezze lo uccisero di veleno» (LODICO, *Storia dei Paladini di Francia*, vol. II, libro VI: 565).

²³ «Un solo venne a quell'invito, che fu il Gran Cane della Tartaria [in questo luogo lo si chiama Khan di Tartaria ma si comprende facilmente che si tratta del Gran Khan di Damasco, N. d. R.], il quale quantunque pagano pure non disprezzava la cristiana religione. Rinaldo gradì quell'atto cortese, e da quel punto lo tenne per intimo amico» (ivi: 564).

²⁴ LODICO, *Storia dei Paladini di Francia*, vol. IV, libro X: 222-223. La fonte originale utilizzata da Lodico per la morte di Bradamante è BRUSANTINI, *Angelica Innamorata* XXV 84-87.

no.²⁵ Nella *Storia* lodichiana Ricciardetto deve rimanere vivo perché, come raccontato nei cantari finali del *Morgante* di Luigi Pulci, dovrà giungere a Roncisvalle insieme a Rinaldo.

La quarta e ultima variante, introdotta da Lodico nell'impianto originale della *Trabisonda* per esigenze di coerenza narrativa, è il trasferimento di molte imprese compiute nel poema da Bradamante e Sorganello a Guidone, il figlio di Ruggiero e Bradamante che sarebbe diventato una perfetta e compiuta replica di Orlando e l'eroe protagonista della *Storia di Guido Santo*, la continuazione della *Storia dei Paladini di Francia* di Lodico inventata in Sicilia tra la fine dell'Ottocento e i primi del Novecento.²⁶

Assai più interessanti e significative sono le varianti introdotte da Lodico nel tessuto narrativo della *Trabisonda* per rispondere alle esigenze di fruizione e alla visione del mondo del pubblico popolare ottocentesco.

Queste varianti si concentrano tutte nel racconto di Malagigi che per mezzo d'incanto prende prigioniero Carlo Magno a Montalbano, con ciò che ne segue fino alla decisione del negromante di bruciare i libri di arte magica. Qui Lodico ha compiuto un'autonoma opera di consapevole rielaborazione più congruente ai caratteri e ai profili psicologici dei suoi personaggi, così come li ha dispiegati nell'ampio corso della sua *Storia*. In *Trabisonda* IV 35, 1-4, portato Carlo Magno dentro il castello di Montalbano, si dice di Malagigi quanto segue:

In questo ven Malagise sicuro,
che se tu vo la guerra venta l'hai,
tu hai li paladini dentro al muro
e Carlo è qui dentro hora tu lo sai,

²⁵ *Trabisonda* XI 109-110.

²⁶ La *Storia di Guido Santo* ha la sua prima fonte narrativa in BRUNO, *Guido Santo*, romanzo popolare cavalleresco in due volumi, pubblicato a Palermo nel 1897 da Giuseppe Leggio. Quest'ultimo scrisse come continuazione del *Guido Santo* un terzo volume (LEGGIO, *Dolores e Straniero*), pubblicato la prima volta a Palermo nel 1899. Lo stesso Giuseppe Leggio poi riscrisse i due volumi del *Guido Santo* ampliandoli e modificandoli con l'inserimento di vicende inerenti a personaggi che egli aveva introdotto nel suo rifacimento della *Storia dei Paladini di Francia* lodichiana (cfr. LEGGIO, *Guido Santo*). Questo secondo *Guido Santo* prese il titolo di *Il figlio di Ricciardetto ovvero Guido Santo e i discendenti di Carlo Magno. Seguito alla rotta di Roncisvalle* e fu pubblicato la prima volta a Palermo nel 1912. Per un resoconto sulle vicende editoriali e sulla trama del *Guido Santo* si consulti NAPOLI 2002: 200-206.

Cioè Malagigi consiglia a Rinaldo non un'arrendevole pacificazione, ma, avendo l'imperatore in loro balia, quasi istiga il cugino ad approfittare della situazione esercitando un maggiore rapporto di forza sul sovrano prigioniero. Lodico invece, che ha fatto di Malagigi un saggio mediatore nei conflitti, un "eroe pacificatore" e spesso un fustigatore delle molte imprese ladronesche e di seduzione compiute da suo cugino Rinaldo, vuole che il negromante si inginocchi ai piedi di Carlo Magno e implori il perdono per il cugino, rifiutando decisamente il ruolo opposto di "istigatore" che emerge dai versi della *Trabisonda* ricordati *supra*:

Venne Malagigi che si pose umilmente a pregare dicendo: Sire, se mai alcuna opera vi fu gradita che a pro vostre ho fatto, vi supplico, che Rinaldo fosse assolto della sentenza di distruzione.²⁷

In *Trabisonda* IV 50, 3-8 Carlo Magno rimane inflessibile alle preghiere di Clarice, moglie di Rinaldo, inginocchiata ai suoi piedi, e le dà un calcio in pieno petto:

E Carlo non aspecta più sermoni
ne vole de Clarice i sermon soi,
ma cum la furia sua par se abandoni
come quel che pien de dispecto e poi
un calce a quella donna de nel pecto
levati avanti a me, si fo suo decto.²⁸

In Lodico invece Carlo Magno dà il calcio sul petto non a Clarice, ma a Malagigi, proprio per sottolineare intenzionalmente l'ingratitude e l'ottusa durezza dell'imperatore, plagiato dal traditore Gano, di contro all'abnegazione e alla sincera volontà di riconciliazione del negromante.

²⁷ LODICO, *Storia dei Paladini di Francia*, vol. IV, libro XIII: 725.

²⁸ Il calcio che Carlo Magno dà a Clarice nella *Trabisonda* è palese ricalco di un altro e ben più famoso calcio dell'inflessibile e iracondo imperatore: quello che egli dà a Berta, sua sorella e madre di Orlando, in ANDREA DA BARBERINO, *I Reali di Francia*, libro VI, cap. LXIX.

In *Trabisonda* IV 35, 5-8 e 36, 1-4 Orlando reagisce subito alle parole di Malagigi, lo rimprovera assai acerbamente e minaccia di farlo bruciare come anima dannata:

O quanto parse ad Orlando duro
dicendo a Malagise: «Intenderai
e non valerate la tua arte ria
non valerate la nigromantia.

Non valerate le toe maledecte arte
non valerate el tuo incantamento,
che senza fallo ti faro abrusarte,
la povere faro gettare al vento»

Coerente all'immagine di reciproca solidarietà con cui nella sua *Storia* ha connotato i cugini Chiaramonte, Lodico non può accettare che sia Orlando a investire così malamente il cugino Malagigi. E dunque nel romanzo ottocentesco è Carlo Magno che rimprovera Malagigi, lo maledice e minaccia di farlo bruciare:

Carlo che ben comprese esser stato opera di lui il trovarsi in mezzo a quella confusione gli diede un calcio dicendogli: Figliuolo del Diavolo, vanne pur lungi da me, tu che l'anima ed il corpo hai venduto a Pluto; prometto che alla tua morte farotti bruciare; e la cenere darò al vento.²⁹

Dopo aver subito calcio e rimprovero, il buon Malagigi, addolorato per l'ingratitude che Carlo Magno gli ha riversato addosso, brucia i libri dell'arte magica e lascia Montalbano per ritirarsi a vita di penitenza. Come si vede, Lodico, trasferendoli dalla *Trabisonda* alla sua *Storia*, ha modificato tutti questi particolari del racconto per venire incontro alle attese e alla visione del mondo dei suoi lettori, rimarcando ancor più che nel poema originale l'ottusità ostinata del potente Carlo Magno che disprezza, umilia e conculca gli innocenti Rinaldo e Malagigi su istigazione del traditore Gano.

²⁹ LODICO, *Storia dei Paladini*, vol. IV, libro XIII: 725.

Tutte le intenzioni espresse dalla *Storia dei Paladini di Francia* lodichiana venivano esplicitate nella messinscena allestita dai pupari siciliani nei teatri di quartiere, tanto nell'*Opera* palermitana che nell'*Opera* catanese. L'episodio di Carlo Magno che prende a calci Malagigi suscitava grande commozione negli spettatori dell'Opera dei pupi perché destava nei loro animi echi e risonanze di torti subiti in un vissuto quotidiano in cui, nella precarietà della sopravvivenza, era facile si verificasse la possibilità di esser delusi dall'ingratitude di un amico fidato. A Catania l'episodio era considerato da pupari e pubblico così importante che la supplica rivolta dal buon negromante a Carlo Magno non veniva recitata improvvisando, ma si stendeva per essa una *parrata longa*, una 'parlata lunga', a copione disteso. Qui di seguito riporterò quella scritta nei primi del Novecento dal grande puparo Raffaele Trombetta, genero e allievo di Gaetano Crimi, il "padre fondatore" dell'Opera dei Pupi a Catania.³⁰

Maestà, se i miei servizi prestati per il bene e per la difesa della vostra corona, per la bandiera con tre gigli d'oro e per la bandiera cristiana meritano una riconpenza, io vi domando una grazia, si ricorda maestà che mai gli ò chiesto grazia e si ricordi quante volte ho difeso la Francia, per la prima volta dunque le domando una grazia, prostrato ai vostri piedi, e bagnando con le mie lagrime il suolo che calpestate Rinaldo mancò presso di voi e del Papa, Rinaldo merita d'essere punito, ma siate magnanimi mostratevi degno del soprannome che vi diedero i francesi che vi chiamarono nei primi anni del vostro regno Carlomagno, il perdono è dei grandi, la vendetta è dei barbari, il perdono è inposto da Dio per ogni perfetto cristiano, de! perdonate o imperatore, come perdonò Dio ai suoi percursori, pensate o Carlo che questa è la prima grazia che vi domanda Malagigi dopo tanti servizii prestati al vostro regno; commovetevi, sia docile il vostro cuore, io vi prego non per Rinaldo ma per una famiglia innocente, per un vecchio barone di vostra corte che tanti servizi a prestato alla vostra corona, io vi prego a nome della famiglia di Chiamonte che non dovete dimenticare che fu quella che pose la corona di Francia sul vostro capo, vi prego a nome dell'illustre vostro padre, vi prego per quanto stimaste Giallerana vostra degna consorte, vi prego per quanto soffriste in Aspromonte, vi prego per quanto fece Rinaldo nella dificolta impresa della guerra di

³⁰ Questa parlata è contenuta nella *Serata 23* dei canovacci manoscritti in cui don Raffaele Trombetta ha sceneggiato il IV volume della *Storia dei Paladini di Francia* lodichiana. Ho potuto frequentemente consultare e studiare le carte di Raffaele Trombetta grazie all'infinita cortesia di suo nipote Nino Amico, che le ha amorosamente conservate, custodite e ordinate. Nella riproduzione del testo vergato da Trombetta saranno conservati gli errori ortografici e di punteggiatura riscontrabili rispetto all'uso corretto dell'Italiano standard.

Agramante; e per la morte di Rovenza, quando Orlando stava per soccombere: siate imperatore, siate re, siate sovrano, siate padre, site difensore dei vostri figli, siate clemente con i vostri sudditi,... perdono... perdono... perdono maestà... io ve ne prego con le lagrime agli occhi, siate clemente, e non vi fate vincere dai magonzesi che sempre anno voluto, vogliono, e vorranno la distrutta dello stato francese.

Inoltre, le messinscene palermitana e catanese delle vicende della *Trabisonda* introducono altre significative varianti rispetto al poema originario e rispetto alla compilazione lodichiana utili a chiarire ulteriormente le ragioni del grande successo di questa parte della *Storia dei Paladini di Francia* per il pubblico tradizionale dell'Opera dei Pupi. Innanzitutto è importante ricordare una significativa battuta che il puparo di tradizione palermitana Nino Canino, attivo a Partinico fino ai primissimi anni di questo secolo,³¹ faceva pronunciare a Rinaldo nell'episodio del vantamento dei paladini [Figura 1].



Figura 1. Cartello dell'Opera dei Pupi catanese. Rosario Napoli, *Vantamento dei paladini: Rinaldo butta le bandiere*, 1933 ca. Collezione Marionettistica dei Fratelli Napoli, Catania (CT).

³¹ Su Nino Canino e sulla sua tradizione familiare si consulti VIOLA 2020.

Il principe di Montalbano, prima di iniziare a elencare tutte le sue imprese, diceva questa frase memorabile: «Vantarsi di ricchezza non è virtù dell'uomo».³² Queste parole non ci sono né nel poema quattrocentesco, né nel romanzo di Lodico: esse sono nate sul palcoscenico dell'Opera dei Pupi proprio perché il puparo ha voluto marcare la contrapposizione tra due personaggi e i valori che essi rispettivamente rappresentano: Gano, ricchissimo e che ha escogitato il vantamento proprio per umiliare Rinaldo, e quest'ultimo, che invece è povero, ma virtuoso. Il puparo cioè, condividendo la visione del mondo del suo pubblico, attraverso questa battuta esplicitava ancor più che nella sua fonte letteraria ottocentesca quali fossero i modelli negativi di comportamento da riprovare e fuggire – l'infamia di Gano esercitata anche in forza della sua ricchezza – e invece quelli positivi da approvare e imitare – la lealtà virtuosa di Rinaldo praticata comunque, anche se in condizioni di precaria povertà. La messinscena siciliana del vantamento insomma intende evidenziare lo squilibrio fra ricchezza e povertà, se vogliamo fra il potere di pochi ricchi sfruttatori e la moltitudine di poveri sfruttati. Come bene osserva Pasqualino, in questo modo i pupari e il loro pubblico «[d]efiniscono cioè chiaramente il potere in senso classista».³³

Possiamo individuare un secondo indice dell'importanza di significato che i fatti della *Trabisonda* assumevano per il pubblico popolare siciliano nelle varianti e nelle intenzioni che i pupari catanesi introducevano quando rappresentavano il diverso trattamento riservato da Rinaldo a re Marsilio di Spagna e ai suoi fratelli, al Gran Khan di Damasco e infine ai cardinali romani inviati dal papa a Carlo Magno. Rinaldo, bandito dall'imperatore subito dopo il vantamento, per fargli onta e per punire Gano, si mette al passo insieme ai suoi fratelli e alla sua schiera di settecento ladroni per depredate i ricchi sovrani saraceni che ritornano ai loro regni o le carovane magonzesi recanti oro per

³² Riporto qui la citazione testuale, come si può ascoltare nella quarta puntata del bel documentario intitolato *L'opera dei pupi* girato in Sicilia nel 1972 dal regista Angelo D'Alessandro per *Sapere*, programma televisivo di divulgazione culturale e scientifica della Rai. Chi volesse vedere la parte del documentario appena citata può collegarsi alla pagina seguente: <edblogs.columbia.edu/eboiardo/sicilian-puppet-theater/documentaries>. PASQUALINO 1977: 117 riferisce la battuta in una versione più estesa: «Non di ricchezza bisogna vantarsi, ma di virtù; perché vantarsi di ricchezza non è da uomo».

³³ PASQUALINO 1977: 118.

il Sacro Romano Imperatore.³⁴ I pupari catanesi, con dialoghi molto più estesi che nelle due fonti letterarie, insistevano molto sul fatto che Rinaldo depredava e faceva bastonare Marsilio e i suoi fratelli, e invece al contrario dava libero passo e onorava il Gran Khan di Damasco, lasciandogli tutte intere le sue ricchezze. Ancora una volta Rinaldo, punendo i tre fratelli spagnoli, da sempre all'Opera dei Pupi considerati complici e manutengoli di Gano, e invece elogiando il Gran Khan di Damasco, segnava in termini di modelli culturali positivi e negativi la contrapposizione tra lealtà e infamia, tra ricchezza e onore. Nella continuazione dell'episodio, quando entravano in scena i cardinali della curia romana, la messinscena catanese dava inoltre voce alla ben nota antipatia popolare per il clero e per la sua ricchezza.³⁵ Rinaldo maltrattava i cardinali e strappava loro le pesanti croci d'oro massiccio che portavano al collo, rinfacciando che quelle ricchezze avrebbero dovuto esser meglio impiegate per le necessità e il sostentamento della povera gente. Come si vede, nella messinscena catanese Rinaldo veniva ulteriormente connotato come "bandito sociale" alla Robin Hood, considerato dal pubblico dell'Opera dei Pupi un eroe, un campione, un vendicatore di torti e un combattente per la giustizia.

³⁴ Queste vicende sono narrate in *Trabisonda* III 49-60.

³⁵ Dell'istintiva antipatia dei ceti subalterni siciliani per il clero, la sua ricchezza e la sua discutibile condotta morale forniscono ampia testimonianza pagine di autori della letteratura italiana. Basti qui citare due frammenti dalla novella *Libertà* di Giovanni Verga: «A te, prete del diavolo! che ci hai succhiato l'anima!»; «"Te! tu pure!" Al reverendo che predicava l'inferno per chi rubava il pane. Egli tornava dal dir messa, coll'ostia consacrata nel pancione. "Non mi ammazzate, ché sono in peccato mortale!" La gnà Lucia, il peccato mortale; la gnà Lucia che il padre gli aveva venduta a 14 anni, l'inverno della fame, e riempiva la Ruota e le strade di monelli affamati» (VERGA, *Libertà* [Riccardi]: 338-339). L'anticlericalismo dei pupari catanesi, ben accetto e condiviso dal loro pubblico, emerge anche da altre due testimonianze che qui di seguito ricordiamo. Il puparo Raffaele Trombetta nella quinta *serata* della sua *Storia di Orlando*, quando muore papa Adriano e gli succede il cardinale Leone di Chiamonte, annota: «Dice il Papa / alla mia morte ci sarà l'elezione / un'altro coglione, testa di rapa / sarà Papa». L'altro grande sintomo di anticlericalismo nell'Opera dei Pupi catanese è la messinscena della morte di Erminio della Stella d'Oro nel ciclo che da lui prende il nome. Erminio muore avvelenato per una congiura ordita dai frati domenicani capeggiati dal superiore Fernando Ruell (o Ruvel). Essi vedono minacciati i loro piani e i loro interessi economici in territorio spagnolo dall'intervento di Erminio a favore del matrimonio del principe Leone con Cristina di Podolia. Il nobile Battiforte avrebbe poi scoperto, rivelato e punito la colpevolezza dei Domenicani e sarebbe riuscito a impiccarli tutti, eccetto Fernando Ruell, suscitando l'entusiasmo del pubblico in sala, che avrebbe gioito della loro morte come quando si gioiva allo squartamento del traditore Gano. Pur non avendo avuto mai per ragioni anagrafiche la possibilità di vedere in prima persona né la rappresentazione di quest'episodio, né le successive reazioni del pubblico, le ricordo qui sulla base delle più volte citate carte di Raffaele Trombetta e soprattutto pensando a un lungo e vivace racconto che me ne fece il puparo Pippo Napoli quando ero adolescente.

Il terzo indice dell'importanza di questa parte della *Storia dei Paladini di Francia* per il pubblico popolare dell'Opera dei Pupi è la maniera in cui i pupari catanesi rappresentavano la liberazione dei fratelli di Rinaldo.³⁶ Nel poema è Astolfo a liberare dalla prigionia i fratelli di Rinaldo, con la confidente complicità di Orlando, di sua moglie Aldabella e degli altri paladini. Lodico semplifica molto la narrazione della *Trabisonda*, omettendo il particolare delle damigelle di Aldabella che recano armi e armature ai prigionieri nascondendole sotto i loro abiti donneschi. All'*Opira* catanese quest'episodio era invece l'occasione per i pupari di imbastire un'originale messinscena dei fatti, nella quale rivestiva una parte da protagonista Peppininu, la maschera tradizionale del teatro dei pupi della Sicilia orientale.³⁷ Egli suggeriva ad Astolfo lo stratagemma per portare a compimento l'evasione e si recava con alcuni suonatori a cantare una notturna sotto la prigione dei fratelli di Rinaldo. L'atmosfera gioiosa di festa attirava fuori dalla fortezza i carcerieri magonzesi, che venivano fatti ubriacare da Peppininu e dai suonatori. Al momento opportuno, con le guardie ubriache al punto giusto, Astolfo riusciva a sottrarre loro le chiavi della prigione, a entrarvi, a liberare i fratelli di Rinaldo e a uccidere i carcerieri. Anche Peppininu dava il suo bel contributo alla rovina degli sciocchi Magonzesi, bastonandoli a colpi di chitarra. E questo con grande gioia del pubblico popolare dei quartieri, il quale assisteva al

³⁶ Raccontata in *Trabisonda* VIII 135-166 e in LODICO, *Storia dei Paladini di Francia*, vol. IV, libro XIII: 775-776.

³⁷ Peppininu appartiene al gruppo delle nuove maschere, che compaiono al principio del secolo XIX. Queste, a differenza delle vecchie maschere della Commedia dell'Arte, non portano veramente una maschera sul volto. Peppininu, guercio, nano e zoppo, indossa una livrea settecentesca: parrucca incipriata con boccoli e lunghissimo codino, *jabot*, marsina, *culottes*, scarpe con fibbie. Egli è l'unico personaggio dell'*Opira* che parli in dialetto catanese. Figura "trasversale" presente in tutte le *storie*, si accompagna agli eroi principali come "famiglio" al loro servizio, uniformandosi in questo a una ben consolidata tradizione riscontrabile in tutto il teatro d'animazione italiano, sia dei burattini che delle marionette. Arguto, ironico e salace, talvolta ingenuamente malizioso, egli solo può rompere l'illusione scenica per dialogare col pubblico, di cui si fa voce, esprimendone il punto di vista sia rispetto alle vicende epiche rappresentate in teatro, sia rispetto a fatti e problemi della vita reale. Erede del servo trappolone, del *fool* e dello Zanni cari alla tradizione teatrale occidentale, Peppininu, apparentemente sciocco, è in realtà furbissimo: proprio lui tira l'intrigo per sciogliere nelle *storie* importanti nodi narrativi. Basti, su tutti, l'esempio del rinsavimento di Orlando: egli può riacquistare il senno solo perché Peppininu suggerisce ad Astolfo e ai paladini la maniera di immobilizzare l'indomabile furioso, attorno al corpo del quale è egli stesso a passare le corde. E ancora, proprio Peppininu punisce i traditori colpevoli: li bastona, li fustiga o esegue la loro condanna a morte, diventando espressione simbolica dell'aspirazione popolare alla giustizia riparatrice. Come molte maschere tradizionali di Oriente e Occidente (Karagoz, Semar, Pulcinella), Peppininu replica la figura del *Trickster*, del *Briccone Divino*: marchiato (si ricordino le sue deficienze fisiche) e ambivalente (sciocco e dissennato, ma furbo e saggio).

trionfo del giusto e alla punizione degli aguzzini traditori per mano del personaggio che li rappresentava e ne incarnava ed esprimeva gli umori.

Veniamo così a riflettere sui motivi profondi per cui la materia della *Trabisonda*, ripasmata attraverso il romanzo di Lodico, assumeva per il pubblico tradizionale dell'Opera dei Pupi una grande pregnanza di significato, fino a diventare una griglia di interpretazione del mondo e un riscatto mitico dalla propria condizione di subalternità. Il pubblico popolare dei teatri di quartiere identificava più o meno consapevolmente il contrasto tra l'imperatore Carlo Magno e Rinaldo, il paladino più amato e ribelle, con il contrasto che oppone il potere al povero, le classi dominanti a quelle dominate. Carlo Magno, istigato da Gano di Magonza, perseguitava Rinaldo, gli distruggeva la fortezza di Montalbano, lo umiliava facendolo spogliare delle armi, ne prendeva in ostaggio la moglie e i figli e lo esiliava in Oriente [Figura 2].



Figura 2. Cartello dell'Opera dei Pupi catanese. Rosario Napoli, *Carlo Magno esilia Rinaldo*, 1933. Collezione Giuseppe Giuffrida, Trecastagni (CT).

Ma qui il paladino viveva la sua gloriosa ascesa al soglio imperiale di Trebisonda, conquistando con valore e fascino, saggezza e clemenza la fiducia di ben trentasei sovrani saraceni. Assistendo alle serate di Rinaldo imperatore il pubblico dell'Opera dei Pupi gioiva ed esultava, vedendo che il loro beniamino, disprezzato in patria, riceveva finalmente la giusta gratificazione dei suoi meriti e il meritato trionfo [Figura 3].



Figura 3. Cartello dell'Opera dei Pupi catanese. Rosario Napoli, Rinaldo acclamato imperatore di Trebisonda da Balano e Balanetto, 1928-1930 ca. Collezione Marionettistica dei Fratelli Napoli, Catania.

Gli umili e poveri spettatori dell'Opera dei Pupi si identificavano in Rinaldo e perciò Rinaldo, in Occidente umiliato e disprezzato a torto da Carlo Magno e Gano e invece glorificato in Oriente da molti sovrani di diversa religione, diventava per il pubblico dei teatri di quartiere sia l'esempio tangibile di un diverso ordine del mondo che qualche volta rimettesse le cose al posto giusto, sia un modello di mobilità sociale che spingesse a considerare la stringente necessità di andare a cercare un lavoro emigrando dalla Sicilia

come la reale possibilità di un'emancipazione dalle proprie condizioni di miseria. In quelle serate lo strutturale bisogno di riscattare la propria condizione di subalternità veniva appagato e «il trionfo dei valori positivi, ritualmente equilibrava a livello mitico la condizione di squilibrio della prassi, riconduceva a misura razionale un orizzonte esistenziale permanentemente insidiato dall'emergere dell'irrazionale».³⁸

Chi scrive continua ancora a credere in quella che è la cifra sostanziale dell'Opera dei Pupi fin dalle sue origini: la lotta dei valori positivi su quelli negativi, incarnata dal conflitto degli eroi paladini coi loro nemici, per un'aspirazione a un ordine del mondo più giusto. Per questo due degli ultimi copioni scritti insieme a Fiorenzo Napoli sono stati dedicati l'uno alla *pars destruens* e l'altro alla *pars construens* della *Trabisonda*.³⁹ La vicenda di Rinaldo di Montalbano, il paladino ribelle ingiustamente perseguitato, si fa oggi significativa metafora della lotta degli innocenti vittime dell'ottusità del potere o anche di quella di eroi come i giudici Giovanni Falcone e Paolo Borsellino, che sono stati schiacciati dalla collusione mafiosa di potere politico, come quello di Carlo Magno, e potere economico, come quello del ricchissimo Gano.

³⁸ BUTTITA 1977: 13.

³⁹ Il primo intitolato *Il grimòrio di Malagigi e la passione di Rinaldo, ovvero la distruzione di Montalbano*; il secondo il già ricordato *Rinaldo imperatore di Trebisonda*.

BIBLIOGRAFIA

BIBLIOGRAFIA PRIMARIA

- Ajolpho = Aiolpho del Barbicone*, [...], Venezia, Marchio Sessa, 1516.
- Altobello = Historia di Altobello e di re Troiano suo fratello*, Venezia, Antonio Pasqualino, 1476.
- ANDREA DA BARBERINO, *Ajolfo del Barbicone* [Del Prete] = Andrea da Barberino, *Storia di Ajolfo del Barbicone e di altri valorosi cavalieri*, a cura di Leone Del Prete, Bologna, Gaetano Romagnoli, 1863.
- ANDREA DA BARBERINO, *I Reali di Francia* [Vandelli - Gambarin] = Andrea da Barberino, *I Reali di Francia*, a cura di Giuseppe Vandelli - Giovanni Gambarin, Bari, Laterza, 1947.
- BRUNO, *Guido Santo* = Emanuele Bruno, *Il figlio di Bradamante ovvero Guido Santo e i nipoti di Carlo Magno*, 2 voll., Palermo, Giuseppe Leggio, 1897.
- BRUSANTINI, *Angelica Inamorata* = Vincenzo Brusantino, *Angelica Inamorata*, Venezia, Francesco Marcolini, 1550.
- CIECO DA FERRARA, *Mambriano* = Francesco Cieco da Ferrara, *Libro d'arme e d'amore nomato Mambriano*, Ferrara, Giovanni Mazzocchi, 1509.
- DOLCE, *Palmerino* = Lodovico Dolce, *Il Palmerino*, Venezia, Giovan Battista Sessa, 1561.
- LEGGIO, *Dolores e Straniero* = Giuseppe Leggio, *Dolores e Straniero ed Il prete rinnegato: seguito al Guido Santo*, vol. III, Palermo, Giuseppe Leggio, 1899, 1907, 1922 e s. d.
- LEGGIO, *Guido Santo* = Giuseppe Leggio, *Il figlio di Ricciardetto ovvero Guido Santo e i discendenti di Carlo Magno: seguito alla rotta di Roncisvalle*, 2 voll., Palermo, Giuseppe Leggio, 1912, 1920, 1922, 1928 e s. d.
- LODICO, *Storia dei Paladini di Francia* = Giusto Lodico, *Storia dei Paladini di Francia cominciando da Milone conte d'Anglante sino alla morte di Rinaldo*, 4 voll., Palermo, Gaudiano, 1858-1860 [II ed. 1862].

- LODICO, *Storia dei Paladini di Francia* [Leggio] = Giusto Lodico, *Storia dei Paladini di Francia cominciando dal re Pipino alla morte di Rinaldo. Lavoro di Giusto Lodico con l'aggiunta di altri famosi autori*, 3 voll., Palermo, Giuseppe Leggio, 1895-1896.
- PULCI, *Morgante* [Puccini] = Luigi Pulci, *Morgante*, introduzione, note e indici di Davide Puccini, Milano, Garzanti, 1989.
- Trabisonda* = *La Trabisonda*, Bologna, Ugo Ruggeri, 1483.
- VERGA, *Libertà* [Riccardi] = Giovanni Verga, *Libertà*, in Id., *Tutte le novelle*, Introduzione, testo e note a cura di Carla Riccardi, Milano, Mondadori, 1979, 338-345.

BIBLIOGRAFIA SECONDARIA

- BABINGER 1957 = Franz Babinger, *Mehmed der Eroberer und seine Zeit: Welteneroberer einer Zeitenwende*, München, Bruckmann, 1953, tr. it. di Evelina Polacco, *Mahometto il Conquistatore e il suo tempo*, Torino, Einaudi, 1957.
- BIANCHI 2016 = Vito Bianchi, *Otranto 1480. Il sultano, la strage, la conquista*, Roma - Bari, Laterza, 2016.
- BUTTITTA 1977 = Antonino Buttitta, *Prefazione*, in PASQUALINO 1977, 11-13.
- CARDINI 1999 = Franco Cardini, *Europa e Islam. Storia di un malinteso*, Roma - Bari, Laterza, 1999.
- CAROCCI 2019 = Anna Carocci, *Il poema che cammina. La letteratura cavalleresca nell'opera dei pupi*, Palermo, Edizioni Museo Pasqualino, 2019.
- CAVALLO 2012 = Jo Ann Cavallo, *Giusto Lodico*, in *The Literary Encyclopedia*, 2012, <www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=13068>.
- LI GOTTI 1957 = Ettore Li Gotti, *Il teatro dei pupi*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1957.
- MESERVE 2008 = Margaret Meserve, *Empires of Islam in Renaissance Historical Thought*, Cambridge (Mass.) - London, Harvard University Press, 2008.
- NAPOLI 2002 = Alessandro Napoli, *Il racconto e i colori. "Storie" e "cartelli" dell'Opera dei Pupi catanese*, Palermo, Sellerio, 2002.

- ORVIETO 2022 = Paolo Orvieto, *Poemi minori del Quattrocento. Altobello, Reina Ancroia, Trabisonda, Inamoramento de Carlo*, Alessandria, Edizioni dell'Orso, 2022.
- PASQUALINO 1977 = Antonio Pasqualino, *L'opera dei pupi*, Palermo, Sellerio, 1977.
- PASQUALINO 2018 = Antonio Pasqualino, *Rerum palatinorum fragmenta*, a cura di Alessandro Napoli, Palermo, Edizioni Museo Pasqualino, 2018.
- PERRET 1954-1956 = Rosalia Perret, *Ucuntu*, in «Annali del Museo Pitrè», V-VII (1954-1956), 107-113.
- PERROTTA 2017 = Annalisa Perrotta, *I cristiani e gli Altri. Guerre di religione, politica e propaganda nel poema cavalleresco di fine Quattrocento*, Roma, Bagatto, 2017.
- PERROTTA 2019 = Annalisa Perrotta, *Rinaldo conquista l'Oriente: figure antiche e storia contemporanea nella "Trabisonda" (1483)*, in «Critica del testo», XXII, 3 (2019), 235-248.
- PITRÈ 1889 = Giuseppe Pitrè, *Usi e costumi credenze e pregiudizi del popolo siciliano*, vol. II, Palermo, Lauriel, 1889.
- SCARCIA 1974 = Gianroberto Scarcia, *Venezia e la Persia tra Uzun Hasan e Tahmasp (1454-1572)*, in «Acta Iranica», s. I, 3 (1974), 419-438.
- VIOLA 2020 = Francesco Viola, *L'opera dei pupi della famiglia Canino*, Bologna, Pàtron Editore, 2020.

THE CAROLINGIAN EPIC IN THE TRADITIONAL LIÈGE MARIONETTE THEATRE: A CASE STUDY OF *HUON DE BORDEAUX AND LES QUATRE FILS AYMON**

Yanna Kor

Project ERC PuppetPlays / Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3

ABSTRACT: Although Carolingian epics are at the heart of the traditional Liège puppet repertoire, they remain a little explored field of research. This essay focuses on two epics, *Les quatre fils Aymon* and *Huon de Bordeaux*, which serve as case studies to examine the transition from narrative to dramatic text and its transposition for the regional puppet stage. Following the stories from the annotated novels to the modern plays, the first part shows how the dramatisation of the prose text gradually developed. The second part examines the creation process of staging the story of the paladins of France from the point of view of regional identification, focusing on the role of Tchanchès, the typical character of the Liège puppet theatre.

KEY-WORDS: Carolingian Epics, Liège puppet theatre, Tchanchès, *Les quatre fils Aymon*, *Huon de Bordeaux*, Children auditory, Popular puppet theatre, Regional identification, Chivalric novel

RIASSUNTO: Nonostante l'epopea carolingia sia al centro del repertorio tradizionale delle marionette di Liegi, rimane un campo di ricerca poco esplorato. Questo saggio tratta due poemi epici, *Les quatre fils Aymon* e *Huon de Bordeaux*, per esaminare la transizione dal testo narrativo a quello drammatico e la sua trasposizione sul palcoscenico regionale delle marionette. Seguendo le storie dai romanzi commentati alle opere teatrali moderne, la prima parte mostra come si è progressivamente sviluppata la drammatizzazione del testo in prosa. La seconda parte esamina il processo di creazione della mise-en-scene della storia dei paladini di Francia dal punto di vista dell'identificazione regionale, particolarmente concentrandosi sul ruolo di Tchanchès, il personaggio tipico del teatro delle marionette di Liegi.

* This research has been funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under Grant Agreement 835193.



PAROLE CHIAVE: Epica carolingia, teatro delle marionette di Liegi, Tchanches, *I quattro figli Aymon*, *Huon di Bordeaux*, ascolto dei bambini, teatro popolare delle marionette, identificazione regionale, romanzo cavalleresco

The Carolingian epics established the reputation of the Liège marionette theatre and continue to do so to this day. Plays recounting the story of the paladins of France, such as *Les quatre fils Aymon*, are classics in the traditional repertoire, adapted by puppeteers from the editions of the *Bibliothèque bleue*, especially those by Alfred Delvau, the favourite author of today's puppeteers and of their predecessors. It is generally agreed that the history of the Liège puppets began with a certain Conti who came from Italy to Liège in the middle of the 19th century.¹ According to the testimony of Léopold Vandervelden in 1860, Conti performed plays «in which Emperors are cast down»,² thus probably the Carolingian epics. Dieudonné Salmé (1888) gives more precise information, naming among the great plays performed in the Conti theatre «Les quatre fils Raymond (Les Quatre Fils Aymon)».³ For Joseph Médard (1895) *Les quatre fils Aymon*, as well as *Oger le Danois*, *Huon de Bordeaux*, and *Roland le furieux*, are the old plays of chivalry that are often performed without audiences ever tiring of them.⁴ In 1911, Alexis Deitz divided the Liège puppet repertoire into five categories: the romances of chivalry, religious plays (*La Naissance* and *La Passion*), plays based on popular tales, novels, and the Walloon plays.⁵ After 1931, that is, after the creation of the Museum of Walloon Life puppet theatre, the «classical» repertoire, comprising the first two categories, is the only one that remained. Of the chivalry plays, the Carolingian cycle is the one which has survived the best. Maurice Piron explains:

¹ Cfr. PIRON 1957; NEVEN - HAERTJENS 2001.

² By LEGROS 1954: 126. All the translations are mine, if not otherwise indicated.

³ SALME 1888: 53.

⁴ Joseph Médard, *l'Almanac' des quatre Matis* (LEGROS 1961: 137).

⁵ DEITZ 1911: 387-393. This classification has been revised and supplemented by Legros (LEGROS 1961).

This condensed neo-formation, concentrating on epic themes, that is to say on Carolingian themes, took place in the Liège environment, where schoolchildren were taught that Liège was the cradle of Charlemagne, or, at the very least, that the region of Liège was the homeland of his ancestors.⁶

It is indeed a double approach, preserving tradition and building regional identity, which distinguishes the Liège epic. Its other particularity is to be the result of a double process of rewriting: first, the medieval *chanson de geste* was modified and simplified to make it accessible to the readers of the *Bibliothèque bleue*, then remodeled by the puppeteer to adapt it for marionettes according to his own interpretation. Traditionally, the plays were not written, but the novels were annotated directly for the stage. Over the years, some puppeteers began to write full-length plays based on the romances of chivalry.

For the present essay, I have chosen *Les quatre fils Aymon* and *Huon de Bordeaux* as my main case studies. The themes of revolt and crusade, along with the fantastic element, that distinguish the two epics have seduced puppeteers and their public, ensuring for these epics a place of choice in the repertoire of Liège marionettes.⁷ This essay does not seek to draw up a panorama of the epic repertoire of the Liège puppets, but rather to examine the passage from narrative to dramatic text and its transposition for the regional puppet stage, a process that has been barely examined by specialists till now.⁸

⁶ PIRON 1978: 13. The particular importance of the figure of Charlemagne for the Wallonia, whose political and cultural identity has only recently been established, is also emphasised by John McCormick and Bennie Pratasik: «It allowed the textile workers, poorly paid and living in insalubrious conditions, to feel that there was a glorious and heroic past in which they could participate by going to a puppet show» (McCORMICK - PRATASIK 2004: 199).

⁷ From a thematic point of view, we can classify these epics within the cycle of the revolting barons. Luke Sunderland proposes a sub-classification according to the main narrative axis, revolt for *Les quatre fils Aymon* and the crusade for *Huon de Bordeaux* (SUNDERLAND 2017, see in particular Chapters 2 and 6).

⁸ Among the few works on the subject are: IMPE 2019; GROSS 2001: 143-162. The same can be said of the Liège epics, which despite the richness of their subject, remain a field of research that has been little explored. Cfr. QUÉRUEL 2000b; CAZANAVE 2010; CAZANAVE 2011.

1. THE ANNOTATED NOVELS

Initially, the writing of the Liège epic followed a process of annotation, adaptation, and transformation. Before the play could be staged, it was necessary for the puppeteer to reappropriate the text by adding his own marks. The edition played an important role in the nature of the annotations added. The text of the *Épinal* edition, printed in two columns, required a lot of work to distinguish direct speech from the descriptive passages because of its sparse use of punctuation. The novels in Delvau's version, by contrast, did not require such intervention, as the characters' lines were clearly apparent. The text, while also printed in two columns, is not as tightly packed on the page, as the format is twice the size of the *Épinal* edition, which makes the reading much easier. Among the 36 annotated novels held in the Museum of Walloon Life collection are the *Épinal* editions of *Huon de Bordeaux* and *Les quatre fils Aymon*, annotated by unidentified puppeteers, which attracted my attention particularly for their complex and abundant annotation system, involving both literal and pictorial stage directions. I therefore propose to examine them first.

1.1 "*Histoire de Huon de Bordeaux*"

Huon de Bordeaux tells the story of the young son of the duke of Bordeaux, Huon, who unwittingly kills the son of Charlemagne Charlot. To earn the emperor's forgiveness, he must go on a penitential journey to Babylon with a message for Charlemagne's enemy, Admiral Gaudisse. The crusade was meant to be Huon's downfall, but it would lead to his triumph. Written in the second half of the thirteenth century by an anonymous author, this poem became at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth century a cycle centered on the adventures of Huon.⁹ The earliest prose version of the poem dates from the fifteenth century.

⁹ The datation is open to discussion. Cfr: CAZANAVE 2008: 32-33; WHITE-LE GOFF 2010.

The *Épinal* copy of *Histoire de Huon de Bordeaux*, probably annotated by Gaston Engels,¹⁰ bears marks in the text as well as inscriptions and small drawings added in the margins [Figure 1]. Examining first additions on the level of the text, we find quite a few underlined words, most of which are the names of people and places. Our puppeteer has also underlined words that are important for the meaning of the story. Thus, for example, if we extract the underlined words from the first two chapters, in which Charlemagne asks his barons for advice and listens to the answers of Count Amaury and Duke of Naimes, we get the following result:

Charlemagne – Naimes – Ganelon – appela le duc Naimes, et lui dit – Rome Dieu – Or, vous – deux fils – Louis – Charlot – nobles – détruit – guerre – Baudoin – Oger le Danois – Amaury de Haute-Feuille – Naimes – barons – Charlot – dont l'empereur – son fils – felon – empereur – terre – servi – sept ans – duc Sevin mourut – nom Huon – Girard – Bordeaux – Aquitaine – Sire – dit l'empereur – trois mille – fils de Sevin – Huon – Girard – Quand le duc Naimes – le duc Sevin – jeunesse – mère – Mais, sire – croire – prince – père – vos chevaliers – enfants – cour – hommage¹¹

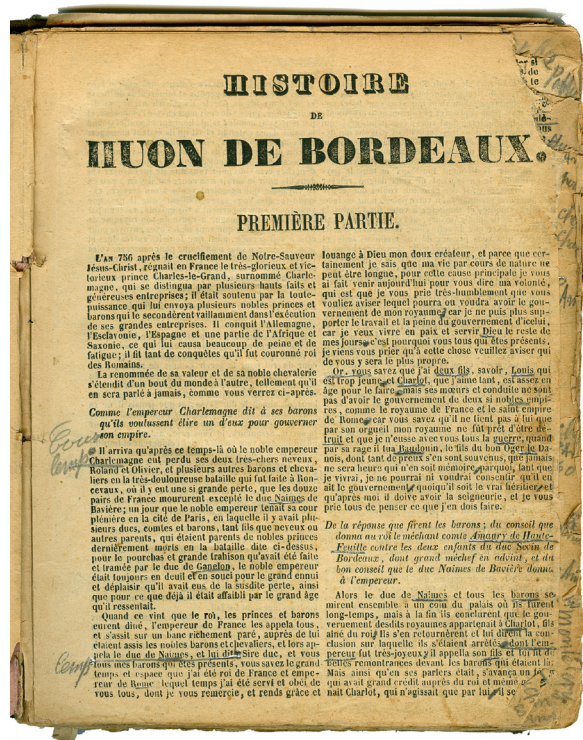


Fig. 1: First page of *Histoire de Huon de Bordeaux pair de France, Duc de Guenne, contenant ses faits et actions héroïques, réunis en un seul volume, nouvelle édition, ornée de huit gravures, Épinal, Pellerin, n.d., copy annotated by unidentified puppeteer, n. 11644.* © Province de Liège – Musée de la Vie wallonne.

¹⁰ The name of Gaston Engels is written on the cover, and the programme of a street performance by the singer Arthur Engels (Gaston's uncle) was used as a page marker and for annotations. Gaston Engels, born in 1905 into a family of puppeteers, was active from the 1920s until the 1970s.

¹¹ *HHB*: 3-4.

Even if we do not know the story (although audiences did know the Carolingian cycle), it is possible to understand that Charlemagne is faced with a dilemma, that the sons of Duke Sevin will play an important role, and that the villain will be opposed to the noble knight. Thus, underlining could have been used by the performer either to indicate the words to be emphasized when reading the text aloud or to improvise on the basis of the written text.

Other types of marks in the text are dots indicating the beginning of a sentence, and slashes showing where breaths should be taken in long sentences. To understand the function of these marks better, one must cross-reference them with the annotations added in the margins. Using the same system, let us try to rewrite the beginning of chapter four in which the Duchess Sevin responds to the king's messengers. With the annotations (in italics) and markings this gives:

Duchesse, la dame entendant [les messagers] / jeunes/ [duc] Sevin leur père – droiturier [Charlemagne] – aimait [duc Sevin].

Huon, chevaliers

Duchesse, elle regarda [ses enfants en pleurant]: nuit / duc Naimes / parents / Sevin

Messagers: Dame – messagers – Naimes

Messagers passe la nuit.¹²

The beginning of a script is slowly coming together. There are stage directions, characters and lines. The duchess is the only one who acts, hears, and watches. The action of Huon, who in the novel advances towards his mother, is not underlined, but the word “chevaliers”, expressing Huon's desire to become a knight, is important.

Now that we have a better understanding of the system, let us look at how it works in the transposition of the battle scene to the puppet stage. In the novels, the description of the battle is often very long and detailed. How do the annotations help to transform description into action? To answer this question, let us take the example of the judicial duel between Huon and the traitor Amaury, which we can rewrite according to the same method as in the previous passages:

¹² *HHB*: 4. The original spelling has been retained.

Champions. *Amaury parle à Huon.*

Amaury. Huon.

Huon : –

Éclats – [tombèrent] par terre / se relevèrent – *épée* / [trois pas en] arrière – Amaury

Amaury : –

Quand le comte Amaury [eut senti le grand coup]

La hanche – tomba – encore que le dit Amaury [se sentit fort angoisseux et navré]¹³

The dialogue between the characters is not particularly relevant (it was probably improvised), what is important is the opposition of the two. The action is reduced to a few main movements: the two fall and rise again. The battle is represented, not read or illustrated.

The annotations in the margins of this chapter also offer a different type of stage direction: drawings. There are four sketches: two crossed swords, a church, a shield, and a sword. The first is often used by puppeteers to mark a battle. The second is an indication of place, perhaps even of setting, because not every place deserves a pictorial stage direction. We can also assume that the shield and sword are indications of the props used in the scene. The marks therefore offer a global overview of the performance to the showman who is often the only one who plays all the roles and directs the show.

1.2 “*Histoire des quatre fils Aymon*”

The *chanson de geste* of *Renaut de Montauban* was written around 1200. As in the case of *Huon de Bordeaux*, we have no precise information on the author or date of composition. Over the centuries the poem has undergone many variations, with the first prose adaptations appearing in the fifteenth century. The title *Les quatre fils Aymon*, under which it appears in the catalogues of the *Bibliothèque bleue* and enters into the traditional repertoire of Liège marionettes, was attributed to it in the second half of the fourteenth century.¹⁴ The popularity of the story of Aymon’s four sons, Regnault (or Renaud), Al-

¹³ *HHB*: 12.

¹⁴ This medieval narrative has been the subject of multiple studies. Cfr: QUÉRUEL 2000a; BAUELLE-MICHEL 2005; BAUELLE-MICHEL 2006.

lard, Guidard, and Richard, is due to the subject matter, which pits the dominant power of Charlemagne against the four rebellious knights. Initially loyal to the emperor, they become his bitter enemies after a dispute between Berthelot, Charlemagne's nephew, and Regnault, which ends in Barthelot's death. With the help of their cousin Maugis, a powerful enchanter, and the magic horse Bayard, they manage to escape from Charlemagne.

The annotated copy of *Histoire des quatre fils Aymon* is of particular interest because it suggests the intervention of at least two different puppeteers. I would like to look first at some of the marks added by the first puppeteer in pencil. The writing is sloppy, with spelling mistakes, suggesting rapid notes made while reading rather than precise annotations. There are both inscriptions in the margins and marks made within the text. Most of the annotations of the first type designate the character who is speaking, thus giving the prose text the dramatic form of dialogue. The dots added in the text make it easier to distinguish speech, which is not preceded by any punctuation. Sometimes the name of the speaker is also underlined. The system is therefore very similar to the one we have seen in the case of *Huon de Bordeaux*.

The first puppeteer's annotations evoke another important working process: the transformation from description to direct speech. The puppeteer indicates that the passage describing Duke Beuves's castle is a speech of Savari (one of the men of Lohier, the son of Charlemagne). However, our puppeteer did not stop there, because on the previous page he marked "Savari spy" in the margins to indicate that the spy who informs Duke Beuves of Lohier's arrival must be played by the same marionette as the Savari character. This choice is probably dictated by the requirements of a puppet show, in which the number of characters must be reduced to a necessary minimum, but it is not without interest.

The annotations made by the second hand (from chapter XI [the siege of Montauban]) offer an even more advanced approach to dramatisation. Written in black ink, they are more meticulous. Sometimes they complement the pencil annotations in the margins, more often they are superimposed on the text, written on small pieces of paper and glued on. These additions hide the parts that are not to be played and make it easier to add stage directions and speeches rewritten to suit puppets. For example, the detailed description of the treating of Richard's wound by Maugis in chapter XV is replaced by the

following brief stage direction «Maugis leads Richard out, a little later Richard enters».¹⁵ As the puppet is not capable of complicated manipulations such as cleaning and stitching a wound, the “operation” must be done offstage.¹⁶ The scene of Maugis’s liberation by magic in chapter XXII offers another case in point. The original text states:

Le roi lui-même s’endormit si fort, qu’il tomba à l’envers sur son lit. Maugis, voyant que le roi et tous les pairs de France *étaient* bien endormis, fit un autre charme, qui *était* d’une si grande vertu, que les fers qu’il avait aux pieds, le collier et la chaîne de fer, tout tomba par terre, puis il se leva; voyant que Charlemagne dormait la tête de travers, il prit le cuiller et la lui redressa; il lui déceignit *ensuite Joyeuse* sa bonne épée, et la mit à sa ceinture, puis alla vers Roland auquel il *ôta* Durandal, son épée, ensuite à Olivier, Hauteclaire, après à Oger; puis vint au coffre où la couronne et le trésor *étaient*, et prit tout. Dès qu’il eut fait tout cela il prit une herbe, en frotta le nez et la barbe du roi, et le décharma, puis le poussa de doigt, et lui dit: Sire, je vous ai dit hier que...¹⁷

The glued-on paper simplifies the action so that it can be played by puppets:

Maugis passe devant les chevaliers maintenant les voilas tous endormi délivrons nous de nos chaines et désarmons les tous (il passe devant tous) voilas que est fait maintenant *éveillons* le roi (il va près du roi) sire *éveillez* vous.¹⁸

We can thus see how the literary text is transformed into a stage text. The description has become direct speech with the stage directions indicating Maugis’s movements on stage. This time, the solution for replacing what the puppet cannot do is not off-stage action but naming the actions instead of actually performing them.

The working methods of the puppeteers who annotate these novels thus become clearer: they identify the important facts, that is, where the action takes place and who is

¹⁵ HQFA: 46 (glued paper).

¹⁶ The movements of the Liège marionette are even more limited than those of the string puppet. As it is manipulated by a rod, *fi d’acro*, attached at the crown, the impression of life is given only by the movements from right to left of the head and the swinging of the hands and legs.

¹⁷ HQFA: 60.

¹⁸ Ivi: 60 (glued paper).

speaking, and in this way they build the virtual canvas that will facilitate the combination of reading and improvisation. What at first sight appears to be a text to be read is, on closer examination, a truly dramaturgical work of adaptation and interpretation. The puppeteer who added glued pieces of paper advances even further with the annotations which are more distinctly intended for the staging with puppets.

2. THE SCRIPTS

Over time, some puppeteers have created more or less elaborate plays from the *Bibliothèque bleue* chapbooks. However, the literary aspect dominating the dramatic aspect persists, as the plays, referred to rather as “episodes”, are linked together, the story is told over a period of weeks or even months, as was the case with performances based on annotated novels. This division gradually took on the form of established parts. Thus, Christian Deville, successor of Gaston Engels, divides *Huon de Bordeaux* into ten episodes embracing the main events of the story:

1. La Jeunesse de Huon de Bordeaux
2. Huon à la cour de Charlemagne
3. Huon rencontre Oberon
4. Huon fait la conquête de Tourmont
5. Combat de Huon contre Angoulafre
6. Huon à la cour d’Amiral Gaudisse
7. Combat de Huon contre Agrapard
8. La délivrance d’Esclarmonde
9. La Trahison de Girard
10. La Réhabilitation de Huon¹⁹

Without going into a detailed analysis of the episodes, we can see the progress made in interpreting the novel and transposing it to the puppet stage in this list alone: Huon’s

¹⁹ This handwritten list is found on a single page attached to the typed version of Christian Deville, *Huon de Bordeaux, La Délivrance d’Esclarmonde. 8^{ème} épisode*, coll. Denis Fauconnier.

travels have been removed, the plot reduced to its essentials, the number of characters obviously reduced, and clear preference has been given to the magical aspects and battles. Some puppeteers, such as Victor Verrées,²⁰ synthesized the first two episodes into one. Having established the episodes, the puppeteers gradually expanded them into isolated plays that could be performed separately. To resolve the problem of the contextualisation of the events for the audience, some of them, like Deville, added to each of the episodes a short introduction summarising what happened in the preceding episodes.

2.1 *The transition from the annotated novel to the play*

The written play did not have the same importance for all the puppeteers. We can thus only partially consider the transition from the annotated novel to the play as a step in the evolution of the Liège puppet epic. Gaston Engels continued to perform according to the annotated novels, while some of his colleagues, such as Thomas Talbot²¹ or Victor Verrées, already had written plays.²² An examination of the latter allows us to see the development of the techniques of the dramatisation of the epic narrative as well as the evolution of writing for puppets according to the period and the audience.

2.1.1 “*Les Quatre Fils Aymon*” (ca. 1925)

The typed version of *Les quatre fils Aymon* attributed to Thomas Talbot and written around 1925 is a good starting point, as the influence of the literary source, the Épinal edition, was still very much present. Its subtitle, «1^{er} chapitre - Ou les Quatre Fils Aymon sont sacrés chevaliers; ou La mort de Lohier, fils aîné de Charlemagne» already evokes a

²⁰ Born into a family of puppeteers, Victor Verrées (1889-1962) took over the family theatre in 1913. After its closure in 1931, Verrées was recruited by the Museum of Walloon Life where he worked until the end of his artistic career.

²¹ Talbot was active in the first half of the 20th century (his theatre was founded in 1924). In 1929, he published some of his plays in the Bibliothèque de Tchantchès series.

²² GROSS 2001: 148-149.

novel rather than a play. This more literary than theatrical approach to the text is reflected in the plot, which remains largely faithful to the *Bibliothèque bleue* version. Nevertheless, the rewriting is considerable.

First of all, the author has chosen to change the order of the scenes, placing Duke Beuves's council after Lohier's exchange with Savari. This enables him to better integrate this scene, which existed in the novel, with that in which the spy, seeing Charlemagne's men, goes to warn the duke. Another brief scene has also been modified to contribute to the dramatisation of the whole structure. This is the scene of the porter who in the novel first meets Lohier and then goes to warn his master. Our puppeteer has omitted the meeting, leaving just the announcement made in Walloon, as it is "a Tchanchès" who takes on the role. The introduction of the Tchanchès, the marionette representing a popular Liège character, is one of the most important additions made. We shall come back to this later.

Also, the dialogues are developed to give greater prominence to the characters and events. Thus, Duke Beuves's exchange with the anxious duchess is enriched with a few additional lines to highlight the choleric and rebellious character of the duke: «Par le diable, madame mon épouse je vous prierai de ne plus oncques me parler de cette manière ; car en vérité, je ne ferai pour le roi Charlemagne, le sacrifice d'un denier.»²³ These additions serve to gradually build up to the climax of the play, Duke Beuves's battle with Lohier.

As in the annotated novels, the battle scene undergoes the most important dramatization, as the description must be transformed into action. Thus, the great massacre by the duke's men of Lohier's knights is broken down into five battles in which «Lohier's men are killed» on the one hand and «Duke Beuves's men are victorious» on the other. The death scene of Lohier, summarised in the Épinal edition in one sentence, is enriched by dialogue:

COMBAT

Le Duc Beuves contre Lohier tombe

Lohier (droite)

Par Dieu! duc Beuves, de mon coup vous n'en échapperez pas...

²³ *Les Quatre Fils Aymon* [1925]: 4.

Le duc Beuves (se relève)
Je me priserai peu si je ne puis me venger de toi.
COMBAT
Le duc Beuves contre Lohier tué²⁴

The importance of dialogue here must be emphasized. The battle involving the duke and Lohier is not reduced to a few directions indicating the stage action, as with the previous battles. It is a more personal confrontation that needs speech to be dramatic.

2.1.2 *The Verrées versions*²⁵

In the 1930s and 1940s, Victor Verrées adapted Delvau's versions of *Huon de Bordeaux* and *Les quatre fils Aymon* for marionettes. According to Bernard Guidot, the interest of Verrées (and of many other Liège puppeteers) in Delvau can be explained by the latter's «new writing technique, forgetting the epic style and its often incantatory lyrical aspects, and favouring a narrative style closer to the readers and giving pride of place to the more lively, albeit frequently clumsy, stage directions».²⁶ Although Verrées divided the epic into episodes rather than chapters, he did not stray too far from the literary source. He took up the modifications made by Delvau, namely, a synthesis of the action and reduction in the number of characters. In spite of this, his work in transposing the novel onto the stage shows an even more advanced approach to dramatization.

2.1.2.1 “*La Prise de Montfort*”

To better understand Verrées' method, I propose first to examine the episode «*La Prise de Montfort*» (chapters III and IV of *Les quatre fils Aymon*). It divides the plot into eleven

²⁴ *Les Quatre Fils Aymon* [1925]: 8.

²⁵ The plays analysed in this section as well as the plays by Christian Deville mentioned above and the play by Denis Fauconnier which will be examined later were graciously placed at my disposal by Denis Fauconnier, the director of the Théâtre à Denis, to whom I would like to express my gratitude.

²⁶ GUIDOT 2005. Cfr. MÉNARD 2000.

short scenes, sometimes containing only a stage direction. Even though there are several characters on stage, only two or three speak. Verrées assigns Charlemagne the role of narrator, and it is the emperor who recounts the previous events.

Although Verrées remains faithful to Delvau's plot, he nevertheless makes some changes to its structure. For example, he reduces the battle in defence of the castle to the fight between the brothers and the traitor Hernier. Scene XI, in which the fight takes place, opens with action (a perfect counterbalance, it should be noted, to Charlemagne's council in scene I):

Hernier met le feu au Château, puis sort.

Arrivent les 4 fils Aymon.

Renaud: – Frères nous devons gagner le pont-levis pour barrer la route à nos ennemis. (*Ils sortent*).

Hernier vient avec ses hommes, les fils Aymons également. Grand combat. Hernier reste seul de son groupe avec deux soldats et combat avec Renaud.

Renaud: – Hernier, traître que vous êtes? Est-ce la récompense que vous se deviez pour l'hospitalité que je vous avais donnée. Vous allez mourir de la mort des lâches.

*Renaud tue les deux soldats et à ce moment reviennent du côté contraire Richard, Allard et Guichard avec une armée et font Hernier prisonnier.*²⁷

This agitation is followed by Renaud's announcement of the punishment of the traitor and of his decision to leave Montfort castle. Here Verrées tightens up the original story in which the brothers do not hastily leave the castle because of the flames, but first complete the defeat the emperor's men and punish Hernier. Verrées also adds an emotional moment:

Renaud regarde une dernière fois son château.

Renaud: – Adieu beau château... C'est grand dommage de te voir ainsi détruit... Grand dommage, vraiment...

²⁷ VERRÉES, *La Prise*: 6-7. My italics.

Allard: – Ne vous attristez pas ainsi, mon frère, vous le plus vaillant chevalier que je connaisse.²⁸

This moving separation is not present in Delvau. It is most likely an addition by Verrées to give Renaud's character greater dramatic relief. Verrées, however, omits the emotional scenes that are present in the literary source, such as Renaud's meeting with his father on the battlefield, or the exchange between Duke Naimés and Charlemagne, who is devastated by the loss at the battle of Montfort.²⁹

2.1.2.2 *La Jeunesse de Huon de Bordeaux*

Verrées's version of the first episode of the *Histoire de Huon de Bordeaux*, up to Huon's departure for Jerusalem, sheds important light on the methods used by the puppeteer to transfer the narrative description of a battle to the puppet stage. A comparison of Huon's encounter with Charlot in Delvau's and Verrées' versions gives a clear idea of this:

DELVAU

Charlot, en [apercevant Girard] ainsi seul, sans armes, tout baguenaudant et sans défiance, courut au devant de lui au galop de son cheval et, sans prétexte aucun, lui chercha aussitôt querelle. Girard, étourdi par la brusquerie de l'attaque, allait se décider cependant à répondre, lorsque, d'un coup de lance appliqué en pleine poitrine, Charlot le renversa, blessé, de son cheval.

– A moi, frère, à moi ! cria Girard d'une voix lamentable, en roulant sur l'herbe du sentier.

VERRÉES

Charlot à Girard qui s'avance lentement – Chevalier ! qui t'a donné la permission de chasser dans ce bois. Je ne sais qui me retient que je ne te donne de mon épée dans le corps. (Il frappe Girard)

Girard – A moi, frère, à moi !

²⁸ Ivi: 7.

²⁹ It is worth noting that Alfred Dufour and Christian Deville chose to include in their version of *La Prise de Montfort* (very similar to that of Verrées) the scene of Charlemagne admitting the mistake he had made.

[L'arrivée de Huon]

– Que t'a fait cet enfant, barbare? lui cria Huon, indigné. C'est lâcheté de l'avoir attaqué ainsi sans qu'il pût se défendre...

[Charlot le ment sur son identité. Huon le répond]

Huon avait à peine fini de parler, que Charlot, mettant on continent sa lance en arrêt et serrant les flancs de son cheval, courut sur le fils aîné du duc Sévin qui n'eut que le temps d'envelopper son bras gauche de son manteau, afin de s'en faire un bouclier. Le choc fut violent, mais le manteau de Huon fut seul percé. Huon, alors, se levant sur ses étiers, frappa à plomb un coup si terrible de son épée, sa seule arme en cet instant, que le casque de Charlot en fut brisé et qu'il eut le crâne fendu jusqu'aux yeux. Le fils de Charlemagne tomba mort sur le gazon.³⁰

Huon (accouru) – Que t'a fait cet enfant, barbare. C'est lâcheté de l'avoir attaqué ainsi, sans qu'il put se défendre...

[Charlot le ment sur son identité. Huon le répond]

(Duel entre Charlot et Huon. Charlot tué)³¹

As we can see, Verrées's approach to the literary source is more flexible: he keeps the essential lines and replaces the descriptions with brief stage directions. He invents a line for Charlot to give him the pretext to attack Girard. As the focus is on action, Girard's suffering is effaced. The scene thus becomes more dynamic and gains a livelier rhythm. As the battle is the climax of the show, Verrées doubles it, adding another one that does not appear in Delvau. After the death of Charlot, the abbot and Huon's knights arrive ready to fight. But, says Delvau, «not one of Charlot's men came out of the thickets of the wood to attack them».³² Verrées instead takes advantage of this opportunity to stage a "great battle" from which Huon and his entourage emerge victorious.

³⁰ DELVAU, *Huon*: 148

³¹ VERRÉES, *La Jeunesse*: 6-7.

³² DELVAU, *Huon*: 148

2.2 *The plays for children*

The evolution in audiences, initially mostly adults and increasingly young people over the years, has in turn influenced the rewriting process. Children had to be taken into account: violence had to be avoided. At the end of the 1950s, the educational service of the Walloon Museum published booklets entitled «puppet plays adapted for children».³³ Are these the plays that were performed in the museum's theatre or the plays proposed for children to prolong the experience of the show at home? It is difficult to say. It is also impossible to say exactly who wrote these plays or when. Nevertheless, I think it is essential to mention these versions of our plays here.

The story of Huon de Bordeaux is represented by two texts: the first, *Huon de Bordeaux*, corresponds to Verrées episode «La Jeunesse de Huon de Bordeaux»; the second, *Le Retour de Huon de Bordeaux* – to the tenth episode of Deville, «La Réhabilitation de Huon». But here the similarity ends. The list of characters is reduced. In *Huon de Bordeaux*, Duke Naimés, Girard, the duchess, and the abbot are no longer present. On the other hand, Louis, another son of Charlemagne, is added. Here it is Louis who, according to Amaury and Charles's plan, is to be killed by Huon, but the plan does not work. Nobody is killed (Louis just pretends to be dead). Huon fights Amaury to prove his loyalty, but he does not kill the traitor who, once defeated, flees. His departure for Jerusalem is not a penance but the only way to avoid further battles with Charles and Amaury. *Le Retour de Huon de Bordeaux*, reduced to a canvas of seven episodes, keeps the same thematic orientation, which is the confrontation between Huon and Amaury. It is not clear why only the first and final episodes were published, leaving the central part of the subject, Huon's journey, aside.

Les quatre fils Aymon is also a canvas preceded by an introduction, in which it is explained to children that Charlemagne was very indulgent with his sons and nephews, often intervening to avoid punishing them for their misdeeds, and, on the contrary, intransigent with the innocent, even chastising them without cause. «It was such injustice

³³ The creation of the Walloon Museum's educational service dates back to 1955.

that provoked the great revolt of the Four Sons of Aymon».³⁴ The story opens with the dispute between Renaud and Charlemagne's nephew Ganelon (in the *Bibliothèque bleue* versions this is the name of the traitor who kills Duke Beuves). In contrast to the original story, the nephew does not die but becomes the brothers' worst enemy.

These versions are a far cry from the epics of the blue chapbooks, which here provide almost no frame. For the sake of accuracy, however, it must be said that the publication is followed by the explanation that the plays in the collection «are a free interpretation of the romances of chivalry in the *Bibliothèque bleue*», «specially adapted to be within the reach of children»: «one will therefore not necessarily look for an exact reflection of our old epic legends».³⁵

2.3 Modern versions

The further away the play is from its literary source, the more important the work of rewriting becomes. In modern versions of our epics, the division into episodes does not always take place and, even when it is present, does not correspond to the division followed by previous generations of puppeteers. Thus, the first episode of *Les quatre fils Aymon* as staged by Denis Fauconnier,³⁶ successor of Gaston Engels and Christian Deville, embraces the events represented traditionally in two distinct episodes: «La mort de Lohier» and «La prise de Montfort». The plot of *Huon de Bordeaux* by Jean-Claude Maggi³⁷ focuses on Huon's journey. What was once the subject of the first episode is reduced here to an introduction, and the whole story is told in analeptic form.

Oriented towards young audiences, any hint of violence is avoided. Denis Fauconnier, for example, omits Charlemagne's threats to «hang» the son of Duke Beuves and «burn his wife». It must be said, however, that in contrast to the plays published by the

³⁴ *Les 4 Fils Aymon* [Musée wallon]: 15.

³⁵ *Pièces de marionnettes adaptées pour les enfants : Huon de Bordeaux. Le Retour de Huon de Bordeaux. Les 4 Fils Aymon*, Liège, éditions du Musée wallon, n.d., 16.

³⁶ Fauconnier (1977-) is founder and principal puppeteer of the Théâtre à Denis (Liège), created in 1994.

³⁷ Maggi (1953-2010) was the puppeteer of the Tchanchès Museum (Liège).

Walloon Museum's educational service, Fauconnier does not remove the dead; he takes advantage of the presence of Tchantchès to divert the nature of these scenes: «Quant à moi il ne me reste plus qu'à sonner aux pompiers pour qu'ils viennent avec leur pompe funèbre! On va soigner les morts et enterrer les blessés!».³⁸

In Maggi's work in particular, the process of transposing puppets onto the stage is complemented by the action of cultural translation. Thus, his Huon and Esclarmonde travel on a TGV (a high-speed train). Fauconnier's adaptation remains more traditional. His rewriting follows the methods of the puppeteers of yesteryear: replacing description with action or dialogue, simplifying the language where necessary while remaining largely faithful to the literary source, and removing the magical aspects, such as the horse Bayard and the necromancer Maugis. Whereas Fauconnier seeks to be part of the long tradition of epic theater drawn from novels,³⁹ Maggi's approach is more controversial, his «global fidelity and deviations in the detail of the actions are constantly in competition».⁴⁰

3. TCHANTCHÈS

What makes the Liège epic stand out is the character of Tchantchès. A popular type in the Liège puppet theatre, he represents the voice of the people, in the manner of an ancient chorus, and formulates common sense reflections. There is a certain similarity between Tchantchès and the farcical characters of the Sicilian Opera dei Pupi, the vastasi, who «play the parts of equerries, servitors of the paladins to express, in dialect, the point of view of the people and to make joking comments on the action.»⁴¹ But Tchantchès, as Maurice Piron rightly points out, is not only «the grotesque peasant who, from time to time, in the manner of a clown, distracts the spectator».⁴² For Piron, his role in the epics

³⁸ FAUCONNIER, *Les Quatre Fils*: 19.

³⁹ Although the subtitle claims that the play is an adaptation of Delvau's version, there are parts taken from the Épinal version.

⁴⁰ CAZANAVE 2011: 543. Not having the Maggi play at my disposal, I rely in my analysis on the summary of the play made by Cazanave.

⁴¹ PASQUALINO 1981: 18.

⁴² PIRON 1988 : 31-32.

is indispensable, for without him «the epic would retain too uniform a gravity, capable of weakening the dramatic interest of the play».⁴³ Jacques de Caluwé, on the other hand, believes that in the plays of chivalry Tchantchès is “over-added”: «He comments on the events without playing a determining role, without ever bringing a really indispensable element to the narrative development».⁴⁴

The comedy of Tchantchès often plays on the visual mismatch between him and the knightly character. Faced with a large marionette in shining armour, the little Tchantchès dressed in a smock, patched trousers and large clogs, with a red-checked scarf around his neck, and sometimes with a disproportionately large nose, seems grotesque. His appearance and language – traditionally, Tchantchès speaks a hybrid mixture of Walloon and French – distinguish him from the world of chivalry, marking a line of demarcation between him and the epic plot in which he does not really participate. He always remains outside, and this enables him to move between the fictional world and reality. His role is therefore that of an outside observer; he is a commentator and director rather than an active participant. The words of Tchantchès are the words of the puppeteer himself who «by means of his humble actor’s voice [...] becomes more himself, natural, lively, playful, a people at last».⁴⁵ Tchantchès introduces the action, ensures the transition between scenes, and announces the next show; through him the puppeteer conducts a discourse with the audience and calls the latter to silence if necessary.

In the annotated version of *Les quatre fils Aymon* discussed above, it is the second puppeteer who added a “tchantchet”. His interventions can be divided into two categories. Firstly, the lines in French of servants and valets already present in the text and addressed to the knights. In chapter XVIII, for example, a “tchantchet” replaces the valet who tells the brothers that Richard has been imprisoned by Rolland; in chapter XXI, he is the page in the service of the king who gives Regnault news about Maugis; finally, in

⁴³ Ivi: 32.

⁴⁴ CALUWÉ 1978 :19. This ambiguous approach to the character has accompanied Tchantchès since his first days on the Liège puppet stage. At the end of the 19th century he mainly attracted the new audiences of students, who were less interested in stories of chivalry, and more in current affairs, for which Tchantchès was the spokesperson. Older audiences, on the other hand, often disliked Tchantchès’s interventions, which were considered undesirable because they slowed down the main action.

⁴⁵ PIRON 1988: 31.

chapter XXIII, he takes the place of the guard who was keeping watch on the tower to warn Maugis of the arrival of the king with his army. Clearly, Tchantchès's function here is to help the brothers and not the emperor. The interventions that can be classified in the second category are the comments in Walloon, replacing the narrative passages, intended for the public. For example, the following sentence: «Our Lord, at the prayer of the king, caused a beautiful miracle, for he made a cloud appear so large that one person could not see another» was transformed into: «Y n a li bondiu quelle a oyou ca. Vola qui fait neure comme divai en beur»⁴⁶ ('There was the Good Lord who heard it. Because it is now as dark as in a mineshaft'). This is not a simple translation into Walloon, but an attempt to bring the situation closer to the reality of the audience, which apparently consisted largely of miners. A few pages later the puppeteer uses a "tchantchet" to describe the situation in the besieged town: «I na l'amagni quest rase qu'a vola des meus qui nos estant assieger ossi fâte des magni y n'a les gens qui toumai turto mouer s'ol pavaie»⁴⁷ ('Food is scarce because for months we have been besieged and for lack of food there are people who fall dead on the ground'). A line of "tchantchet" also replaces the episode relating the preparation of Bayard's blood sausage to feed the starving people: «Si sa continue ainsi ji va rote a gno heureusemint qui Renaud vint d'avou in bonne idée y vent d'es prinde des song da Bayard po fe d'el neur trippe»⁴⁸ ('If it goes on like this I'll be walking on my knees, fortunately Renaud had a good idea: he just put Bayard's blood on fire to make black pudding'). These three lines show that Tchantchès's speech serves to lighten the overly serious and uniform tone of the epic and mediate between the epic characters and the popular audience, helping the latter to identify with the epic action. The tone is lighter, but it is not comic. Only rarely can a hint of comedy be discerned, as in the following line of a "tchantchet" that replaces a description of the attack on the city: «les voyou vola qui hinet a grosse est pire asteur les varegn des geu pos no fé dè ma waie J'y vin dé sure une somme tchiesse»⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *HQFA*: 64 (glued papper). I wish to thank Mr. Baptiste Frankinet, in charge of the Walloon Dialect Fund and the Library of the Museum of Walloon Life, for the translation of this sentence and of the other interventions of Tchantches. It should be noted that, according to Mr. Frankinet, these transcriptions do not correspond to the Feller spelling of Walloon.

⁴⁷ Ivi: 69.

⁴⁸ Ivi: 72.

⁴⁹ Ivi: 70.

(‘the ruffians who throw big stones, in the name of God, to do us harm. Aye! I’ve just had one thrown at my head’) [Figure 2]. Obviously, the comedy even here is very ambiguous. The function of the character is not to make us laugh, but to help transform literary narrative into drama, to serve as a means of transposing the story onto the stage.

In the 1925 version of *Les quatre fils Aymon*, Tchanchès is an already established version of the character. He fulfils his traditional function of providing a frame for the play that, in fact, begins with Tchanchès ensuring that everything is ready for Charlemagne and the knights to enter. At the conclusion, three Tchanchès close the play: one of them tells another that he must hurry, the third explains that the stage hand must lower the curtain. Here the function of Tchanchès as an agent of comedy is much more present. Thus, announcing Lohier and his knights, he presents them as «ine trulève di marchands d’inglatins»⁵⁰ (‘a flock of herring merchants’). His advice to Charlemagne is not lacking in humor, either: he suggests that he take out life insurance for his son. In this way, he complements Charlemagne’s noble advisor, Duke Naimes, bringing the action closer to the public.

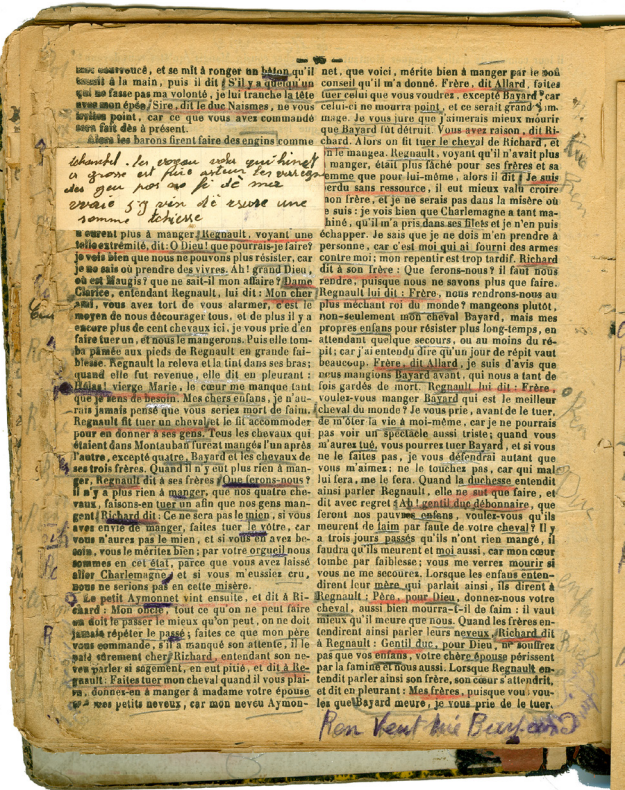


Fig. 2: Glued paper with a line for Tchanchès from *Histoire des quatre fils Aymon, très-nobles, très-bardis et très-vaillans chevaliers*, nouvelle édition, ornée de huit gravures, Épinal, Pellerin, n.d., copy annotated by unidentified puppeteer, n. 11645. © Province de Liège – Musée de la Vie wallonne

⁵⁰ *Les Quatre Fils Aymon* [1925]: 5.

In the dramatized versions of the Carolingian epics by Verrées that we have examined above, the role of Tchantchès remains episodic: Tchantchès summarises the action or intervenes as a servant. In contrast to the Tchantchès of 1925, he does not communicate easily with everyone. As a servant of the Duchess of Bordeaux in Verrées's version of *La Jeunesse de Huon de Bordeaux*, he is not understood by Charlemagne's messengers. On the other hand, Huon speaks to him without experiencing any difficulty, even though one speaks French and the other Walloon. Charlemagne, on the other hand, does not hear Tchantchès's answer to his question about the noises coming from outside. Tchantchès is thus represented as an Other. The language creates a distance, primarily social, between him and Charlemagne's court. It also identifies him as a Walloon character while the other characters are French. Huon, the only epic character capable of understanding him, is thus designated as a popular and regional hero, alien to Charlemagne's entourage. His short dialogue with Tchantchès therefore predisposes the audience to identify with him.

A Tchantchès who is more present in the battle scenes can be found in the adaptations of the epics for children (the editions of the Walloon Museum). In *Huon de Bordeaux*, his intervention in the battle between Huon and Charlemagne's eldest son Louis ends badly for Tchantchès:

Tchantchès: Hé là ! Ne vous battez pas comme ça. Expliquez-vous un peu d'abord, au lieu de vous doguer tout de suite... Hé là! Arrêtez. (Il court à travers la scène. Mais il reçoit un coup d'épée, alors, il se retire au fond).

Tchantchès: Ils sont terribles, hein, ces chevaliers-là. Il faut se méfier! Ils vous donneraient un mauvais coup comme rien. Après tout, ce ne sont pas mes affaires. Tirez votre plan! ⁵¹

Tchantchès introduces a farcical scene into the epic battle. He does not act much, but his intervention is necessary. It enables the puppeteer to soften the cruelty of the scene: through Tchantchès the danger becomes tangible (he has been hit), without showing the wounded and the dead. When Tchantchès is injured, the battle is over. In *Le Retour de Huon de Bordeaux*, Tchantchès gives Amaury his famous *côp d' tièsse èpwèsoné* ('poisoned

⁵¹ *Huon de Bordeaux* [Musée wallon]: 7.

headbutt'),⁵² but this is the only demonstration of physical violence on the part of Tchantchès reflected in the text (bear in mind that this is only an outline).

The modern versions give a place of honor to Tchantchès' exchanges with the children which are well planned and written into the text, even if during the show they are entirely improvised. Tchantchès takes charge of making the story accessible to the young audience. Thus, in Faucounnier's play, he introduces the preceding events in the following way: «Et le sire empereur Charlemagne nous a surement réunis pour fêter la victoire et distribuer un kilo de médailles en chocolat pour tous les braves qui se sont bien splinquer à la bataille!».⁵³ Although Tchantchès gradually asserts himself in his functions, his position as an external element added to the epic remains. Even if in the modern versions he is better integrated into the main action (especially in Maggi), Tchantchès retains his liminal status, continuing to fulfil his role as intermediary between the audience and the epic characters.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise the importance of the annotated novels in the development of the Liège epic. My research has revealed the beginnings of a dramaturgical reflection in the annotations regarding the transformation of the novels into puppet plays. We have seen that already at this stage the figure of Tchantchès begins to play an important role, bringing the audience closer to the epic plot through his commentaries in Walloon. However, his role in the process of transferring the epic to the puppet stage is not limited, as Casanave suggests, to helping «to rewrite the old script by giving it certain added territorial marks». ⁵⁴ By enabling the puppeteer to improvise, Tchantchès is one of the tools for dramatizing the Carolingian epic and bringing it to life on the puppet stage. The study of the annotated novels and the scenarios based on them has thus shown that

⁵² The headbutt is Tchantchès' preferred offensive style. For his worst enemies, he reserves a particularly violent "poison headbutt" that sends the opponent into the wings.

⁵³ Ivi: 2.

⁵⁴ CAZANAVE 2011: 541.

we are dealing not so much with an adaptation as with a complex process of transposition of the French chivalric novel on the Liège puppet stage.

REFERENCES

PRIMARY SOURCES

- DELVAU, *Huon = Huon de Bordeaux*, in *Bibliothèque Bleue. Romans de chevalerie des XII^e, XIII^e, XIV^e, XV^e, XVI^e siècles, publié sur les meilleurs textes par une société de gens de lettres*, sous la direction d'Alfred Delvau, Paris, Lécivain et Toubon, 1859-60, I, 1-47.
- FAUCONNIER, *Les quatre fils* = Denis Fauconnier, *Les quatre fils Aymon*, pièce en 2 actes et 6 tableaux, adaptation des romans de A. Delvau selon la tradition des grands épisodes de haute chevalerie, coll. Denis Fauconnier, n.d.
- HQFA = *Histoire des quatre fils Aymon, très-nobles, très-hardis et très-vaillans chevaliers*, nouvelle édition, ornée de huit gravures, *Épinal*, Pellerin, n.d., copy annotated by unidentified puppeteer, Museum of Walloon Life, n. 11645.
- HHB = *Histoire de Huon de Bordeaux pair de France, Duc de Guenne, contenant ses faits et actions héroïques, réunis en un seul volume*, nouvelle édition, ornée de huit gravures, *Épinal*, Pellerin, n.d., copy annotated by unidentified puppeteer, Museum of Walloon Life, n. 11644.
- Huon de Bordeaux* [Musée wallon] = *Pièces de marionnettes adaptées pour les enfants: Huon de Bordeaux. Le Retour de Huon de Bordeaux. Les 4 Fils Aymon*, Liège, éditions du Musée wallon, n.d. <<http://collections.viewallonne.be?queryid=12f9a890-8d60-4753-8f73-9966c3345e4a>>.
- Les 4 Fils Aymon* [Musée wallon] = *Pièces de marionnettes adaptées pour les enfants: Huon de Bordeaux. Le Retour de Huon de Bordeaux. Les 4 Fils Aymon*, Liège, éditions du Musée wallon, n.d. <<http://collections.viewallonne.be?queryid=12f9a890-8d60-4753-8f73-9966c3345e4a>>.
- Les Quatre Fils Aymon* [1925] = *Les Quatre Fils Aymon: 1^{er} chapitre: où les Quatre Fils Aymon sont sacrés chevaliers; où La mort de Lobier, fils aîné de Charlemagne*, typed version, Museum of Walloon Life, n. 2095793, ca. 1925 <<http://collections.viewallonne.be?queryid=2e4fd044-a9c3-45ea-8c29-0228a6c28546>>.

VERRÉES, *La Prise* = [Victor Verrées], *Les 4 Fils Aymon. La Prise de Montfort*, typed version, coll. Denis Fauconnier, n.d.

VERRÉES, *La Jeunesse* = [Victor Verrées], *La Jeunesse de Huon de Bordeaux*, typed version, coll. Denis Fauconnier, n.d.

SECONDARY SOURCES

BAUELLE-MICHELS 2005 = Sarah Baudelle-Michels, *La Fortune de “Renaut de Montauban”*, in «Cahiers de recherches médiévales», 12 (2005), online (since 30 December 2008) <<http://journals.openedition.org/crm/2222>>.

BAUELLE-MICHELS 2006 = Sarah Baudelle-Michels, *Les Avatars d’une chanson de geste. “De Renaut de Montauban” aux “Quatre Fils Aymon”*, Paris, Honoré-Champion éditeur, 2006.

CALUWÉ 1978 = Jacques de Caluwé, *Propos sur le langage des marionnettes liégeoises*, in *La Marionnette liégeoise*, Liège, Province de Liège affaires culturelles, 1978: 15-22.

CAZANAVE 2008 = Caroline Cazanave, *D’Esclarmonde à Croissant: Huon de Bordeaux, l’épique médiéval et l’esprit de suite*, Beçanson, Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2008.

CAZANAVE 2010 = Caroline Cazanave, *Huon de Bordeaux à la sauce enfantine*, in *Grands textes du Moyen Age à l’usage des petits*, Besançon, Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2010, online (generated 2 April 2023) <<http://books.openedition.org/pufc/42052>>.

CAZANAVE 2011 = Caroline Cazanave, *Huon de Bordeaux, Tchanchès et l’évolution de la “comédie de chevalerie à Liège”*, in Sylvie Bazin-Tacchella - Damien de Carné - Muriel Ott, *Le Souffle épique. L’Esprit de la chanson de geste*, Dijon, éditions universitaires, 2011: 537-545.

DEITZ 1911 = Alexis Deitz, *Les Marionnettes liégeoises et leur théâtre*, in «Wallonia», XIX, 12 (1911), 357-420.

- GROSS 2001 = Joan Gross, *Speaking in Other Voices. An Ethnography of Walloon Puppet Theaters*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001, 143-162.
- GUIDOT 2005 = Bernard Guidot, *La "manière" d'Alfred Delvau*, in «Cahiers de recherches médiévales», 12 (2005) <<http://journals.openedition.org/crm/2212>>, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/crm.2212>.
- IMPE 2019 = Anaëlle Impe, *La Tradition épique médiévale française dans le répertoire des marionnettes liégeoises*, in *La Marionnette objet de musée et patrimoine vivant*, Actes du colloque (Musée de la vie wallonne- Province de Liège, 8 et 9 novembre 2018), Liège, Les éditions de la Province de Liège, 2019, 98-111.
- LEGROS 1954 = Elisée Legros, *Un texte de 1860 sur le théâtre liégeois de marionnettes*, in «La Vie wallonne», XXVIII (1954), 125-126.
- LEGROS 1961 = Elisée Legros, *Le Répertoire des théâtres de marionnettes liégeois*, in «Enquêtes du Musée de la Vie wallonne», 101-104 (1961), 129-164.
- MÉNARD 2000 = Philippe Ménard, *La réception des "Quatre Fils Aymon" au milieu du XIX^e siècle*, in QUÉRUEL 2000a, vol. II, 199-228.
- MCCORMICK - PRATASIK 2004 = John McCormick - Bennie Pratasik, *Popular puppet theatre in Europe, 1800-1914*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, 199-200 [1st ed. 1998].
- NEVEN - HAERTJENS 2001 = Claude Neven - Lucile Haertjens, *La Marionnette liégeoise*, Liège, Éditions du CEFAL, 2001.
- PASQUALINO 1981 = Antonio Pasqualino, *The Sicilian Puppets*, Palermo, Association for the preservation of popular traditions, 1981.
- PIRON 1957 = Maurice Piron, *Controverse sur l'origine du théâtre liégeois des marionnettes*, in «Bulletin de la société royale Le Vieux-Liège», V, 117-118 (1957), 150-160.
- PIRON 1978 = Maurice Piron, *Les Marionnettes liégeoises dans leur histoire*, in *La Marionnette liegeoise*, Liège, Province de Liège affaires culturelles, 1978, 5-14.
- PIRON 1988 = Maurice Piron, *Histoire d'un type populaire. Tchanchès et son évolution dans la tradition liégeoise*, Bruxelles, éditions Libro-sciences, 1988.
- QUÉRUEL 2000a = *Entre épopée et légende: "Les quatre fils Aymon ou Renaut de Montauban"*, dir. David Quéruel, 2 voll., Langres-Saints-Geosmes, D. Guéniot, 2000.

- QUÉRUEL 2000b = Danielle Quéruel, *En guise de conclusion. “Les Quatre Fils Aymon” et la tradition des marionettes dans le Nord*, in QUÉRUEL 2000a, vol. II, 229-235.
- SALME 1888 = Salme Dieudonné, *Li Houlo, roman historique wallon: scènes de la vie, us et coutumes et transformations du quartier d’Outre-Meuse*, Liège, Vaillant-Carmanne, 1888.
- SUNDERLAND 2017 = Luke Sunderland, *Rebel Barons: Resisting Royal Power in Medieval Culture*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017.
- WHITE-LE GOFF 2010 = Myriam White-Le Goff, *Huon de Bordeaux peut-il être considéré comme héros héroï-comique?*, in «HAL» 2010, <hal-00486360>, <<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/52877234.pdf>>.

DON QUICHOTTE POLICHINELLE PARODIE POUR MARIONNETTES DE *DON* *QUICHOTTE CHEZ LA DUCHESSE DE FAVART*

Flora Mele
Sorbonne Université

ABSTRACT: The epic farce is used as a source in the Adrien-Joseph Le Valois d'Orville's puppets parody *Don Quichotte Polichinelle*, written for the 1743 Saint-Germain fair in Paris. The *Don Quichotte Polichinelle* manuscript, preserved at Bibliothèque Nationale de France, shows that the parodist follows closely the comedy-ballet *Don Quichotte chez la duchesse* by Charles-Simon Favart, performed at the Académie royale de Musique the same year. The puppet parody transforms the original version into vaudevilles. The Adrien-Joseph Le Valois d'Orville's parody manuscript centres on three key moments from Favart's comedy. The parody uses a vulgar style and focuses on the simulated animal metamorphosis, a pantomime ballet interpreted by the famous Louis Antoine Cuvillier in Favart's work. This article is about the choice of the Don Quichotte thematic in a fairground show context, fertile ground for reflection on conventional societal attitudes and on the contemporary aesthetic situation of theatre in France. The parody by Valois d'Orville, who also wrote the libretto of Rameau's *Platée*, highlights in a more free and transgressive way the message given by Favart's comedy-ballet, while honouring and publicizing it through puppet theatre.

KEY-WORDS: Favart, Valois d'Orville, Rameau, puppet, Pulcinella, Opéra-Comique, Académie royale de musique, Fair, théâtres de société, dispute

RÉSUMÉ: La source épique et farcesque est utilisée dans la parodie pour marionnettes *Don Quichotte Polichinelle* d'Adrien-Joseph Le Valois d'Orville, écrite pour la Foire Saint-Germain de Paris, en 1743. Le manuscrit du canevas de *Don Quichotte Polichinelle*, conservé dans le Fonds français de la Bibliothèque nationale de France, montre que le parodiste reprend de près la comédie-ballet *Don Quichotte chez la duchesse* de Charles-Simon Favart, jouée à l'Académie royale de Musique, la même année. La parodie pour marionnettes tourne l'original en vaudevilles. Le manuscrit de la parodie d'Adrien-Joseph Le Valois d'Orville se concentre sur trois moments clés du spectacle de Favart. Elle utilise un style poissard et insiste sur la partie de la métamorphose animale simulée, qui

correspond à un ballet pantomime, interprété par le célèbre Louis Antoine Cuvillier, dans l'œuvre de Favart. Cet article traite du choix de la thématique de Don Quichotte, dans un contexte de spectacle forain, terrain fertile pour la réflexion sur les attitudes sociétales conventionnelles et sur la situation esthétique contemporaine du théâtre, en France. La parodie de Valois d'Orville qui écrit aussi le livret de *Platée* de Rameau, met en relief de manière plus libre et transgressive le message donné par la comédie-ballet de Favart, tout en lui rendant honneur et en lui faisant de la publicité, par le biais de la marionnette.

MOTS-CLÉS: Favart, Valois d'Orville, Rameau, marionnette, Polichinelle, Opéra-Comique, Académie royale de musique, Foire, théâtres de société, dispute

1. LA MARIONNETTE EN FRANCE AU XVII^e ET XVIII^e SIÈCLE

À partir du XVII^e siècle, les marionnettes jouèrent un rôle important, dans le théâtre français, autant dans les Foires parisiennes que dans le répertoire des théâtres de sociétés, ou du théâtre de cour. En 1675, Dominique Normandin, Sieur de La Grille, eut le privilège de l'Opéra des Bamboches. Il s'agissait de marionnettes de grande taille qui mettaient en spectacle des comédies reproduisant le merveilleux opératique, avec des décorations et des machines et qui imitaient la danse, le chant et la voix humaine.¹ Au XVIII^e siècle, les représentations dans les cours et théâtres privés mirent à l'honneur la marionnette. Le Régent, Monsieur le duc d'Orléans en fit représenter pendant ses fêtes.² La duchesse du Maine fit jouer des marionnettes pendant ses célèbres Nuits de Sceaux. À cette occasion, dans la parade *Polichinelle demandant une place dans l'Académie. Comédie Représentée à plusieurs reprises par les Marionnettes de Brioché, en présence des Personnes les plus considérables de la Cour*,³ l'auteur Malézieu qui était également un Académicien, un poète, un mathématicien,

¹ IMPE 1994: 13.

² «[II] voulut voir ce spectacle, et le fit représenter à deux heures après minuit» (RUBELLIN 2022: 10).

³ CAMINITI PENNAROLA 1990: 311-326.

rien et un acteur à ses heures, tout comme la duchesse du Maine, outre que l'organisateur des divertissements de Sceaux,⁴ montrait bien l'ambivalence de ce type de pièces⁵ jouées pour un public savant, très ouvert à un répertoire scatologique.⁶ Dans un autre cadre, toujours pour les théâtres de société, Thomas-Simon Gueulette magistrat et auteur de parades, jouait également des pièces pour marionnettes en société. Ce dernier aimait surtout interpréter le personnage de Polichinelle, dans lequel il était très apprécié.⁷ Avant 1745 et en particulier entre 1722 et 1744,⁸ le répertoire pour marionnettes se développa à la suite des interdictions des théâtres officiels, en amenant les auteurs des foires parisiennes à utiliser des acteurs en bois,⁹ dans leurs théâtres qu'on appelait loges. Il s'agissait d'un ré-

⁴ « Cette fantaisie en un acte fut jouée plusieurs fois par les marionnettes de Brioché devant la cour. Il s'agit de François Datelin, dit Fanchon Brioché, le fils de Pierre Datelin dit Jean Brioché (1567-1771), lequel, d'abord arracheur de dents, ouvrit les premiers théâtres de marionnettes aux Foires Saint-Laurent et Saint-Germain » (MALÉZIEU, *Polichinelle demandant une place dans l'Académie* [Chevrier]: 873).

⁵ « Dans ce dialogue, un Polichinelle bien naïf explique au Voisin, un substitut du Compère, qu'il souhaite entrer à l'Académie française pour contribuer à purger la langue française de ses mots orduriers. Ce faisant, ses répliques sont criblées d'évocations scatologiques [...] d'allusions sexuelles [...] et son comportement est à l'avenant » (RUBELLIN 2022: 87).

⁶ « Pour reprendre les termes de Polichinelle dans sa harangue obscène, dont l'adresse donne le ton: 'Mes chieurs', 'entrons donc en matière' » (RIZZONI 2005: 22).

⁷ « Il excellait surtout dans le rôle de Polichinelle, qui faillit lui devenir très funeste. Il avala un jour la pratique qu'il mettait dans sa bouche pour briser sa voix, et ce ne fut qu'après des efforts incroyables qu'il parvint à rejeter le fatal instrument » (GUEULLETTE 1938: 65).

⁸ Il s'agit d'une « phase étincelante » des marionnettes (BATY - CHAVANCE 1959: 58; RUBELLIN 2022: 9). « Il faut ajouter qu'il ne reste presque rien du répertoire des marionnettes foraines d'avant 1722, à l'exception de quelques titres ou anecdotes trouvés dans des journaux, des correspondances, des mémoires, alors que les spectacles étaient nombreux. Les marionnettes existent depuis plus d'un siècle à la Foire mais on ne conserve aucun texte du XVII^e siècle, on ne cite parfois des pièces de 1701 à 1705 [...] comme étant de Fuzelier destinées aux marionnettes parce qu'elles ont été données, selon la page de titre de leur édition imprimée 'aux jeux des victoires' d'Alexandre Bertrand » (ivi: 12).

⁹ L'histoire et la bibliographie des spectacles des Foires serait trop longue à résumer. Rappelons, néanmoins, qu'en 1690 le lieutenant général de police avait ordonné la démolition du théâtre de Bertrand qui avait rajouté à son jeu de marionnettes une troupe de comédiens. En 1699 on avait interdit les comédies à la Foire, ce qui amena les forains à jouer des scènes détachées, ce qui fut interdit en 1704, ainsi en 1707 les forains s'inventèrent des pièces en monologue où un seul acteur parlait sur scène et d'autres criaient dans les coulisses. Même cette astuce fut mal prise par les théâtres concurrents, ainsi les forains utilisèrent des astuces comme des fantômes, des perroquets, des statues parlantes et enfin en 1708 les forains misèrent sur l'utilisation du chant, mais l'Académie royale de musique exigea une redevance que pas toutes les troupes foraines purent se permettre, ce qui fit développer la pantomime. Enfin, on joua à la muette et on fit chanter les vaudevilles au public. En 1714 les troupes foraines formalisèrent l'accord avec l'Opéra, ils achetèrent un « privilège » et prirent enfin le nom de troupe de l'Opéra-Comique. Ils devinrent ainsi les plus grands rivaux de la Comédie-Française. En 1721 le privilège de l'Opéra-Comique fut supprimé.

pertoire vaste, très similaire à celui de l'opéra-comique, pour les acteurs en chair et en os, et où ces derniers pouvaient s'intégrer aux comédiens de bois.¹⁰ Ainsi, souvent le répertoire pour marionnettes en France au XVIII^e siècle n'a été que partiellement étudié, d'autant que si pour certains textes, la mention des marionnettes était bien affichée, pour d'autres ce n'était pas le cas.¹¹ Face à des difficultés de classement, toute analyse a été d'ailleurs faussée,¹² en empêchant de recenser certaines pièces pour marionnettes comme telles, même si cette attribution n'aurait pas dû échapper à un regard attentif.¹³

2. LA MARIONNETTE DANS LES PARODIES DE LA FOIRE: ENTRE FAVART ET VALOIS D'ORVILLE

Charles-Simon Favart et Adrien-Joseph Le Valois d'Orville furent des auteurs d'opéras-comiques très appréciés, ils écrivirent aussi des pièces pour marionnettes.¹⁴ Charles-Simon Favart (1710-1792) débuta avec *Largillières*,¹⁵ à la Foire Saint-Germain de Paris le 14 mars 1732, sur le théâtre des marionnettes du Sieur Bienfait avec une parodie du *Glorieux* de

¹⁰ MAGNIN 1862: 149-168; RUBELLIN 2022: 206.

¹¹ Voir à ce propos aussi le récent projet de recensement des répertoires pour marionnettes: <<https://puppetplays.eu>>.

¹² «S'agit-il de vrais danseurs ou de marionnettes ? La mention de contredanse est du plus grand intérêt: cette danse à plusieurs couples, d'origine anglaise, fondée sur des figures spatiales, très en vogue dès la fin du XVII^e siècle, se prête bien aux marionnettes parce que les relations d'espace et les déplacements (pour la figure) priment sur les pas. Plusieurs danseurs de bois sont montés sur un même contrôle. [Nous remercions pour cette explication Hubert Hazebroucq, chercheur, danseur et chorégraphe]» (RUBELLIN 2022: 41).

¹³ C'est le cas de Pierrot arbitre que Françoise Rubellin considère comme «Une pièce pour marionnettes bien dissimulée» (ivi: 177).

¹⁴ «En ce qui concerne le genre de la parodie dramatique, l'arrivée de Rameau sur la scène lyrique n'a rien changé du côté des parodies. C'est Carolet qui provoque une rupture entre deux pratiques, celle d'avant 1730 (fortement marquée par Le Sage, Fuzelier, d'Orneval, Dominique et Romagnesi) et celle d'après 1740 (dominée par Favart, Valois d'Orville et de nouveaux parodistes)» (BEAUCÉ 2013: 42-43).

¹⁵ Il débuta par *Polichinelle comte de Paonfier* (BNF, ms. fr. 9325, f. 52-64; FAVART - LARGILLIÈRE, *Polichinelle, comte de Paonfier* [Van Roosbroeck - Constans]). Rappelons que Nicolas de Largillière (1656-1746), fut le fils du peintre Nicolas de Largillière, qui était appelé de son temps «le Van Dyck des français» (Van Roosbroeck in FAVART - LARGILLIÈRE, *Polichinelle, comte de Paonfier*: 5).

Destouches,¹⁶ qui fut une des comédies les plus connues de l'époque.¹⁷ À cette époque, le genre de la parodie obéissait à la loi du consensus du public et elle favorisait le processus publicitaire de la cible.¹⁸ Ainsi, même si *Polichinelle comte de Paonfier* contenait quelques allusions peu flatteuses au physique de Destouches, petit, gros et bossu comme celui de Polichinelle,¹⁹ Favart et Largillères pointaient plutôt l'esthétique et le manque de vraisemblance du *Glorieux* et de ses interprètes;²⁰ par ce biais, ils critiquaient les défauts du théâtre contemporain, surtout ceux de la Comédie-Française.

Quant à Adrien-Joseph Le Valois d'Orville (?-1780),²¹ il est principalement connu pour avoir adapté le livret de *Platée* (1745) de Jean-Philippe Rameau, tiré de *Platée ou Junon jalouse*, du dramaturge Jacques Autreau;²² mais il écrivit de nombreux opéras-comiques, seul ou en collaboration, surtout avec Thomas l'Affichard, mieux connu comme Laffichard (1698-1753) et de nombreux ballets²³ pour la troupe des Pantomimes.²⁴ Entre

¹⁶ *Le Glorieux* fut créé à la Comédie-Française, le 18 janvier 1732 et fut repris trente fois jusqu'au 28 mars de la même année.

¹⁷ Dans cette pièce Favart, comme plus globalement dans le cas des parodies d'opéra, témoignait de la popularité de la cible (MELE 2010: 99-108; BEAUCÉ 2013: 135-138). Favart soulignait d'ailleurs: «Un parodiste habile, en faisant sentir adroitement et d'une manière plaisante les endroits défectueux, doit en même temps répandre un jour favorable sur les endroits de son original qui ont été applaudis avec justice; c'est ainsi qu'une parodie, en joignant l'agréable à l'utile, peut être regardée comme une poétique très instructive pour les jeunes gens qui courent la carrière du théâtre» (FAVART, *Mémoires et correspondance*, I: 142).

¹⁸ De ce fait les auteurs étaient souvent amenés à participer à la création des séries parodiques, ce qui permettait de mieux comprendre, d'apprécier, de consacrer l'original (QUÉRO - MENANT 2005; BEAUCÉ 2014: 73-77; LE BLANC 2014: 320-327, 533-537; MELE 2016: 69-85).

¹⁹ Dans sa préface, Destouches ne signala que la pièce *La Critique*, autre parodie contemporaine de son *Glorieux*, que Boissy avait donné à la Comédie-Italienne, sans en nommer le titre (FAVART - LARGILLIÈRE, *Polichinelle, comte de Paonfier* [Van Roosbroeck - Constans]: 13).

²⁰ «Favart et Largillière, pour tracer une caricature du *Glorieux*, ont renforcé jusqu'au burlesque les traits des personnages. Cette exagération leur a permis de mettre en évidence le manque de naturel chez les êtres artificiels qu'ils reprochent à l'imagination de Destouches d'avoir créé de toutes pièces» (ivi: 17).

²¹ Il fut le «fils d'un Trésorier de France au Bureau des Finances de Rouen» (LÉRIS 1763: 626).

²² «Le texte d'Autreau, dont le manuscrit est acheté par Rameau du vivant de l'auteur, a été également retouché par Ballot et Sauvot» (LE BLANC 2014: 668).

²³ *La Barbe bleue, La Servante de sa fille, L'École de Salerne, Les Talents comiques, Les Fêtes du Bois de Boulogne, La Femme jalouse* (PARFAIT 1767, VI: 33).

²⁴ La Troupe du nouveau spectacle Pantomime opéra à la Foire de 1746-1749, suite à la fermeture forcée du Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique. Il fut très probablement l'auteur de la pantomime de *Platée*: «Nous croyons aussi devoir avertir que nous avons lieu de soupçonner que la jalousie désabusée, parodie pantomime du ballet de *Platée* est de M. Valois d'Orville, mais nous ne pouvons pas l'assurer» (PARFAIT 1767, VI: 33).

autres, il écrivit *L'Abondance* (BNF, ms. fr. 9319, f. 78-98), en collaboration avec Favart et Laffichard, une pièce épisodique qui fut créée à la Foire Saint-Germain, le 21 mars 1737,²⁵ outre que de nombreuses pièces pour marionnette, dont deux en particulier furent liées à Favart. Plus précisément, en 1733 dans *La Pièce manquée*, ouvrage représenté à la Foire Saint-Laurent, en un acte en vaudeville, Valois d'Orville mettait en scène Madame Bienfait, célèbre entrepreneuse de marionnettes, avec ses deux filles et un personnage de Farinet, qui évoquait Charles-Simon Favart, fils de pâtissier et auteur très prometteur.²⁶ Dans cette pièce, l'auteur utilisait la technique du théâtre dans le théâtre,²⁷ qui fut bien employée avec les mêmes buts par Favart, dans plusieurs de ses productions, afin de désigner les problématiques du théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique, dont il fut entrepreneur. Cette technique lui servit aussi pour critiquer l'esthétique des productions concurrentes, ou bien encore pour définir l'esthétique du genre de l'opéra-comique.²⁸ En 1741, à la Foire Saint-Germain, chez les Bienfait, dans la parodie pour marionnettes de *La Chercheuse d'esprit* de Favart, ayant comme titre *Polichinelle distributeur d'esprits* (BNF, ms. fr. 9318, f. 29-36), Valois d'Orville parodiait *La Chercheuse d'esprit* de Favart, tout en faisant une sorte de parodie-revue, sous la forme d'une pièce épisodique, comme dans le cas des audiences de Momus.²⁹ Dans ce contexte, Valois d'Orville se servait de Pierrot et de Polichinelle pour tenir boutique; ce dernier était le personnage pivot de la pièce, doté d'un magasin d'esprit caché dans ses deux bosses, qui lui permettait d'aider ceux qui avaient besoin d'inspiration. La pièce critiquait les productions contemporaines des théâtres, en citant des œuvres

²⁵ Les Frères Parfait relatent une collaboration entre Valois d'Orville et Favart pour *Les Valets* (PARFAIT 1767, VI: 32) ce qui est démenti au tome sept de leur *Dictionnaire* (PARFAIT 1767, VII: 731). Il s'agit un opéra-comique en un acte, non imprimé, qui fut joué le 21 septembre en 1741, à la Foire Saint-Laurent.

²⁶ PARFAIT 1767, IV: 137; RUBELLIN 2022: 205-207.

²⁷ Il mettait bien «en lumière l'économie d'un spectacle de marionnettes» de manière métathéâtrale, tout en traitant de sujets comme «le salaire des auteurs, les rapports conflictuels entre ceux-ci et les entrepreneurs, la distribution des rôles, les rivalités entre actrices, les dépenses pour le spectacle» (RUBELLIN 2022: 205). Le Farinet de cette pièce est bien un auteur d'opéras-comiques dont on se moque, car un pâtissier n'est pas un bon poète pour Mademoiselle Godon, une des filles de Madame Bienfait.

²⁸ MELE 2012.

²⁹ QUÉRO 2008; QUÉRO 2010a; QUÉRO 2010b.

théâtrales comme *Pygmalion*,³⁰ créée aux Italiens le douze janvier 1741 et *Farinette*³¹ de Favart, à travers un personnage éponyme, qui figurait comme vendeuse de biscuits, débitant des couplets satiriques sur *La Chercheuse d'esprit*. Dans la troisième scène, après avoir critiqué Servandoni pour ses *Travaux d'Ulysse* (19 mars 1741), au théâtre des Tuileries, Valois d'Orville visait d'ailleurs, plus spécifiquement, *La Chercheuse d'esprit* de Favart et sa protagoniste Nicette.³² La parodie, plus que pointer méchamment Favart, faisait une critique générique.³³

3. DES PIÈCES À LA GLOIRE DE POLICHINELLE

Le personnage de Polichinelle fut bien présent dans les parodies pour marionnettes de Favart et de Valois d'Orville. Les origines de ce masque sont très anciennes et remontent à un premier prototype dans le personnage de Maccus des *fabulae atellanae* qui surent s'adapter aux différentes typologies,³⁴ interlocuteurs, caractères et décors.³⁵ Ainsi, la mobilité de Polichinelle, élément bâtisseur de son charme, comme le montre des recueils tels que

³⁰ «Le 13, le Public n'a voulu voir qu'un sujet rebattu dans *Pygmalion*, Comédie de la composition de Bauran, et retouchée par Procope Couteaux et Romagnesi. Les connaisseurs y ont admiré la manière ingénieuse dont il est traité; les détails de l'Ouvrage les ont aussi frappés, et la vivacité du Dialogue a enlevé leur suffrage» (D'ORIGNY, *Annales du Théâtre Italien* I: 175-176, Janvier 1740). Rappelons que Pannard et Laffichard avaient déjà écrit un opéra-comique ayant comme titre *Pygmalion ou la Statue animée* (Foire Saint-Germain, le 26 mars 1735).

³¹ Le 9 mars 1741, Favart avait fait précéder cet ouvrage ciblé par Valois d'Orville, par *Farinette*, parodie à son tour, de Proserpine de Quinault: «*Farinette*, parodie en un acte de la tragédie lyrique de *Proserpine*, par M. Favart, représentée le jeudi 9 mars 1741, à la suite de la *Joie* et de *La Chercheuse d'esprit* [...]» (PARFAIT 1767, II: 473).

³² La pièce finissait par un mariage entre Lise et Pierrot, auxquels Polichinelle accordait sa bénédiction.

³³ «La parodie de Valois d'Orville ne se présente pas comme une glose servile du schéma structurel de l'œuvre originale mais plutôt comme un prétexte, un motif pour développer une satire globale sur l'esprit ou ce qu'on appellerait le sens commun» (IMPE 1994: 227).

³⁴ «Depuis le XVII^e siècle [...] ce masque [...] donn[a] naissance à toute une série d'avatars européens» (PLASSARD 2014: 13)

³⁵ GRECO 1988.

celui du comte de Casamarciano³⁶ incarne bien autant la philosophie de vie du probable, typique de la société napolitaine,³⁷ que le caractère universel de Polichinelle.

Charles Mazouer souligne qu'en France la première occurrence du nom de Polichinelle se situe dans le titre d'une mazarinade de 1649.³⁸ Molière utilisa bien deux Polichinelles dansants, dans le divertissement final de *Psyché* (1670). Quatre ans plus tard, dans le premier intermède du *Malade imaginaire*, chez les Italiens, l'auteur fit de Polichinelle un personnage théâtral original, assez différent du masque de la *Commedia dell'arte*.³⁹ Dans les Foires parisiennes⁴⁰ Polichinelle devint une marionnette, grâce aux Brioché, en particulier Pierre et Jean qui étaient père et fils.⁴¹ Michel Manson, souligne que le Polichinelle français eut un physique des traits proches de ceux qu'Abraham Bosse attribuait au Capitan ou au matamore espagnol.⁴² Dans l'Hexagone, comme nous venons de le rappeler, Polichinelle fut en vogue aussi chez les aristocrates et en général, dans les théâtres de société.⁴³ Dans ce contexte, il acquit vite un rôle impudique et irrévérent, permettant de dénoncer ce que des comédiens véritables n'avaient pas le droit de verbaliser.⁴⁴ Il devint ainsi une sorte de censeur, pouvant exprimer assez rudement sa position de critique, souvent grâce à son langage scatologique. À la Foire avant 1722, en tant que marionnette,

³⁶ COTTICELLI 1988.

³⁷ Dans le contexte de cette société, dont la vie de tous les jours se fonde sur le probable, «en tant qu'expression de cet éthos [Polichinelle, N.D.L.R.] est en antithèse à toute expérience dogmatique, à toute coercitions, à toute tranquillité démagogique» (DE MAIO 1988: 51).

³⁸ MAZOUER 1999: 20.

³⁹ Dans l'esthétique de la comédie-ballet, cet intermède est particulièrement intéressant, car Molière et son musicien Marc-Antoine Charpentier font dialoguer un acteur qui parle (Polichinelle) avec les violons, puis avec une troupe d'archets du guet chantant et dansant (ivi).

⁴⁰ «Que représente la Foire personnifiée ? Quand elle se distingue de Polichinelle, il semblerait qu'elle désigne l'Opéra-Comique; quand elle s'associe à lui, elle recouvre tous les spectacles forains» (RUBELLIN 2022: 126).

⁴¹ C'est à dire les Briocchi, une vraie dynastie italienne de forains arracheurs de dents, musiciens et danseurs de corde.

⁴² «Il fut très vite populaire, dans son rôle de "mauvais drôle, mal embouché, jargonnant un français de barrière, paillard, goinfre, ivrogne, sans foi ni loi", "qui ne respecte aucune puissance, rosse le guet, bâtonne le commissaire et assomme le diable", ce qui lui donne "une insolence anarchique" qui plaît aux Français frondeurs» (MANSON 2002: 44).

⁴³ CURTIS - TROTT 1996: 112-169.

⁴⁴ «L'insolent Polichinelle n'est-il pas l'ultime recours de ces spectacles dit "populaires" auxquels on interdisait régulièrement tantôt la présence des comédiens en chair et en os, tantôt tout bonnement la parole ?» (RIZZONI 2005: 32).

Polichinelle joua un rôle essentiel dans les parodies. Dans ces pièces, il pouvait être avide de nourriture, présenter un esprit assez naïf, aimer les bonnes affaires, mettre en place des tromperies et se rapprocher du Pulcinella italien;⁴⁵ mais en général il acquit des caractéristiques bien diverses au cours du siècle et il s'éloigna souvent du modèle italien, en devenant particulièrement grossier. Ce personnage mouvant, à l'attitude non conventionnelle et contestataire, convenait en tous cas aux auteurs de vaudevilles et au genre de la parodie, comme le montre *La Pièce manquée* de Valois d'Orville qui peut être pris comme un témoignage exemplaire de pièce pour Polichinelle,⁴⁶ où ce personnage prenait le statut de collaborateur à la direction d'un théâtre. Dans le titre de la parodie pour marionnettes *Don Quichotte Polichinelle*, que nous analysons, son nom fut associé à celui de Don Quichotte.

4. *DON QUICHOTTE POLICHINELLE* PARODIE POUR MARIONNETTES DE *DON QUICHOTTE CHEZ LA DUCHESSSE*

La source épique et farcesque est bien utilisée dans la comédie-ballet *Don Quichotte chez la duchesse* de Charles-Simon Favart, jouée à l'Académie royale de Musique, le 12 février 1743,⁴⁷ devant le roi, à l'occasion du Carnaval, sur musiques de Joseph Bodin de Boismortier.⁴⁸ La mise en spectacle de l'ouvrage de Favart fut tellement marquante que Christophe-Barthélemy Fagan, auteur à la Foire, à la Comédie-Française, à la Comédie-Italienne et collaborateur de Favart, en esquissa une première critique parodique, juste quelques semaines après sa création, dans *l'Isle des talents*, jouée aux Italiens, le 19 mars 1743. Fagan faisait remarquer avec ironie, à la scène XIII de sa pièce, que les subti-

⁴⁵ RUBELLIN 2022: 39.

⁴⁶ Un véritable «impromptu à la gloire de Polichinelle» (ivi: 207).

⁴⁷ Cette cible bénéficia d'une troupe d'exception incluant des vedettes comme Mademoiselle Fel, la Camargo, Jean-Antoine Bérard et Cuvillier (MELE 2019: 211)

⁴⁸ Joseph Bodin de Boismortier (Thionville 1689-Roissy en Brie 1755). Après un premier essai d'opéra-ballet, *Les voyages de l'amour*, il composa un recueil d'airs sérieux et à boire chaque année, de 1732 à 1744. Ces compositions préfigurent les airs de *Don Quichotte chez la duchesse* (PERREAU 2001: 139 et 143). En 1734, Charles-François Pannard avait déjà tiré le ballet pantomime *Don Quichotte chez la duchesse* du roman espagnol, mais l'intrigue n'était pas la même. Sur Don Quichotte au théâtre voir aussi COUDERC 2007: 33-49.

lités du comique de Favart étaient difficiles à percevoir à un œil peu avisé. En effet, *Don Quichotte chez la duchesse* était inspirée très librement du roman de Cervantès et, de plus près, il reprenait certains passages de la *Continuation de l'admirable Don Quichotte de la Manche* de Robert Challe, environ trente ans après sa publication.⁴⁹ La pièce de Favart était riche en références érudites et en éléments symboliques.⁵⁰ Le choix de la thématique de Don Quichotte était important, car il permettait d'amener à l'Opéra, à travers la figure de ce chevalier-philosophe, la réflexion développée par les forains sur les attitudes sociétales conventionnelles et sur la situation esthétique contemporaine du théâtre en France. Prendre ce roman chevaleresque comme source pour la comédie-ballet permettait ainsi d'apporter le rire sur la scène officielle de l'Académie royale de musique, tout en utilisant un anti-héros comique et contestataire. Il permettait de prendre une distance par rapport au système théâtral parisien, qui avait un fonctionnement très rigide et stéréotypé et qui faisait face à une crise de répertoires et de formes.

Dans la parodie pour marionnettes *Don Quichotte Polichinelle*, qui était consacrée à la Foire Saint-Germain de Paris de 1743,⁵¹ Valois d'Orville reprenait d'assez près sa cible et rapprochait, du moins dans le titre, le nom de Polichinelle, à celui du chevalier de Cervantès. Le manuscrit de *Don Quichotte Polichinelle* de la Bibliothèque nationale de France (ms. fr. 9318, f. 83-84) annonce une «parodie en trois actes du Ballet de Don Quichotte», sans donner le nom de l'entrepreneur auquel elle était destinée.⁵² Il s'agit d'une copie, car

⁴⁹ La *Continuation* avait été présentée en France comme une traduction du roman de Cervantès. «Filleau de Saint-Martin, le réalisateur d'une adaptation française du *Don Quichotte* en quatre volumes, et Robert Challe, le génial auteur des *Illustres Françaises*, ont respectivement rédigé l'une une *Suite*, l'autre une *Continuation* du récit de Don Quichotte» (CORMIER 1994: 201; ID. 2010: 419; MELE cs).

⁵⁰ MELE 2019: 214-215.

⁵¹ Le site Theaville donne une transcription du manuscrit sans appareil critique (<<http://www.theaville.org/kitesite/index.php?r=pieces/afficher&ref=don-quichotte-polichinelle>>).

⁵² «L'auteur de cette pièce qui ne fut point représentée» (VALOIS D'ORVILLE, *Don Quichotte Polichinelle*: f. 83). Dans son intégralité, le ms. fr. 9318 (158 feuillets) contient: *La Pièce manquée et L'Impromptu de Polichinelle*, prologue et vaudevilles (1735); *Les Veuves*, opéra-comique (28 juin 1738); *Polichinelle distributeur d'esprit*, parodie de *La Chercheuse d'esprit* (1741); *Les Faux Rapports*, pièce, prologue et vaudevilles (1742); *L'Un pour l'autre*, parodie d'*Amour pour amour* (1742); *Orphée et Euridice*, tout en vaudevilles (1742); *Javotte*, parodie de *Méropé* (1743); *Don Quichotte Polichinelle*, parodie du ballet de *Don Quichotte* de Favart (1743); *Arlequin Thésée*, parodie de *Thésée*, toute en vaudevilles, au Théâtre-Italien (26 janv. 1745); *La Barbe-bleue*, pantomime (1746); *La Servante de sa fille*, parodie-pantomime de *La Gouvernante* de La Chaussée (1747); *Le Bois de Boulogne*, pantomime (août 1747); *La Faim d'Eresichthon*, pantomime (1747); *Les Talents comiques*,

l'auteur de la pièce y est indiqué à la troisième personne mais ce n'est probablement qu'un résumé élaboré par ce transcripteur et contenant un nombre moindre de vaudevilles, ou tout au plus un canevas. Il pourrait donc exister une version manuscrite plus longue et articulée de cet ouvrage,⁵³ mais à ce jour elle n'a pas été retrouvée. Faute d'un document plus complet, cette sorte de canevas, donne quelques indications utiles sur le spectacle qui devait avoir lieu et il permet d'avoir des indices sur la stratégie parodique adoptée par Valois d'Orville. La scène se passe chez la duchesse, tout comme pour la comédie-ballet de Favart. La pièce pour marionnettes emploie un nombre de personnages très proche de celui de l'original de Favart. En particulier, le manuscrit indique la présence de six personnages principaux, les mêmes que dans Favart, alors que les rôles secondaires, probablement destinés à figurer dans des divertissements dansés de la pièce, sont légèrement différents. Le personnage de Polichinelle qui est annoncé dans le titre de la parodie, n'apparaît ni dans la liste des personnages ni dans le texte de la pièce. Il n'est ainsi pas possible de savoir si c'est bien un Polichinelle qui tenait le personnage de Don Quichotte, mais le rapprochement entre ce masque et l'anti-héros chevaleresque est à prendre en compte, étant donné le titre de la parodie. Si Favart utilise des amants et des amantes enchantés, dans la parodie de Valois d'Orville ces personnages sont remplacés par des suivantes de la duchesse. En outre, Favart utilise des japonais et des japonaises, alors que Valois d'Orville se contente d'un seul japonais et d'une seule japonaise, signe d'une mise en spectacle un peu moins somptueuse que celle de la comédie-ballet.

Don Quichotte chez la duchesse

Don Quichotte

Sancho

Altisidore, *souvainante de la duchesse*

Une paysanne

Merlin *enchanteur*

Don Quichotte Polichinelle

Don Quichotte

Sancho

Altisidore, *première dame de la duchesse*

Une paysanne

Merlin *enchanteur*

parodie-pantomime des *Talents lyriques* (10 août 1747); *L'École de Salerne*, pantomime (1747); *La Femme jalouse*, ou *Le Mauvais Ménage*, parodie-pantomime de *Médée et Jason* (févr. 1749).

⁵³ IMPE 1994: 241.

Montésinos <i>enchanteur</i>	Montésinos <i>enchanteur</i>
Amants et amantes <i>enchantés</i>	Suivantes de la duchesse
Japonnais	Un japonais
Japonnaises	Une japonaise
Démons	Troupe de démons

Le spectacle pour marionnettes était destiné à une mise en scène à la Foire, mais les moyens prévus, de même que la structure en trois actes, indiquent un spectacle relativement long pour les marionnettes aussi pour une parodie en général.⁵⁴ Il s'agit d'une époque bien importante pour la Foire où, entre 1743 et 1745, Favart eut le rôle de régisseur du théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique. Dans cette période, l'auteur amena ce théâtre à un excellent niveau de professionnalisation, avec des embauches prestigieuses, comme celle de Boismortier et de Rameau, pour diriger un orchestre ayant un nombre important d'effectifs. En tant que régisseur, Favart embaucha aussi d'excellents danseurs, comme le jeune Noverre, des peintres décorateurs, comme Boucher et il mit en place un vrai système de vedettariat féminin.⁵⁵

Favart répartit sa comédie-ballet sur trois actes et commence avec une chasse à un monstre/ours, dans laquelle Don Quichotte sauve Altisidore, suivante de la duchesse, alors qu'il passe sur les terres du Duc et de la Duchesse en compagnie de Sancho Pança. Cette partie sert à Favart de critique autour des artifices du merveilleux opératique. Alors que la suivante feint d'être amoureuse du héros, ce dernier, toujours fidèle à Dulcinée, refuse les avances d'Altisidore et la met en colère. Puis, à la scène cinq du premier acte, Sancho fait croire à Don Quichotte que Dulcinée s'est transformée en une simple paysanne, mais lorsque le héros chevaleresque s'adresse à cette femme en la traitant d'adorable prin-

⁵⁴ Habituellement la «miniaturisation», la «réduction des effectifs» et la «mécanisation» sont les procédés typiques du processus parodique (LE BLANC 2014: 685).

⁵⁵ «À l'époque de la gestion Monnet-Favart, la salle, le parterre et l'amphithéâtre furent améliorés; les décors furent confiés au peintre et artiste décoratif François Boucher, qui se chargea aussi des habits [...]. L'Opéra-Comique devint ainsi un théâtre moderne qui atteignait un haut niveau de professionnalisation et de finesse. L'Académie royale de musique, qui fonctionnait à l'époque comme une vraie entreprise privée, percevait une partie des bénéfices [...]. Avec *Acajou* (18 mars 1744) Favart atteignit le plus grand succès de cette époque» (MELE 2022: 194-195).

cesse, celle-ci répond de manière assez brusque. Le manuscrit de la parodie indique que c'est à la quatrième scène du premier acte que Don Quichotte, trompé par Sancho, prend cette paysanne pour Dulcinée enchantée, mais celle-ci n'apprécie pas ce compliment. La réponse de la paysanne s'étale pour Favart sur plusieurs répliques, intercalées par celles de Don Quichotte et d'Altisidore, tandis que le manuscrit de la parodie de Valois d'Orville ne signale qu'une seule réplique, s'articulant sur la musique de deux timbres, pour la paysanne.

Don Quichotte chez la duchesse

Don Quichotte Polichinelle

Acte I scène 5

Acte I scène 4

LA PAYSANNE

LA PAYSANNE

Aga, Stila!

Air: Le cotillon couleur de rose

Que vient-il nous dire ?

Pour qui me prend-on ?

Non, je ne veux pas badiner

Non, non, Je ne veux pas rire;

Rangez-vous, gare une taloche

Finissez, je ne veux pas rire. [...]

Je m'en vais vous égratigner

Ou vous écraser la caboche.

LA PAYSANNE

Aga stilà,

Comme il y va !

Finissez, je ne veux pas rire. [...]

Le premier pendart qui m'approche

D'un coup de poing

LA PAYSANNE

Dans le groin,⁵⁶

Je l'enverrai rire plus loin.

Tredame! Madame,

Air: Vraiment, ma commère, oui

Point tant de mépris;

Allez, si cela vous dit,

⁵⁶ Museau du cochon ou du sanglier.

Chacun vaut son prix.	tiré la corde du puits
Si je n'avons la peau si bian polie,	Où je vous y ferons boire
Si je n'avons vos biaux attraits,	Vraiment, ma commère, voire
Les nôtres sont tout comme on les a faits;	Vraiment [ma commère, oui.]
Je ne sais pas me rendre plus jolie.	
Sans avoir tant de favoris,	
Je trouvons à qui plaire;	
C'est notre affaire: Pardi,	
Chacun vaut son prix,	
Chacun vaut son prix. [...]	

LA PAYSANNE

Je n'entends point le caquet
D'un muguet;
Jamais freluquet⁵⁷
Coquet
N'enticha ma vertu
D'un fétu.⁵⁸
Je suis sans reproche;
Si l'on m'approche,
Je poche les yeux;
Adressez-vous mieux.
Les biautés de la ville,
D'une himeur plus civile,
Plus poliment recevront un galant.

⁵⁷ Jeune homme généralement mince, d'apparence frêle, de mise soignée; personnage léger, frivole et pré-tentieux.

⁵⁸ Un brin de paille, un petit peu.

Je n'avons point ce talent: vraiment !

Je n'avons point ce talent.

La paysanne de Favart est déjà bien rustre, car elle menace Don Quichotte de lui «poche[r] les yeux», mais la parodie a un grand pouvoir de démystification, tout en suivant le principe de la dégradation sociale opérée par un travestissement burlesque, car la paysanne tient un registre explicitement poissard.⁵⁹ Valois d'Orville amplifie d'ailleurs le comportement agressif de la paysanne, tout en restant dans le registre animalier («un coup de poing dans le groin»). La rage de la paysanne est ainsi exprimée par un comportement très physique, car elle promet bien des égratignures.⁶⁰ Les deux timbres utilisés par Valois d'Orville, *Cotillon couleur de rose* et *Vraiment ma commère oui*, qui accompagnent vraisemblablement une pantomime, accentuent l'effet comique, par contraposition. L'utilisation du style poissard est ici une marque d'intérêt pour le vrai et indique la recherche de nouvelles formes plus proches de l'esprit du peuple; cela ramène à l'exigence d'un langage plus véridique au théâtre, surtout si on pense que l'Académie royale de musique était traditionnellement une scène théâtrale très conventionnelle.⁶¹

À la scène six de l'acte I, Favart introduit le thème du désenchantement de Dulcinée en montrant Sancho qui triche pour éviter de se fustiger. Favart développe la question de Sancho à l'acte suivant,⁶² où il déclare s'être frappé finalement par lui-même,

⁵⁹ Rappelons que le genre poissard donnait un aperçu intéressant des mœurs de l'époque. Ce genre était aimé autant par le peuple, car il était bien festif, que par la haute société des salons, car elle essayait d'en imiter les situations, dans l'illusion de reproduire la nature, avec vraisemblance et franchise. Le chef d'œuvre de ce genre littéraire est *La Pipe cassée* de Vadé.

⁶⁰ La prépondérance du corps qui était un élément typique de la farce était bien présent dans les divertissements de la duchesse du Maine auquel *Don Quichotte chez la duchesse* fait honneur. «La place prépondérante donnée au corps est une autre caractéristique rapprochant ces spectacles de la farce» (RIZZONI 2005: 25).

⁶¹ «La Querelle des Bouffons marque un tournant décisif dans l'évolution des goûts des publics parisiens [...]. Dans le spectacle des Bouffons *Bertoldo in corte* (1753), certains déplorent la présence de termes aussi triviaux que 'chataignes', 'fèves' et 'navet' sur la scène de l'Académie royale de musique [...]. Le vent des Bouffons a passé sur la scène lyrique et a définitivement ébranlé la position dominante de la tragédie en musique. Celle-ci n'est plus aussi goûtée. [...] À l'Opéra, le succès des petits genres s'accélère. À partir de 1744, les nouveautés créées à l'Académie royale de musique sont essentiellement des ballets» (LE BLANC 2014: 675).

⁶² Maurice Bardon souligne que Valois d'Orville «développe une indication rapide de Favart» (BARDON 1931, II: 638).

alors que ce n'est pas vraiment le cas. Dans le deuxième acte de Favart, les héros arrivent à la caverne de Montésinos, et Merlin ordonne aux démons de frapper le valet.

Don Quichotte chez la duchesse
Acte I, scène 7

SANCHO

Nenni, nenni; ce n'est qu'un badinage.
Monsieur Merlin, chacun répond pour soi [...]

SANCHO

Bon ! Bon ! Ce n'est qu'un badinage. [...]

SANCHO

J'enrage.

Acte II, scène 2

SANCHO

Tous vos malheurs vont prendre fin.
Je viens d'exécuter moi-même,
L'ordre inhumain
De Merlin.
J'en sens encore une douleur extrême.

Don Quichotte Polichinelle
Acte II, scène 6

SANCHO

Air: Un peu de tricherie

Quand un nonnain se discipline
Pensez-vous donc qu'il s'assassine ?
Eh ! bon, bon, bon !
Je t'en réponds.
C'est une fraude bien permise
Que de frapper sur la chemise.
Et zon, zon, zon,
Ah ! ah ! voyez donc !
Un peu de tricherie
Dans la vie,
Est toujours de saison.

Valois d'Orville introduit dans sa parodie un nouvel élément important, car en bon auteur de la Foire il s'en prend au clergé, plus spécifiquement aux religieuses ou «nonnain[s]», en soulignant leur capacité de dissimulation. Encore une fois l'élément critique sociétal est explicite dans la parodie, par rapport à l'ouvrage de Favart qui ne relève pas ce genre de commentaire si ouvertement. Dans la comédie-ballet de Favart, Altisidore se venge d'ailleurs du comportement de Don Quichotte, faisant semblant de transformer ce dernier en ours, et Sancho en singe. La transformation est réussie aux yeux des deux personnages, qui se comportent alors comme des animaux. Favart reste plus court, en ce qui concerne la description de l'état d'âme de Sancho alors que Le Valois rentre franchement dans la description de la rage du personnage:

Don Quichotte chez la duchesse

Je ne suis plus Sancho, fatale destinée !
Hélas ! Je suis sans savoir où

Don Quichotte Polichinelle

Bon Dieu, que j'enrage dans l'âme
D'être singe de bout en bout.
Que dira Sanchia ma femme ?
La chienne en aura du dégoût,
Ce n'est plus là ma cravatte ?
Ce n'est plus là mon toupet ?
Cette main n'est plus qu'une patte ?
Tout ceci n'est que poil follet

La métamorphose est une illusion pour les spectateurs complices de la moquerie, au-delà de la moquerie dramatique cela devient un jeu pour le public. Valois d'Orville insiste sur le vocabulaire animalier et il en profite pour critiquer de manière plus nette l'homme de cour.⁶³

Si dans Cervantès cet animal ramenait à l'épisode du singe divinateur de maître Pierre,⁶⁴ ce qui faisait écho à toute une tradition de charlatans de la Foire et montreurs de marionnettes; dans Challe, auquel Favart s'était inspiré de plus près, il n'y avait pas de

⁶³ Sancho, qui dans le roman chevaleresque n'était qu'un valet, prend alors les mines d'un homme chic et à la mode, voué à la frivolité et à l'artifice, avec sa cravate et son toupet (GRAU 2007: 61-64).

⁶⁴ CERVANTÈS, *Don Quichotte*, II XXV-XVII.

référence à une métamorphose simulée.⁶⁵ Pourtant, le romancier avait aussi évoqué l'animal exotique, en comparant Sancho à un chien couvert d'une peau de singe.⁶⁶ Cette bête exotique avait été très largement utilisée dans les ballets depuis le dix-septième siècle. Dans le *Ballet comique de la reine* (1610) il y avait dix magots (singes) dansant; dans un ballet des singes de 1612, l'on précisait que, comme les singes imitent l'homme on peut inverser le rôle, et faire en sorte que les hommes imitent l'animal.⁶⁷ Pour *La Finta Pazza* de Francesco Cavalli, qui fut très important pour l'histoire de l'Opéra italien en France, le chorégraphe Giovan Battista Balbi imagine, pour amuser le jeune Louis XIV, âgé d'à peine sept ans, un ballet de singes et d'ours conduits par des eunuques.⁶⁸ Le singe de Favart ramenait certes à cette tradition en la modernisant à l'aide du ballet pantomime, mais aussi aux théâtres de société et en particulier aux divertissements de Sceaux, où les métamorphoses furent bien mises à l'honneur.⁶⁹ La métamorphose de Sancho en singe amplifiait pour Favart les effets de la danse comique et évoquait la Foire avec ses spectacles,⁷⁰ car la duchesse et ses courtisans essayaient de faire faire des tours et des acrobaties au singe, tout comme le faisaient les montreurs d'animaux de la Foire. Favart utilisait Louis-Antoine Cuvillier, interprète de

⁶⁵ Challe avait bien utilisé ce double registre en soulignant les moqueries de la noble compagnie envers Don Quichotte et son écuyer (CHALLE, *Continuation*, chap. LV: 322-333).

⁶⁶ Il s'agit du chapitre *Suites agréables de la victoire remportée par le chevalier Sancho, et du projet que forma Don Quichotte pour le faire repentir de son indiscretion* «[...] les deux duchesses, quoiqu'il s'en défendit beaucoup; mais ses fesses lui faisaient trop de mal pour demeurer assis sur son gazon. Il fut obligé de se mettre sur le ventre, et en mangeant avec son visage tout ridé et roussi, il ne ressemblait pas mal à un chien couvert de la peau d'un singe; ce qui faisait rire tout le monde, surtout lorsqu'il buvait, comme il lui arrivait fort souvent, malgré la posture contrainte où il était; parce que les dames qui avaient voulu absolument avoir l'honneur de le servir, n'attendaient pas qu'il en demandât» (ivi, chap. XLVII: 190).

⁶⁷ *Le Récit du ballet des singes par une femme qui les conduisait et les aidait à dérober un Monsieur qui était endormi* montrait d'ailleurs bien le côté sympathique de cet animal (*Recueil des plus excellents ballets de ce temps*: 43-44). Il faut penser aussi à des antimasques anglais comme *The Masque of the Inner Temple and Grey's Inn* et *The Memorable Masque of the Middle Temple and Lincoln's Inn*, en 1613 (LECOMTE 2014: 117).

⁶⁸ «À la cour médicéenne de Florence, les Febiarmonici dirigés par Balbi, présenterent notamment *La Finta pazza* où sont introduits par le chorégraphe des "balli d'orsi, di gatti mammoni e alter invenzioni"» (LECOMTE 2014: 263).

⁶⁹ Il suffit de penser à «la horde de fous, de la Septième Nuit, métamorphosés en loups-garous» (RIZZONI 2005: 24).

⁷⁰ «Brioché, du reste, n'était pas le seul qui fit concurrence à Ponteau. Celui-ci avait à craindre aussi une nuée de géants, de nains, de sauteurs, de funambules, d'animaux féroces, d'escamoteurs etc. etc. dont la foire était peuplée. On vit même une troupe de rats, dansants sur la corde raide avec un balancier, détourner une bonne partie des spectateurs conviés par l'Opéra-Comique» (SOLIÉ 1847: 2).

Momus dans *Platée* et spécialisé dans ces types de danse. Nous ne savons pas si la parodie pour marionnette prévoyait un danseur en chair et en os, mais ce serait une possibilité, car cette parodie paraît très vouée à une vraie pantomime grotesque. En outre, si le singe de Favart bien domestiqué, dressé et dégrossi de son animalité sauvage peut être vu aussi comme un animal de compagnie et un objet de luxe d'une femme aristocrate,⁷¹ le singe de Le Valois d'Orville restait plus franchement une caricature à mi-chemin entre l'homme de cour frivole et le valet du bas-peuple.⁷² Par ailleurs, dans une acception d'imitateur mal avisé de l'homme, le singe servait déjà à Favart pour montrer la décadence des théâtres et du jeu de l'acteur. La parodie pour marionnette, dans le cadre plus libre des spectacles de la Foire, où les auteurs s'engageaient très fermement dans une réflexion sur le naturel au théâtre,⁷³ allait accentuer cette réflexion.

La transmission de la trace écrite de la parodie pour marionnettes *Don Quichotte Polichinelle* présente des lacunes ne permettant pas d'aller plus loin dans l'analyse de la pièce et de reconstituer intégralement sa mise en spectacle. Elle laisse pourtant percevoir le contexte des rivalités entre théâtres concurrents. Ainsi, si le singe/Sancho de Favart et l'ours/Don Quichotte sont utilisés comme éléments critiques et symboliques de la situation du jeu de l'acteur et des mœurs du temps, la parodie pour marionnettes met en relief de manière plus libre et transgressive le message donné par Favart.⁷⁴ La comédie-ballet est déjà assez novatrice en soi, car elle apporte avant *Platée*, l'intrusion de la folie du Quichotte et du Carnaval, à l'Académie royale de musique, la merveille de la métamorphose et des enchantements grotesques. Elle amène ainsi un discours sur la place du rire à l'Académie royale de musique, de manière similaire au travail publicitaire de Valois d'Orville avec

⁷¹ La duchesse du Maine, de laquelle le ballet de Favart s'inspirait pour l'ambiance de sa comédie-ballet, avait d'ailleurs véritablement possédé un singe qui s'appelait Jeannot et pour lequel elle fit écrire une épitaphe, lors de sa mort (MELE 2019: 218). Rappelons que le singe était important déjà chez les Romains, où il faisait partie des animaux familiers et que ceux-ci avaient repris les traditions grecques, égyptiennes et mésopotamiennes. Les riches propriétaires romains les achetaient afin de les exhiber en présence de leurs invités. Des études récentes ont permis de mettre à la lumière une «Découverte exceptionnelle, il s'agit de la sépulture d'un petit singe. Elle témoigne de l'importance donnée ici à cet animal exotique, prisé comme animal de compagnie dans les familles aisées romaines et gallo-romaines», (GERBER - BAUDRY DAUTRY 2012: 42).

⁷² Sous cet aspect, il montrait le valet comme une sorte de sous-humain (MELE 2019: 215).

⁷³ Cette réflexion avait bien été engagée par le Théâtre Italien en France: voir à ce propos les traités sur le sujet, en particulier ceux des Riccoboni (RICCOBONI, *Dell'Arte rappresentativa*: 39-50).

⁷⁴ Voir aussi l'iconographie sur Polichinelle à propos du singe: «Pulcinella e le scimmie», (GRECO 1990: 193).

les marionnettes. La parodie pour marionnette, loin de prendre une vraie distance avec l'œuvre de Favart était destinée à en amplifier son message intrinsèque, tout en supposant un pacte de connivence avec le public. Ainsi, cela ne paraît pas un hasard que l'auteur de ce spectacle pour marionnette fut le même que celui du livret de *Platée*, où Rameau avait inséré sa veine comique,⁷⁵ tout en visant le genre de l'Opéra, de manière autoparodique, en le présentant sur scène, dans une sorte de miroir déformant qui permit de fondre les traditions musicales françaises et italienne.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Il avait «réinject[é] [...] la veine comique qu'il avait cultivée lorsqu'il fréquentait la Société du Caveau et au cours de sa collaboration avec Piron à la Foire» (LE BLANC 2014: 668-669).

⁷⁶ Voir plus largement les pages de Judith le Blanc concernant *Platée* (ivi: 668-673).

BIBLIOGRAPHIE

SOURCES PRIMAIRES

- D'ORIGNY, *Annales du Théâtre Italien* = Antoine d'Origny, *Annales du Théâtre Italien depuis son origine jusqu'à ce jour*, Genève, Slatkin Reprints, 1970 [1788].
- CERVANTÈS, *Don Quichotte* = Miguel de Cervantès, *Don Quichotte de la Manche*, édition et traduction de l'espagnol par Claude Allaire - Jean Canavaggio - Michel Monner, préface de Jean Canavaggio, Paris, Gallimard, 2015.
- CHALLE, *Continuation* = Robert Challe, *Continuation de l'histoire de l'admirable Don Quichotte de la Manche*, édition critique par Jacques Cormier - Michèle Weil, Genève, Droz, 1994.
- FAVART, *Mémoires et correspondance* = Charles-Simon Favart, *Mémoires et correspondance littéraires, dramatiques et anecdotiques, publiés par Antoine-Pierre-Charles Favart [...] et précédés d'une notice historique [...] par Henri François Dumolard*, Paris, Collin, 1808.
- FAVART - LARGILLIÈRE, *Polichinelle, comte de Paonfier* [Van Roosbroeck - Constans] = Charles-Simon Favart - Nicolas de Largillière, *Polichinelle, comte de Paonfier. Parodie inédite du "Glorieux" de Destouches (1732)*, publiée par Gustave Van Roosbroeck - Antony Constans, Paris, Champion, 1924.
- MALÉZIEU, *Polichinelle demandant une place dans l'Académie* [Chevrier] = Nicolas de Malézieu, *Polichinelle demandant une place dans l'Académie*, dans *La Matière et l'esprit. La littérature scatologique au XVIII^e siècle*, édition d'Alain Chevrier, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2018, 873-881.
- Recueil des plus excellents ballets de ce temps* = *Recueil des plus excellents ballets de ce temps*, Paris, chez Toussaint du Bray, 1612.
- PARFAIT, *Dictionnaire des Théâtres* = Claude et François Parfait, *Dictionnaire des théâtres contenant toutes les pièces qui ont été représentées jusqu'à présent sur les différents théâtres français et sur celui de "Académie royale de musique..."*, Paris, chez Crozet, 1767.

- RICCOBONI, *Dell'Arte rappresentativa* = Luigi Riccoboni, *Dell'Arte rappresentativa. Capitoli sei*, Londra, s.n., 1728.
- VALOIS D'ORVILLE, *Don Quichotte Polichinelle* = Adrien-Joseph Le Valois d'Orville, *Don Quichotte Polichinelle. Parodie en trois actes du ballet de Don Quichotte* [1743], BNF, ms. fr. 9318, f. 83-84.

SOURCES SECONDAIRES

- BARDON 1931 = Maurice Bardon, *“Don Quichotte” en France au XVII^e et au XVIII^e siècle. 1605-1815*, Paris, Librairie ancienne Honoré Champion, 1931.
- BATY - CHAVANCE 1959 = Gaston Baty - René Chavance, *Histoire des marionnettes*, Paris, PUF, 1959.
- BEUCÉ 2013 = Pauline Beucé, *Parodies d'opéra au siècle des Lumières. Évolution d'un genre comique*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2013.
- CAMINITI PENNAROLA 1990 = Lea Caminiti Pennarola, *Pulcinella all'Accademia*, dans *Pulcinella una maschera tra gli specchi*, a cura di Franco Carmelo Greco, Napoli, Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1990, 311-326.
- CORMIER 1994 = Jacques Cormier, *D'un Sancho à l'autre. De Saint-Martin à Robert Challe. Sur quelques différences entre les tomes V et VI du Don Quichotte français*, dans «*Travaux de littérature*», VII (1994), 201-222.
- CORMIER 2010 = Jacques Cormier, *D'un Sancho à l'autre: de Filleau de Saint-Martin à Robert Challe*, dans Id., *L'atelier de Robert Challe (1659-1721)*, Paris, PUPS, 2010, 419-440.
- COTTICELLI 1988 = Francesco Cotticelli, *Il Pulcinella della raccolta di Casamarciano: Antinomia di una tradizione*, dans *Quante storie per Pulcinella/Combien d'histoires pour Polichinelle*, a cura di Franco Carmelo Greco, Napoli, Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1988, 87-107.
- COUDERC 2007 = Christophe Couderc, *Don Quichotte et Sanche sur la scène française (XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles)*, dans «*Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez*», XXXVII, 2

- (2007), *Cervantès et la France*, 33-49 (URL: <<http://journals.openedition.org/mcv/1655>>; DOI: <<https://doi.org/10.4000/mcv.1655>>).
- CURTIS - TROTT 1996 = Judith Curtis - David Trott, *Histoire et recueil des Lazzis*, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 1996.
- DE MAIO 1988 = Romeo De Maio, «Pulcinella e la chiesa», dans *Quante storie per Pulcinella/Combien d'histoires pour Polichinelle*, a cura di Franco Carmelo Greco, Napoli, Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1988, 37-51.
- GERBER - BAUDRY DAUTRY 2012= Frédéric Gerber - Anna Baudry-Dautry, *La mode de l'animal exotique dans la haute société gallo-romaine. Sépulture d'un singe dans la nécropole de la rue des Caillons à Poitiers*, dans «Archéopages», 35 (2012), 42-47 (URL: <<http://journals.openedition.org/archeopages/296>>; DOI: <<https://doi.org/10.4000/archeopages.296>>).
- GRECO 1988 = Franco Carmelo Greco, *Quante storie per Pulcinella!*, dans *Quante storie per Pulcinella/Combien d'histoires pour Polichinelle*, a cura di Franco Carmelo Greco, Napoli, Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1988, 21-31.
- GRECO 1990 = *Pulcinella maschera del mondo*, a cura di Franco Carmelo Greco, Napoli, Electa, 1990.
- GRAU 2007 = François-Marie Grau, *Histoire du costume*, Paris, PUF, 2007.
- GUEULLETTE 1938 = Jean-Émile Gueullette, *Thomas-Simon Gueullette, un magistrat du XVIII^e siècle ami des lettres, du théâtre et des plaisirs*, Paris, Droz, 1938.
- IMPE 1994 = Jean-Luc Impe, *Opéra baroque et marionnette: dix lustres de répertoire musical au siècle des Lumières*, Charleville-Mézières, Institut international de la marionnette, 1994.
- LE BLANC 2014= Judith le Blanc, *Avatars d'opéras. Parodies et circulation des airs chantés sur les scènes parisiennes*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2014.
- LECOMTE 2014 = Nathalie Lecomte, *Entre cours et jardins d'illusion. Le ballet en Europe (1515-1715)*, Pantin, Centre national de la danse, 2014.
- LÉRIS 1763 = Antoine de Lérès, *Dictionnaire portatif historique et littéraire des théâtres, contenant l'origine des différents théâtres de Paris*, Paris, Jombert, 1763.
- MAGNIN 1862 = Charles Magnin, *Histoire des marionnettes en Europe. Depuis l'Antiquité jusqu'à nos jours*, Paris, Lévy, 1862.

- MANSON 2002 = Michel Manson, *Comment Polichinelle est devenu un jouet à l'inquiétante étrangeté (XVII^e-XIX^e siècles)*, dans «L'Émoi de l'Histoire», 25-26 (2002), *Jeu et Histoire*, 44-68.
- MAZOUER 1999 = Charles Mazouer, *Polichinelle en France jusqu'aux théâtres de la Foire*, dans «Cahiers Robinson», 6 (1999), *Polichinelle*, sous la direction de Francis Marcoin, 19-48.
- MELE 2010 = Flora Mele, *Le théâtre de Charles-Simon Favart. Histoire et Inventaire des manuscrits*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2010.
- MELE 2012 = Flora Mele, *L'adaptation du répertoire Italien en France à travers les manuscrits de Favart*, dans *Le Théâtre Italien en France à l'époque des Lumières: entre attraction et dénégation*, textes réunis par Camilla Cederna, Lille, Éditions du conseil scientifique de l'Université de Lille 3, 2012, 25-51.
- MELE 2016 = Flora Mele, *Le cas des parodies de Favart: entre la Foire et l'Académie royale de musique*, dans *Rameau, entre art et science*, études réunis par Sylvie Bouissou - Graham Sadler - Solveig Serre, Paris, École des Chartes, 2016, 69-85.
- MELE 2019 = Flora Mele, *La figure du singe à la Foire et à l'Académie royale de musique à travers Favart*, dans *Le Singe au XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles. Figure de l'art, personnage littéraire et curiosité scientifique*, sous la direction de Florence Boulerie et Katalin Kovács, Paris, Hermann, 2019, 209-224.
- MELE 2022 = Flora Mele, *Charles-Simon Favart entrepreneur de spectacles*, dans «European Drama and Performance Studies», 18 (2022), *Molière and After. Aspects of the Theatrical Enterprise in 17th and 18th Century France*, edited by Sabine Chaouche et Jan Clarke, 193-228.
- MELE cs = Flora Mele, *L'aventure au théâtre: Favart lecteur de Challe dans "Don Quichotte" chez la duchesse*, dans *Robert Challe et l'aventure*, textes réunis par Geneviève Artigas-Menant - Marc André Bernier - Christophe Martin, Paris, Classiques Garnier, cs.
- MENANT - QUÉRO 2005 = *Séries parodiques au siècle des Lumières*, textes réunis par Sylvain Menant - Dominique Quéro, Paris, PUPS, 2005.
- PERREAU 2001 = Stéphan Perreau, *Joseph Bodin de Boismortier 1689-1755. Un musicien lorrain-catalan à la cour des Lumières*, Montpellier, Presses du Languedoc, 2001.

- PLASSARD 2014= Didier Plassard, *Pourquoi Polichinelle*, dans *Polichinelle, entre le rire et la mort. Filiations, ruptures et régénération d'une figure traditionnelle*, sous la direction de Didier Plassard, Cinisello Balsamo (MI), Silvana Editoriale, 2015, 13.
- QUÉRO 2008= Dominique Quéro, *Les audiences de la Folie*, dans *Ris, masques et tréteaux. Aspects du théâtre du XVIII^e siècle. Mélanges en hommage à David Trott*, études réunies et éditées par Marie-Laure Girou-Swidorski - Stéphanie Massé - Françoise Rubellin, Québec City, Presses de l'Université Laval, 2008, 215-241.
- QUÉRO 2010a = Dominique Quéro, *Les audiences du moraliste: rire et satire dans les "pièces à tiroirs"*, dans *Le Rire ou Le Modèle. Le Dilemme du moraliste*, textes réunis par Jean Dagen - Anne-Sophie Barrovecchio, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2010, 445-462.
- QUÉRO 2010b = Dominique Quéro, *Ridicules en série au XVIII^e siècle: la "pièce à tiroirs", structure récurrente des spectacles forains*, dans *Séries et variations. Études littéraires offertes à Sylvain Menant*, sous la direction de Luc Fraisse, Paris, PUPS, 2010, 811-822.
- RIZZONI 2005 = Nathalie Rizzoni, *Polichinelle chez la duchesse ou l'ombre de la Foire à la cour de Sceaux*, dans «Études sur le XVIII^e siècle», 33 (2005), *Les Théâtres de société au XVIII^e siècle*, volume composé par Marie-Emmanuelle Plagnol-Diéval - Dominique Quéro, 21-32.
- RUBELLIN 2022 = *Marionnettes du XVIII^e siècle. Anthologie de textes rares*, édition de Françoise Rubellin, Les Matelles, Éditions Espaces 34, 2022.
- SOLIÉ 1847 = Émile Solié, *Histoire du Théâtre royal de l'Opéra-Comique*, Paris, Chez Tous les Libraires, 1847.

THE LEGEND OF BITON AND FAARO: A REINTERPRETATION OF A CREATION MYTH FROM THE EPIC OF BAMANA SEGU PERFORMED WITH PUPPETS AND MASKS IN MALI

Elisabeth den Otter
Tropenmuseum Amsterdam

ABSTRACT: This contribution calls attention to Malian masquerades that reinterpret narrative material drawn from the epic of Bamana Segu through puppets and masks. After providing a general overview of African puppetry, the essay zooms in specifically on the Malian village of Kirango, located on the bank of the Niger River about 35 kilometers northeast of the city of Ségou. The inhabitants of this village (Bamana farmers and Bozo fishermen) celebrate masquerades in which puppets and masks are made to dance by puppeteers whose performance is accompanied by drummers and singers. In this context, no difference is made between puppets and masks: both are called *sogo* ('animal'), because many of them represent animals such as the hippopotamus, the crocodile, various types of fish (Bozo), antelopes and the buffalo (Bamana). The essay then introduces two characters from the epic of Bamana Segu, Faaro (water spirit and creator god) and Biton (Mamari Coulibaly, a historical Bamana king who, according to a widespread legend, acquired power with the help of Faaro); and it goes on to discuss Faaro's role in Bozo and Bamana masquerades and explain how a 2009 Bozo performance recreated the legend of Faaro and Biton. The final sections of the essay reflect on the masquerades' significance with respect to collective memory and cultural identity as well as their possible evolution in the future.

KEY-WORDS: Mali, Kirango, Bozo, Bamana, masquerades, puppets, masks, epic of Bamana Segu, Biton, Faaro

RIASSUNTO: Questo contributo richiama l'attenzione sulle maschere maliane che reinterpretano materiale narrativo tratto dall'epopea di Bamana Segu attraverso burattini e maschere. Dopo aver fornito una panoramica generale del teatro di figura africano, il saggio si sofferma specificamente sul villaggio maliano di Kirango, situato sulla riva del fiume Niger, circa 35 km a nord-est della città di Ségou. Gli abitanti di questo villaggio (contadini Bamana e pescatori Bozo) celebrano delle

mascherate nelle quali pupazzi e maschere vengono fatti ballare da burattinai la cui performance è accompagnata da suonatori di tamburi e cantanti. In questo contesto, non si fa differenza tra pupazzi e maschere: entrambi sono chiamati sogo ('animale'), perché molti di essi rappresentano animali come l'ippopotamo, il cocodrillo, vari tipi di pesce (nel caso dei Bozo), le antilopi e il bufalo (nel caso dei Bamana). Il saggio presenta poi due personaggi dell'epopea di Bamana Segu, Faaro (spirito dell'acqua e dio creatore) e Biton (Mamari Coulibaly, storico re Bamana che, secondo una diffusa leggenda, prese il potere con l'aiuto di Faaro); e prosegue discutendo il ruolo di Faaro nelle mascherate dei Bozo e dei Bamana e spiegando come una performance realizzata dai Bozo nel 2009 ha ricreato la leggenda di Faaro e Biton. Le sezioni finali del saggio riflettono sull'importanza delle mascherate in relazione alla memoria collettiva e all'identità culturale, nonché sulla loro possibile evoluzione futura.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Mali, Kirango, Bozo, Bamana, mascherata, marionette, maschere, epopea di Bamana Segu, Biton, Faaro

1. THE MYSTERY OF AFRICAN PUPPETS

African puppets are relatively unknown in Europe. From various sources (literature, conversations with experts, and fieldwork),¹ I have gathered that traditional puppet theatre exists in Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroun, Gabon, and Congo. Modern types of puppetry may be found in Togo, Nigeria, Zaïre, Burundi, and South Africa. Most of the puppets are rod, string, or hand puppets; there are no shadow figures, except in Egypt. They may be articulated or non-articulated, as is the case with (small) statues and *marottes* (a head mounted on a stick, representing human types, known in Europe as a "fool's bauble").

The ritual origin of African puppets is obvious: small statues were and are used in ancestor worship and by initiation societies. Puppets are a double of man, created to project his being, but also a double of society. Their performances are often funny and

¹ For literature that provides an overview of puppet theater in Africa, see especially DARKOWSKA-NIDZGORSKA - NIDZGORSKI 1998.

destined to make people laugh. Sexuality, a source of social tension, and its corollary, fertility, are favorite themes in this type of popular entertainment.

Some types of African puppetry are small-scale and satiric, a bit like the English Punch. This is the case in southern Niger, where the Hausa puppeteer, hidden under his long gown, plays small scenes with two unarticulated puppets representing characteristic types such as the man who beguiles women with his sexual parts, the marabout (Islamic priest) seducing a young girl, the dancing cousins, and so on. His text, spoken through a voice-distorting device, is “translated” by his helpers. In the Congo, the puppets have the shape of a bauble, a head on a stick. The puppeteer is covered entirely by a cloth, from which only the puppet sticks out. Traditional as well as modern characters are represented: village heads, civil servants, and soldiers.

Masquerades are an interpretation of a world in evolution; the tradition is maintained, but new elements are added. For example, some puppets are ancient, like the Bird, but new puppets are shown, such as the Shrimp which was ‘invented’ by a fisherman who worked in Senegal. When a masquerade is organized, people watch out for new characters and comment on them.

2. BOZO AND BAMANA PUPPETS AND MASKS

In Kirango, a village located on the banks of the Niger River, about 35 km northeast of the city of Ségou (Mali), the inhabitants (Bamana farmers and Bozo fishermen) celebrate their masquerades.² During the masquerades, both groups show large rod puppets that are made to dance by puppeteers hidden inside them. The puppets of the Bamana are made of wood, whereas those of the Bozo consist of a bamboo frame covered with cloth (or plastic) and are manipulated by a man crawling on all fours; one might call it a “body puppet”. Both groups have masks in their repertoire, such as Yayoroba, the Ideal Woman (Bamana), and the water spirit Faaro (Bozo), whose wooden mask was made by a Bamana carver.

² For background information regarding puppet theater in Mali, see ARNOLDI 1995.

No difference is made between puppets and masks; both are called *sogo* ('animal'), since many of them represent animals. They resemble each other in many ways and serve the same purpose: to represent mythical and symbolic beings through concealed human beings. They can be viewed as two sides of the same coin, since both are a means to establish contact between the invisible world of the supernatural and the visible human world.

The characters are humans, spirits, and (mythical) animals. They are accompanied by drummers and singers; the songs describe the power of some animals (e.g., the Buffalo and Crocodile), the beauty of others (e.g., the Dog-Fish), and specific character traits (e.g., Gonfarinman, the Mean Chimpanzee). They alternate with masked dancers, who likewise represent mythical animals and symbolic figures. The songs that accompany the animals do not tell stories, but speak of values that are important to the Bamana and the Bozo. They praise the ancestors, fishermen, farmers, and hunters; they speak about the mythical powers of certain animals and also warn against bad behavior. An example of this is the song for the Dog-Fish:

Mirror of gold
Dog-fish is like a mirror
A mirror of gold
Have you not heard the words of the indiscrete person?
Have you not heard the words of the person who speaks badly about others?
Trying to separate the children of the same mother?

An interesting category is that of the "strong" animals; they are difficult to capture. The Bozo and the Bamana share a number of characters, but it is the powerful aquatic animals associated with Bozo hunting and powerful land-based animals associated with Bamana hunting that serve to distinguish one group's repertoire from the other's. Some animals – like the buffalo, some antelopes (Bamana), and the cow (Bozo) – can transform themselves into human beings. The Bozo perform important aquatic animals like the dog-fish, the crocodile, the hippopotamus and the manatee. Some of the animals of the Bamana carry small rod puppets on their back, which show scenes of daily life. Sigi, the male bush buffalo, symbolizes the strength and power of tradition. On his back, he carries



Fig. 1. Sigi, the Bush Buffalo, with small rod-puppets on his back. Drawing by Hetty Paërl. Source: den Otter 1995: 97.

small rod puppets representing women pounding millet, a farmer, fishermen in a boat, the water spirit Faaro, and a crocodile. He is accompanied by men playing drums [Figure 1].

A number of oppositions may be noted in relation to the puppetry. As mentioned above, modern Bozo characters represent aquatic animals, whereas the animals of the Bamana are land-based. There are great differences between day puppets and puppets that are shown at night. The Bozo day puppets are paraded on boats and in the water, whereas the Bamana puppets are only shown on land. The differentiation between domestic and wild is also quite present, as is the difference between real-life animals and mythical animals.

The Bozo fishermen consider themselves descendants of Faaro, the water spirit and creator god. Every year sacrifices are made to Faaro; the men receive Faaro's council, and sometimes they go into the water to follow him into his domain. Offerings are made of a white cock, white porridge, and other white objects. This coincides with the "installing of the staff" (*mettre le bâton*) in the river, to mark the part of the river where the fishermen cannot fish for a certain period. Faaro's den is said to be in Saman, west of

Ségou. The song goes as follows: «I'm going to visit Faaro's den in Saman / So that Faaro of Saman gives me his blessing».

In the legend of Biton and Faaro, the oppositions (Bozo/Bamana and Water/Land) are “neutralized” by the fact that Faaro plays a role in Bozo as well as Bamana masquerades. There is, in fact, a mutual dependency between the Bamana and the Bozo. Although they live in separate quarters, the Bozo near the river and the Bamana more inland, both fish and agricultural produce are sold at the market. During the Bamana masquerade, the Bozo fishermen do guest appearances with their puppets in the shape of various types of fish, a hippopotamus, and other characters. And vice versa: the Bamana give a short performance during the masquerades of the Bozo. This is a sign of friendly relationships.

3. FAARO AND THE CREATION OF THE WORLD

The Bamana have developed a cosmology in order to explain the creation of the world. Yo, the primordial spirit, produced the twenty-two fundamental elements of the creation. He first made Pemba appear, who gave form to the earth, then Faaro, who helped Pemba to construct the sky. On his path, Faaro determined the four cardinal points, in the form of water (seas, rivers, lakes) filling the void. Finally, Téliko, the spirit of the air, came into the world. Then, the first lives appeared on earth and Faaro gave birth to twins.³ Pemba created animals and plants, as well as his wife. After that, Musokoronin (“The Little Old Lady”) appeared; she planted Pemba in the earth so that he became Balansan, the first tree.⁴ In this form, he imposed his domination over the human beings born from Faaro. Pemba wanted the love of other women, but Musokoronin did not want to share him and ceased to participate in the work of the creation. Faaro and Pemba traced Musokoronin, in order to take from her the knowledge that she had received from her creator. They found her,

³ The scorpions, Bunteninw, always appear in pairs because they represent twins. The song goes as follows: «Bama is right / Kasafune and Wasafune are right / He who is born after the twins is right». Bama is the first woman to give birth to twins.

⁴ Ségou is called the City of Balansans.

but she refused to submit. Thereupon, Pemba cursed her, and she became mad. Pemba abused his power, which Faaro found unjust, and a battle took place that Faaro won. Faaro became the new master of the world and he reorganized it the way he wanted. Pemba's malediction was the origin of death, illness, and hate on earth.⁵

4. THE LEGEND OF BITON AND FAARO

This story forms part of an epic poem – a long narrative poem celebrating heroic deeds and events significant to a culture or nation – about the history of the Bamana kingdom of Ségou.⁶ The legend tells how a young Bamana king, Mamari Coulibaly (Biton), who reigned in the early eighteenth century, acquired power with the help of Faaro. It is widely known by people living along the Niger river, including those who live in the capital Bamako, and told by the bards (*griots*) of Ségou.

Biton's mother cultivated bitter tomatoes (*ngoyo*) on the edge of the Niger river. Every morning she discovered that some tomatoes had disappeared. One night, Biton decided to stay in the field to see what was happening. After a few hours, he saw a silhouette taking the best-looking tomatoes from the garden, but he was too slow to catch it. The next night he watched from the riverbank, to see whether the thief came by boat, but he saw nothing. The following morning, however, more tomatoes were missing. He stayed one more night watching the garden, sitting on the edge of the river. Then he saw the most beautiful creature on earth coming out of the water. The thief was not a human being, but a water spirit with light skin and long brown hair. It was the daughter of Faaro, water spirit and creator of the world. She came out of the water every night to steal tomatoes for her parents. Biton said to her, «So it's you who steals the beautiful tomatoes that my mother cultivates along the river», upon which she replied, «Yes, I'm sorry, but my parents are hungry. Come with me and they will compensate you».

⁵ For a fuller account of the myth, see DIETERLEN 1957.

⁶ For an English translation of a version of the epic by a hereditary professional bard recorded in 1976, see *A State of Intrigue* [Conrad - Diakité]. Excerpts of this translation are included in *Oral Epics from Africa* [Johnson - Hale - Becher].

This is how Biton discovered Faaro's kingdom. When they descended into the water, Faaro's daughter told Biton to ask two things from her parents. From her mother he should ask to pour a drop of milk from her breast into his ear. This way, Biton could hear everything that was said around him. From Faaro, he should ask a handful of millet-seeds (*fonio*), which he should sow in a large field and leave to the birds. As a result, he would reign over the territories where these birds left their droppings. And so Biton became the ruler of a large territory.

Faaro appears in masquerades, Bamana as well as Bozo, in the shape of a mermaid, with a woman's upper body. This character is related to Mamy Wata, a water spirit venerated in Africa and the African diaspora in the Americas. It is believed that all of ancient Africa possessed a multitude of water spirit traditions before the first contact with Europeans. Most of these were regarded as female. Dual natures of good and evil were not uncommon, reflecting the fact that water is an important means of providing communication, food, drink, trade, and transportation, but it can drown people, flood fields or villages, and provide passage to intruders. Traditions on both sides of the Atlantic tell of the spirit abducting her followers or random people whilst they are swimming or boating. She brings them to her paradisiacal realm, which may be underwater, in the spirit world, or both.

There may be a relation with the West African manatee as well; «Mami Wata» is a common name for this animal in the region. In fact, the Bozo have a pair of them (Ma) in their masquerade repertoire. The Bamana have a small version (*maanin*, 'Little Person') carved in wood. The color yellow represents the clear skin which is a symbol of beauty for women. Her glass eyes symbolise her mythical character. Her long, disheveled hair is explained by her living in the water [Figure 2]. The Bozo have a



Fig. 2. Faaro, a small rod puppet of the Bamana. Photo: Elisabeth den Otter.

larger version that appears in water during the day and on land during the night [Figure 3].

During the Festival on the Niger in Ségou in 2009, the Bozo of the Jaka-quarter of Kirango recreated this legend: Faaro (mask) swam in the river and a man represented Biton, with a basket of tomatoes [Figures 4 and 5]. It was the first time I saw such a sketch performed: from individual characters



Fig. 3. Faaro, at night. Kirango, 2008. Photo: Elisabeth den Otter

that tell no stories, to a narrative inspired by a legend. It may be that the performers are more ambitious here than elsewhere because they have been participating in the Festival since February of 2005 and are exposed to (foreign) visitors.



Fig. 4. Faaro with guide. Festival on the Niger, Ségou, 2009. Photo: Elisabeth den Otter.



Fig. 5. Biton offering tomatoes to Faaro. Festival on the Niger, Ségou, 2009. Photo: Elisabeth den Otter.

5. COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

The relation of the actual (non-ritual) masquerade to the old initiation societies of the Bamana (Ntomo, Kòmò, Nama, Kònò, Ciwara, Kòrè) is apparent during the masquerades: we see that the Ntomo and Ciwara societies appear in the form of masks, the Kòmò society in the form of row dances, and the Nama society in the form of a puppet made of straw. Faaro, the water deity, is represented by a small rod puppet. These survivals may be seen as a “collective memory” of animistic rituals now forbidden by Islam.

Through the masquerades, verbal as well as non-verbal communication takes place. Important cultural information is passed on during this “total theatre”, from performers to public. The message is “wrapped” in music, song, dance, costumes, masks, and puppets: symbolic forms of image and sound. Within the framework of the masquerade,

the people of Kirango celebrate their origins and their relation to the animals of the land and the water. It expresses the values of their society and transmits them to the next generation.⁷

6. THE FUTURE

Even though in Kirango annual village-based festivals associated with ritual events like circumcision remain the primary contexts for the masquerades, the process of “folklorizing” these performances was already well underway in the larger region during the colonial period. Because of factors such as modern education, urbanisation, migration, the influence of Islam, and lack of (financial) means, many villages no longer perform their masquerades. But there are also more recent influences, such as tourism, that contribute to changes in the masquerade. For example, in order to attract attention and increase their visibility, puppets and masks have recently been made larger and more colorful than before.⁸ Visitors take photographs and videos, and sometimes a television crew is present. And what will be the future of the masquerades: will they disappear, change into “folklore” which has little relation to village life, or adapt to modern times?

⁷ For more on festivals with masks in Kirango, see DEN OTTER - KÉÏTA 2002. For more on the society of the Bozo, see DEN OTTER 2013.

⁸ For a recent example, see a video of the event titled *Masques et danses des maîtres du fleuve: marionnettes Bozo du Mali*, performed by a group of Bozo from Kirango. The performance includes the appearance of Faaro (minutes 35:00–38:15) followed by various aquatic animals.

REFERENCES

PRIMARY SOURCES

- A State of Intrigue* [Conrad - Diakité] = *A State of Intrigue: The Epic of Bamana Segu according to Tayiru Banbera*, ed. by David C. Conrad - Soumaila Diakité, Oxford, Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1990.
- Oral Epics from Africa* [Johnson - Hale - Belcher] = *Oral Epics from Africa: Vibrant Voices from a Vast Continent*, ed. by John William Johnson - Thomas A. Hale - Stephen Belcher, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997.
- Masques et danses des maîtres du fleuve: marionnettes Bozo du Mali* = *Masques et danses des maîtres du fleuve: marionnettes Bozo du Mali*, interpreted by Bozo da Kirango, comment by Elisabeth den Otter, Musée du quai Branly, Jacques Chirac, Paris, 11 July 2021 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKwB8Css1wA>>.

SECONDARY SOURCES

- ARNOLDI 1995 = Mary Jo Arnoldi, *Playing with Time: Art and Performance in Central Mali*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1995.
- DARKOWSKA-NIDZGORSKA - NIDZGORSKI 1998 = Olenka Darkowska-Nidzgorska - Denis Nidzgorski, *Marionnettes et masques au cœur du théâtre africain*, Saint-Maur, Sépia, 1998.
- DEN OTTER 1995 = Elisabeth den Otter, *Verre vrienden van Jan Klaassen. Poppenspel in Afrika en Azië*, Amsterdam, Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen - Royal Tropical Institute, 1995.
- DEN OTTER 2013 = Elisabeth den Otter, *Peuple de l'eau: Le Bozos du Mali*, Lyon, Médiris, 2013 <http://www.elisabethdenotter.nl/site1/Homepage_of_Elisabeth_den_Otter/Publications_files/cahier_bozo_siaap_2013.pdf>.

The Legend of Biton and Faaro

- DEN OTTER - KÉÏTA 2002 = Elisabeth Den Otter - Mamadou Kéïta, *Sogo bo. La fête des masques Bamanan*, Bamako, Imprim Color, 2002 <http://www.elisabethdenotter.nl/site1/Homepage_of_Elisabeth_den_Otter/Sogobo_Archive_org.html>.
- DIETERLEN 1957 = Germaine Dieterlen, *The Mande Creation Myth*, in «Africa», XXVII, 2 (1957), 124-138.

A BOASTFUL MAN BORNE BY A BRAVE WOMAN: THE MUBILA EPIC OF THE LEGA (DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO)

Brunhilde Biebuyck
Columbia University

ABSTRACT: This paper focuses on the hero Mubila and his wife Kabungulu, protagonists of the Mubila (Mubela) epic of the Lega. The oral narration was recorded in writing by Daniel P. Biebuyck in 1953 from Kambala Mubila of the Beianangi group residing in a remote Lega hamlet. Together with his apprentice and four percussionists, Kambala Mubila recounted, sang, and dramatized the narrative over several days to a large group of interactive participants. Close examination of the text reveals that while Mubila is identified as the central hero of the epic who loudly professes his victory over adversaries, he is more often than not assisted by his wife Kabungulu. One can go so far as to say that he would not be the hero he claims to be without the help of his wife who overcomes his enemies by directly intervening on his behalf.

KEY-WORDS: Democratic Republic of the Congo, epic, Mubila, Lega

RIASSUNTO: Il saggio prende in considerazione l'eroe Mubila e sua moglie Kabungulu, protagonisti dell'epopea Mubila (Mubela) della Lega. La narrazione orale fu registrata per iscritto da Daniel P. Biebuyck nel 1953 da Kambala Mubila del gruppo Beianangi, residente in un remoto borgo della Lega. Insieme al suo apprendista e a quattro percussionisti, Kambala Mubila ha raccontato, cantato e drammatizzato la narrazione per diversi giorni a un folto gruppo di partecipanti interattivi. Un attento esame del testo rivela che, mentre Mubila è identificato come l'eroe centrale dell'epopea che professa ad alta voce la sua vittoria sugli avversari, nella maggior parte dei casi è assistito dalla moglie Kabungulu. Si può arrivare a dire che non sarebbe l'eroe che afferma di essere senza l'aiuto di sua moglie, che sconfigge i suoi nemici intervenendo direttamente al suo favore.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Repubblica Democratica del Congo, epopea, Mubila, Lega



«Women characters play various roles in African epics, including heroic roles, but audiences and scholars generally fail to note and appreciate the full extent of these roles, focusing, instead, on male characters and their actions. The experiences and actions of men get more attention than those of women. Notions such as heroism are seen and understood from a male perspective. These biases are built into research tools such as the motif indexes and the hero pattern»
Joseph L. Mbele

We owe the little information we have on bards and epic tales of the Democratic Republic of Congo to the work of a few ethnologists, linguists, and missionaries, mainly carried out between the 1930s and 1980s. In the light of these publications, we can only regret that many contemporary scholars have ignored a tradition whose scope seems to have been extremely important in societies which, while being very diverse, have a past marked by migrations, expansions, cultural assimilations, or conquests and wars.

Traditionally, in the Democratic Republic of Congo bards did not constitute a group of specialists or a caste as in certain West African communities. Here, the narration of the epic seems to have been reserved to particularly gifted men who were, all at once, dramaturges, singers, musicians, and narrators with a vast knowledge of their culture and its history as well as a profound mastery of the poetic qualities of the spoken word. Their extraordinary talent and memory were honed through many years of apprenticeship with another bard (often their father), whom they accompanied during performances. They not only mastered a wide range of oral literary genres, but were also frequently involved in social affairs as arbiters, negotiators, advisors, and oral historians.

These oral epics (collected from the male bards by anthropologists) all center on a male hero whose deeds are at the very core of the narrative, which begins by recounting the circumstances of his birth that forecast his future endeavors. Most are born of extraordinary circumstances and harness supernatural resources or extraordinary personal powers to overcome difficult situations and destroy their enemies. From the outset, these heroes are depicted as self-praising, swaggering individuals who are ready to fight at the slightest mishap or encounter. The hero Lianja (from the Mongo people, DRC), for example, raves about his prowess in the following terms:

I am Lianja of Nsombe, the one who crosses a river in one leap
Wherever I go, first there is noise, then there is weeping

If there are fighters, let us fight, bring me a battlefield, let us fight our shields to pieces
I am the liana, who knows no peace with the fish, no friendship with animals.¹

Mwindo (the central character from the epics of the Nyanga region, DRC) also shouts his praise name as he confronts an adversary:

Dragon, you are defenseless against Mwindo
For Mwindo is the little one just born he walked
Dragon, you have defied Mwindo
Dragon, you are helpless against Mwindo
For Mwindo is the little one just born he walked
Shemwendo gave birth to a hero.
Comrade, you are powerless against Mwindo.²

Entitled from the get-go, such epic male protagonists flaunt their bravery like a litany throughout their trajectory, which reads like a concatenation of power struggles composed of disputes, clashes, face-offs, contests, and brushes with danger. Close examination of the trajectory of some of these heroic male figures reveals that while they all loudly profess their abilities, they are frequently assisted by the women of their entourage. One can even go so far as to say that many would not be the heroes that they claim to be without the help of women who counsel them or directly intervene on their behalf.

This essay will focus on the telling example of the hero Mubila and his wife Kabungulu, protagonists of the as yet unpublished Mubila (Mubela) epic of the Lega.³ The oral narration was recorded in writing by Daniel P. Biebuyck in 1953 from Kambala Mubila of the Beianangi group residing in a remote Lega hamlet. Together with his apprentice and four percussionists, Kambala Mubila recounted, sang, and dramatized the narrative over several days to a large group of interactive participants [Figure 1].

¹ BOELAERT 1957: 72 (translated from Dutch by the author).

² BIEBUYCK 1969: 128.

³ The original Lega text, together with a French translation, will be published by the *Classiques Africains* in 2025, edited by Daniel P. Biebuyck in collaboration with Brunhilde Biebuyck and Germain M'Beku.

The story unfolds in the depths of a dense rainforest filled with diverse species of trees, lianas, and shrubs, and crisscrossed by numerous rivers, swamps, and dispersed hamlets or villages. The forest milieu is rich in animals (many of whom are personified) and theriomorphic beings that are neither divinities, ogres, nor specters. Bizarre, unusual, and enigmatic events or pursuits mingle with typical human occupations such as hunting with dogs, nets and spears, trapping, fishing, the felling of trees, and the gathering of food and building materials. Descriptions of activities inside and around the village are very limited: reference is made to ball games, games of dice, dancing and drumming, pottery-making, smithing, elders sitting in council, and initiation rituals. Food preparation is reduced to a minimum, as is eating and drinking.



Fig. 1: Photo of Mubila Kambara (the Bard who “sang” the Mubila epic). Photo taken by Daniel P. Biebuyck, 1953. Courtesy of Brunhilde Biebuyck

In this context, the story begins with a chief, Yombi, who builds his village and simultaneously impregnates his forty-one wives, who immediately give birth to thirty-nine boys and one daughter. After they are born, the chief and his favorite wife, the most junior of his forty-one wives, conceive Mubila who instantaneously comes into the world. From the womb, Mubila orders the midwife to his mother’s side so he can emerge. He falls to the ground with a thud, is fully grown, and likens his birth to the fall of giant trees. The midwife rushes to Yombi’s village with a message from the newborn informing his father that he is born, that his name is Mubila, and that he is robust, vigorous, and immensely virile. From the outset, Mubila presents himself as threatening and demonstrates

his insolence by selecting his own name. His appearance further underscores his bellicose nature: he is described as wearing a heavy necklace made of pods and a belt of thorny vines; his eyebrows are likened to the tail of an elephant, and his long, spiky nails are said to be capable of seizing anyone who dares to provoke him. Additionally, he is born with the very accouterments of a warrior: a spear (Quivering), a copper shield (Provoker), and a knife (Cutting-Edge). Several passages later, we learn that he also owns a magical, alluring whistle, which he claims is «in his mouth», as if it were an intrinsic part of his being, able to seduce and destroy at will. He also benefits from an invisible oracle, his Baya, an inner voice (apparently hidden under his armpit) with which he deliberates in various circumstances. As his indispensable guide, a kind of poised, rational, and reflective «alter ego», Baya advises, warns, and sometimes criticizes Mubila in all his enterprises.

Mubila leaves his birthplace and travels to his father's village with the cohort of thirty-nine brothers (and one sister) who preceded him. He orders everyone to build him a new village, which they finish in one fell swoop. When he discovers that his father has died in the meanwhile, he blames his most senior brother, Bukulu bwa Kitaba, in whose custody he had left his father. Bukulu flees to a distant land. Mubila then decides to find wives for himself and his remaining brothers. Without further ado, he captures forty women and distributes them, albeit refusing to give a wife to one of his senior brothers, Kinkutunkutu. After battling with the villagers whose women he captured, he sets out in search of his brother Bukulu against the recommendations of several diviners and his own oracle. Thus, the stage for the remainder of the epic is set.

Mubila does not tend to the needs of his village and people. Using the quest for Bukulu as an excuse, he is repeatedly drawn into new expeditions and escapades. Without using established forest trails, he travels quickly over great distances, crossing rivers and territories belonging to other groups, encountering enemies and dangerous obstacles, engaging in risky activities, transforming passersby into opponents, and ransacking villages. Relentless in his thirst for adventure, he lacks etiquette and only adheres to his own code of honor. Most of his actions are unusual, illicit, anti-social, and in flagrant contradiction with Lega rules of conduct. Nothing in what he says or does advocates generosity, moderation, temperance, verbal restraint, nonviolence, mutual aid, or customary decorum.

He is fierce, and is proud of it: «A leaf trembles and I cut it with my knife». He is blood-thirsty, and brags about it: «I, Great-knife, unsheathe suddenly!».

From the outset, Mubila defies fundamental kinship codes: since he is the most junior son of a patriarch, his departure from the paternal village directly after birth – for no apparent reason – is an act of rebellion that goes against all rules regulating intra-family and lineage relationships. As soon as his new village is built, his father dies, as if struck down by the overwhelming number of his son's behavioral breaches. Mubila is also disrespectful to his most senior brothers, Bukulu and Kinkutunkutu, accusing them of misdeeds and refusing their advice and criticism. His impulsive anger leads him to inflict injuries on both brothers. Although he later reconciles with them, their relationship is fraught with latent tensions, ill feelings, or outright hatred.

Throughout his peregrinations, Mubila reveals his character traits, many of which are encapsulated in the names he and others use to refer to him: Tireless-Traveler; Trail-Blazer; Haughty-One; Intrepid-Manly-Hero, True-Man, Brazen-One; One-Who-Is-So-Talked-About; Braggart; Hard-Hearted. Everywhere he goes, especially before or after a confrontation, he bellows his self-given praise-names, either partially or in full:

I am the only child, followed by no other
The great ax that suddenly breaks off from its handle
The scaffolding-of-light-wood that shatters very suddenly
The Mugulugulu-tree that breaks its top and lets a heap of vines crash down
The Viper of the dry season that is not threatened by a stick
This is what the elders have always told me

Flame, no one can seize me
Rabble-rouser, the super powerful
Year of famine, causing dissension in the family
Viper-of-the-dry-season, that is not threatened by a stick
Mugulugulu-tree, I break my top and a heap of vines crash down
This is what the elders called me
Male-monkey, who does not suckle puppies
Only child, followed by no other

Flame, no one can seize me
Rabble-rouser, the super powerful
Male-monkey, who does not suckle puppies
Only child, followed by no other
Scaffolding-of-Light-Wood that shatters very suddenly,
Goat in heat, I mate, bleat, and pass
Grand-parrot, fruit gatherer
Hunting-dog, whose scars cannot be counted

It is I who will fight alone
I seize whomever darkens my heart with my long, sharp nails
I cannot flee from battle; I have my iron shield, my quivering spear,
Don't you see my belt made of thorny vines, that of a truly virile man?

Mubila's personality and behavioral traits are consistent throughout the epic. He excels in exaggerated self-pride, arrogance, and braggadocio. Particularly inventive in his insolence, he uses a thesaurus of vile insults and biting sarcasm to tease or challenge other persons without good reason. He claims that simply his gaze summons war, and his bellicose temperament translates into ruthless actions and reactions. Intolerant, he never listens to the advice of elders or to the warnings given by his mother, wife, brothers, or son, claiming that «I, myself, am self-sufficient; I deliberate in my heart». All told, nothing is taboo for Mubila, not even sexual relations with his sister. He is self-centered, does as he pleases, and succeeds in his forays mainly because of his pugnacity, his magical objects, and the assistance of his entourage.

In that entourage, his senior wife Kabungulu plays a vital role. The mother of his only son Zakeuti, she is a powerful protagonist whose interventions may be even more decisive than those of Mubila himself. It is suggested that Mubila has a more intimate bond with Kabungulu than with his two other wives, who are childless and play a minor role, fetching water, tobacco, or nuts for him. Upon meeting her, he is struck by her youthful beauty. She describes herself as immaculate and without blemish. Even though she is attracted to Mubila because of his beauty and fame, she resists his advances; only his magical whistle succeeds in winning her over. While very little is said about the nature

of their relationship, it is clear that they have a solid bond. At times, Mubila even demonstrates special concern and affection for Kabungulu. When he leaves her in the custody of a senior brother, for example, he asks him to treat her well, to give her extra food, to reprimand her if necessary but never to beat her. When he and Kabungulu have not seen one another for a time, «they embrace – chest to chest, they greet each other». He actually seems quite attached to Kabungulu and sometimes bemoans her absence: «Even if my wife leaves my house to seduce someone else, even if she dies in the river, I will always look for her». Mubila calls her a «dignified young mother» and «matron who gave birth only once», and he praises the straightness of her back and the slenderness of her body. He even admires her uncommon ways and recognizes that she is a woman «whose manners are different from those of other women», «one who has the ways of men», one whose «behavior is unusual», and one who, compared to other women, is a «rebel».

The only possessions associated with Kabungulu are a small basket where she keeps shell money, magical potions, and her powerful magical loincloth. With the help of this cloth, she destroys, defeats, weakens, or neutralizes Mubila's enemies, whether they act as individuals or as a group. She achieves this on her own or when Mubila is already tackling an enemy but is unable to overcome him. At times, he actively solicits her help, but more often than not, she suddenly enters the scene and acts quickly and radically: she tears off her loincloth and flings it into the face of the opponent, who dies on the spot. She also shrewdly plays on her abilities to seduce, using her loincloth as a seductive instrument: «She caresses her loincloth like a beauty caresses herself». Her husband will sometimes dispatch her to the village of an adversary so that she can weaken him with her wile and guile. She enters his village as a «runaway woman», ready for sexual adventures; she lets herself be seduced, but then slays her target.

Kabungulu demonstrates her true colors in the very early stages of the epic when her group avenges the abduction of their women by attacking Mubila's village, Tubala. Mubila urges everyone to flee, suggesting he will fight alone and proclaiming his praise names. Kabungulu replies by declaring war: «My husband, let the battle begin!» She tears away her loincloth and announces: «I destroy all ne'er do wells with my exterminator». Although, at this juncture, she does not have the opportunity to transform her words into action, she nevertheless demonstrates the combative spirit already suggested by her

name, which means genet cat, an animal known for its agility, quick reflexes, and the price one pays for provoking it. All told, she is fierce, aggressive, and unafraid of battle or confrontation. Some liken her to a witch and others recognize her force and efficiency: «Hey! This Kabungulu is not a mere woman. Among all women, she is a rebel!». Kabungulu's loincloth is the shield with which she fights. She designates herself as undefeated, «one who cannot be knocked down first», and as an exceptional, victorious woman: «I am not just a woman; among women, I am a winner, I destroy all ne'er do wells». She regularly exalts the effectiveness of her loincloth which, as noted above, she refers to as her «exterminator». In describing her actions to her son, she explains: «You, my son, when I fight against virile men, the exterminator with which I fight is my loincloth; it is a shield that destroys all virile men». Kabungulu's supreme power is most strongly emphasized when, on two occasions, she brings her husband back to life with the help of her loincloth and magic potions.

But while Mubila lauds his wife for being like no other woman, he is clearly ambivalent about her remarkable differences. Now and then, he will call her «My mean, little trouble-maker» and accuse her of being a «source of evil». At other times, he will flatly rebuke her by reminding her to keep her place: «A wife does not hand out meat even if only a weakling is around», «A wife does not wear a tight, high belt», «A wife does not roll up the hunting net; it would kill her immediately». In a particularly telling passage, where she absolutely wants to accompany him to initiation rites, he grabs her violently by the arm and crushes her under his armpit. As she screams, he declares: «Since sunrise, I have been telling you that a wife does not set the hunting nets». She accompanies him nevertheless and contributes to unveiling the shameful secret of one of the mentors. Mubila also frequently reminds her of his own prowess: «Kabungulu, my wife, look how a virile man performs: at the foot of my spear, seven [killed] and at the point, fourteen». He never listens to her advice or objections, and if she proposes a course of action, he will retort: «My Baya is always the one who shows me the way». Even her son will fault her for going against Mubila's wishes: «Your disobedience, you, my mother, will cause problems that will lead to the death of my father!».

For her part, Kabungulu supports her husband in many of his initiatives. She accompanies him even when he tries to prevent her from doing so; she admonishes and

counsels him even if he never listens; she supports him even when he rebukes her; and she acts even when he fends her off. Although Kabungulu is a vital complement to her husband's activities and successes, he never overtly recognizes her as a victor; rather, after she succeeds in killing one of his aggressors, he merely pursues his peregrinations or, rather, shouts his praise name as if he were solely responsible for exterminating an enemy, obtaining the glory for the work his wife accomplished. In point of fact, Kabungulu disrupts established power structures and challenges gender roles. She is a force that must be controlled, and she cannot be fully recognized in her own right even if she is instrumental in solving crises.

Interestingly, whereas Mubila has recourse to multiple tools and relies on a host of beings in his battles, Kabungulu uses only one weapon, her loincloth, the Lega term used in the epic being «garment over the fire». The association of fire with the pubic area is significant since both are powerful transformative agents associated with positive and negative consequences – in this case, punishment, destruction, and death. The correlation between the woman and her destructive instrument is equally significant. The loincloth hides the gateway to the womb, symbol of a sacred space associated with birth and renewal but also with danger, contamination, and uncontrollable forces. As such, it represents a formidable metaphor for female empowerment.

The epic ends on a peaceful note after Kabungulu succeeds in killing Mubila's final enemy. Mubila and his followers return to Tubala; their village is cleaned (and cleansed) and endless dances are organized. Stability has been achieved; the people are settled. According to Daniel Biebuyck, the Mubila epic reflects a pre-Bwami society where internecine wars ultimately led to the emergence of the elaborate Bwami association, «the fruit that came from above», bringing peace, unity and a cult for those who lead by wisdom and moderation. On a symbolic level, Mubila would thus represent all the feuding leaders of the Lega migrations that took place some two to three hundred years ago, when they gradually moved from eastern Africa and the Ruwenzori Mountains region into the deep rain forests of Kivu and Maniema, occupied by pre-established groups of diverse origins (Pygmies, Luba and Lunda offshoots, and other hunting groups). Their incursion generated competition and disagreement over hunting rights, seniority in kinship groups, women, witchcraft, and sorcery. Once the Lega were settled, the Bwami association grad-

ually established a new power structure that brought order where there had been chaos and excess, a structure where women were not only admitted, but held positions of authority in the hierarchy of social grades.

In a pre-Bwami context, it is not surprising that Kabungulu is as combative as Mubila since she assists her husband in vanquishing enemies and establishing their people. With her «ways of doing like no other», she might, however, symbolically represent the beginnings of a new order, one that aspires to the fusion of gendered roles, wherein women hold a complementary position, equal to that of men. In point of fact, Kabungulu's actions forecast the egalitarian adages of the Bwami association, two of which are particularly relevant:

- A canoe is propelled by moving the paddles on each side, left (female) and right (male).⁴
- Even if one is intelligent, one finger alone cannot pick up a clod of dirt.⁵

The Bwami, which was suppressed by the Belgian colonial powers, regained popularity post-independence (1960) and played an important role in training for new forms of leadership in the DRC. Given that this particular epic text was collected in 1953, it would be interesting to compare this version with others collected in the 1970s and 1980s, or even more so, with narratives that are still performed today. The comparison might yield interesting perspectives on the evolution, if any, of heroic figures in the cycle of narratives to which the Mubila epic belongs.

In other epic traditions of the DRC, notably among the Nyanga and Mongo, while the male hero is described as ruthless and arrogant, he is also perceived as a prodigy, the originator of marvelous things, one whose capacity to overstep boundaries generates the creative force needed for fashioning a new society in which leadership is no longer defined on the battlefield. The women in these epics are likewise not simply in the background, nor do they merely represent a refuge, feeding their brothers, husbands, or sons

⁴ Among the Lega, as well as among other African cultures, left and right are gendered, with the left associated with women and the right with men.

⁵ This proverb applies specifically to the husband-wife relationship.

with advice and food. As bulwarks of physical strength and mental know-how, they not only protect, but also defend and revive. Their actions demonstrate that, when all is said and done, the «male hero» must die (physically or symbolically) since his very actions are antithetical to the new order he has founded: at the beginning of the world, we need a god; at the onset of society, we need a hero; when, however, the society is established, we need instead a form of leadership that embraces the male-female duality in a non-gendered perspective.

REFERENCES

PRIMARY SOURCES

- BIEBUYCK 1969 = Daniel Biebuyck, *The Mwindo Epic from the Banyanga*, Berkeley - Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1969.
- BIEBUYCK 1992 = Daniel Biebuyck, *Mwindo, a Nyanga Epic Hero and Mubila, a Lega Epic Hero. A Comparison*, in «Cahiers de littérature orale», XXXII (1992), 39-62.
- BOELAERT 1934 = Edmond Boelaert, *Nsong'a Lianja*, in «Congo», I (1934), 49-71, 197-216.
- BOELAERT 1949 = Edmond Boelaert, *Nsong'a Lianja: l'épopée nationale des Nkundo*, Antwerp, De Sikkel, 1949.
- BOELAERT 1957 = Edmond Boelaert, *Lianja Verhalen I: Efoko versie*, Tervuren, Koninklijk Museum van Belgisch-Congo, 1957.
- WAMENKA 1970 = N'sanda Wamenka, *Épopée Kiguma, Essai d'étude d'un genre littéraire lega*, mémoire de licence, Université Lovanium, Kinshasa, 1970.

SECONDARY SOURCES

- BIEBUYCK 1972 = Daniel Biebuyck, *The Epic as a Genre in Congo Oral Literature*, in *African Folklore*, ed. by Richard M. Dorson, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1972, 257-274.
- BIEBUYCK 1973 = Daniel Biebuyck, *Lega Culture. Art, Initiation and Moral Philosophy among a Central African People*, Berkeley - Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1973.
- BIEBUYCK 1976 = Daniel Biebuyck, *The African Heroic Epic*, in «Journal of the Folklore Institute», XIII (1976), 5-36.

- BIEBUYCK 1978 = Daniel Biebuyck, *The African Heroic Epic*, in *Heroic Epic and Saga: An Introduction to the World's Great Folk Epics*, ed. by Felix J. Oinas, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1978, 336-367.
- DE ROP 1964 = Albert de Rop, *Lianja, l'épopée des Mongo*, Bruxelles, ARSOM, 1964.
- MBELE 2006 = Joseph Mbele, *Women in the African Epic*, in «Research in African Literature», XXXVII, 2 (2006), pp. 61-67.
- WAMENKA 1970 = N'Sanda Wamenka, *Épopée Kiguma, Essai d'étude d'un genre littéraire lega*, mémoire de licence, Université Lovanium, Kinshasa, 1970.
- WAMENKA 1974 = N'Sanda Wamenka, *Étude des unités de structure et de leur récurrence dans un récit épique lega*, thèse de doctorat, université nationale du Zaïre, Lubumbashi, 3 vols, 1974.
- WAMENKA 1992 = N'Sanda Wamenka, *Récits épiques des Lega du Zaïre*, voll. I-II, Tervuren, Musée Royal de l'Afrique centrale, 1992.

A FEARLESS HERO: THE PUPPET IN THE SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Yassaman Khajehi
Université Clermont Auvergne

ABSTRACT: Since the beginning of the 21st century, the countries of the Middle East have experienced several episodes of revolt and revolution. Art in general has both been affected by and has influenced these events. With this in mind, my essay examines the art of puppet theatre as an epic narrative approach in the sense of both epic-political and epic-adventurous. To explore this phenomenon in historical context, I first trace puppetry's past in the Middle East and then discuss in more detail its important contemporary role. My contention is that the Middle Eastern puppet becomes a narrative schema of the socio-political field, going beyond the limits imposed on the rest of society with skill, like a hero who acts to save his beloved at the end of the story.

KEY-WORDS: epic puppetry, Middle East, Middle Eastern theatre, political theatre

RIASSUNTO: Dall'inizio del XXI secolo, i paesi del Medio Oriente hanno vissuto diversi episodi di rivolta e rivoluzione. L'arte in generale è stata influenzata e ha influenzato questi eventi. A questo proposito, il mio saggio esamina l'arte del teatro delle marionette come approccio narrativo epico sia nel senso epico-politico che in quello epico-avventuroso. Per esplorare questo fenomeno nel contesto storico, ripercorrerò innanzitutto il passato del teatro di figura in Medio Oriente e poi discuterò più in dettaglio il suo importante ruolo contemporaneo. La mia tesi è che il burattino mediorientale diventi uno schema narrativo del campo sociale-politico, andando oltre i limiti imposti al resto della società nel suo procedere come un eroe che agisce per salvare la sua amata alla fine della storia.

PAROLE CHIAVE: marionette epiche, Medio Oriente, teatro del Medio Oriente, teatro politico



In a situation where social and political pressure is imposing itself on societies, socio-political expression through art becomes a natural reaction. It takes the form of a cry or a call to protest. But in oppressive situations, freedom of speech and expression almost always become problematic. Some arts are more targeted than others, some are more controlled than others, but in the midst of all this, there are mediums that are better able to adapt and find ways to express themselves while circumventing the limits. In such tormented environments, puppet theatre is an apt forum for expressing ideas not easy to communicate in other venues. The puppet often finds itself body and soul at the heart of an ineffable story that man cannot tell.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the countries of the Middle East have been through numerous revolts, revolutions and protests. Some of them have reached the forefront of international news, such as the Iranian Green Movement of 2009, the Arab Spring in Egypt, Tunisia, and elsewhere, in 2011, the Gezi protest movement of 2013 in Turkey, the demonstrations of 2019 known as the “Revolution” in Lebanon, and the Woman Life Freedom movement in Iran in 2022. In these circumstances, puppet theatre has shifted its framework to engage critically with socio-political issues characteristic of the epic sphere, even while adapting to new constraints. These new puppet productions can be defined within the framework of an epic narrative approach in two senses: epic-political and epic-adventure. To explain this dual approach that places puppetry between the two fields of activism and entertainment, I propose to study the art through the lens of history rather than focus exclusively on contemporary times. Indeed, I think that to better understand the contemporary place of puppetry and its function, it is important to know how this place was acquired.

If we follow the history of puppet arts, we discover that the puppet has frequently had this double role in one way or another. In Middle Eastern society, where it seems difficult to separate art, current affairs, and religion, puppet arts resist and, while retaining their characteristics, transform themselves at every opportunity in order to respect the law of survival. In the process, puppetry branches out and permeates society, adapting to each era, its strategies changing from time to time. It can be camouflaged within folk culture, or boldly assert itself on television. This intermediary character defines the place of puppetry within the living arts; this hybridity, this mixture of “living” and “dead”,

distinguishes it within the theatrical world (see the works of Tadeusz Kantor). This singularity can be seen as a scenic constraint and can reduce these shows to the rank of minor art, as they are often understood by contemporary audiences as puerile, naïve, and banal. And yet its expressive power and popular success lie precisely in these characteristics and provocations: that's why dead beings come alive and become credible. This paradoxical approach – which denies the puppet any life, but at the same time raises questions about its real presence on stage – reveals the particular way in which this object functions. It is also important to specify that this study is interested in puppetry in a theatrical sense, focusing as much on its aesthetic aspect as on its semantics. Accordingly, it does not study the puppet as dependent on its technique of manufacture and performance, but rather the puppet as a language of representation.

This relationship with the puppet is perhaps less obvious in a Western society such as France, where this art form is supported institutionally through cultural, artistic and heritage policies. But in Middle Eastern society, where the relationship between “living creatures” is always confronted with the “unsaid” and the “un-done”, the “dead” being is better suited to expressing himself and performing in front of an audience. This is how puppetry asserts itself as an intriguing object that transcends the codes and limits imposed by both the State and traditional morality. The traditional puppet theatre of certain countries in the region, such as Iran, Turkey, and Egypt, can therefore be seen as a national heritage that has withstood the many socio-political changes that have taken place. Today, puppetry is coming back, existing and being practiced in an astonishing way through a young generation that did not learn these arts in the traditional way. This phenomenon needs to be studied to show how far traditional puppetry has come: a form of cultural expression that has never been officially supported, but which has advanced thanks to its «natural» strength.

1. THE PAST OF PUPPETRY IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA (MENA)

The puppetry past in the Middle East suffers from the same lack of documentation as the history of other forms of theatre in this region. In order to reconstruct it, therefore, we

must seek its traces in other fields, notably classical literature, or draw inspiration from archaeological discoveries, such as the terracotta figurines with articulated arms and legs, the work of the Jiroft civilisation, dating from 5000 BC and located in the Kerman region in south-west Iran. There are no documents describing puppet shows prior to the 11th century. The earliest references in Arabic appear in poems attributed to Ibn Hadjāj, which mention a form of shadow play (*Zilliāt*, ‘shadows’). Subsequently, in 1282, Ibn Ḥellikan reports that the governor of Mosul Mūzaffar ed-dīn Kūkabūrī ordered a shadow show that was performed by a specialised troupe to celebrate the commemoration of the birth of the prophet Muḥammad.¹ Among the Persians, we see the appearance of words related to puppetry among thinkers, philosophers, and poets likewise from the 11th century onwards. This puppet vocabulary is often used symbolically to talk about Man and the universe. The fact that authors used puppet theatre techniques to talk about complex concepts shows that people were familiar with this practice well before the 11th century. The most quoted poem in this field is one of the quatrains of Omar Khayyām, philosopher, mathematician and poet (1050-1123). It evokes the fact that Man is no more than a puppet manipulated by fate. Khayyām uses the following words in Persian: *Lowbatak*, ‘the little puppet’, *lowbat bāz*, ‘the puppeteer’, *bassāt*, his ‘working tools’, including *sandogh*, the ‘chest’ that can also be used as a stage. Here is an English translation of this poem: «We are puppets that the wheel makes move / Such is the naked truth / It pushes us onto the stage of existence, / Then precipitates us one by one into the coffer of nothingness».² In another quatrain, he offers another glimpse of these puppet shows: «This wheel on which we turn is like a magic lantern / The sun is the lamp / The world, the screen / We are the images that pass by».³ Here we find more or less the same paradigm, in this case the vulnerability of Man compared to shadow theatre. But whatever Khayyām’s approach, we can deduce from it the existence of puppet theatre, which seems invaluable in the construction of the puppet past in the region. From the 17th century onwards, a number of Western travellers to the East, such as Jean Chardin and Tavernier, bear witness to acrobatic practices, particularly in Esfahan, the capital of the Safavid dynasty. It was not

¹ TRABELSI 2023: 33-77.

² KHAYYĀM 1998: 83.

³ KHAYYĀM 2013: 144.

until the early 20th century that Western missionaries described the shows in greater detail, providing illustrative information about the technique, the storyline, the characters, and other elements like as the reaction of the audience.

The best-known puppet in the region is Karagoz, who existed from Egypt to Persia, bordering on Ottoman territory. According to some, it seems that the Turks learned about shadow theatre from the Egyptians, and that the name Karagoz is derived from Karaqūš, a minister of Egypt in the Ayyubid era known for his ferocity. He then became the symbol of tyranny, mocked by the people.⁴ Others believe that this theatre came from the Far East and was introduced into the Arab-Muslim world in the eleventh century by the Seljuk Turks.⁵ Adolphe Thalasso writes:

There is every reason to believe that the origins of Persian puppets – and, moreover, of all Iranian theatre, drama and comedy – go back to the earliest antiquity and date from the Macedonian conquest of Persia. It is even more likely that Karagueuz himself was a natural son of Ketchel Pehlivan [Pahlavān Kachal]. There was not much distance between the plains of Iran and the Altai plateau, the cradle of the Turks, whom they were soon to leave to conquer Asia, Africa and Europe.⁶

There are several conflicting hypotheses about the origin of this shadow theatre and the character of Karagoz.⁷ What is important for our purposes is the fact that Karagoz appears as a very clever, extravagant, sometimes cruel, and transgressive character. He attracted the attention not only of the people, but also of Western travellers. In his book *Journey to the Orient*, published in 1851, Gérard de Nerval describes a «Caragueuz» show he saw in Turkey in 1843:

Among these toys is the bizarre puppet called Caragueuz, which the French already know by reputation. It's incredible that this indecent figure should be so unscrupulously placed

⁴ TRABELSI 2023: 33-77.

⁵ CLEVELOT 1944: 131.

⁶ THALASSO 1904: 3.

⁷ KHAJEHI 2020: 157-166.

in the hands of young people. Yet it is the most common gift that a father or mother gives to their children. The Orient has different ideas about education and morality than we do. They seek to develop the senses, just as we seek to extinguish them. I had arrived at the Place du Séraskier: a large crowd was crowding round a shadow puppet theatre marked by an overhead sign bearing the words: CARAGUEZ, victim of his chastity! An appalling paradox for anyone who knows the character... The characteristic and the noun that I have just translated would no doubt howl with horror to find themselves united under such a name. Nevertheless, I went along to the show, braving the odds of being grossly disappointed. At the door of this cheb-bâzi (night play) stood four actors who were to perform in the second play [...].⁸

This passage is an important reference for historians of Karagoz theatre, and has been used in several articles. But we must refer to the last sentence where the author calls this puppet game «Cheb-bâzi». This word is composed of *cheb* (shab) and *bâzi*, meaning in Persian ‘the night game’. Indeed, this expression is used to name puppet theatre in Iran. Clearly, Nerval did not travel to Iran and the word *shab* was pronounced *sheb*, confirming that he heard it with a Turkish accent. We can imagine that this word was used quite frequently in Turkey. This indicates that the neighbouring country, Persia, had this artistic practice, insofar as «night play» in Turkey referred to the shadow theatre of Karagoz. We now know that these shows, whether Karagoz shadow puppets or glove puppets, had both a lyrical and epic dimension. Altan Gökalp also tells us about the linguistic structure and polyglot nature of Karagoz’s theatre, which may confirm this lyrical aspect and the cultural and artistic exchange.⁹

This passage describes Karagoz shadow theatre (or Caragueuz, as Nerval transcribed it) in 19th century Turkey. Its importance is revealed very well in the performances of Pahlāvan Kachal (also mentioned by Thalasso) staged until the second half of the 20th century in Iran, then renewed and taught at the University until today. Pahlāvan kachal, or the bald hero, is the representative of Iranian glove puppet theatre sometimes named *pandj* (meaning ‘five’), the number of main characters. The Pahlavān kachal show we

⁸ Nerval 1998: 613-614.

⁹ Gökalp 2007: 345.

know today tells the story of the conflict between the bald hero and Ververeh djadou, the witch who, with the help of her three demon sons, has imprisoned his beloved Sarvenāz. These characters also have their roots in older cultures such as Zoroastrian tradition, where every form of evil, whether moral or physical, is represented by a demon. Pahlavān kachal is at war with both the symbols of evil and the representatives of power. During his adventures, he also meets the village teacher, a cleric, and invents funny stories often taking place at the time of his marriage to Sarvenaz. Mobārak, the other key character in Iranian string puppet theatre, the black valet, also takes part in the adventures. The existence of a variety of characters, both real and imaginary, gives the show the characteristics of a fairy tale while reflecting socio-political and cultural concerns.

Indeed, through these epic adventures, this character finds ways to challenge and oppose. In Marylie Marcovitch's article, *Le rire dans l'Islam*, published in «La Nouvelle Revue» in 1913, we find an example of this presence of revolt.¹⁰ Always compared to Karagöz, the Persian puppet is presented as the symbol of Iranian characteristics: «An unscrupulous diplomat, Palhavan-Ketchel succeeds by skill where that great devil Kargheuz would use a hard-on». This clever, literate hero knows how to please women: once again, it's a question of opposition in the face of religious force. This article systematically repeats ideas and observations from previous texts on these shows without specifying its sources.¹¹ Yet it also describes a scene with some new details about Pahlavan's relationship with the woman and his role in the adventure:

Pahlavân-Ketchel set his eyes on the wife of the Akhound (religious leader of the parish). He slipped her many declarations of love, which the beautiful woman (Zen) listened to without too many qualms. If she blushed, no one knows, because it was under cover of a veil. The demon of lust kindled its flame in the veins of Pahlavân-Ketchel. How could he get to her? One fine morning, he turned up at her husband's house, dressed as a mulah. He put on all the outward appearances of a pious Muslim, sighed, raised his eyes to heaven, recited verses with the pure pronunciation of a doctor versed in the knowledge of sacred texts. He invented a story from Isfahan to preach Ramadhan, and attracted by the Akhound's reputation for holiness, he insisted on the honour of appearing at his house

¹⁰ MARCOVITCH 1913: 385-387.

¹¹ See KHAJEHI 2020: 129-156.

first. The Akhound, flattered, did not want to be outdone in politeness. The fame of the pious Mullah had also reached him. Their mutual congratulations provoked hilarity in the audience, which was used to the mullahs' obsequious flattery, which more often than not masked secret rivalries. The conversation turns to pious subjects. With calculated skill, Pahlavân-Ketchel steered the conversation in the right direction at the right moment. Little by little, people become animated, heated, sing, dance, drink... until poor Akhound, less used than his partner to such feasts, rolls onto the carpet. It's time for the shepherd. The tapestry is lifted and the beautiful woman, having broken her endaroun, appears before the delighted eyes of her lover. When the unfortunate Akhound, ashamed and confused, emerges from his drunkenness, he finds his companion, devoutly seated at his side, praying his rosary for this sinner Akhound! And no one sees any malice in this, for these are familiar tricks for the master rascal.¹²

We can see that this character takes part in both warlike and chivalrous adventures, but also in episodes of protest to keep his audience happy. This is exactly what happens in Karagoz shows, but also in more recent puppet shows in the countries of the region.

2. THE MONSTER THAT SHOWS, THE MONSTER THAT TELLS

To explain the place of the puppet in a constrained condition, we look at the question of animation in puppet theatre: animating an object to make it resemble the living can be on the borderline between magic, shamanism, and the creation of strange, supernatural



Fig. 1. Pahlavan Kachal of the groupe Derakht e Sib Apple tree, Tehran, 2008.

¹² MARCOVITCH 1913: 385-387.

beings. From a semantic point of view, this approach can indeed explain how the puppet achieves the power discussed in this article. Gilbert Lascault raises these issues in his book *Le monstre dans l'art occidental*. In Chapter II (entitled *Essai d'une classification formelle des monstres dans l'art*), he proposes, in the first order, «to show» [*monster* in Old French] the monster by confusion of kingdoms or genres, which includes, first of all, «Humanised animals and animalised men», then «Animated plants and intelligent plants», and, finally, «Animation of the inanimate», where he develops the idea of monstrosity by animation in six categories.¹³ He then examines the opposite of the animation of natural animate beings in the first two categorisations, that is, manufactured objects and the results of man's technical work evoking a common process of the imagination. In this case, the object no longer serves the purpose for which it was made; it takes on a life of its own, an autonomous life. This idea brings us back to the question of the reproduction of figurative forms with «soul» in Islam. We might even wonder whether the prohibition of this type of creation in Islamic thought is not rooted in an archaic fear of animate objects examined by Lascault. But he also proposes another category that brings us closer to the question of the puppet. What is more common, according to Lascault, is the animation of statues made by man in the likeness of himself or animals. Of course, the automaton itself, the robot that obeys a programme determined by man, is not a monster, at least for the spectator who can reduce its actions to the effects of a mechanism. Here, if we try to replace the robot with the puppet and the programme with the puppeteer's staging or improvisation system, we see that the security of total obedience no longer exists. The puppet therefore becomes more monstrous, and here we also come close to the uncanny valley theory of the Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori. In the theatre, we can still refer to the image of the mannequin in Kantor's *Dead Class*, where the monstrosity of these animated beings is strongly felt.

But I also propose to consider the concept of the monster at the heart of the narrative from another point of view. We can look back at the etymology of the word monster, from the middle of the 12th century onwards, from the Latin *monstrum*, 'prodigy that warns of the will of the gods, that shows it', then 'supernatural object or being'

¹³ LASCAULT 2004.

and ‘monster’, a family of *monere* (‘to warn’). *Montrer* belongs to this family, but in Latin (*monstrare*) has already lost the religious meaning of *monstrum* as ‘prodigy’, meaning only ‘to indicate’. This brings to mind the religious controversy and debates about the prohibition or authorisation of figurative production and manipulation in the Islamic religion. From a general point of view, this is an issue linked to imitation and the creation of a figurine of a “living” or “soulful” creature: by creating and imitating, man could take morbid pride in believing himself to be on the same level as God, or else engage in idolatry. These two ideas can lead us towards a conceptual fusion in which we can place greater emphasis on the fact that the puppet can be described as a monster: if its figurative manufacture and animation give it breath and soul, seen as an act comparable to that of God, it can, seen from another angle, become the one that indicates and “shows” the divine will. So, in a symbolic field, it seems that the puppet, like an unrivalled hero, finds a superior place that makes it impervious to the constraints imposed on actors.

3. THE STRENGTH OF A BEAUTIFUL NOTHING AT ALL

The puppet, like the doll, is called in Arabic *'arus*, the word also used for groom and bride, with the earlier meaning of ‘stay’ and then ‘celebrate’. Thus, puppet theatre is called *masrahū al'arā'isi*, ‘the theatre of brides’. It is also called *masarahū alddumā*, linked to the term *dumya* in the sense of ‘effigy’, ‘idol’, and a ‘vivacious beauty’ (red face) etymology referring to the word *dam*, ‘blood’ in Arabic¹⁴, which in Persian also means ‘breath’, exactly as in the etymology of the word *anima* in Latin. Today, the word *animation* is used to refer to animated cartoons or stop-motion productions, in which an inanimate image or body is given breath and life to bring it to life. We are therefore closely linked to a creature that is ultimately full of life. The Persian word *'arus* means bride, and with the diminutive suffix of *ak* it becomes *arusak*, meaning ‘puppet’. Having said that, this “little bride” in Persian seems beautiful, innocent, and pure, as does its root in the French word

¹⁴ Almaany and Reverso online dictionaries. I would also like to thank my colleagues specialising in Arabic language and civilisation, Ons Trabelsi, Najmeddine Khalfallah, and Sobhi Boustani, for constructive exchanges.

marionette, meaning *la petite Marie*. It does not threaten anyone, which is why this “toy”, this “doll”, can express itself without being restricted or censored. Because no one is making a fool of themselves by imposing limits on such a harmless little “nothing” creature. It should also be noted that, in Islamic thought, the puppet is considered to be a human creation, and therefore imperfect by definition, unlike man who is created by God, so it should come as no surprise that it has little legitimacy. It is from this kind of illegitimacy, then, that puppeteers often play in a more unveiled manner, while hiding behind a child-like appearance, an animal, even a stuffed toy and a minor object.

This minor form gives Iranian puppetry considerable power, like that of a monster, a supernatural hybrid that is obviously “small”. This enables it to resist the limits imposed on it, making it less constrained by the State than other performing arts: a minority art form, it is less exposed to censorship. It’s worth noting that in the eyes of the powers that be, “this little thing” isn’t even seen and therefore doesn’t deserve to be censored. Indeed, if the “big” powers were to oppose this “little” entity, they would lose their credibility by setting themselves so low.

Finally, we can announce that the Iranian puppet, enriched throughout its history by popular culture and the turbulent history of its country, is growing stronger by the day and surprising its audience on the theatre stage and on television. Small, cunning and agile, it possesses the wisdom that comes with age, and finds its way at every dead end. The hybridity of Iranian puppetry, with its cultural and socio-political cross-fertilisation, combined with the power of this puppet concealed by its minor character, is a phenomenon that we will study more closely through examples. Finally, we must also point out that the puppet, this hybrid half-man, half-object, half-dead, half-alive, half-real, half-imaginary, even possesses the power to hide, camouflage, and protect those who act behind it: its designer, its manipulator, and its vocal performer. Since a puppet performance is made up of a subject, an object, and a voice, we will examine its power against these topics in order to better discover its approach. This will be done first in the revival of traditional forms, then in contemporary or televised forms. In order to grasp puppetry as a hybrid art form, the following pages will respond to the different kinds of questions surrounding the subject. We can therefore also raise the question of a performative presence in the same

way as brides are in the context of a wedding celebration. It is a question of a heightened focus of attention and gaze.

4. PUPPET AND ITS OWN VERSION OF HISTORY

Today, in every MENA country, we can observe the presence of contemporary puppetry based on its traditional characteristics. So much so that the rebellious humour of the puppet that also existed in the West is becoming a form of current affairs in MENA. In Europe today, the characters of Guignol, Kasperle, or Punch belong more to its cultural heritage. But in MENA, the traditional characters are being revived, sometimes adopting a different name, and playing an active part in resistance and the establishment of freedom of speech.

In the Iranian puppetry tradition, the puppets speak, like Punch and Judy in England, with a high-pitched voice produced by a device installed in the puppeteer's mouth. But unlike the English show, in Iran the puppets' words are repeated and/or translated by the Morshed, an actor who stands in front of the *castelet* or puppet booth and interacts with the characters. He begins his dialogue by asking the puppets a few questions to introduce the story. It is at this point that we realise that there are two sides to this show: one produced by the voice distorted by the Safir, the name for a small whistle, and the other by the master reinterpreting the words of the puppets. It is in this discrepancy that the comedy is created, and the audience is delighted by the puppets' rebellion. This is often the case with Mobārak, the black valet at the king's court, dressed in red; an extravagant character who makes fun of everyone, the other characters, the master, and even the spectators. The show is an improvisation based on the main plot, the marriage of the king's son and the preparations for the ceremony, with all its twists and turns. The king is often called Sultan Salim, inspired by the Ottoman king, the enemy of the Persians in the 16th century, but sometimes Ahmad Shah, the Qadjar king of the 20th century. In other words, the king of Kheymeh *shab bāzi* has his origins in history, which gives him a "real" identity, offering his audience greater joy when he is ridiculed by his valet. There are different hypotheses

about the origin of the latter character, as his skin colour is not typical of the inhabitants of Persia.¹⁵

This tradition was revived in the 1990s with the appearance of Kolāh Qermezi, an Iranian puppet celebrity, in the *Sandogh e post* ('The Post Box'), a television show created by the comedians Iraj Tahmasb and Hamid Jebeli in 1992. This daily programme, which featured *āghaye mojri*, the presenter, and puppet characters, brought a number of foreign cartoons to children every afternoon. In this programme, Tahmasb took part in the debate between the characters by acting as a mediator and always trying to find a suitable arrangement. These amusing sketches and the resulting situations enabled the presenter to launch the main theme of the programme: talking about social behaviour, giving moral advice to children, showing them what is "good" in order to avoid what is "bad". This theme is reminiscent of the confrontation between good and evil that stems from the Zoroastrian paradigm of dualism, later influenced by Shiite Islam. However, these characters appear all the freer and at ease in their actions and words because the voices of the two characters were produced by the whistle, as in traditional theatre, or by the distorted voice of the puppeteer. This coded language left a great deal of room for the viewer's imagination and interpretation; as a result, these characters appeared more remarkable, funnier, and closer to the viewer's social reality than the propagandist images generally conveyed on Iranian television. What's more, unlike the television repertoire for young audiences of the same period, this programme did not underestimate the perceptivity of its viewers. This strengthened the bond between the child and everything that was happening in *Sandogh e post*. As a result, this programme became a solid foundation for puppetry on television. Kolāh Qermezi then became the main character in the Iranian New Year programme and returned to Iranian television between 2009 and 2018. Kolāh Qermezi and the other characters offered their own versions of Iranian society. This freer narrative with its twists and turns was obviously obliged to end with a morality that conformed to the country's official discourse, but viewers were used to distancing themselves from this imposed ending and having fun with the freedom taken by the programme's creators. If, in the 12th century, Khayyām expressed himself using puppet vocabulary, to-

¹⁵ For more information and analysis, see KHAJEHI 2020.

day the people express their thoughts and voice their demands using phrases attributed to puppet characters. These characters often have a particular philosophy, such as that of the Fāmil é dour character in the show: «The worst failures of my life were the consequence of the lies I should have told», «You have to make the path to be made, just as you have to close the door for it to be closed», «I am unwell, like an inhabitant of Mashhad (the Iranian religious city) who won a trip to Mashhad in a contest is unwell», «I'm not rude, I have politeness, but I don't plan to use it».

We can see that this double narrative still exists. Sometimes the puppets also intervene on purpose to help the MENA people retell their story. In November 2013, all over the world, several amateur groups tried to make a cover of Pharrell Williams' *Happy* video clip. This movement, which developed thanks to the Internet and the YouTube website, travelled to several countries, including Iran. In May 2014, young Iranians in Tehran posted on YouTube a video showing three men and three women without veils singing and dancing in the streets and on the rooftops of Tehran to the music of the American pop singer. This short film provoked the anger of conservative Iranians who deplored the fact that their compatriots, particularly young people, were abandoning Islamic values in favour of a more Western lifestyle. On May 19, 2014, the young Iranians were arrested by the forces of law and order for «offending the chastity of the public». This immediately gave rise to a dozen other videos of *Happy* made and posted on the Internet by other Iranians, albeit anonymously, in solidarity with the young people arrested. A few days later, a troupe of artists comprised of students and graduates of the puppet arts broadcast a video offering a puppet retelling of these events with their names on the credits, thus making no secret of their identity.¹⁶ The video shows three muppets, including a female character, with their outfits and gestures reminiscent of their counterparts. Although short, the video includes many images, each of which can be interpreted beyond its appearance. It is also shot on the roof of a flat, and the first puppet character appears from behind a satellite dish – an object banned in Iran because of its ability to pick up foreign channels – behind which hides the manipulator. This staging shows that the puppets are not being manipulated by Westerners and suggests the existence of this device on some roof, thus al-

¹⁶ <<https://www.aparat.com/v/w2WSH>> [website consulted and verified in July 2023].

lowing Iranians to hear *Happy* like the rest of the world. We then see the female character who, unlike the young girls whose outfits cover their whole body, is dressed in a top that shows off her generous cleavage, highlighted by a close-up.

Towards the end, this same puppet body, this time without a head, is still in the same position, dancing in the wind. This image – the last appearance of the female character during the broadcast of the song – precedes the final shot of the clip, which shows the disappearance of one of the male characters. The muppet retreats and apparently falls from the roof. At the same time we see the two performer-manipulators, two young people, a woman and a man, each entering from one side of the frame. They hold out their hands to retrieve the muppet, but the only thing they manage to catch is the head scarf. We also quickly see that the young man is holding the female character under his arm, but in the form of an object rather than a puppet. At this point, the song *Happy* is replaced by the sound of a police flashing light and the credits begin to roll. Finally, we see the puppet characters back at home; hearing the flashing light approaching, they start to get agitated and frightened. The headless female puppet, still dancing to the music, free as a bird, represents a social reality and a reference to current events in Iran beyond the arrest of these young people. The male character sings until, exhausted, he falls: he sacrifices himself as a sign of his claim to be *Happy*. The presence of the manipulators, which may at first appear to be an act of rescue, does not change the situation: they are there simply to save what they can later use. In the end, the puppets never die. They may be decapitated or fall, but then live again in their home. They may panic when they hear the police flashing their lights, but they resist, they survive. These puppets, who oppose even their manipulators, may refer to a lost generation in search of its destiny. This short film directed by Mehdi Ali beygi cleverly explores the ability of puppets to express themselves and give a more honest version of events in Iran without being arrested and condemned by the forces of law and order.

We can also see such storytelling in other MENA countries. Simon Dubois explains that the Syrian artist Raafat Al Zakout became involved in the revolution in 2011 by staging the three-story play, *talāt qiṣaṣ*, about the revolution itself.¹⁷ He quickly real-

¹⁷ DUBOIS 2023.

ised that while the demonstrations brought together tens of thousands of participants, his show of support for the mobilised Syrian street protests was only seen by a circle of people with links to the artistic world. He then opted, with a group of artists, to use puppets. As they were still in Syria, using puppets allowed them to express themselves without putting themselves in danger. For wider distribution, for example, in Iran and Turkey, the puppets were filmed and the video broadcast on the Internet. Raafat Al Zakout founded the *Maṣṣāṣit mattih* collective, which created a series of ten-minute videos featuring the president's puppets, his bloodthirsty henchman, and the protester, in satirical sketches in which those in power were ridiculed and even insulted. The project began in the summer of 2011, with the sketches filmed in Syria and then edited in Lebanon for greater security. The first season was broadcast on YouTube in November 2011 and on Orient TV, an opposition television channel. The series, whose name has been translated as 'Top Goon', has been very well received by the foreign press.¹⁸ This puppet series features fairly simple glove puppets bearing the faces of politicians. On the *Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution* digital platform,¹⁹ founded in 2013 to archive creative expression, art, and culture in times of revolution and war in Syria, we can find an episode of Top Goon presenting Bashar al Assad and his association with Russia to maintain peace and security in accordance with the principles and objectives of the United Nations. The show's humorous and surreal dimension allows it to denounce the situation in Syria and its links with the outside world, and to deal with both hard and ugly subjects from a distance. In the second episode, for example, we see retired former dictators from the MENA region on the sky track, discussing and confessing their crimes, and talking about their punishments, which is still quite caricatural, but is very liberating for a people who themselves cannot see or tell such a version of events.²⁰

Today we can also see an active presence of puppetry in Palestine. Puppets help human beings in the act of resistance and education. Palestinian artist Diana al-Suwaiti is part of this movement. From 2019, she has been touring with her minibus and creat-

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ <https://beta.creativememory.org/fr/archive/?_archives_search=top%20goon> [website consulted and verified in May 2023].

²⁰ <<https://youtu.be/Go1ZBOie9Cw>> [website consulted and verified in May 2023].

ing mobile puppet theatre scenes to make up for the lack of cultural and artistic venues due to the sporadic tensions and conflicts between the Palestinians and the Israeli army. She says «For years, we have been suffering from a decline in cultural life, which negatively affected children's attitudes, given they are indulged in



Fig. 2. Screenshot of Top Goon Reloaded - Episode 2 - Hold on to my beard. Source: YouTube@MasasitMati (<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Go1ZBOie9Cw>>).

smartphones to have entertainment».²¹ Even if technically and aesthetically the work of the group of five puppeteers remains simple, it brings a lot to children and families in the West Bank, as if the puppets give their own version of a world in conflict and create a reassuring and culturally rich place for families.²²

In Lebanon, this educational and cultural use of puppets is aimed at the Lebanese, but also at Syrian and Palestinian exiles and immigrants. This is the case of the Khayal (Shadows) Association, which federates and promotes the performing arts and puppetry for educational and psychological purposes, under the direction of Karim Dakroub, who now works as a Clinical Psychologist in Beirut.²³ These creations often revolve around a narrative that carries a fairly clear message in the sphere of education. For example, he created a show to raise awareness of the dangers of the mines and cluster bombs that were dropped by the Israeli army in 2006. In his article entitled *Puppetry, a psychosocial support tool in a war-torn country*, Kardim Dakroub explains the use of puppetry in therapy for post-traumatic syndromes.²⁴ When he put on his very first show for his diploma, Dakroub used, in his words, the story of «Kalila and Dimna», that is to say, not a story

²¹ <<https://english.news.cn/20220531/3b6f4e2725c2440eb23bbf9764b15a24/c.html>> [website consulted and verified in May 2023].

²² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GNkBeC1V8c&ab_channel=NewChinaTV> [website consulted and verified in May 2023].

²³ I would like to thank Abdo Nawar, director, curator and teacher of the Shams association, for speaking with me in May 2023 in Beirut about this.

²⁴ DAKROUB 2010: 22; <<http://marionnettetherapie.free.fr/IMG/file/MT%20B%202010.pdf>>.

taken from the book «but the story of the story of this book», the way in which it was written and passed on in the Eastern and then the Western world. Through his puppet show, he looks back at the history of the transmission of these animal fables, recounting how the book was translated before being passed on from India to Persia, as well as the aims of disseminating this work: «The story of my show was a mixture of the story of the book and the idea of immortality».²⁵ In fact, it's a collection of ancient oriental tales from India via Persia that, according to some, date back to the 3rd century BC. In this work, the animals adopt human behaviour to evoke moral, societal, and political issues. This form of storytelling seems ideally suited to puppetry. Here the puppet becomes the main actor in an ancient narrative form while allowing it to update and travel, as Dakroub did from Lebanon. In this case, the puppet undertakes an epic struggle with a precise goal, not only to speak and express itself by gaining freedom, but to give its audience a form of liberation from its ills and suffering.

In Lebanon and in a more political context, yet somehow still therapeutic or cathartic, cardboard puppets are given the roles of the country's leading political figures. They are there to take part in a fictitious court in the public square to be condemned as those responsible for the explosion in the port of Beirut in August 2020, a catastrophic event that shook and seriously weakened Lebanese society. These Middle Eastern puppets also played an active part in the protests and demonstrations during the Arab Spring in Egypt in 2011.²⁶ For example, playwright and activist Muhammad Marros, together with a troupe of actors and musicians, invented a sardonic puppet show about the failure of the Mubarak regime. Marros and his ensemble rehearsed feverishly for twelve hours in an abandoned office near Tahrir and presented their storytelling spectacle on the revolutionary artists' stage, one of several performance platforms that had been erected in the square.²⁷

We can also see that this puppet presence is becoming a well-known form of demonstration in Egypt given that a year later, in 2012, the giant puppets of the Kousha puppet troupe representing the Egyptian military took to the streets: «The move of giant

²⁵ YOUSSEF 2021: 136.

²⁶ I would like to thank Pauline Donizeau, a lecturer at Lyon 2 University, for the exchange on this subject.

²⁷ ALBAKRY - MAGGOR 2016: 11.

puppets with political messages towards the street, with direct impact on the audience and a simple theatrical backbone, is one of the important indications of changes that are taking place in the artistic field in Egypt». ²⁸ This “tradition” of the presence of giant puppets that raise public awareness of socio-political events in the MENA region is also reflected in the character of Little Amal, a large puppet representing a young Syrian refugee whose name means hope in Arabic and who embarks on a long journey across Turkey and Europe to find her mother. The project, called “The Walk”, was launched in 2021 and has raised awareness among people in over fifteen countries. ²⁹ Her walk is sometimes broadcast via live videos on Instagram, and people can follow her on-screen.



Fig. 3. Fresco at Sahat al Shouhada, Martyrs' Square in Beirut. Photo taken in November 2022 by Yassaman Khajehi.

5. PUPPET NARRATION, FROM IDEA TO BODY: A CONCLUSION?

The puppet, or the idea of the puppet, is part of the narrative scheme of the socio-political field. In other words, the question of manipulation and the relationship of power are

²⁸ <<https://atimetwaly.com/2012/03/10/procession-of-giant-scaf-characters-steals-the-show-in-tahrir-square/>> [website consulted and verified in May 2023].

²⁹ Official project site: <<https://www.walkwithamal.org>> [website consulted and verified in May 2023].

very easily shown through puppets. Walter Benjamin, for example, in his *One-Way Street* (1928), discusses the use of small figurines and automata representing great powers such as those of Françoise-Joseph, Queen Helena of Italy, Napoleon III, et al.³⁰ This custom is still very much alive in MENA. If you look in newspapers, on television, or in the theatre, you can easily find traces of how puppets and politics are woven together to tell the story of a hectic daily life that sometimes has no end in sight. In Martyrs' Square, Sāḥāt ash-Shuhadā in downtown Beirut, deserted following the explosion of the port, at the same time as the presidential election campaigns of 2022, we can see a fresco showing a sad Lebanese manipulated by a hand. From each finger of the hand a different coloured thread descends and attaches itself to the sad, manipulated man, who seems lost by these varied and sometimes divergent forces that nevertheless come from a single hand. Here, as in the examples discussed in this article, the artist uses the puppet as a creature that gives him the strength to tell his story. Whether in the field of aerotherapy or the socio-political framework, artists often agree on the liberating force of the puppet. It can at the same time protect, hide, and bring anonymity to its maker, sometimes functioning as a mask, which itself has sometimes been treated as a political object, but which also possesses a body beyond a face.³¹ We are then in a form of face-to-face encounter with a form of narrative that ultimately encompasses the epic dimension. In other words, whether the puppets are telling a story from the repertoire of folk tales or showing themselves to demonstrators in the streets of MENA, they are creating a movement that encourages both puppeteers and their audience to take action on behalf of themselves and their larger communities. Social networks and digital platforms have also lent their support to puppets, as in the Syrian Top Goon example, but also the Turkish puppet character Dayı ('Uncle' in Turkish)³² and his talk show on YouTube, or the Iranian character Loghmeh created by Mohammad Loghmanian on Instagram.³³

³⁰ BENJAMIN 1988: 203.

³¹ BJØRN - RIISSGAARD 2023: 90-267.

³² <<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLo9gmeup3bXj69btrtNxUQgoDI3RsIkOL>>. I would also like to thank Zeynep Ugur PhD candidate in Political Science at EHESS for his advice.

³³ <<https://www.instagram.com/loghmeshow>> [website consulted and verified in May 2023].

This Middle Eastern puppet, then, skilfully goes beyond the limits, like a hero who goes to save his beloved at the end of the story. It overturns the conventional framework and produces a minor disorder, which results in a new societal order based on the functioning of the puppet, diverting it from the limits of Middle Eastern societies. This order arouses and develops the audience's systematic attention to what is "said" and "shown" by the puppets. Being in a form of direct address, in the street



Fig. 4. Screenshot of Mohammad Loghmanian's June 2021 Loghmeshow post, President Rowhani's puppet Lip-sync in Iran. Source: Instagram & YouTube @loghmeshow.

or behind the puppet booth, and having a very simple and basic aesthetic (as we have discussed in the previous examples), puppetry becomes a form of radicalism as proposed by Peter Schumann.³⁴ In this approach, the puppet form, with its hybrid characteristics, protects the main message until it is received by the audience. The puppet's power as a mode of communication and narration can also be seen by those in power as "marginal agitation", a kind of safety valve that allows the minor disorders of the official discourse to escape. However, underestimated in this way, these puppet elements, these agitations, and these minor disorders manage to push back the margins of freedom and move the limits of censorship in an underlying way: these puppets are so *not serious* that we forget to *see* them, and therefore to beat, censure, or suppress them. It is in this way that the puppet becomes a Middle Eastern hero at the service of artists and society.

³⁴ SCHUMANN 1991: 75-83.

REFERENCES

PRIMARY SOURCES

- ALBAKRY - MAGGOR 2016 = Mohammed Albakry - Rebeka Maggor, *Tabrir Tales Plays from the Egyptian Revolution*, Kolkata, Seagull Books, 2016.
- KHAYYĀM 1998 = Omar Khayyām, *Taranehay Khayyam*, edited by Mohammad Roshan, Tehran, Seday-e-amo'aser Publication, 1998.
- KHAYYĀM 2013 = Khayyam, *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, edited by Baholldin Khoramshahi, Tehran, NahidPublication, 2013.
- TRABELSI 2023 = Ons Trabelsi, *Sīdī Molière Traduire et adapter Molière en arabe (Liban, Égypte, Tunisie, 1847-1967)*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2023.

SECONDARY SOURCES

- BENJAMIN 1988 = Walter Benjamin, *Sens unique*, translated from German by Jean Lacoste, Paris, Revue, 1998.
- CLEVELOT 1994 = Dominique Clevelot, *Une esthétique du voile: Essai sur l'art arabo-islamique*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1994.
- GÖKALP 2007 = Altan Gökalp, *Karagöz et l'univers féminin: la subversion de la domination masculine par la langue*, in *Pitres et pantins. Transformations du masque comique, de l'Antiquité au théâtre d'ombres*, edited by Sophie Basch - Pierre Chuvin, Paris, PUPS, 2007, 345-357.
- KHAJEHI 2020 = Yassaman Khajehi, *La marionnette iranienne ou Les pouvoirs d'un objet hybride*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2020.
- LASCAULT 2004 = Gilbert Lascault, *Le monstre dans l'art occidental: un probleme esthetique*, Paris, Klincksieck, 2004.
- MARKOVITCH 1913 = Marylie Markovitch, *Le rire dans l'Islam*, in «La Nouvelle revue», XIX, Paris (1913), SER4, T5, 385-387.

- NERVAL 1998 = Gerard de Nerval, *Voyage en Orient*, Paris, Folio Classique, 1998, 613-614.
- SCHUMANN 1991 = Peter Schumann, *The Radicality of the Puppet Theatre*, in «TDR», XXXV, 4 (1991), 75-83.
- THALASSO 1904 = Adolphe Thalasso, *Le théâtre persan*, Paris, Éditions d'art de la Revue théâtrale, 1904.
- THOMASSEN - RIISGAARD 2023 = Bjørn Thomasson - Lone Riisgaard, *The Mask as Political Symbol: On the Ritualization of Political Protest through Mask-Wearing*, in *Symbolic Objects in Contentious Politics*, edited by Benjamin Abrams - Peter Gardner, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2023, 267-290.
- YOUSSEF 2021 = Jean Youssef, *Le théâtre de marionnettes au Liban, Histoire, formes et usages de 1958 à nos jours*, thesis defended under the supervision of Julie Sermon - Marco Consolini, Musique, musicologie et arts de la scène, Université de la Sorbonne nouvelle-Paris III, 2021.

JAPANESE EPIC PUPPET TALES AT NEW YEAR: THE FUKAZE DEKUMAWASHI AND HIGASHI FUTAKUCHI PERFORMANCE TRADITIONS

Claudia Orenstein

Hunter College and the Graduate Center, CUNY

ABSTRACT: In the Hakusan area of Japan's Ishikawa Prefecture, two villages, Fukaze and Higashi Futakuchi, roughly 350 years ago, developed and have continued to preserve *bun'ya ningyō*, puppetry combined with the *bun'ya* style of chanting, a precursor of *bunraku*. These traditions draw their tales from folk stories and the epic *Heike Monogatari* or *Tale of the Heike*. Although their puppets are basic in construction and use a simple form of manipulation, each of these related but distinct traditions captivates with its own unique figures, particular chanting style, and ingenious manipulation techniques. Equally worthy of attention are the roles these non-commercial traditions have played in uniting their rural communities and the deep attachment locals still have to their artform. With the erosion of rural lifestyles throughout Japan and the aging of the forms' most engaged practitioners, it is difficult to anticipate the future of these arts. Along with Hakusan City Hall, the forms' preservation associations have experimented with ways of documenting the traditions, finding new performance opportunities, and promoting their arts to a broader public.

KEY-WORDS: *bun'ya ningyō*, folk puppetry, *ningyō jōruri*, Japanese traditional puppetry, Hakusan, Ishikawa, Japan, Intangible Cultural Folk Properties, *The Tale of the Heike*, *Heike Monogatari*, Fukaze, Higashi Futakuchi, *dekumawashi*

RIASSUNTO: Circa 350 anni fa, nell'area di Hakusan e nella prefettura giapponese di Ishikawa, due villaggi, Fukaze e Higashi Futakuchi, svilupparono – e hanno continuato a preservare – il *bun'ya ningyō*, il teatro di marionette combinato con lo stile di canto *bun'ya*, precursore del *bunraku*. Queste tradizioni derivano i loro racconti da storie popolari e dall'epica *Heike Monogatari* o *Tale of the Heike*. Sebbene le loro marionette siano semplici nella costruzione e utilizzino una semplice forma di manipolazione, queste tradizioni, associate ma distinte, affasciano con le loro figure uniche, lo stile di canto, le ingegnose tecniche di manipolazione, e la profonda identificazione che il popolo

ha per le loro forme d'arte. Inoltre, i ruoli delle tradizioni non commerciali hanno contribuito a unire le loro comunità rurali. Con l'erosione degli stili di vita rurali in tutto il Giappone e l'invecchiamento dei praticanti più impegnati di queste forme, è difficile prevedere il futuro di queste arti. Insieme al municipio di Hakusan, le associazioni di conservazione delle forme hanno sperimentato modi per documentare le tradizioni, trovare nuove opportunità di esibizione, e promuovere le loro arti a un pubblico più ampio.

PAROLE CHIAVE: *bun'ya ningyō*, marionette popolari, *ningyō jōruri*, marionette tradizionali giapponesi, Hakusan, Ishikawa, Giappone, Proprietà culturali popolari immateriali, La storia dell'Heike, *Heike Monogatari*, Fukaze, Higashi Futakuchi, *dekumawashi*

Two puppetry traditions that each flourished in remote mountain villages of Japan's Ishikawa prefecture endure today featuring stories from Japan's *Heike Monogatari* or *The Tale of the Heike*.¹ Japanese puppetry is world renowned for the unique *ningyō jōruri* form, more commonly referred to as *bunraku*, which developed in the Edo period (1603-1867) and continues most prominently at the National Bunraku Theatre in Osaka. But *bunraku* emerged out of previous practices that are not as well

¹ I am grateful to everyone who supported my research. Thanks go to Hakusan City Hall, especially Aya-ka Urano, from the International Exchange Division, who was extremely helpful in organizing and hosting my visits to Hakusan, answering questions, and lending me JET Program Coordinator of International Relations Evan Rostetter as a translator. I am very grateful to Rostetter, who accompanied me throughout my visit in April 2022 and during my return visit in April 2023. He is a masterful translator, very dedicated in his work, as well as a fun, good-spirited companion. I received an official welcome in 2022 from Hakusan Mayor Yamada Noriyuki and in 2023 from Yokogawa Masashi, Yamada's Vice Mayor who took over temporarily following Yamada's sad and untimely death in March of that year. I am very grateful to the Fulbright Foundation for my 2021-22 Research Fellowship, which allowed me to spend nine months in Japan doing research on puppetry throughout the country, and my host institution, the Institute of Comparative Culture at Sophia University. Importantly, Fulbright found ways to allow grantees to enter Japan when the country was still barring most international visitors as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. I am also very grateful for the PSC-CUNY grant, jointly funded by the Professional Staff Congress and the City University of New York, which allowed me to make my return trip to Japan in April 2023. Greatest thanks to the members of both troupes who shared their artforms with me, especially the members of Fukaze whom I mention in the article and among them, most importantly, Yurika, who answered numerous email questions and looked over materials to make sure everything was correct. Thanks also to Mari Boyd for help with document translation, bibliography, and answering various questions.

known. *Bun'ya ningyō*, the tradition of both Ishikawa's Fukaze Dekumawashi and Higashi Futakuchi's puppet preservation associations, is one of these earlier forms.² Once a flourishing art, *bun'ya ningyō* survives today with only a handful of troupes in four regions of Japan: on Sado Island in Nigata prefecture, in the prefectures of Miyazaki and Kagoshima, and with these two companies in Ishikawa.³ The names of the two performance groups refer to their respective villages, Fukaze and Higashi Futakuchi, with the term *dekumawashi* written using the Chinese characters that mean 'wooden doll' and 'revolving', indicating puppetry performance generally. The groups received joint designation as a National Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property in 1977, under the umbrella name *Oguchi no dekumawashi*, Oguchi being the municipality that encompassed both villages before it was merged with others in 2005 into today's expanded Hakusan City. While Higashi Futakuchi members speak of their performance as *deku no mai* or puppet sliding dance, both troupes also use the word *dekumawashi* and connect it with a different aspect of their performance technique, as I will describe later. The remote locations of Ishikawa's Fukaze and Higashi Futakuchi villages, high in the Hakusan mountains, supported the continuance of *bun'ya ningyō* and its older practices. While *bunraku* may have grown into an elaborate commercial entertainment in the bustling urban areas of Osaka and Kyoto, Fukaze and Higashi Futakuchi's practices, even if simpler by comparison, captivate with their unique puppets, particular chanting styles, and ingenious manipulation techniques. Equally worthy of attention are the roles these non-commercial traditions have played in uniting their rural communities as well as the visible deep attachment locals have to their artforms.

Bun'ya ningyō, like *ningyō jōruri*, marries the performance of puppets with the chanting of a narrator who provides descriptions of the settings, actions, and emotions of the characters as well as dialogue. In both *ningyō jōruri* and *bun'ya ningyō*, the term *ningyō* means 'puppet' or 'doll', while *jōruri* and *bun'ya* each refer to the particular style of music and chanting of their respective traditions. Although today the term *ningyō jōru-*

² The official name of the Higashi Futakuchi preservation society is Higashi Futakuchi Bun'ya Ningyō Jōruri Hozonkai. *Ningyō jōruri* is now commonly used as an expression for traditional Japanese puppetry that involves chanting, even if the chanting style is not *jōruri* style, as I explain later in the essay.

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Important_Intangible_Folk_Cultural_Properties>.

ri has come to be used generally to refer to a wide range of forms of traditional Japanese puppetry, even outside the *jōruri* chanting tradition, contrasting with *パペット* (*papetto*), which refers to more contemporary ideas of puppet performance, the original distinction is instructive. Each term also points to a general repertoire of plays, although there is overlap. The storytelling aspects of these arts trace their origins to a twelfth-century practice of ballad singing from *biwa hōshi* or ‘lute priests’, blind, itinerant performers who sang tales while accompanying themselves on a Chinese lute-like instrument known as the *pipa*. The *biwa hōshi*’s ballads portrayed the heroic and tragic events of the Genpei War (1180-1185) between the Taira or Heike clan and their rivals, the Minamoto or Genji clan. These stories were eventually gathered into the *Heike Monogatari*, an epic that provides a wealth of compelling events ripe for dramatic staging. Numerous Japanese performance traditions have brought stories derived from this epic into their repertoires, puppetry prominent among them. Drawing on the *Heike Monogatari* and other sources, traditional puppetry in Japan developed into a sophisticated art emphasizing complex characters and plots and deeply emotional situations that often capture moments of anguishing conflict between a character’s personal feelings, *ninjō*, and social duty, *giri*.

My research in Hakusan during the period of my 2021-22 Fulbright Research Fellowship in Japan focused primarily on the Fukaze *bun’ya ningyō* troupe. The Fukaze Bun’ya Traditional Puppet Theatre Preservation Association’s leaders – the chanter, Michigami Tetuo, his wife, Michigami Yurika, the company administrator, Sakai Michio, and master of Fukaze’s local weaving tradition, Katsuki Hisayo – all of whom I befriended at a performance in October 2021, were eager to inform me that their tradition had received little scholarly attention and none in English, as far as they knew.⁴ Although my Fulbright project focused primarily on puppetry within ritual contexts, these performers encouraged me to find out more about their troupe and its history,

⁴ The event, sponsored by Hakusan City Hall, included performances from both Fukaze and Higashi Futakuchi troupes, and a third company, Tokubei-za, a *bunraku* troupe created by James Martin Holman, a retired Professor of Japanese Studies from the University of Missouri now living in Tokushima. His troupe includes both Japanese and foreign nationals, some his former students now living in Japan. I had been invited to perform with the troupe at this event. Attending rehearsals allowed me to see the other troupes up close and make initial connections with the performers.

so I added this work to my research.⁵ Michigami, in his seventies, although raised in Fukaze village, has only in the last few years engaged in the tradition and, along with his wife, who is not from the village, is newly invested in enhancing opportunities to present and support the form. Fukaze company members generously provided me with relevant materials and hosted me during two visits to Hakusan, in April 2022 and April 2023 [Figure 1]. Consequently, while I will discuss both forms, and Higashi Futakuchi members also generously welcomed the Fukaze performers and me in their studio during one of my visits, my view of Fukaze's puppetry is more complete. Most of my information on the companies included here derives from the time I spent with the troupe members during my visits and from Yurika's helpful email answers to my follow-up questions.



Fig. 1. The author and the translator with members of the Fukaze Dekumawashi Preservation Association, their puppets in the background, at their rehearsal and performance studio in Tsurugi, Hakusan. Front row from left: Katsuki Hisayo, Kitamura Yoshimi, Claudia Orenstein, Evan Rostetter, Kita Yoshitake, Minami Kenichi, and Michigami Tetsuo. Back row from left: Matsui Sadako, Matsui Kiyoshi, Yamato Masami, Sinza Hideki, Tsubota Nobuo, Uno Mitsuo, Sakai Michio, and Michigami Yurika. April 2022. Photo courtesy of Shōgo Nakano, Hokkoku Shimbun, and the Fukaze Dekumawashi Preservation Association.

⁵ They felt their troupe had received less attention than Higashi Futakuchi. If true, this could be for any number of reasons. Perhaps because they are no longer in their original mountain setting; or their puppets are less sophisticated than Fukaze's; or the troupe, with Tetuo and Yurika Michigami involved, are now interested in bringing more public attention in their art.

1. THE TWO TRADITIONS

Although Fukaze's and Higashi Futakuchi's puppetry both fall within the *bun'ya ningyō* tradition, they differ from each other in numerous ways. Each tradition claims to be roughly 350 years old, but their geneses are distinct. Fukaze's origin legend attributes its beginnings to itinerant puppeteers traveling through the area who were caught in one of the heavy snowfalls for which the region is famous. Fukaze villagers took in the performers, who were unable to continue their route, and cared for them during the long winter months. This generosity was unusual in a region where people often suffered from food shortages during the winter. The puppeteers must have entertained them in return, providing engaging diversion from the cold weather and daily toils. Importantly, the legend emphasizes that the puppeteers taught the villagers their art and left them with puppets and stories so they could continue performing for themselves once the artists had gone. There are no corroborating documents for these tales – nor for a variant version that says the performers lost their puppets to villagers while gambling, a story apparently favored by local gamblers –⁶ but Fukaze residents have long embraced and recounted the main story that highlights the openheartedness of the locals and the form's lineage from professional itinerant performers. Puppeteers traveling from the center of puppetry in Osaka as well as Kyoto, spreading their art throughout Japan, were prevalent in the Edo period. *Bun'ya* players may have increasingly left the Osaka-Kyoto area to seek out new audiences as *ningyō joruri* grew in popularity. The Hakusan mountain region's harsh winter conditions are also legendary. Locals replace the term *yuki*, meaning 'snow', with the almost-synonym *yūki*, with a longer stress and different pitch on the *u*, meaning 'courage', when joking about the hardships of the season. Regional homes have sloped roofs, like those of Swiss chalets, to prevent them from collapsing from the weight of snow, and the roofs have windows built in so that dwellers can climb out from their attics when the drifts submerge their front doors. Artifacts in the Hakusan Folk Museum attest to local ingenuity in crafting tall boots, snowshoes, and sleds from the area's natural resources.

⁶ E-mail message from Yurika Michigami to author, July 19, 2023.

In contrast to Fukaze's story, Higashi Futakuchi's legend attributes their form's beginning to villagers who traveled outside of the region and learned the art in Kyoto and Osaka – notably in Osaka's Dotonburi district, a lively center for puppetry at the time – and brought the practice back with them. There are several different accounts about the circumstances of this excursion. According to one source, gambling was widespread in the village, and performances were brought in to draw villagers away from gaming, a strategy which was said to have been successful. Another account claims that in 1655 four students from the village trained at different places in Kyoto and Osaka while pursuing other studies there. Another tells of two men who went on a pilgrimage to the island of Kyushu to discover new foods from outside their home region and there met the famous playwright for puppetry, Chikamatsu Monzaemon. Inspired by this encounter, they went on to Kyoto and Osaka and learned to perform, subsequently returning to the village with their newly acquired skills.⁷

Interestingly, what allowed both villages to support puppetry originally were unique trades they engaged in that brought them wealth and some leisure time to pursue their arts. Even performing only once a year, as they both did for the lunar New Year celebration (according to the Chinese lunar calendar used in Japan until 1873), would have required time for rehearsal and funds for upkeep of puppets and other materials. Equally important was downtime for the community at large so that people could come together and enjoy what was, in the past, a three or four-day festival of puppetry entertainment. These forms' incorporation of a chanter into the art of object animation adds a further layer of complexity as it requires someone who will dedicate themselves to learning to sing through complicated literary, poetic play texts. Fukaze's tradition does not include instrumental accompaniment; the chanter recites *a cappella*. The style is repetitive and has been compared to the sound of chanting sutras. The role of the chanter in both Hakusan troupes has generally been taken by men, but the sole Fukaze chanter before Michigami joined the troupe was Matsui Sadako, the first woman to take up this demanding role.⁸

⁷ OGUCHISONOSCHI 1979: 714-715.

⁸ When I visited with the Fukaze company members in April 2022, the few women there, who had lived in the village when they were younger, discussed how women had been discouraged from taking part in the performances in the past as chanters and puppeteers and how those that tried (they alluded to a woman named Aoyama in particular who has now passed away and another, Hideko), discouraged by how they were treated,

The two now take turns chanting for long programs. As with *bunraku*, Higashi Futakuchi's shows integrate playing the three-stringed *shamisen* with their puppet performance and their chanting style is more nuanced than Fukaze's. The shamisen here is more intermittent and less elaborate than in *bunraku*, and their tradition also uses flute and taiko drum in an introductory blessing dance with the character Sanbasō.⁹ A version of Sanbasō often precedes traditional puppet performances across Japan, especially at events associated with shrines, since it is a dance which offers blessings for peace, abundance, and a successful event. The National Bunraku Theatre even begins each day of its own performances with a Sanbasō, which also allows the novice puppeteers who do it to practice foundational performance techniques. The Sanbasō character is ubiquitous in both puppet and human renditions throughout the country at New Year, and Fukaze is unusual in not beginning their programs with this dance of blessing. For villagers to bring performance of puppets and chanting together, with or without the addition of instrumental music, to prepare and then perform a three or four-day program of elaborate epic tales, could only be accomplished with serious time, effort, and dedication.

Most villages in the Hakusan mountain region supported themselves through farming, work that was time and labor intensive. Moreover, the rice that farmers grew was taxed by the Shōgun government, creating financial obligations and hardships. Fukaze, however, was set on rough land inhospitable to farming, a supposed disadvantage that ironically worked in the citizens' favor. The mountainside behind the village was rich in *hinoki*, Japanese cypress trees, and, according to local legend, it was a monk who came to the village and taught the villagers how to turn the bark of the *hinoki* into thin strips they could weave into practical goods like baskets and hats. The villagers began making these products for public sale, especially the conical hats known as *hinokigasa*, widely sought after as protection from snow, rain, and sun. During the Edo period, the small Fukaze village was one of only four places in Japan to make these popular hats sold through-

had stopped pursuing the activity. However, as with many folk arts in Japan and elsewhere, as the forms become endangered, women have found new opportunities to take part.

⁹ Sanbasō can also be done as an independent event. The character is known for the jumps in his dance that may be interpreted as preparing the fields for planting and regeneration. The figure, whose name means 'third old man', derives originally from a very old dance of blessing of three old men later transformed into the nō play *Okina*.

out the country. Fukaze even created an intricate distribution system, leaving their products with other villages that then sent them off to further locations. A settlement that in the oldest records had only thirteen households prospered and by 1877 had sixty-nine households, most if not all involved in some way in the local weaving production.¹⁰ Sadly, by the 1950s Fukaze had so devastated the area of *binoki* trees that weavers had to travel to Nara, a three-hour drive away, to get their raw materials.

Beyond wealth, the weaving industry led Fukaze to develop a relatively egalitarian economy and society. This might be understood in contrast to some other local villages, like those housing Buddhist temples, where strong hierarchical social divisions prevailed. The *binoki* weaving technique was relatively straightforward, so everyone in the village could participate in the work and the wealth it brought. Women proved uniquely adept at it and, recognized as making valuable contributions to the village economy, were encouraged to marry locally and then stay in Fukaze, rather than look elsewhere for husbands. Since weaving provided work throughout the year, Fukaze men had no need to travel from home for jobs or other sources of income during lean times or in off-seasons, as was the case in some neighboring villages. Both men and women were available to take part in supporting the puppet performances. Fukaze developed a production method that put the locals into different work units whose members labored collectively. This system and the work values and comradery it fostered carried over into the puppetry production and performance process. For example, particular units were charged with maintaining specific puppets and equipping them with new clothes, hair, or paint when necessary. Looking at the underside of a Fukaze puppet's kimono, one can see handwriting that reveals the work unit and the names of those who gave money for the garment and sewed it [Figure 2]. The village's production system, for both its commercial goods and its puppetry performances, knitted the community and its members together.

¹⁰ This information comes from local records and was transmitted to me by the curator of the Hakusan Folk Museum during my visit there in April 2023.

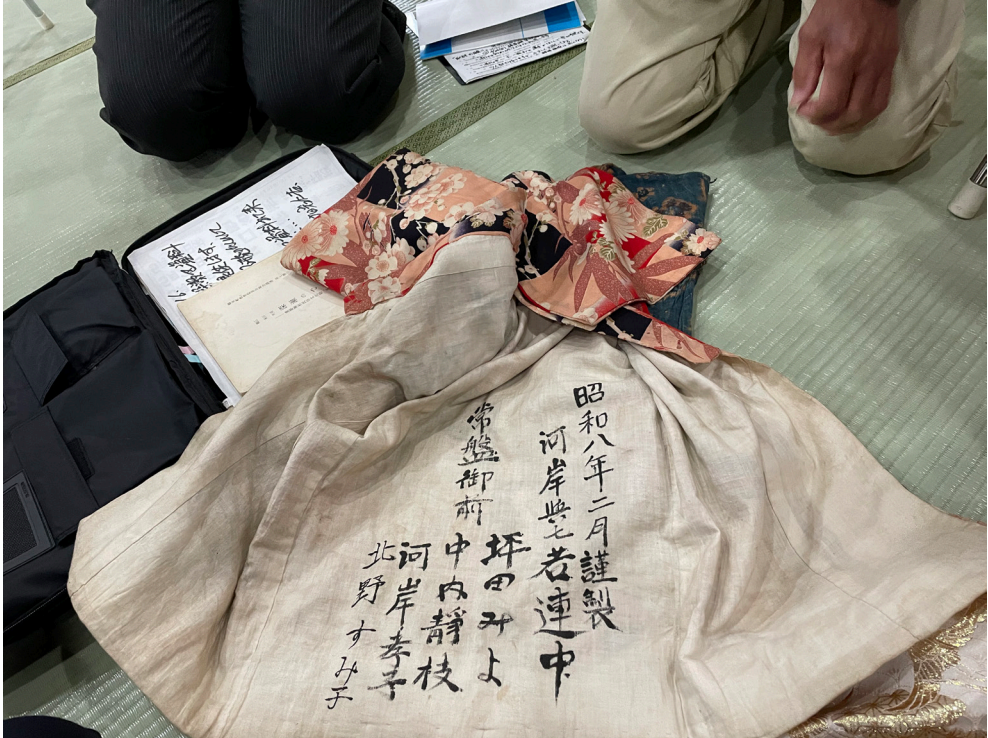


Fig. 2. The inside of the kimono of one of Fukaze's older puppets displays the names of those who funded and sewed the garment. Photo: Claudia Orenstein.

Villagers in Higashi Futakuchi primarily farmed; however, with their access to forest lands, they also developed their own lucrative industry, making charcoal, which was very much in demand. In the Muromachi period (1336-1573) Ishikawa developed a reputation as a charcoal region. Subsequently, «in the Edo period (1603-1868), policies introduced by the Kaga Clan, who ruled the area successfully, ensured that the entire charcoal demand in the castle town of Kanazawa and the rest of the domain was met through local production».¹¹ This work was labor intensive and dominated by men, with women in this village not actively participating. Although Higashi Futakuchi did not thereby develop the same collaborative production model and egalitarian social profile as Fukaze, wealth and occupational alternatives to farming likewise gave Higashi Futakuchi villagers extra financial means and time to support puppetry.

¹¹ <<https://ourworld.unu.edu/en/japans-charcoal-making-traditions-still-alive>>.

It is difficult to know if, in the early years of their development, there were cross-influences between the two traditions. Today we would consider the villages to be only a short drive apart, but before automobiles the distance would have been a long mountain hike. Given that both troupes did their performances at the same time of year, for their own New Year celebrations, it is unlikely that villagers hiked through the snow to observe their neighbors' festivities. One can't accurately test out the trek between the two villages today since in the 1970s Fukaze village was intentionally destroyed to make way for the Teodorigawa dam, a project undertaken to bring water, abundant in the mountains, to the growing nearby city of Kanazawa. Fukaze villagers, who saw their ancestral homes demolished and their lands submerged, were relocated, most to the Tsurugi area of Hakusan City, a more urban environment. The villagers attempted to keep some sense of their former community in their new home by continuing their performance tradition. Today the troupe has a well-appointed hall in Tsurugi area in Hakusan where they store performance materials and meet for rehearsals and the annual presentation. Nonetheless, torn from the small, relatively isolated community and rural lifestyle within which it flourished, Fukaze's puppetry tradition has been navigating questions about its continuance for almost half a century, even as it has managed to persist.

Although the flooding of Fukaze is a unique situation, the general precarity of traditional forms is widespread in Japan and globally. While the village of Higashi Futakuchi was spared Fukaze's watery fate, the continuation of its puppetry has also been of concern. Echoing the fortunes of many of Japan's rural areas, Higashi Futakuchi has suffered a drastic drop in population with young citizens moving to cities for jobs and the amenities of an urban lifestyle. When I visited Higashi Futakuchi in April 2022, my hosts shared that only a single village household remained with young children in it. As the population of Higashi Futakuchi continues to dwindle, and the last residents of the original Fukaze village – those in their 60s and older, still holding memories of the annual puppetry performance in its originary, now subaqueous, home – continue to age, with few new young members in sight, the complications in how not just to preserve but even how to characterize these folk arts accrue. Concerns about these home-grown forms transforming from native practices with local engagement into tourist attractions have been voiced at least since the forms received their Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property designation

in 1977, if not earlier. In Japan, local arts like these can choose to go through a process to be officially recognized first as part of Japan's local and then national heritage, and, once receiving these designations, municipal, prefectural, and national government entities can offer financial and other support. Hakusan City has been particularly energetic in promoting its many unique natural as well as cultural assets. But it remains the job of locals to continue to not only value but engage actively in their traditions for these to continue as living arts. Visiting with those who take part in these two puppet performance forms reveals their heartfelt devotion to their local traditions.

2. THE PUPPETS

The puppets of both these *bun'ya ningyō* troupes are much simpler than those currently used in *bunraku* but reflect objects and practices of earlier Japanese puppeteers who contributed to *bunraku*'s development. The *sannin-zukai* or three-person manipulation technique that has become emblematic of *bunraku*, in which a team of three puppeteers work in unison to manipulate large, fully articulated figures, was not created until 1734, by Yoshida Bunzaburō, and was first used for only a single puppet in the show *Ninin Yakko* ('Two Footmen').¹² It took time for this style of puppet to dominate the *bunraku* stage. In contrast to *bunraku*'s now dynamic figures, with their jointed arms, legs, movable heads, eyes, and eyebrows, and sometimes with faces that can fully transform, Fukaze Dekumawashi's figures are remarkably basic. Their bodies consist primarily of two interconnected crossed sticks: a vertical one, with the puppet's painted head on one end, which the single puppet manipulator grips from the other, and a horizontal stick used as the shoulders and arms of the character. These sticks are straight, with no joints, moving parts, or hands on them, and are held together by lengths of rough rope copiously wrapped around them to form the bulk that stands in for the puppet's torso under its kimono [Figure 3].

¹² LEITER 2006: 14.

While *bunraku* dazzles with figures that were developed to rival the performances of the *kabuki* theatre's human actors and can accomplish a wide range of intricate gestures and flamboyant actions, the charm and captivation of Fukaze's puppets are more subtle but still impressive. The puppeteers give their figures life and movement by rotating them from side to side, stomping their own feet in rhythm with the figure's motions. A puppet's swaying allows its kimono to flutter, adding further liveness to the character. Fukaze attributes the term *deku-mawashi*, ('wooden doll and revolving') in the troupe's



Fig. 3. Sakai Michio, Fukaze puppeteer and company administrator, displays an unclothed puppet to reveal the basic construction style of the troupe's figures. Photo: Claudia Orenstein.

name to this rotating motion at the heart of their technique. The puppeteer's movements and stomps viscerally connect the puppet's liveness with the actions and energy of the human performer. The stomping also echoes the importance of this action as found in other Japanese performing arts, like *nō* theatre, where it reflects a lineage or association with the actions of rice planting and related dances as well as with a mythical Shinto story, recorded in the eighth century *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters), that has been interpreted as the origin of performance in Japan. In this tale, the sun goddess, Amaterasu, angry at her brother, the thunder god, locks herself in a cave, taking light and life from the earth. The other gods, seeking a way to remedy the situation, gather and watch Uzume, goddess of

the dawn, do a stomping dance on top of an overturned bucket. The performance ends with the goddess lifting her skirts to reveal her genitals. Her dance makes the other gods laugh, drawing Amaterasu out of her cave and returning light and fecundity to the land. The story underlines interconnections between ideas of performance, joyfulness, and the rejuvenation of life that remain present in many Shinto rituals and related performing arts. While Fukaze's puppetry is not specifically connected to this lineage or to Shinto rituals, the prominence of stomping may contain remnants of these associations or influences from other practices and performance forms. In any case, it offers at least one more argument for why puppet shows, even those dealing with the tragedies of war and betrayal, would be appropriate fare for a New Year celebration. Indeed, puppetry performances, especially those specifically intended to offer blessings and inspire rejuvenation, take place as part of New Year celebrations throughout Japan. While Fukaze troupe members don't see their form in any way related to offering blessings, it is certainly celebratory. Fukaze's puppets were also brought out in the past as part of wedding celebrations. Villagers would parade to the home of the newlyweds, carrying puppets while waving, close to the puppets, festively colored sticks with streamers and bells attached, making it seem as if the puppets were waving the celebratory objects. The villagers sometimes performed a short scene from one of the puppet plays outside the home, but the primary intent in bringing the puppets was to augment the festive spirit of the marriage celebration.

The stomping action here importantly serves very practical purposes. First, it imparts further liveness to the unjointed, inanimate figures, giving them sound and some kinetic as well as aural force. Also, given that the Fukaze tradition has no instrumental accompaniment, the stomping fills out the show's overall soundscape and helps keep beat with the rhythmic chanting, connecting recitation and puppeteering during performance. Importantly, by varying the speed of a puppet's movements along with the force of the stomping, the puppeteer defines different character types. Warrior figures are turned with swift energetic actions accompanied by strong, vigorous stomps. Female characters receive more graceful, legato gestures, and lighter footwork that barely makes a sound; the movement of elderly figures is characterized by slower, hesitant motions that integrate a slight shaking and no discernable stomping at all. Kita Yoshitake, the most accomplished member of the troupe, explained to me that these elderly figures are too weak to stomp.

Kita himself, however, in his seventies, appears anything but weak as he dances with his puppets, something he has been doing since he was sixteen years old [Figure 4]. There is speculation that Fukaze's puppets, with their limited movements, reflect an even older

style of puppetry than Higashi Futakuchi's or that of other surviving *bun'ya* forms Higashi Futakuchi's puppets are relatively more sophisticated in construction than Fukaze's. They also have a vertical stick with the puppet's head at one end that is gripped by the performer at the other. But the cross stick here serves as a shoulder girdle with the vertical stick inserted into it, which allows the head to turn independent of the body. In contrast to Fukaze's puppets, the whole body of a Higashi Futakuchi puppet doesn't need to shift for the head to face a different direction. Higashi Futaku-



Fig. 4. Kita Yoshitake, the most accomplished performer of the troupe, shows off one of Fukaze's puppets, used for the role of a young man. Kita wears a mask as the photo was taken during the COVID-19 pandemic. Photo: Claudia Orenstein.

chi figures generally have a wooden left arm, with a carved hand, which attaches to the shoulder bar and hangs down at the figure's side. The performer then lends their own right hand, placed into the puppet's right kimono sleeve, to act as the figure's other hand. This allows a character to pick up a sword for fighting or other props. By comparison, in Fukaze's puppetry, when a sword or other prop is needed, the puppeteer just holds it from

underneath the playing board so that it sticks up alongside the character. Some Higashi Futakuchi figures, generally female characters who are less physically active onstage and not engaging in battles, have two arms with carved hands, one hanging on each side [Figure 5].

Higashi Futakuchi's puppets also have a simple trigger mechanism on the vertical pole – similar to those commonly seen in *bunraku* and other traditional Japanese puppets – that allows the performer to move the character's head up and down by means of a lever, here operated by the performer's thumb. At their beautiful, well-equipped studio and performance space in their mountain village, the head of the Higashi Futakuchi Bun'ya Traditional Puppet Theatre Preservation Association, Michishita Jinichi,



Fig. 5. One of Higashi Futakuchi's female puppets, with two hands, hanging backstage at the troupe's studio. Photo: Claudia Orenstein.

demonstrated for my companions and me an old, experimental device that consisted of a hand and arm holding a sword that was meant to replace the use of the performer's right hand. It has a hoop attached to the arm that the performer could move with their thumb while holding the limb in place. The set-up, however, proved too cumbersome for performance and was dropped. In this prototype, we can witness the experimentations of local puppeteers as they have tried to create figures with more realistic features and

different kinds of movements. The simplicity of a puppeteer's direct engagement with and manipulation of a figure, without mechanisms, however, can sometimes be not only easier but more expressive than the use of elaborate devices. It is inspirational to see how much liveness and action Fukaze players get out of puppets that have so little flexibility built into them [Figures 6-7].



Fig. 6. A Higashi Futakuchi troupe's experiment for replacing use of the performer's hand for their puppets' right hand. The system proved too cumbersome for performance and was not adopted. Photo: Claudia Orenstein.



Fig. 7. Mishishita Jinichi, master performer and head of Higashi Futakuchi's preservation society, displays an unclothed puppet and the gripping technique for performance. Photo: Claudia Orenstein.

Higashi Futakuchi puppeteers also dance with their puppets. This troupe, however, attributes the term *dekumawashi* not to any turning gestures they make as they move figures from side to side, but to the overall swaying dance of puppeteer and object performing together. These puppeteers also stomp but additionally move by sliding their feet as they dance [Figure 8]. They refer to their overall performance as *deku no mai*, a sliding puppet dance. In demonstrating his technique for me, Doishita Jintaro, a long-time member of the company, described how one needs to move one's head in unison with that of the puppet for it to appear alive. Moreover, he says, a performer must feel in their heart

the same feeling as the character and express the emotion with one's heart as one dances with the puppet. Although their techniques are slightly different, both traditions emphasize the close interconnection of object and performer working together to bring emotional expression from the figures.

Today, both troupes perform with puppets that were crafted by professional carvers in Tokyo, commissioned within the last fifty years to make replicas of the troupe's older figures. Higashi Futakuchi houses their older puppets in their performance and rehearsal hall, some in enclosed cases. The



Fig. 8. Doishita Jintaro, from Higashi Futakuchi, demonstrates his performance technique. Photo: Claudia Orenstein.

Fukaze troupe's older figures, over thirty of them, which they stopped using in 1991, are kept in the Tsurugi Storage of the Hakusan City Museum, a museum that is no longer in operation.¹³ However, curator of the Hakusan City Museum, Murakami Kazuo, graciously pulled the figures out of storage and set them up in a room of his institution for the current company members, me, and others connected to the tradition to inspect during my field

¹³ According to Michigami Yurika, the museum was called 鶴来町立鶴来博物館 (Tsurugi town-run Tsurugi Museum) when it was decided that the old puppets would be stored there. Sakai says the troupe members were very happy about it at that time; however, the situation changed after Tsurugi Town was merged into Hakusan City. The museum was called 白山市立鶴来博物館 (Hakusan City-run Tsurugi museum) when it was closed. Whereas Dekumawashi and Fukaze people have been at the mercy of the municipal administration, Higashi Futakuchi was wise to keep their old puppets in their possession. E-mail correspondence with author, July 19, 2023.

research in April 2022. Fukaze performers themselves had not seen these original puppets in over thirty years.

Among those who joined in our viewing was Toki Kawagishi, 92, the oldest living member of the original village. She shared her memories of how each year, around February 7th, locals would pull out the puppets to inspect them and see what repairs were needed for that year's performance. She recalled, sometime in the 1940s, walking for a whole day through the snow with other women to a place where they could buy materials for puppet kimonos and hair ornaments. They used children's ornaments and children's cotton kimonos, adapting them for their even smaller puppets. Around 1960, she said, when Japan's economy improved, so did the materials they purchased for the puppets' outfits. Today, Fukaze's puppets, especially those playing noble figures, have clothes made from heavy, patterned and often brocade silk. She also noted that performances did not take place during World War II or at other times of hardship.

The women of Fukaze have long enjoyed and taken pride in dressing and caring for puppets, especially the headdresses and kimonos of the female figures [Figure 9]. As Yurika shared with me in e-mail correspondences over several months in 2023, in preparation for a special program in Hakusan in October that brought the remaining *bun'ya* troupes from around Japan together for a festival of performances and discussions, Katsuki Hisayo bought new *kanzashi* (hair



Fig. 9. The women of Fukaze village have long enjoyed and taken pride in dressing and caring for puppets, especially the headdresses and kimono of the female figures. Photo: Courtesy of Nakauchi Mikio.

ornaments) from the Tsumami Kanzashi Museum in Tokyo. Women from Fukaze, together with others living in the area where the puppeteers now have their studio, gathered, as in the past, to attach new hair and ornaments to the puppets, enjoying friends and conversation in the process. It took them a day to complete four small heads. With fewer puppeteers available, women have now taken on puppeteering as well, which was not common in the past, although at least one woman had tried. For newer puppets, the heavy wood of the figures was replaced with ropes to shape the torsos, making them lighter. This change, Yurika says, has been good for all the puppeteers, but especially for today's women performers.

While Fukaze's puppets certainly represent the familiar cast of character types common to the Japanese puppet stage – warriors, villagers, noblewomen – along with some devil figures, each seems to express an individual personality in its carving and painting [Figures 10-14].



Fig. 10. Presumed to be the oldest puppet in the collection, today a replica of this character is used for the *kōjō*, or prologue introducing the performance. Photo: Claudia Orenstein.



Fig. 11. One of Fukaze's older puppets from storage; a figure of an old man. Photo: Claudia Orenstein.



Fig. 12. One of Fukaze's older puppets from storage; a young girl wearing a brocade silk kimono and hair ornaments. Photo: Claudia Orenstein.



Fig. 13. An older Fukaze puppet from storage with a fancy, brocade, kimono. Photo: Claudia Orenstein.



Fig. 14. One of Fukaze's devil puppets. Photo: Claudia Orenstein.

Some faces are unlike any others I have seen in Japan. The one believed to be the oldest figure, the replica of which the company uses to introduce the performance program, has an unpainted, dark brown face, with eyes carved as slits slanted downward, a triangular nose, gruff frown, and no hair. Some of these characteristics may be the product of wear over the years that removed paint and hair leaving only the rough carving. The devils have almost comical faces with appropriately exaggerated painted features, horns inserted into holes in their scalps, and scraggly tufts of hair popping from the tops of their heads. The faces of good noble figures are painted white, but their antagonists have serious or angry red faces. The puppets were most probably made by the villagers themselves, although some appear more professionally executed than others. There exist no records about who carved what and the troupe members do not know.¹⁴ Unlike *bunraku* puppets, where the heads can be removed from the bodies, allowing one to peek inside and see the name of the artist who carved it, the heads of these puppets do not come off the sticks that hold them and don't display any names. The hair used for the puppets most probably came from local animals, some likely from boars, and was inserted in groups of strands into holes in the heads.

3. THE REPERTOIRE

The combined Oguchi troupes have a repertoire of eight plays, each with several scenes. Four of the plays are performed by both companies: *Genji Eboshi-ori* ('*The Eboshi Hat-maker*'), *Kadode Yashima* ('*The Battle of Yashima*'), *Oeyama Shuten-dōji* ('*Shuten-doji at Oeyama*'), and *Taishokukan* ('*The Stolen Crystal Jewel*'). Fukaze has two more plays in its collection, *Kumai Tarō Kō Kō no Maki* ('*The Filial Piety of Kumai Tarō*') and *Kanadehon Chūshingura* ('*The Treasury of Loyal Retainers*'). Higashi Futakuchi also has two further plays, *Shusse Kagekiyo* ('*Kagekiyo Victorious*') and *Ōyama Uba* ('*The Old Mountain Woman*'). Some of the plays, like *Shusse Kagekiyo*, *Kadode Yashima*, and *Genji Eboshi-ori*,

¹⁴ There was only one puppet whose carver was identified with any certainty. It was carved by Minato Masao (湊真佐男), an art teacher who spent time in Fukaze village in the 1960s and decided to make a puppet based on others he had seen there. Minato also joined our viewing of the puppets and discussed his figure.

are early works by Chikamatsu. It is common in Japanese traditional performing arts to feature popular scenes from very long plays, and the troupes don't necessarily have all the scenes of these plays in their performance traditions.

Working in collaboration, professors and graduate students from Kanazawa University, members of the two puppetry Preservation Associations, and other official organizations of Hakusan City, from 2008 to 2010, published a series of eight beautiful volumes that each has the text of one of the plays, in both the original version and in updated, contemporary Japanese, along with copious annotations on the texts. The stories of many of the plays are taken from the *Heike Monogatari* epic on themes that can also be found in Japan's other traditional forms like *kabuki* and *nō* theatre. They are full of complex relationships of loyalty and revenge, and the first page of each of the publications provides a synopsis of the story and a chart showing the relationships between the characters. In *Genji Eboshi-ori*, for example, Osada no Tadamune and Taira no Kiyomori, warriors of the Heike clan, are tasked by the Emperor Go-Shirakawa to set up a grave for Yoshitomo, a warrior of the Genji clan whom they defeated, and to take care of his widow and children since he had previously been the Emperor's loyal retainer. Kiyomori, however, seeks instead to have them killed. Found by her rivals, the widow, clutching her youngest child, still an infant, laments her fate as she prepares to sacrifice her life. The family is saved at the last minute by Tokuro Morinaga, who had been a servant to the Genji and who hears the family's cries. Later, Yoshitomo's sons, now grown, seek revenge on their father's killers. Central to this part of the plot is the son, Ushiwaka, buying an *eboshi* hat, which indicates his rank, and falling in love with the hatmaker's daughter, adding a love story to the already complex revenge tale. *Shuten-doji at Oeyama*, by contrast, is based on a folk story and recounts how three priests defeat a sake-loving demon who has been terrorizing their area. *Taishokukan* has mythic elements and can be read as a Buddhist allegory. It is about a warrior named Manko who is asked by the Empress of China, a Japanese woman married to the Chinese emperor, to take a precious crystal Buddhist jewel across the sea to her father in Japan. The Dragon King, who lives in the sea, tries to steal the jewel during the boat's crossing, first by force then by trickery, appearing in the guise of a forlorn maiden, who later reveals herself to be the fearful beast. A high point of Higashi Futakuchi's performance of this episode is the replacement of the maiden with a long, cloth dragon

puppet that two performers, one holding each end, undulate back and forth across the stage during the heated battle between Manko and the creature. The play continues with further adventures in trying to retrieve the jewel that include a mother's personal sacrifice for her son and, after her death, her ascension as Kannon, goddess of mercy.

A series of online videos made through Hakusan City Hall, available to watch on the municipality's YouTube channel, introduces viewers to some of these stories and the puppetry forms.¹⁵ The series features the effervescent Gart T. Westerhout, an American who teaches at Kinjo University in Hakusan, along with Daniel Herriott from England, and Susan May from Australia, who were both at the time of filming Coordinators of International Relations from the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program working at City Hall. They tell viewers about the puppetry practices and elucidate the stories by means of a *kamishibai* (a Japanese picture storytelling form). The *kamishibai* stories, translated by J. Martin Holman, and the accompanying images, executed by Little Mou, have also been published by Hakusan City International Exchange Association as a series of softcover children's books. The online videos include clips of Higashi Futakuchi performances and brief interviews with troupe members. The combined online media and books offer a fun way to learn about the tales, emphasizing presenting the art as children's entertainment and cutting out most of what might be difficult to grasp in order to reach a wider audience. Hakusan City is very active in cross-cultural exchange with international sister cities in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, China, Germany, and France, and these videos help connect foreigners to the local arts. Hakusan also has a strong interest in making the traditions accessible to local viewers as these puppetry forms will need both younger performers and patrons to continue.

The videos explain how the troupe starts each event with important preliminaries: the Sanbasō puppet dance of blessing followed by the *kōjō* ('opening statement' or 'prologue') where a puppet introduces the main program. After the plays, the perfor-

¹⁵ You can find the playlist of these particular videos here, on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LujCaUMDN1Y&list=PLmTr_Mb6sMcQloDapYrC1vwiCMzbTxrsP>. The following website takes you to all the Hakusan City Hall videos: <<https://www.youtube.com/@user-ok3ns7gn11/playlists>>. A full performance of *Shutendōji* with accompanying *hana bome* can be found at this website in Japanese without translation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_AT0sNctFV8&list=PLmTr_Mb6sMcQloDapYrC1vwiCMzbTxrsP&index=14>.

mance ends with a *hana home* ('flower praise sequence') in which a puppeteer with his puppet uses copious word play as part of thanking the audience for coming and offering the artists the opportunity to perform. Fukaze's opening event, by contrast, is not a dance of blessing, but a short highlight from the main play. They also have a short *kōjō* before they begin their main program, announcing the plays that will be performed. They perform their *hana home* at intermission rather than at the end of the performance. Traditionally, at the end of the New Year event, the Fukaze performers and spectators, their fellow villagers, come together for folk dancing, singing, and *sake* drinking.

In the Fukaze troupe, it is Mr. Kita who chooses the episodes to be performed each year. In the old days each of the companies staged all their plays for their New Year celebrations, around sixteen hours of performance. Since the multi-day event has today been reduced to a single evening's presentation, for a long time the Fukaze troupe neglected some of their repertoire. Each year they presented the same few lively crowd-pleasers, which relieved the performers from having to rehearse new material. During my 2023 visit, Sakai looked at the repertoire list and remarked that some of the scenes that were rarely performed were left behind because they were boring. Other company members, by contrast, felt that these were just quieter scenes that nonetheless had their own interest. The troupe members all agreed that certain scenes wouldn't make sense unless offered within a sequence of connected ones. In recent years, Kita has made a point of including, at one time or another, each of the scenes in the repertoire in rotation so that the memory and the how-to of the performances can be preserved and passed down. Knowing his own time for performing is limited, he has also created detailed prompt books for each scene of each play with photos inserted that clearly show which puppets play which characters, and which are used in each section of the various scenes [Figure 15].

In February 2023, after three years of canceled New Year events due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Fukaze was finally able to resume their annual performance. For this revival presentation, Kita selected scenes from two plays, the one they deem to be the oldest in the repertoire, *Oeyama Shuten-dōji*, and the newest, *Genji Eboshi-ori*. These two plays, the company felt, could appeal to diverse sensibilities: *Oeyama Shuten-dōji*, with a cadre of devils and lively action, would be more pleasing to children, while *Genji Eboshi-ori*, containing philosophical ideas, would be of more interest to adults. Photos the

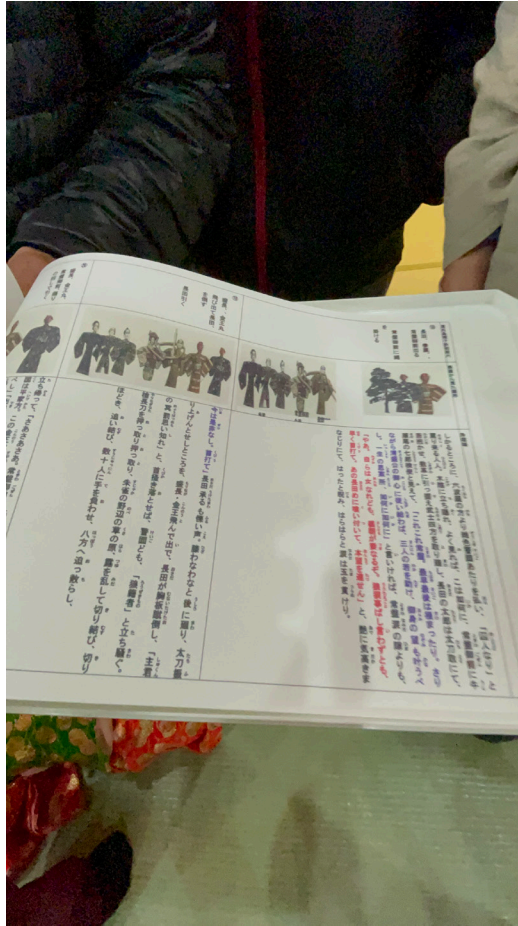


Fig. 15. A page of one of the prompt books Kita Yoshitake made that clearly illustrates which puppets are used in each scene. Photo: Claudia Orenstein.

troupe took of the event show that, although their small hall had a full audience for the performance, only one or two children attended. All the same, the troupe's attempt to appeal to a broad spectrum of spectators, especially children, could allow them to bring this performance back in other contexts in the future, perhaps for presentations in schools. *Oeyama* notably contains the beloved tradition of the devil figures throwing candy out to the spectators as part of the show. Elderly village members fondly remember chasing after the candies when they were young. Another novelty in this show is that one of the

many devils is not a puppet but a masked human performer, looming above his fellow puppet players [Figure 16]. The troupe does not stage *Oeyama* frequently because it requires sixteen puppeteers, a large number for a company straining to recruit new members. The cast requirements also create complications for the possibility of bringing the play to schools out of season. For the 2023 performance, Fukaze was able to round up volunteers to work alongside the usual corps team of trained, committed players so this crowd-pleaser could be revived.

Some members of Fukaze are interested in expanding their offerings, with projects like teaching programs in schools. But there is a division in the company of how to think about this folk art. Originally just a local community event, with very personal resonance, some do not feel the troupe should be paid for what they do or profess to greater professionalism than what their club-like, occasional participation warrants. Others would like to see greater possibilities for their art and further recognition and support for it locally, as well as other means of attracting new, younger performers to guarantee the beloved tradition a long future.



Fig. 16. Michigami Tetuo demonstrates the mask devil character that appears in Fukaze's *Oeyama Shuten-dōji*. Photo: Claudia Orenstein.

4. CONCLUSION

In the vibrant cities of Kyoto and Osaka, bustling during the Edo period with people hungry for novel entertainment, puppetry was primarily a commercial art. Performers seeking to attract crowds, especially as their shows competed with other pastimes, could readily discard old practices – whether in terms of the plays they performed, the styles of chanting or musical accompaniment they used, or the types of puppets they built – trading them for newer, more trendy and popular fare. While Fukaze and Higashi Futakuchi villages each had their own lucrative commercial enterprises that helped sustain their puppetry, the puppet performances themselves were never commercial but, instead, beloved community traditions that brought locals together for festive celebration. The remoteness of the mountain villages, periodically locked in by snow and relatively free from outside influence, helped support the preservation of these arts with much of their early character intact, even as related forms died out elsewhere. The *Heike Monogatari* epic's dramatic episodes, especially popular during the period when *bun'ya ningyō* flourished, were central to fueling these artforms, providing them with tales of emotional depth and narrative complexity. The two traditions are not only of interest for how they reflect older models of puppet performance, but equally for each one's unique qualities – the particular style of their puppet heads and construction; the performative strategies each troupe uses to enliven their figures; the discourses of the local performers about their art; and, significantly, the way the traditions have been central pillars of community identity, especially for Fukaze, whose former citizens no longer have the terrain of a home village as a tangible place for connection to personal and collective histories and to each other. With the erosion of rural lifestyles throughout Japan and the aging of these forms' most engaged performers, it is difficult to anticipate what will become of these arts. Along with Hakusan City Hall, the preservation associations have experimented with many means of documenting the forms, finding new performance opportunities, and promoting their traditions to a broader public. Performers and spectators appreciating the distinctive artistic qualities these arts have to offer are as important to their continuance as valuing their conservation of bygone practices.

REFERENCES

PRIMARY SOURCES

- Genji Eboshi-ori* [Holman] = *Genji Eboshi-ori: The Lacquered Hat of the Genji*, storybook creator, Little Mou, translated by Martin J. Holman, Hakusan (Ishikawa), Hakusan International Association, 2021.
- Genji Eboshi-ori* [Oguchi Dekumawashi] = *Genji Eboshi-ori (The Eboshi Hat-maker; The Lacquered Hat of the Genji)*, ed. by Oguchi Dekumawashi Teaching Material Creation Committee, Hakusan City (Ishikawa), National Intangible Cultural Folk Property, 2009.
- Kadode Yashima* [Oguchi Dekumawashi] = *Kadode Yashima (The Battle of Yashima)*, ed. by Oguchi Dekumawashi Teaching Material Creation Committee, Hakusan City (Ishikawa), National Intangible Cultural Folk Property, 2009.
- Kanadehon Chūshingura* [Oguchi Dekumawashi] = *Kanadehon Chūshingura (The Treasury of Loyal Retainers)*, ed. by Oguchi Dekumawashi Teaching Material Creation Committee, Hakusan City (Ishikawa), National Intangible Cultural Folk Property, 2008.
- Kumai Tarō Kō Kō no Maki* [Oguchi Dekumawashi] = *Kumai Tarō Kō Kō no Maki, (The Filial Piety of Kumai Tarō)*, ed. by Oguchi Dekumawashi Teaching Material Creation Committee, Hakusan City (Ishikawa), National Intangible Cultural Folk Property, 2010.
- Oeyama Shuten-dōji* [Oguchi Dekumawashi] = *Oeyama Shuten-dōji (Shuten-doji at Oeyama)*, ed. by Oguchi Dekumawashi Teaching Material Creation Committee, Hakusan City (Ishikawa), National Intangible Cultural Folk Property, 2008.
- Ōyama Uba* [Oguchi Dekumawashi] = *Ōyama Uba (The Old Mountain Woman)*, ed. by Oguchi Dekumawashi Teaching Material Creation Committee, Hakusan City (Ishikawa), National Intangible Cultural Folk Property, 2010.
- Shusse Kagekiyo* [Oguchi Dekumawashi] = *Shusse Kagekiyo (Kagekiyo Victorious)*, ed. by Oguchi Dekumawashi Teaching Material Creation Committee, Hakusan City (Ishikawa), National Intangible Cultural Folk Property, 2008.

Shuten-doji [Holman] = *Shuten-doji: The Sake-Loving Demo*, storybook creator, Little Mou, translated by Martin J. Holman, Hakusan (Ishikawa), Hakusan International Association, 2020.

Taishokukan [Holman] = *Taishokukan: The Stolen Crystal Jewel*, storybook creator, Little Mou, translated by Martin J. Holman, Hakusan (Ishikawa), Hakusan International Association, 2021.

Taishokukan [Oguchi Dekumawashi] = *Taishokukan (The Stolen Crystal Jewel)*, ed. by Oguchi Dekumawashi Teaching Material Creation Committee, Hakusan City (Ishikawa), National Intangible Cultural Folk Property, 2009.

SECONDARY SOURCES

OGUCHISONSHI 1979 = Ishikawa-ken Oguchisonshi, *History of Oguchi Village Ishikawa Prefecture*, vol. 2, edited by Oguchi Village History Compilation Committee, Ishikawa, Hokkoku Publishing Co, 1979.

LEITER 2006 = Samuel L. Leiter, *Historical Dictionary of Japanese Traditional Theatre*, New York, The Scarecrow Press, 2006.

SHUNKAN ON DEVIL ISLAND:
DOMESTICATING POLITICAL EXILE IN THE PUPPET
PLAY *HEIKE NYOGO NO SHIMA*

Elizabeth Oyler
University of Pittsburgh

ABSTRACT: This essay discusses the scene entitled *Shunkan on Devil Island* from Chikamatsu Monzaemon's early modern puppet play *The Heike on the Island of Women* as a commentary on social and political strictures of the early modern Tokugawa shogunate, which increasingly regulated social and commercial life as it sought to maintain control of the burgeoning cities of Edo and Osaka in the early 1700s. The play is loosely based on the medieval epic war tale *Tale of the Heike* (*Heike monogatari*), a beloved and foundational text that has found numerous afterlives in Japan's theatrical, narrative and cinematic traditions. *Shunkan on Devil Island* refashions the Heike's story of the Buddhist prelate Shunkan (banished to Devil Island following a botched coup attempt) as a specifically early modern tale by introducing a female character, Chidori, who becomes the wife of one of Shunkan's two fellow male exiles and therefore a member of the "family" that they, as aristocrats banished to a distant island, create. Through exploring the idea of family relations on the remote Kigaigashima, Chikamatsu recasts the well-known tale of *Shunkan on Devil Island* to create a utopic staged space that comments on the oppressiveness of the early modern polity experienced acutely by the urban audiences of the early 18th century.

KEY-WORDS: Japanese puppet theatre, *bunraku*, *ningyō jōruri*, Early modern theatre, *Tale of the Heike*, Chikamatsu Monzaemon, Shunkan

RIASSUNTO: Questo saggio si occupa della scena intitolata *Shunkan sull'Isola del Diavolo*, tratta dall'opera teatrale di marionette di Chikamatsu Monzaemon *L'Heike l'Isola delle Donne*. L'opera è un commento alle restrizioni sociali e politiche dello shogunato Tokugawa della prima età moderna, che regolava sempre più la vita sociale e commerciale nel tentativo di controllare le città di Edo e Osaka all'inizio del 1700. L'opera è liberamente ispirata al racconto epico di guerra medievale, *La storia dell'Heike*, un testo amato e fondamentale, che ha trovato numerose vite successive nelle tradizioni teatrali, narrative, e cinematografiche del Giappone. *Shunkan sull'Isola del Diavolo*



rimodella la storia di Heike del prelado buddista Shunkan (bandito sull'Isola del Diavolo in seguito a un fallito tentativo di colpo di stato) come un racconto specificamente moderno, introducendo un personaggio femminile, Chidori, che diventa la moglie di uno dei due compagni esiliati di Shunkan, e quindi un membro della "famiglia" che essi creano, da aristocratici esiliati su un'isola lontana. Esplorando l'idea delle relazioni familiari nella remota Kigaigashima, Chikamatsu riformula la famosa storia di *Shunkan sull'Isola del Diavolo* per creare uno spazio scenico utopico che commenti l'oppressione del sistema politico della prima età moderna percepita in modo acuto dal pubblico urbano dell'inizio del XVIII secolo.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Teatro delle marionette giapponese, *bunraku*, *ningyō jōruri*, teatro della prima età moderna, *La storia dell'Heike*, Chikamatsu Monzaemon, Shunkan

Japan's *ningyō jōruri* 人形浄瑠璃 is among the most complex and theatrical puppet traditions in the world.¹ The product of a historical context of rapid urbanization combined with the growth of popular commercial entertainment aimed at urban audiences, *ningyō jōruri* emerged side-by-side with kabuki in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, during Japan's early modern age (1600-1868), and the two arts vied for audiences in the burgeoning urban centers of Edo (modern-day Tokyo) and Osaka. The competition for audiences proved synergistic for both arts: while most early plays were written for the puppet stage, kabuki troupes often restaged successful puppet plays with live actors, adding new interpretations and interest to characters. That *ningyō jōruri* had to attract the same audiences as kabuki helped spur the development of large, complex puppets with articulated arms, hands, and legs that could closely imitate the movements of actual humans on stage.² The extreme popularity of individual kabuki actors in specific roles further led

¹ Today, and especially outside academic circles, the term *bunraku* is used to encompass the puppet theatre that emerged during Japan's early modern age, referred to as the Edo or Tokugawa Period (1600-1868), so called because the Tokugawa family ruled as shoguns and established their political seat at Edo (modern-day Tokyo). *Bunraku* was the name originally of one troupe; *ningyō jōruri* is the more generic term (BRAZELL 1998: 303).

² Puppets also sometimes have other features, like mouths and eyes that can be opened and closed, faces that flip from human to demonic, or heads that split in half when struck by a sword.

to the highlighting and reshaping of certain parts of plays not only for kabuki but also on the puppet stage. Such is the case with the play *Shunkan on Devil Island* (*Shunkan Kikaigashima no ba* 俊寛鬼界島場). A puppet play about one of classical Japan's most famous exiles, the Buddhist prelate Shunkan, who was banished to and died on Kikaigashima (Devil Island), *Shunkan on Devil Island* derives from most of Act Two of the five-act puppet play entitled *The Heike and the Isle of Women* (*Heike nyogo no shima*) written by Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653-1725), the best-known early playwright of *ningyō jōruri*. The play debuted in 1719 at the Takemotoza theatre in Osaka, and was staged as kabuki less than a year later; it continues to be part of the repertoire of both arts today.

Like many historical plays, *Shunkan on Devil Island* is an adaptation of earlier works: the early fourteenth-century war tale *Tale of the Heike* (*Heike monogatari* 平家物語) and the early fifteenth-century noh play *Shunkan*, based on a portion of the *Tale of the Heike* narrative. All three versions tell the story of Shunkan's banishment to Devil Island following a botched coup attempt in 1177 planned at his home during the run-up to the Genpei War (1180-1185), the civil war that ended Japan's classical age and gave rise to the age of the warriors. This essay explores the process of adaptation of the medieval *Tale of the Heike* to the early modern puppet stage and the ways that the puppet play transforms a familiar story about unjust punishment and karmic retribution into a social commentary on the urban world in which the puppet theatre emerged. In particular, I focus on how Chikamatsu resituates this story of exile to frame a tale that comments on social relations and family structures in the context of early modern society for the growing urban audiences of urban theatregoers.

1. CHIKAMATSU'S SOURCES

The narrative underpinning *The Heike and the Isle of Women* comes from the first three books of the *Tale of the Heike*, a work that has been deemed Japan's epic for the many ways it resembles European epic traditions. Although not a poem, the *Heike* embraces oral formulaic tropes associated with epic, including dressing the warrior, the order of battle, enumeration of lists, and name-announcing, and it is part of an oral performance tradi-

tion. The tale recounts a six-year civil war that brought Japan's classical age to a close with the victory of Minamoto no Yoritomo, the man who would become Japan's first shogun in 1192. The *Tale of the Heike* comprises about eighty variant lines, many of which were originally sung by peripatetic blind male performers who accompanied their narration on the four-stringed *biwa* lute. These men were referred to as *biwa hōshi* 琵琶法師, or 'biwa priests'.³

The *Tale of the Heike*'s narrative and musical origins lie in elegiac ritual and memorial chant intended to soothe the spirits of those killed in the war and lead them to Buddhist enlightenment. The title of the work directs attention to the Heike clan, the losing side, those deemed most apt to return as angry spirits (*onryō* 怨靈) to wreak havoc in the here-and-now. The tale arrived at its current form in the late fourteenth century, after a two-hundred-year period marked by political instability. Starting at the end of the war in 1185, power arrangements were generally in tension between the imperial court and the shogun, a political position the victors created for themselves at the end of the war. The political situation was further complicated by two unsuccessful Mongol invasions (1274 and 1281) and a fissure in the imperial family that led to sporadic warfare for almost six decades in the middle of the fourteenth century. As a story, therefore, the *Tale of the Heike* creates narrative order in response to the political unease not only of the war itself but also of the two centuries that followed it. Although some variants were compiled as histories of the war, the tale was most prominently circulated in the orally transmitted versions performed by *biwa hōshi*, who were loosely affiliated with Buddhist temples and whose status points to the religious and placatory nature of the tale.

Battlefield heroics are an important concern, but the tale also dwells on non-military affairs, including the fate of women and children left behind when men went off to war or the unjust banishment of many innocent, or mostly innocent, men. The story of Shunkan falls into this latter category. He and his two fellow exiles are but three of the many banished men whose stories fill the opening chapters of the work, but their extend-

³ The most recent translation is Royall Tyler's of 2012 (TYLER 2012). This is the first translation to attempt to represent the performance of the tale, by formatting passages differently depending on the musical formulae through which they were performed. The introduction provides a general background of textual development.

ed narrative is significant: we witness them apprehended, sentenced, and then expelled to an island beyond the extremity of the realm by the despotic ruler Taira no Kiyomori, who has also placed his daughter as consort (and then empress) to the reigning emperor. When the other two are returned to the capital as part of a general amnesty during the empress's pregnancy, Shunkan is left behind, ostensibly due to Kiyomori's particular ire at him, but also because the others engaged in religious practices at the site of exile that Shunkan eschewed. He lingers long enough to meet with a former acolyte who has come searching for him. The acolyte finds Shunkan starving on the beach and stays with him for his final days. The acolyte then cremates the body and carries it back to the mainland for proper interment at the Buddhist temple complex at Mt. Koya. Shortly thereafter, Kiyomori dies, and the war begins in earnest. In the tale, this narrative strand is an important example of Kiyomori's capricious rule and excessive cruelty that also emphasizes the importance of Buddhist practice (Shunkan's interment at Mt. Koya) in quieting the wrath of angry spirits.

The first dramatization of the Shunkan story is the *nob Shunkan*. The playwright is unknown, but the play dates from the early fifteenth century and was probably written during the lifetime of Zeami (ca. 1363-ca. 1443), credited as *noh*'s founder.⁴ Shunkan remains in the active *nob* repertoire today. Although *noh* is most famous for its *mugen* 夢幻 or 'dream' plays, which are highly symbolic and center on ghosts, Shunkan is an example of a *genzai* 現在 or 'real time' *nob*, a more theatrical variety, populated with characters who are living beings enacting stories in real time. Like many other *genzai* plays, the plot is more complex and the roles less generic than in *mugen* plays, which always feature placation of a ghost. The play follows closely a set of episodes from Book Two of the *Tale of the Heike* describing the exiles' life on Devil Island and concluding with the pardon of Shunkan's companions and their abandonment of him as they return by boat to the capital. *Shunkan* is comprised of two acts. A very short first act takes place in the capital, and the second, much longer one on Devil Island. The highlight of the play is the sailing away

⁴ Although historically attributed to Zeami, scholars doubt this assertion; qualities suggesting that the playwright might be Motomasa or Zenchiku are not sufficient for definitive identification (YAMASHITA 2006: 177). However, the play is mentioned by Zenchiku in *Kabuzuinōki*, confirming its early composition (SANARI 1964: 1421).

of the boat – a simple frame made of bamboo and reminiscent of the outline of a skiff – which has come to retrieve the two other exiles, Naritsune and Yasuyori, as Shunkan begs not to be left behind.

The Heike on the Isle of Women's five acts provide a highly elaborated (and further fictionalized) version of Shunkan's story. It opens with the despot Kiyomori, having uncovered the plot to depose him, exiling Shunkan and his co-conspirators. Kiyomori then mistreats Shunkan's wife and has her killed for rebuffing his sexual advances; the exiles suffer on the distant Devil Island; the other two exiles are forgiven and return toward the capital; they encounter Kiyomori, who causes more suffering; and the play ends with signs that Kiyomori's days are numbered. As with many early modern adaptations, *The Heike and the Isle of Women* includes numerous fabricated situations and exciting plot twists while retaining sufficient threads of the original to make the story recognizable, and it shifts scenes from the capital city to Devil Island to locations along the sea route between the two. Like most successful puppet plays, less than a year after first appearing on the puppet stage, *The Heike and the Isle of Women* was staged as a kabuki play at the Naka no shibai theatre in Osaka.⁵ In 1759, a performance of the role of Shunkan by kabuki virtuoso Ichikawa Danzō III was so well-received that *Shunkan on Devil Island* began to be staged as an independent piece on both the puppet and kabuki stages.⁶ As many full plays would require an entire day to perform, such reductions were fairly routine and became the basis for current productions. Today, *Shunkan on Devil Island* – essentially the scene that is an elaboration of the noh play – is the only part of the original play performed in the puppet repertoire, although some parts of the longer play are still considered part of the active kabuki repertoire.

Chikamatsu wrote *Shunkan on Devil Island* during a time of political stability, a growth in urban culture, and tight social controls: the Tokugawa shogunate had set up its headquarters in Edo (present-day Tokyo) at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Its policies had led to increased population in Edo and Osaka and the concomitant rise in merchant and artisan populations with disposable income and an interest in theatre. At

⁵ WATANABE 1999: 190.

⁶ LEITNER 1998: 418-419.

the same time, the social structure was codified into a four-tiered system, with samurai at the top and merchants and other urbanites at or near the bottom. Rules restricted movement and social behavior, particularly for non-samurai, and censorship was a constant obstacle for artists creating in many spheres, including theatre.

By Chikamatsu's day, the twin arts of puppet theatre and kabuki were thriving both in Osaka, where Chikamatsu worked and the puppet theatre emerged, and Edo.⁷ Because the puppet theater grew from storytelling traditions, unlike kabuki, it maintained a form in which a chanter, the *gidayū* 義太夫, performs all the narration and dialogue, and is accompanied by a shamisen player. Also, in contrast to kabuki, in which actors deliver dialogue, the *gidayū* is responsible for differentiating characters through varied vocalizations, and plays a role more akin to that of the *biwa hōshi* of the recitational tradition of the *Tale of the Heike*. Traditionally, all performers – puppeteers, *gidayū*, and shamisen players – were men, as was true of the *biwa hōshi* and noh actors before them.

2. KIKAIHASHIMA IN *TALE OF THE HEIKE* AND *SHUNKAN*

Although the arc of Shunkan's story spans numerous episodes in the *Tale of the Heike*, its most famous part is the description of the exiles' lives on Devil Island and the agonizing abandonment of Shunkan after the other two are pardoned. The 'Devil Island exiles' narrative is but one example of many unjust banishments Kiyomori orders at the beginning of the tale. The dispersal of legitimate power to peripheral sites of exile at the tale's beginning additionally serves as the basis for the rise from exile of Minamoto Yoritomo, who will defeat Kiyomori's clan in the war and establish his shogunate – Japan's first – near his place of exile, a move that bifurcated the government and marks the rise of the warrior class. The trope of exile is thus central to the work, and the story of the 'Devil Island exiles' is the first indication that the site of exile could also be a source of power for Kiyomori's enemies.

⁷ UNESCO's presentation of *bunraku* in the representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, 2008, includes a short video clip of the art; the first minute and a half of which depict a performance of *Shunkan on Devil Island* <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEUQNvn8EJQ>>. Accessed April 30, 2023.

One remarkable feature of this part of the narrative is the attention to the character of the landscape of Devil Island, the space of banishment.⁸ Described as a volcanic island lying to the south of Kyushu, the southernmost of the main Japanese islands, it lies far beyond the usual sites of exile and at a distance that renders it essentially imaginary: it is at the border of the commonly known world. And in the tale, it is utterly alien, populated with people whose language is unintelligible and whose appearance is not quite human:

[The residents] are dark, ox-like, and very hairy, and they do not understand human speech.
The men wear no *ebashi* hat; the women do not let their hair hang loose.
Going unclothed as they do, they little resemble people.
Having no food, they think only of slaughtering living beings.
The peasants till no hillside paddies,
And so it is that they have no rice;
Since they lack mulberry trees and leaves,
They have nothing resembling silk.
A peak at the center of the island
smolders with everlasting fire,
And stuff called 'sulfur' lies everywhere;
Some even call this 'Sulfur Island'.
Above, thunder constantly crashes and booms.
Below, it just rains and rains.
No not for one miserable moment
Does human life seem possible here.⁹

This description underlines the kinds of distances from the capital at which Devil Island lies: linguistically, culturally, and physically, the residents are alien and frightening to the exiles. Scholars also note that this fiery vision of the volcano resembles depictions of Buddhist hell-realms, many of which depict the dead suffering various tortures, for example, being engulfed in flames, starving, or drowning. The name given the island reflects this – it is Kikaigashima 鬼界島, the island of demons. Thus the place of exile is like that most

⁸ Book Two, episodes 10, 15, and 16 (TYLER 2012: 106-110; 118-125).

⁹ Ivi: 106.

alienating exilic destination, hell. Its residents, moreover, are described as beasts: they look like oxen, they are hairy, they hunt, and their language sounds more like bird calls than human speech: this characterization suggests another of the Buddhist lower realms, that of beasts. The men seem definitively to have been expelled from not just the capital, but also the human world.

The response of Yasuyori and Naritsune, however, is to reimagine the space as something holy: they «wanted at all costs to enshrine the three Kumano deities on the island so as to pray that they might return to the capital».¹⁰ Their practice within the tale reflects the actual historical significance of the Kumano shrines in the late twelfth century. The Kumano deities were enshrined at Kumano, a complex of three holy sites spread over the mountainous interior and eastern shore of the Kii peninsula. These three shrines formed one of the most important and prestigious pilgrimage circuits during Japan's classical age and beyond.¹¹ From the eleventh century in particular, members of the royal family and high-ranking aristocrats made frequent trips there, which helped to develop Kumano's status as a socio-political node of power. The deepening of Buddhism's roots in Japan during this period, particularly among the high aristocracy, also led to the conjoining of Buddhist and native deities, including those traditionally revered at Kumano. As a result, Buddhist cosmologies were mapped onto the actual landscape of the Kumano pilgrimage routes. As Max Moerman notes, as Buddhist deities became identified with those native to the sacred spaces within the Kumano region, the paradises associated with individual Buddhist deities were simultaneously inscribed on the spaces of Kumano, rendering it:

... a place where native and Buddhist cosmologies, one locative and the other utopian, converged. The mountains of Kumano contained a multiplicity of other worlds: the homelands of an ancestral past and the celestial paradises of Buddhist rebirth.¹²

Thus, the idea of a polyvalent landscape was associated with Kumano from very early on.

¹⁰ Ivi: 118.

¹¹ MOERMAN 2005: 1.

¹² *Ibidem*.

In their efforts to recreate a Kumano pilgrimage route, Naritsune and Yasuyori transport that polyvalence to Devil Island by naming certain features of the landscape after similar sites in the Kumano region, as they travel from one to the next as if they were on the pilgrimage route. The narrator remarks:

They could not change to new pilgrim robes,
Since they had none. They dressed in hemp
And for their ablutions drew from a swale,
Water that in their minds they drew
From the pristine Iwada River.
Whatever height they chance to climb
In their minds was the Hosshin Gate,
And on each of their pilgrimages
Yasuyori pronounced a prayer.¹³

Yasuyori and Naritsune thus circumambulate the island, converting the land from hellscape to sacred space. In the process, they effectively transform their dead-end journey of expulsion into one of pilgrimage, that circular, profitable kind of movement, one that embraces at least the hope of a return home.¹⁴

Within the *Tale of the Heike*, the making familiar of Devil Island as a mini-Kumano resonates with the treatment of other provincial locales. As provincial residents and formally or informally exiled political players become more prominent, the spaces they inhabit become meaningful in new ways that complicate the exile motif – here, two unjustly banished men imbue such a space with the numinous power of Kumano and leverage that to effect their return. This early extended narrative that transforms the peripheral into the powerfully sacred is the narrative's first hint at how ideas about exilic spaces will be altered in the war tale.¹⁵ The space of exile reconfigured as a place of numinous power is fundamental in the tale's depiction of Devil Island and to the narrative of the exiles as a whole:

¹³ TYLER 2012: 119.

¹⁴ BIALOCK 2007: 256.

¹⁵ The transformation of the exilic trope in the *Tale of the Heike* is considered in OYLER 2006, especially Chapter 5.

they reimagine a world in which they are able to call on the Kumano deities, and those deities eventually respond by moving Kiyomori to release them. Shunkan's abandonment reflects his unwillingness to participate in the other men's perigrinations, and only comes to a conclusion when his remains are carried back to Mt. Koya for burial. Thus one important feature of the Heike narrative of Shunkan's fate is the religious revisioning of Kikaigashima, which is ultimately concluded with the return of Shunkan's remains to one of the most important Buddhist sites in the realm.

This characterization of Devil Island is replicated in the *noh Shunkan*, a work that cleaves closely to the *Tale of the Heike* narrative, with an emphasis on Naritune and Yasuyori's reinscribing of Kumano on Devil Island. Their piety, and Shunkan's choice not to join them on their pilgrimage, is marked from the start. The first dramatic highlight of the play is Shunkan's examination of the letter of pardon, on which his name cannot be found. The two others leave, promising to plead his case once they arrive in the capital. As the boat departs, Shunkan clings to the ropes used to moor it, creating a second dramatic climax as he is abandoned as the boat disappears in the offing. Shunkan stages the *Tale of the Heike* story faithfully, adding to it the visual poignancy of witnessing Shunkan search the letter of pardon for his name, and then be left utterly alone as the others depart Devil Island. Although the portrayal of religious reinscription of the space persists, this dramatic rendering concludes with the abject Shunkan alone on the island, a haunting image that is replicated in both the puppet play and later versions of his story.¹⁶

3. THE *SHUNKAN ON DEVIL ISLAND* SCENE FROM *THE HEIKE AND THE ISLAND OF WOMEN*

In Chikamatsu's hands, the story of the Devil Island exiles becomes wildly more dramatic through the addition of characters and subplots wholly absent from the *Tale of the Heike*, a transformation well in keeping with the orientation of the early modern puppet theatre, patronized by urbanites in Osaka and Edo. One important alteration is the introduction

¹⁶ WATANABE 1999: 198.

of a female character on Devil Island: Chidori, a native of Devil Island, and an attractive young woman who becomes the love interest of Naritsune.¹⁷ Her prominence, and the introduction of a domestic arrangement (which substantially overshadows the religious one of the earlier works), shifts the social geography of the story and in so doing points to reimagining the meaning of exile for a world in which being part of society meant occupying a defined place within a stratified social hierarchy.

Chidori first appears in the play as a pliant and attractive young woman who has charmed Naritsune, the youngest and most politically prominent of the three exiles. They have ‘married’, and when the wicked envoy Senoo bearing news of the pardon arrives, Naritsune plans to take Chidori home with him. In this version, all three men are pardoned through an earlier plot twist – Kiyomori’s upright son, Shigemori, has arranged a partial pardon for Shunkan and transmitted it through Tazaemon, an equally upright member of Senoo’s party. Conflict derives from Senoo’s unwillingness to bring a fourth passenger back to the capital, and the plot thickens when Shunkan learns that his beloved wife Azumaya has been killed for rebuffing the sexual advances of Kiyomori. The play concludes with Shunkan, having slain the envoy and thus given cause for Shigemori’s pardon to be revoked, staying on the island as the rest head toward the capital.

The landscape in *Shunkan on Devil Island* is at once that familiar from *Tale of the Heike* and a different and less hostile one. The play opens with a brief description of Devil Island as «a place where demons live. It is indeed a hell on earth», a nod to the *Tale of the Heike* description.¹⁸ On stage, however, it is rather reminiscent of other lonely shorelines familiar from Japanese poetry and narrative: the set depicts a rocky shore, with the sea stretched out beside and behind it. There is no visual evidence of sulphureous vapors or other hellish vistas, but such empty strands conventionally evoke separation from the socio-political center and the civilization it represents – usually because a good man has been unjustly exiled.¹⁹

¹⁷ This character is likely built on the mention of a dalliance of Naritsune in *Genpei jōsuiki*, an expanded, late-medieval variant of *The Tale of the Heike*. Although only mentioned in passing in that work, it is most likely the seed for Chikamatsu’s reimagining of the story (ENOMOTO 1980: 27; and MASAKI 2005).

¹⁸ LEITNER 1998 1998: 420; SNKBZ 2000: 483.

¹⁹ This represents a more extreme poeticization of landscape in theatre that began in Zeami’s *noh* (BRAZELL 1997).

The act opens with Shunkan alone on the empty shore. Naritsune and Yasuyori arrive after having been gone for several days on their circumambulation of the (imagined) Kumano shrines. However, on this visit, they also bring Chidori, whom they introduce to Shunkan as Naritsune's wife, a figure who recasts the relationships among the group as, quite literally, familiar. She not only genuinely loves Naritsune but says, «I pray that my husband's good friend Yasuyori will be my elder brother and that Lord Shunkan will act as my father. I will be a most devoted daughter and sister in return».²⁰ This new configuration is the first notable result of their peregrinations.

Chidori does not appear immediately on stage; instead, Naritsune invites Shunkan and the audience to imagine her:

The girl I love is named Chidori. She is the daughter of a Kiri Island fisherman and works on the beach wearing a sea-stained robe, gathering in the salt water and drying it for its salt. When the tide is right, she reveals her lovely body as she takes a bucket and scythe and plunges into the bottomless depths to gather many kinds of seaweed, too busy even to keep her hair back with a boxwood comb.²¹

The introduction of Chidori transforms the hellscape to a more familiar, pastoral one – this Devil Island is peopled not by ox-like creatures, but by a young woman with a 'lovely body'. For a culturally clued-in audience, this type of scene is also familiar from poetry and narrative specifically linked to exile, and particularly the exile in Suma of several historical and fictional men, most prominently the hero of the *Tale of Genji*. The play integrates a series of poetically codified *engo* 縁語 (associative words) to activate this pastoralization. For example, Chidori's name means plover, and refers to a bird whose plaintive call echoes that of the exiled men on the shore. Moreover, she is a saltmaker and a diving girl (*ama* 海人), whose (always implied) sensuality is given special attention here:

²⁰ LEITNER 1998 424; SNKBZ 486.

²¹ LEITNER 1998: 423; SNKBZ 485-486.

Naritsune describes her revealing her body as she prepares to dive into the sea. Learning of Naritsune's beloved, Shunkan, in fact, notes, «It reminds me of the love affair of the fabled Prince Yukihira, who fell in love with a fishergirl at Suma Beach». ²² Yukihira's story is recounted in a poem he purportedly wrote in exile at the seaside location of Suma. His poem is also the basis for one of the best-loved noh plays, *Matsukaze*. The narrative is further rendered familiar by Chidori's not-so-alien behaviors: to Naritsune's ear, her language is «a charming island accent» (*Satsuma namari* 薩摩なまり). Naritsune thus situates her dialect as akin to that of Satsuma, the southernmost province of Kyushu, further drawing her (and therefore Devil Island) within much less alien linguistic terrain. Moreover, her demeanor is «just like that of a woman from the capital». ²³ Chidori's appearance reinforces this characterization:

Her beauty is such that,
Though she be clad in rags,
It were as if her garments
Were of silk and silver threads.
Why in the world was she born
A lowly diving girl?²⁴

The puppet head and costume used for Chidori reinforce her legibility as a lovely young woman – the head is the one used for other young, innocent, beautiful women of any class, and her clothing, while simple, is the common dress for a woman of humble means. Everything about her appearance codes her in familiar ways as a beautiful, if lowly, young woman worthy of the attention of an aristocrat in exile. Shunkan notes:

I know that you wish me to act as your father from this day forward. [...] Since we are to be parent and child, from now on you are my daughter. If pardon were to be granted to us, we

²² LEITNER 1998: 423; SNKBZ 2000: 485.

²³ LEITNER 1998: 423-424; SNKBZ 2000: 487

²⁴ LEITNER 1998: 424; SNKBZ 2000: 487. Leitner has here “maker of salt” for ama; the term embraces this occupation but more specifically refers to diving for seaweed and is translated as “diving girl” earlier, so I have slightly modified the translation here for consistency.

four would return to the capital together; you would be acknowledged as the wife of Naritsune ... and would wear long, trailing scarlet hakama skirts, like any other noblewoman.²⁵

Chidori responds demurely, but notes that «if a lowly saltmaker like me were to wear long Scarlet skirts, she would surely be punished», a reminder that it is the setting that permits the group to imagine a community in which they constitute a family.²⁶

Their status as a family is celebrated in an ensuing wedding ceremony, one in which each aspect requires a leap of imagination. Although there is no wine for the celebration, Chidori suggests that they imitate the sacred hermit of China who «lived for seven hundred years by drinking water in which chrysanthemums were floated».²⁷ This reference evokes the famous story about a figure known in Japan as Kikujidō, an exile from the court who became a hermit and lived for hundreds of years because he drank water from a mountain stream fed by the magical dew fallen from chrysanthemums in a hidden valley.²⁸ Chidori goes on to say, «We should [...] drink fresh water from an island stream as if it were wine. This abalone shell will serve as a winecup». Each character takes his or her proper place, and, through wishful imagination, together they transform the rocky strand into a banquet hall where the abalone shell becomes «a cup of lapis lazuli as they pretend to be drinking wine».²⁹

The wedding ceremony and the domestic arrangement it authorizes are yet another reimagining of the space of Devil Island. Yasuyori and Naritsune evoke Kumano through their tracing of a pilgrimage route, turning the land holy, and now Chidori invites the group to imagine themselves in Kikujidō's place, so that the water they drink seems to be wine. Like the exiles' Kumano pilgrimage, Chidori's revisioning turns hostile space into familiar, welcoming space. But whereas the exiles impose the familiar on

²⁵ LEITNER 1998: 424-425; SNKBZ 2000: 487.

²⁶ LEITNER 1998: 425; SNKBZ 2000: 488.

²⁷ LEITNER 1998: 425; SNKBZ 2000: 488.

²⁸ The "chrysanthemum dew" story of Kikujidō is also the basis for plays in both noh and kabuki. Through this story, the chrysanthemum is associated with longevity, and is the central image for the Chrysanthemum Festival (*Chōyō no sekku*), one of the five *seasonal festivals celebrated in pre-modern Japan* originally brought from China. For discussions of the festivals see SHIRANE 2012, esp. 159-160.

²⁹ LEITNER 1998: 426; SNKBZ 2000: 488.

the alien, Chidori willfully creates a domestic utopia where the exiles become her family. Hers is a greater act of wishful thinking, one that creates the imaginary situation in which she could be wife to Naritsune and daughter-in-law to Shunkan. This scenario also emphasizes Shunkan's own domestic and romantic dimensions: he understands the ardor of the young lovers because he, too, knows romantic love.³⁰

In Chikamatsu's play, Devil Island thus becomes a place of domestic harmony, and one that pointedly transgresses class boundaries. Despite her charms, Chidori is a peasant girl, and it is purely their exilic status that allows her to be acknowledged by the aristocratic men as a wife. As she points out, she would be prohibited from dressing as an aristocrat in the capital. It is only because they are on an island they can reimagine as a utopian space that the creation of this family is possible. The "outside" location of Devil Island enables a kind of social movement that was not available in everyday society for either people of Shunkan's day or for the early modern spectators of Chikamatsu's play.

The scene of the wedding celebration is interrupted by the approach of a boat bearing Kiyomori's henchman Senoo from the capital. The appearance of the envoy disrupts this newly imagined world by calling two of the exiles back to the capital, thus reinstating the boundary between homeland and exile, aristocrat and peasant, reality and imagination. He says he has come to take only Naritsune and Yasuyori back; Shunkan's name is not on the pardon he carries. After Shunkan examines the pardon futilely searching for his name, Tanzaemon finally reveals Shigemori's letter allowing Shunkan to return part way to the capital. All four then attempt to board the boat, believing their imagined family unit can be transported off the island. As they board, however, Chidori is stopped by the cruel envoy, Senoo, who says she is «not fit to board this boat» and calls her a «filthy creature».³¹ As the villain, he is quick to reinstate the kind of order that, as Chidori noted earlier, would prevent someone like her from being in the company of someone like Naritsune. Senoo, moreover, taunts the exiles as they beg for Chidori to be brought along, aiming his derision most pointedly at Shunkan, to whom he reveals that Shunkan's

³⁰ ENOMOTO 1980: 27.

³¹ LEITNER 1998: 431; SNKBZ 2000: 491.

wife has died rather than succumb to Kiyomori's advances. Senoo's escalating viciousness leads to the dramatic highlight of the act, Chidori's lament:

A samurai is said to know the meaning of compassion.
It is a lie! It is a falsehood!
There are no devils on Devil Island
The devils are all in the capital.
From the very day we first exchanged vows
Wishing a letter of pardon from Kyoto
I worshipped the sun and the moon
And fervently prayed to the dragon god
Not because I wanted
To return with my husband to the capital
To live a life of splendor
But because I wanted to sleep
With him there at least one night....
You evil devil! You fiend! Will one girl make your flimsy boat too heavy? Have you no eyes
to see the misery of others? ...³²

Chidori's despair is aimed at the imposition of conventional social mores, made here more oppressive by Senoo's cruelty. She pointedly singles out samurai as her tormenters. This accusation would have resonated with early modern viewers, for whom 'samurai' as an official class was defined against the other classes beneath it: saltmakers and divers, but also performers, merchants, and the majority of the cast and audience for *ningyō jōruri*. Chidori further asserts that it is love for Naritsune that drives her desire to return with him to the capital, not desire 'to live a life of splendor'.

When Senoo still forbids Chidori from boarding the boat, Shunkan, bereft in the knowledge that his wife has died, offers Chidori his place on the boat, but Senoo will not permit this exchange, and proceeds to insult, kick, and trample the two. In desperation, Shunkan appropriates Senoo's sword and strikes him with it. When Chidori attempts to assist Shunkan, he forbids her to help him, realizing that she must remain blameless if

³² LEITNER 1998: 433-434; SNKBZ 2000: 492-493.

she is to board the boat. Although Tazaemon urges Shunkan not to deal the final blow to Senoo, Shunkan strikes again, clearing the way for Chidori to replace him on the boat.

Tazaemon's entreaties to Shunkan are grounded in his concern with various kinds of order: he has been instructed to bring back three exiles; Shunkan's crime against Senoo does not respect the goodwill of Shigemori, who sought to release him; and the amnesty that freed the men was intended to serve as karmic insurance for the safe delivery of the pregnant empress, Kiyomori's daughter. Shunkan counters that by including Chidori in their number, the boat will hold the requisite number of three returnees and therefore be permitted to pass through the checkpoints along the way to the capital. His offense in killing Senoo negates Shigemori's clemency. And by leaving Shunkan behind, Tazaemon will have discharged his duty fully.

Although Chidori insists that she should be the one to stay behind, Shunkan mounts an argument that now transforms Devil Island even further:

I have already passed through the three evil hells – the hell of hunger, the hell of battle – as you've just seen – and the hell of brimstone, which is always being burned on this island. I will surely be given salvation in the next world. The boat on which Shunkan will ride will be Buddha's noble craft bringing me to the shores of enlightenment. I have no desire to take a boat back to the floating world.³³

Shunkan thus returns Devil Island to its original state, a hellscape, but one through which he can envision himself moving in a sort of productive pilgrimage toward enlightenment: his description of his journey through hell to reach Buddhist truth echoes the ending of the *Tale of the Heike*, in which the empress mentioned above, the sole survivor of her clan, describes her own fate in similar terms. Whereas Shunkan did not join his companions on their Kumano pilgrimages, he follows them in seeing his life on Devil Island as a pilgrimage that might bring release, if only in the afterlife. He chooses to forego the envoy's boat – representing return and reintegration into the social and political order – in anticipation of the Buddha's, destined for yet another imaginary realm where the social and political order that has caused him so much grief cannot intrude as the envoy has.

³³ LEITNER 1998: 439; SNKBZ 2000: 497.

The play ends with Shunkan, standing alone on a hillock, watching the boat disappear in the offing:

He climbs to the highest point on the shore
And, waving, stretches his frame
As tall as he can,
Then breaks down, weeping,
In the pure white sand.
Though he burns with longing
And shouts with despair,
Not a soul is there to comfort him.
Only the cries of the gulls
And the wild geese flying overhead
Answer his lonely calls.
His only friends are the Chidori,
Which he lures to his side.
The tide rushes in to cut him off from those
Who have left him behind.³⁴

He has become one with the island as the Chidori who was his daughter disappears in the boat and the plovers (Chidori) replace her as his companions.

What is Devil Island, then, for the early modern audience? On one level, it is a fantasy pastoral realm, where a domestic, happily ordered – if patently invented – ‘family’ can exist. It lies outside the realm, beyond the reach of the exacting class structure, and it represents freedom from such restrictions: the religious utopia that is created in the *Tale of the Heike* and *Shunkan* becomes a domestic utopia in Chikamatsu’s hands. It is a space that the exiles make familiar by replicating the categories of society, a place where such replication allows them to imagine reintegration – and for a brief moment their wishing seems to turn that desire into reality, as a boat does come to retrieve them. When it becomes clear that not all of them will be permitted to return, Shunkan clings to the

³⁴ LEITNER 1998: 440-441; SNKBZ 2000: 497. The UNESCO video clip referenced earlier presents a portion of this scene, including the dramatic spinning of the center part of the stage holding the hillock from which Shunkan watches the boat depart.

imagined role of father he has assumed. This is a role he can embrace at this moment only because his actual family in the capital no longer exists.

Whereas in the *Tale of the Heike* these exiles represent Kiyomori's unjust manipulation in the political sphere, in *Shunkan on Devil Island* they demonstrate instead his cruelty in the social sphere. By insisting that Chidori take his place, Shunkan embraces a familial role that Kiyomori has taken from him, which makes the final scene especially poignant. He remains out of self-sacrifice, wholly embracing the ideal of a family of equals, where his sacrifice as the patriarch will ensure the reintegration into society of those under his care.

In the end, Shunkan's sacrifice comes to naught – in a later act, Chidori is killed before she reaches the capital, thus breaking up the 'family'. In part this is a twist typical of historical plays both in Chikamatsu's oeuvre and in early modern theatre more generally: righteous characters die or are killed to heighten drama. But it also reflects concerns more common to domestic plays of the time: the harmonious 'family' can only exist in the exilic space of Devil Island. So as Shunkan embraces his fate, not only his companions but also their imagined world slips away, to be replaced by the alien, frightening, and lonely strand as he watches the boat depart, his only hope the belief that his suffering will lead to his release in the afterlife.

In the milieu of early modern theater, where self-sacrifice was celebrated in increasingly theatrical acts, the quiet solitude of Shunkan at the end of this play is especially heart-wrenching, as it accentuates his loss of community and specifically family. His plight certainly resonated with the urban audiences of Chikamatsu's plays, for whom Shunkan and his compatriots' everyday desires to create community and celebrate friendship were more compelling than the religiously inflected represented in medieval versions of the Shunkan story.³⁵ Chikamatsu's reworking of the familiar plot shifts the register of the play to focus on the hopes and fears of characters in a utopian community situated on Devil Island, a place that, like the stage on which it was performed, represented a momentary escape from the strictures and obligations of everyday life, even as it ultimately also stressed the imaginary nature of the world created there.

³⁵ ENOMOTO 1980: 29-30.

REFERENCES

PRIMARY SOURCES

- LEITNER 1998 = Samuel T. Leitner (tr.), *Shunkan on Devil Island*, in *Traditional Japanese Theater: an anthology of plays*, ed. by Karen Brazell, New York, Columbia University Press, 1998.
- SANARI 1964 = Sanari Kentarō (ed.), *Yōkyoku taikan* ('Collection of nob texts'), vol. 3., Tokyo, Meiji shoin, 1964.
- SNKBZ 2000 = *Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* ('Collected Works of Classical Japanese Literature'), Tokyo, Shogakkan, 2000.
- TYLER 2012 = Royall Tyler (tr.), *The Tale of the Heike*, New York, Viking, 2012.

SECONDARY SOURCES

- BIALOCK 2007 = David T. Bialock, *Eccentric Spaces, Hidden Histories: narrative, ritual, and royal authority from The Chronicles of Japan to The Tale of the Heike*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2007.
- BRAZELL 1997 = Karen Brazell, *Subversive Transformations: Atsumori and Tadanori at Suma*, in *Currents in Japanese Culture. Translations and Transformations*, ed. by Amy Vladeck Heinrich, New York, Columbia University Press, 1997, 35-52.
- BRAZELL 1998 = Karen Brazell (ed.), *Traditional Japanese Theater: an anthology of plays*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1998.
- ENOMOTO 1980 = Enomoto Shigeo, *Chikamatsu no Shunkan zō*, in «Kokubun kenkyū» 26, (1980), 24-30.
- MASAKI 2005 = Masaki Yumi, *Chikamatsu no Shunkan zō to Genpei jōsuiki*, in «Joshi dai kokubun», 137 (2005), 73-89.
- MOERMAN 2005 = D. Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise: Kumano pilgrimage and the religious landscape of premodern Japan*, London, Brill, 2005.

OYLER 2006 = Elizabeth Oyler, *Swords, Oaths, and Prophetic Visions: authoring warrior rule in medieval Japan*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2006.

SHIRANE 2012 = Haruo Shirane, *Japan and the Culture of the Four Seasons: Nature, Literature, and the Arts*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2012.

WATANABE 1999 = Watanabe Tamotsu, *Shunkan zo no bensen: Heike monogatari kara, nō, ningyō jōruri, kabuki, Kurata Hyakuzō Shunkan made*, in «Engekigaku ronshū», 37 (1999), 181-202.

YAMASHITA 2006 = Yamashita Hiroaki, *Biwa hōshi no Heike monogatari to nō* ('The Biwa hōshi's "Tale of the Heike" and Noh'), Tokyo, Hanawa shobō, 2006.

RAMAYANA AND ANIMISM IN *WAYANG* PUPPET THEATRE

Matthew Isaac Cohen
University of Connecticut

ABSTRACT: Traditions of *wayang* puppetry in Indonesia realize what Philippe Descola refers to as an «animist ontology». Not only human figures, but also what Tim Ingold calls «nonhuman persons», including personal possessions, landforms, and animals, possess consciousness and interiority. Among *wayang*'s diverse story sources, the Ramayana stands out for its animistic qualities. Episodes depict interactions between humans, ogres, monkeys, deities, and other nonhuman persons, activating the potential of the medium for representing transformation and theatrically mining the suspension of natural laws. This essay, based on ongoing research into the *wayang* collection of Yale University Art Gallery, examines how the characters of the Ramayana reflect shifting theatrical styles and animistic beliefs. Analysis of these historical puppets is followed by an exploration of an experimental 2023 Ramayana production originated at the University of Connecticut hybridizing *wayang* with the *tholpavakoothu* shadow puppet tradition of Kerala, India, in which the epic is retold from the perspective of the trees and wood inhabiting it.

KEY-WORDS: Ramayana, *wayang*, animism, *tholpavakoothu*, Indonesia, puppets

RIASSUNTO: Le tradizioni delle marionette *wayang* in Indonesia realizzano quella che Philippe Descola definisce come una «animist ontology». Non solo gli esseri umani, ma anche quelle a cui Tim Ingold si riferisce come «persone non umane», compresi gli oggetti, i territori geografici, e gli animali, possiedono coscienza e interiorità. Il Ramayana si distingue tra le diverse fonti narrative del *wayang* per le sue qualità animistiche. Gli episodi descrivono interazioni tra umani, orchi, scimmie, divinità e altre persone non umane, sfruttando la capacità delle marionette di rappresentare la trasformazione ed esplorando teatralmente la sospensione delle leggi naturali. Questo saggio, basato sulla ricerca in corso sulla collezione *wayang* della Yale University Art Gallery, esamina come i personaggi del Ramayana riflettono i mutevoli stili teatrali e le credenze animistiche. L'analisi di queste marionette storiche è seguita dall'esplorazione di una produzione sperimentale ispirata



al Ramayana del 2023 realizzata presso l'Università del Connecticut, che ibrida il *wayang* con la tradizione delle marionette ombra *tholpavakoothu* del Kerala, in India, in cui l'epopea viene raccontata dalla prospettiva degli alberi e dei boschi che lo popolano.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Ramayana, *wayang*, animismo, Indonesia, marionette

Anthropology in recent decades has made strides in «reclaiming» the concept of animism from the dustbins of evolutionary anthropology.¹ Nineteenth-century European anthropologists, starting with Sir Edward Tylor, considered the belief that objects and animals might have a soul and that life pervades all of nature as an «epistemological failure».² In contrast, many anthropologists today, in line with object-oriented-ontology, actor-network-theory, and other theoretical positions that recognize the importance of granting agency to things other than human beings, see an animist worldview as not just a feature of “primitive religion” but as a strategy for achieving reciprocity between the human and non-human world. For the French anthropologist Philippe Descola, animism is «a kind of objectification of nature [which] endows natural beings not only with human dispositions, granting them the status of persons with human emotions and often the ability to talk, but also with social attributes – a hierarchy of positions, behaviours based on kinship, respect for certain norms of conduct».³ Just as in some legal systems a natural entity such as a river can be recognized as a judicial person in order to protect it against pollution or other forms of degradation, the attribution of feelings and responses to non-humans is not a «pathetic fallacy» but rather a step towards the full recognition of interdependence with the natural world.

In this essay, I propose to consider *wayang*, a raft of puppet theaters and related performance forms originating in the Southeast Asian nation of Indonesia, as a form of animist theatre. While performed in Indonesia by and for Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists,

¹ STENGERS 2012.

² BIRD-DAVID 1999.

³ Descola qtd. INGOLD 2000:106.

and Christians, *wayang* plays present essentially an «animist ontology», braiding entertainment and ritual efficacy.⁴ Performances are occasioned by communal celebrations and rites of passages such as planting and harvest festivities, commemoration of ancestors, tooth filings, circumcisions, weddings, birthdays, thanksgiving for fishing, exorcism, completion of building projects, release from vows, pregnancy rites, and rites honoring the first time a baby sets foot on the ground or has a haircut. Performances aim to propitiate spirits, venerate ancestors, retell myths and legends, visualize the demonic and the divine, and remind audiences of their ethical duties, behavioral norms, and spiritual values. As vehicles for summoning unseen forces, the puppets themselves are sacred. The puppet, as what performance theorist Joe Roach calls an «effigy», summons through a process of «surrogation» historical or mythical figures at a remove. The *kayon*, a tree of life figure that opens and closes performances and acts as an all-purpose stage property, is an *axis mundi*, a representation of passage from the chthonic and demonic domain, through the middle world of humans, up to the celestial plane.

This does not imply that performing *wayang* should be equated with the worship of nature spirits. These beings – such as Dewi Sri, the rice goddess – do appear in *wayang* plays, but they are generally not revered as deities.⁵ Rather, for many Javanese Muslim puppeteers, for example, they are invoked as natural symbols in the service of collective well-being. As one senior puppeteer explained it to me, the ritual drama of *Mapag Sri* ('Greeting Sri') which concerns the rice goddess Sri and the origins of agriculture, sponsored annually by agricultural villages in the Cirebon region of West Java, is a collective search for «goodness, a search for purity, a search for God's blessings. For *mapag* means 'to follow', while *sri* is 'purity'. So with *Mapag Sri* the symbolic goal is for us, as God's creations, to strive for goodness, for peace, for happiness, for salvation».⁶

But in *wayang* mythology, Sri is not only a symbol for the good, she is also a particular kind of being, a *dewi* or *bathari*, who in *wayang* enters into dialogue with other

⁴ Cfr. DESCOLA 2013: 129-143.

⁵ Even in Bali, a majority Hindu island, the gods and nature spirits are prone to faults.

⁶ Interview with Sukarta at his home in Bongas, Majalengka on 25 June 2019: «kebecikan, nggayuh kealusan, nggayuh ridhoeng Pengeran. Mapag – nusul, Sri iku alus. Dados Mapag Sri ku tujuane sih dados, 'ayulah, kula sageda makhlukeng Pangeran, ayo nggayuh kebecikan, mamrih keslametan, mamrih kebegjan, mamrih kerahyuan,' simbolnya seperti itu».

beings, human and non-human alike. The classical *wayang kulit* theatre of Java has been famously analyzed by Ben Anderson as a vehicle for inculcating tolerance and recognizing the value of different modes of behavior and associated character types in Javanese society.⁷ But *wayang* as a representational system encompasses a far wider gamut of beings – representing not only human figures from the prenatal stages to the moment of death, but also what Tim Ingold calls «nonhuman persons».⁸ Gods, ogres, demons, and a variety of spirits feature prominently in many plays, and a whole menagerie of chimerical animals and mythical beasts populate *wayang* plays. Such non-human persons, from humanoids and animals to weapons and even mountains, can be depicted as possessing consciousness and interiority. Owners can have conversations with their weapons, who can act as their envoys or surrogates in some cases. Kresna’s loquacious magical disk Cakra Baswara is one such sentient weapon. A horse can hitch itself to a chariot and rally to rescue its master. There is an understanding that the self and body are not coterminous. Humans can metamorph (*ngalihwarna*) into an animal or flower, or can be possessed (*ngrendhon*) by the living or the dead, or enlarge into fearsome giants when enraged beyond human capacities (*tiwikrama*).

Certain puppets are depicted as being in the process of changing from one state to another. One of these is a variant of Bathara Guru melding into clouds [Figure 1]. This puppet, which appears in *wayang* plays in East Java and Madura when the heavenly teacher (or Shiva to South Asians) descends from his heaven to the earth, models an esoteric practice known as *bhuvanaśarīra* (‘the body-as-world’) associated with Shaivism.⁹ The Singaporean scholar and artist Tan Zi Hao has referred to this as an instance of «self-dissolution».¹⁰ Characters upon dying can transform into a rice field or an animal, merge body-and-soul into another character, or reincarnate. Part of the power of the great warrior Gatotkaca, who is of mixed human and ogre descent, is due to the fact that his ogre uncles have all taken up residence in various parts of his body after Gatotkaca defeated them in battle. These uncles are prone to escaping from the confines of Gatotkaca’s body

⁷ ANDERSON 1965.

⁸ INGOLD 2000: 92.

⁹ ACRI 2019: 294.

¹⁰ TAN ZI HAO 2019: 131f.

from time to time, creating havoc for their nephew.

Among the various cycles of plays that make up *wayang*'s core repertoire, animist ideas and scenarios most thoroughly infuse the Ramayana cycle. Examined as a whole, the Ramayana is probably the most popular story source for shadow puppetry throughout South and Southeast Asia, enacted in forms as diverse as *tholpavakoothu*, a ritual shadow theatre performed in temples of Kerala, India; *sbeik thom*, the large-scale shadow theatre of Cambodia; and *wayang Siam*, the folk shadow theatre of the northernmost Malaysian state of Kelantan.

The Ramayana narrates the story of the kidnapping of the princess Sinta by the covetous demon king Rahwana, and the war that Sinta's husband Rama and a simian army wage to retrieve her.¹¹ The other major story source for *wayang* in Java, Bali, and other Indonesian islands is the Mahabharata, which is at its core a tale about conflict and war in an extended family of humans. The Ramayana, in contrast, narrates tales of interactions between and among humans, ogres, animals, and other nonhuman persons. It activates the potential of the medium for transformation and the suspension of natural laws. In the remainder of this essay, I propose to examine puppet representations of the Ramayana's main characters and character-types to see how they embody an animist ontology, before turning to a recent intercultural experiment that amplifies the Ramayana's animist themes and ideas.



Fig. 1. Bathara Guru melding into clouds, from a set of puppets formerly in the collection of a Buddhist temple in Pamekasan, Madura. Yale University Art Gallery, The Dr. Walter Angst and Sir Henry Angst Collection of Indonesian Puppets.

¹¹ Rahwana is known as Ravana in South Asia while Sinta is Sita.

1. ANOMAN

One of the most impressive and extensive pre-modern visual representations of the Ramayana are the stone reliefs of the ancient state temple of Majapahit known as *Candi Panataran*. This temple, located near the present-day city of Blitar in East Java, was in use and under constant construction between 1197 and 1454 CE.¹² In a sequence of 106 panels carved into the stone walls of the main temple, we encounter several episodes from the Ramayana, mostly representations of the plays known today as *Anoman Duta* ('Anoman, the Envoy') and *Rama Tambak* ('Rama Builds a Causeway').¹³ The action takes place in a landscape that is alive, with trees and rock formations sporting demonic faces, a representational style described as «magicism» by Dutch archaeologist Willem Stutterheim.¹⁴ Though Rama is the Ramayana's titular character, it is the sentient ape Anoman, Rama's trusted aide-de-camp and general, who occupies center stage in the reliefs. We marvel at the dexterity of the monkey-warrior in his mission from Rama to ascertain his kidnapped wife's condition. Anoman is shown jumping around, flying through clouds, perching atop a tree, shrinking and expanding in size, uprooting and brandishing a tree to threaten his enemies, Rahwana's demonic hordes. Anoman traverses different domains, undertaking a solo, shaman-like journey into a demonic realm, equally at home beneath the sea and flying the clouds, standing proud on land and swinging adroitly through the trees. Some scholars have speculated about the existence of a cult of Anoman in pre-modern Java that emphasized his role as an «intermediary between humans and the Divine».¹⁵

Anoman remains a beloved and central character in modern and contemporary Indonesia. Rama and Sinta generally are depicted blandly in *wayang* as paragons of virtue and a symbol of heterosexual love. In contrast, Anoman is often a trickster character, proud and sometimes even arrogant, whose sexual impulses repeatedly cross species boundaries. Some Javanese *dhalang* ('puppeteers') not only include him in Ramayana plays but also find ways to introduce him into Mahabharata plays as well. These *dhalang*

¹² KINNEY 2003: 179-213; STUTTERHEIM 1989: 149-160, plates 105-210.

¹³ Anoman is also known as Hanoman or Hanuman.

¹⁴ STUTTERHEIM 1989.

¹⁵ KIEVEN 2010: 229.

tend to be renowned for their dexterous monkey movements and energetic monkey voices and are branded generically as *dhalang kethek* ('monkey puppeteers'). The importance of the character in Indonesia's multiple *wayang* traditions can be seen in the wide variety of Anoman puppets in the Dr. Walter Angst and Sir Henry Angst Collection of Indonesian Puppets at Yale University Art Gallery.¹⁶

The popularity of the character of Anoman means that he is represented in the collection in various puppet styles – including dozens of *wayang kulit* ('shadow puppets' [see Figure 2]) and *wayang golek* ('rod puppets'), as well as a smaller number of *wayang krucil* or flat rod puppets. Regardless of the puppet form or regional style, there are some constant features of Anoman as a *wayang* puppet. His face always has simian characteristics – with an extended mouth, sharp teeth or fangs, a snout-like nose. A tail wraps around his body. His skin is white, with black hair in spots. The rest of his features and his costume and accessories are all humanoid. This mixed human-animal iconography is a reflection of Anoman's parentage. In some tellings, he was born from the union of Rama and Sinta when they were cursed for a time to be monkeys. In others, his mother is the part-simian Anjani and his father is none other than Bathara Guru, the Divine Teacher.

One version of Anoman's origin begins with the two sons of the sage Gotama, Guwarsa and Guwarsi, who fight over a locket belonging to their mother Olya.¹⁷ Gotama learns of the conflict and opens the locket only to discover a love letter to Olya from the sun god Surya. Gotama curses Olya and she becomes a statue. He then throws the lock-

¹⁶ The Angst collection was built up over four decades as a study collection – the product of Swiss collector Walter Angst's systematic collecting of puppets representing all the major traditions of puppetry practiced in western Indonesia. Our current estimate is that the collection has in excess of 23,000 puppets: more than 120 full sets of puppets in their original boxes, and thousands more puppets collected individually or in small groups. This is the largest collection of *wayang* in the world and the largest collection of puppets of any sort in the United States. Puppets in the collection are accompanied by detailed notes on their provenance. Most puppets in the collection are identified by character name, regional style, name of the puppeteer who used them, and the rough date of making. For some, we also know the names of the craftsmen who made and designed them. Yale University Art Gallery's generous open access policy means that images of these puppets can be freely shared online or in publications without the need for permission or attribution.

¹⁷ There is no single authoritative telling of the Ramayana in Indonesia. My account is based primarily on NURIYA nd, a manuscript that has served as an important reference for puppeteers in the Cirebon-Indramayu region where I studied *wayang kulit* for much of the 1990s and early 2000s. Nuriya's son, Taham (1934-2014), was among the best known puppeteers of his generation, and trained dozens of puppeteers in his *sanggar* ('art studio') Mulya Bhakti, founded in 1983.

et away and it transforms into a magical lake. Guwarsa and Guwarsi continue their contest for the locket and dive into the lake, while their sister Anjani follows them and bathes her face, lower arms, and lower legs in the magic waters. Gotama curses them, saying that his children's behavior is fit for monkeys. Guwarsa and Guwarsi transform into monkeys while all the parts of Anjani's body that she washed become simian. The children beg their father to reverse the magic but a sage's word is irrevocable. Gotama advises them to undertake harsh devotions as penance and gives new names to the boys. Guwarsa, renamed Subali, does the devotion of the



Fig. 2. Anoman, the white ape from the Kyai Nugroho set of puppets, commissioned from Ki Kertiwanda by Prince Tejakusuma of Yogyakarta circa 1937. Yale University Art Gallery, The Dr. Walter Angst and Sir Henry Angst Collection of Indonesian Puppets, 2018.130.1.20

bat, hanging upside down atop Mount Ronya Pringga and venturing forth for food only at night. Minantara, renamed Sugriwa, conducts the devotion of the deer, which means wandering through the forest and only eating things growing naturally. Anjani conducts the devotions of the frog, half-submerged in water with her mouth always open, eating only flotsam and jetsam.

Flying through the heavens, Bathara Guru catches sight of the naked Anjani meditating in a stream. The Divine Teacher becomes so excited he emits an explosion of lust. The open-mouthed Anjani swallows his seed and she becomes pregnant. She later gives birth to Anoman, the white monkey, who is brought up by Bayu, the god of the wind, and is recognized as Bayu's god son.

Like Bayu and other god sons of Bayu, including Bima, Anoman has extended thumb nails. These razor-sharp nails, Kuku Pancanaka, are both a sign of virility and potent weapons. There are many plays in which the god sons of Bayu band together. In one episode of the Ramayana, Anoman's magical leap or flight to the island nation of Alengka

is interrupted by an excursion to the talking mountain Gunung Maenaka, another incarnation of Bayu. Maenaka cautions Anoman to be aware that Alengka is guarded not only on land but also by creatures in the sea, and so he should not fly too close to the water. The proud Anoman does not heed this advice, leading to an epic fight with the sea monsters off Alengka's coast. Anoman is swallowed alive by one of them and uses his Kuku Pancanaka nails to tear the monster to pieces from within. In some tellings, sticking close to the surf also causes Anoman to be spotted by a beautiful mermaid, leading to one of Anoman's many unions with a non-human being.

Another of Anoman's major powers is to transform his size – shrinking in size when required and becoming a giant or *tiwikrama* when enraged in combat. A set of Ramayana puppets commissioned from the Kediri-based puppet innovator Ki Djoko Langgeng in the 1980s by the well-known puppeteer Ki Gondarman and subsequently acquired by Ki Manteb Soedarsono, one of Java's most popular puppeteers, has both a giant-sized Anoman and a super-giant-sized Anoman. Contemporary renditions of Anoman, such as Djoko Langgeng's, often show him as a redhead. This innovation dates from around 1980 – puppeteers say his red hair is a reminder of the famous scene in which Anoman is bound in Alengka and set afire. He escapes his bonds and with his long tail on fire burns down half of Alengka. Red-haired Anoman puppets were all the rage in Solo in the late 1980s, the time and place where I began my own puppetry studies, and later spread to other parts of Java due to the dominance of Solo-style *wayang* in the mass media. In East Javanese traditions, in contrast, Anoman Tiwikirama puppets feature articulated tails, which can be manipulated in performance to strike down enemies or set buildings afire.

Anoman is so powerful that his life extends well beyond that of other Ramayana characters. In Javanese versions of the Ramayana, after Rama defeats the demon king Rahwana in battle, a sentient mountain named Mount Siyem tells Anoman that he wishes to avenge himself on Rahwana. The mountain was previously a humanoid, the ogrous prime minister Patih Gomuka of the nation of Lokapala, who became a mountain only after he was defeated by Rahwana. But the demon king cannot be killed for he has received a boon from the gods to possess the combined lifespan of 1000 herons, 1000 crows, 1000 doves, 1000 carrion crows, and 1000 *siwalan* birds. Anoman thus picks up the moun-

tain and slams it over Rahwana, entrapping him under its weight for eternity. Anoman becomes a sage and takes on the new name of Resi Mayangkara, establishing a hermitage at the foothills of Mount Siyem, spreading the wisdom he acquired during his years helping Rama and also acting as Rahwana's jailor. Sometimes Rahwana escapes from his mountain jail and it is up to Anoman to capture him. It is believed that Rahwana yet lives, pinned down under the weight of the mountain even today, and that whoever ventures to Mount Siyem should not bring *arak* or other spirits as this will cause the ground to move.

2. WANARA AND THE "LITTLE MONKEYS"

The monkey society depicted in the Ramayana adheres, as in pre-modern Java, to a strict class system. Anoman, Subali, Sugriwa, and the officers in Rama's army are all classed in Java as *wanara* [Figure 3]. While they have monkey-like faces, tails, and sometimes monkey-like hands and feet, they wear human clothes and accessories and speak in the manner of other humanoid characters. In combat, *wanara* can fight either as humans, punching with a hand or kicking with their feet, or they can switch into monkey mode and bite, scratch, and jump on their opponents as they howl and screech like monkeys.

Human characters in *wayang* are distinguished from each other by the shape of their eyes and noses, facial hair, the tilt of their heads, and costumes. In contrast, *wanara* are identified by having different skin colors, or additional animal-like features. Anila (from the Sanskrit word *nila*, meaning 'dark blue') has blue skin, while other *wanara* have the features of a fighting cock, tiger, or dragon. In Bali, the status of the *wanara* as being somewhere in-between human and non-human is emphasized by the attachment of bells of different pitches to the puppets. This allows the puppeteer to play the puppets like musical instruments, alternating between differently-pitched figures.

The underlings of Rama's forces, in contrast, are much closer in iconographic style and expression in performance to the familiar monkeys of the natural world. These are generally referred to as *kethkek* or *munyuk* in Java or *bojog* in Bali, and are much simpler in build, smaller in size, simply carved and often without secondary control rods or moving arms. The lower-class monkeys are the ones that drive the chariots that the monkey kings



Fig. 3. King Sugirwa addressing his *wanara* troops. From the Kyai Nugroho set of puppets, commissioned from Ki Kertiwanda by Prince Tejakusuma of Yogyakarta circa 1937. Yale University Art Gallery, The Dr. Walter Angst and Sir Henry Angst Collection of Indonesian Puppets.

Subali and Sugriwa ride. The little monkeys are the servants who hold the *pusaka* or emblems of state and accompany Sugriwa and Subali when they appear in royal audiences. They are the grunts who do the hard work of uprooting trees and carrying boulders to build the causeway to

Alengka that allows Rama's armies to invade [figure 4]. They appear en masse, tend not to be identified by name, and "speak" in squawks and squeals instead of words. Some wear loincloths while others are completely naked. Those who do wear clothes do so for comic effect. There are few set models for how to depict the little monkey characters, and so there is much room for expressing individual artistry and visual humor in their realization.

One of the most awe-inspiring *wayang* puppets depicts the gigantic Kumbakarna, the gargantuan brother of Rahwana who begrudgingly enters the battle against Rama

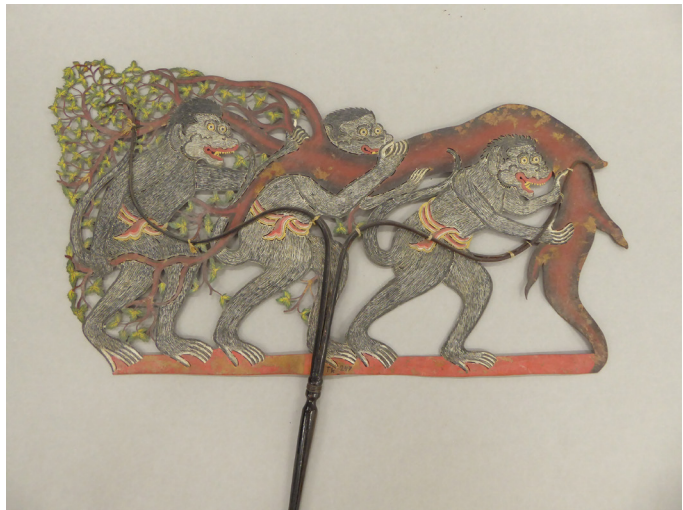


Fig. 4. Rampogan kethek – a tableau of "little monkeys" showing them carrying a tree. This puppet is typically used in the play *Rama Tambak*, in the scene in which Sugriwa's monkey army constructs a causeway to the island of Alengka. Designed and carved by Ki Kertiwanda of Yogyakarta circa 1900. Yale University Art Gallery, The Dr. Walter Angst and Sir Henry Angst Collection of Indonesian Puppets.

and his army not out of loyalty to his king but for the sake of preserving his homeland. In Kumbakarna's final moments, the monkey army swarms over him, biting, grabbing, pulling, in a concerted effort to bring the giant down. Monkeys in this scene function collectively as a horde, losing all signs of individual sentience in their combined effort to overwhelm the mighty Kumbakarna.

3. RAHWANA AND HIS DEMON ARMIES

Rahwana, also known as Dasamuka (the 'ten-faced'), the principal protagonist of the Ramayana, takes on a variety of forms in his *wayang* representations. He is regularly shown with a snarl and red face, indicating that he is quick to anger, but can appear to be much like any other powerful king. In Bali and in the archaic, bug-eyed *wanda belis* variant of the Javanese Rahwana [Figure 5], he tends to be portrayed a bit more demonically, with tell-tale fangs. Rahwana's demonic aspects, as noted above, signal his origins.

In the standard Javanese telling, Rahwana is the son of a star-crossed union. The story goes that the ogre king of Alengka, Sumali, is possessed by a desire to become human. He thus commands his beautiful daughter Sukesih to require of any suitor the revelation of the magical spell *Sastra Jendra Hayudiningrat*, which has the power to transform ogres into humans and make humans divine. The sage Wisrawa pays suit on behalf of his son, King Danaraja, and instructs Sukesih in the requisite secret knowledge. The gods are infuriated by this unauthorized revelation and mete out a punishment. The chief god Bathara Guru possesses Wisrawa and Guru's consort Uma possesses Sukesih. The possessed Wisrawa then betrays his son's trust and sleeps with the possessed Sukesih. From this sullied union are born four children. Rahwana, the eldest, is born in the forest as a clump of blood (Thus his name: *rah*, meaning 'blood', and *wana*, meaning 'forest'). Wisrawa recites an incantation and the clump becomes an ogre, similar in form to his grandfather Sumali. Rahwana is then sent to do harsh devotions on Mount Arcamanik. The second-born is Kumbakarna, an ogre of monstrous proportions, who is sent to meditate on Mount Gokarna. The third is an ogress, Sarpakenaka, who is raised by Sumali. Fourth comes Wibisana, who has a more-or-less human form – though

his ogre heritage can be glimpsed in his monstrous lips in the Yogyakarta tradition – and is taken by Wisrawa to be raised by the gods.

In some versions of Rahwana's origin story, he is born with ten heads. Rahwana lops off nine of his heads, one at a time as a sign of his devotion to the gods. He is about to lop off the tenth, and thus commit ritual suicide, but the gods intervene and grant him a boon of immortality. Among the puppets of the Angst collection there are a fair number of Rahwana puppets with multiple heads and arms. Different puppet traditions bring out different aspects of Rahwana's personality in their puppet designs. Sometimes these heads are decorative elements of a head-dress and signifiers of his power, while other multi-headed puppets are used when Anoman becomes enraged and takes on a giant form (*tiwikrama*) that betrays his monstrous character. Rahwana puppets regularly have only one mobile arm – this is a feature also of sages, kings, and other figures of authority. But some puppeteers interpret this lack of mobility as a result of an injury Rahwana sustained in the rebellion against his half-brother



Fig. 5. Rahwana, the demon king of Alengka, in a two-eyed *wanda belis* variant. This puppet is from East Java and is dated August 1, 1927. Yale University Art Gallery, The Dr. Walter Angst and Sir Henry Angst Collection of Indonesian Puppets.

Danaraja – Rahwana successfully wrested the throne away from him but sustained a crippling injury in the battle. Some puppets show Rahwana to be a great ascetic, a scholar who has mastered all sorts of ascetic knowledge. This is indicated by having him wear a sage's sash across his chest. Others depict him as a fun-seeker who enjoys singing and dancing. In the Cirebon tradition, which I have been studying since 1993, Dasamuka regularly indulges in a dance at his first appearance on screen. To show their appreciation, audience members throw coins mixed with rice (*sawer*) at the dancing puppet. The accompanying gamelan players immediately cease playing as they scramble to retrieve the coins.

Just as Anoman's leap across Alengka is memorialized in a single-use puppet, there is also a puppet of Rahwana in chains that captures a key moment of Rahwana's story. This moment occurs at the conclusion of the *Lokapala* cycle of plays that immediately precedes the Ramayana proper. Having established himself as king of Alengka, Rahwana wages war against the nation of Maespati as he desires the wife of its king, whom Rahwana recognizes as an incarnation of the rice goddess Sri. Rahwana is defeated by Maespati's king, Arjunasrabau, who like Rama is an incarnation of the god Wisnu, but not before he has devoured Arjunasrabau's beloved vizier Patih Suwanda. As punishment, Arjunasrabau enchains Rahwana and drags him from the back of his chariot until only his bones are left. In a comic twist, an old rag-and-bone man, actually Rahwana's father Sumali in disguise, requests the remains of Rahwana in order (he claims) to make a percussion instrument, and subsequently uses powerful magic to restore Rahwana to health, showing again that death is not absolute in *wayang's* animist world.

The demonic hordes of Alengka take on a variety of puppet forms. Indrajit, Rahwana's beloved son who wields the fearsome magical arrows – the poisonous Nagapasa and the immobilizing Senjatarante – has a humanoid appearance, though like his father he often sports fangs. But in standard Javanese tellings, he was actually created from a cloud (thus his name Megananda) by Rahwana's brother Wibiksana, who switched out Rahwana's newborn beautiful daughter with this magical creation, as he feared that the beauty of his offspring would result in Rahwana committing incest (the daughter is raised by the king of Mantili and grows up to become Sinta).

Other principles in Rahwana's army have fearsome appearances that match their awesome powers. Some have the power to transform themselves – like Marica, who takes on the form of a golden deer in order to draw Rama away from Sinta so that Rahwana can kidnap her. So varied are they in form that there is even a demon who has a superficial resemblance to a monkey and is able thereby to infiltrate Rama's army as a spy.

4. MODERNIZATION AND THE RETURN TO ANIMISM

The animist dimensions of Ramayana stories and of *wayang* more generally persist in Indonesia, but with the modernization of *wayang* there have also been systematic efforts – on the part of both cultural bureaucrats and puppeteers themselves – to tone these down and emphasize humanistic values over the supernatural and the non-human. Writing in 1929, Dutch philologist Th. Pigeaud opined that *wayang* avoided the expression of tragedy as it was rooted in a world view in which everyone and everything had a fixed place.¹⁸ In contrast, the influential Javanese arts theorist and administrator Gendhon Humardani and his followers interpreted the actions of *wayang* as being due to human desires, rather than the working out of fate. Thus, in a modernized play from the *Lokapala* cycle, Wisrawa and Sukesih do not have intercourse because they are possessed by the gods who want to punish them for the revelation of secret knowledge, but because Wisrawa and Sukesih fall in love.¹⁹ For modernizers like Humardhani, *wayang* needed to unshackle from ritual, magic, and irrational beliefs if it was to speak to contemporary audiences. Codified stylization and supernatural storylines were permissible, but the core values were to be humanist and plots were to be driven by human emotions and desires.²⁰

The Ramayana in modern tellings does not emphasize the reciprocity of people and nature but instead the human conquest of the non-human world. Pancawati, the home that Rama, Sinta, and Laksamana make while in their forest exile, is not a simple hut but a grand palace with all the conveniences of royal life. Sinta does not send Rama to chase after a golden deer because she is enchanted by its beauty but because she wants to add it to a menagerie she is building.²¹ The building of the causeway from the mainland to Alengka is figured as a state-sponsored development project.²² There is little or no explanation about the interdependence of the noble giant bird Jatayu and Rama's father King Dasarata, and thus the reason why Jatayu might sacrifice himself in an effort to save Sinta

¹⁸ PIGEAUD 1929.

¹⁹ SOEMANTO 1980.

²⁰ RUSTOPO 1991: *passim*.

²¹ See, for example, HADITJAROKO 1988.

²² On the Ramayana as an inspiration for modernization, including authorizing five-year development plans, see RESINK 1975.

when she is abducted by Rahwana, and use his last breath to tell Rama about Rahwana's dastardly scheme, becomes obscure.

Marshall Clark, in a fascinating article on literary appropriations of Ramayana during the New Order dictatorship, recounts an official state project launched in January 1998 to get Java's top *dbalang* to perform the play *Rama Tambak*, in the heat of the IMF-induced financial crisis, with regular protests on Jakarta's streets against rising food prices.²³ The organizers of this series of performances recognized the play's magical powers – Indonesia's first president Sukarno had sponsored performances of the same play to deal with collective crises. But audiences were not pleased by the performances of these elite puppeteers, many of whom were out of step with the genuine needs and desires of the people. One magazine critic was particularly unhappy with the enactment by Manteb Soedharsono, Java's top puppeteer in 1998, which focused on intrigue in Rama's court. This emphasis on the actions of political elites over the agency of the common people was out of step with the aspirational democratic values espoused in this moment of political crisis.²⁴

In the decades following the downfall of the Soeharto dictatorship, the ideologies informing these modern departures away from *wayang*'s animist ontology have been questioned and challenged by coalitions of environmental activists and traditional artists. There is a new appreciation of the potential of *wayang* to inform the public about ecological issues and current and future challenges related to climate change, pollution, and environmental degradation. As discussed at length in the recent volume *Wayang sebagai Media Ekologi: Buku Pintar Kreativitas pada Masa Perubahan Iklim* ('*Wayang as an Ecological Medium: A Reader in Creativity in a Time of Climate Change*'), this entails the excavation and highlighting of environmental themes in the traditional repertoire, the creation of "green" *wayang* forms that address pertinent environmental challenges impacting communities and ecological systems, and alliances between activists and artists.²⁵

²³ CLARK 2001.

²⁴ Ivi: 169.

²⁵ WAYANG 2020.

5. RAMAYANA: A TALE OF TREES AND WOOD

In the spring semester of 2023, I had the opportunity to collaborate with Rahul Koonathara, a twelfth-generation shadow puppeteer from Kerala, India, and a group of University of Connecticut students to experiment with how the animism underpinning the Ramayana might be pushed even further, inspired by recent trends in ecologically-attuned *wayang* in Indonesia. Primary aims were to hybridize the Kerala tradition of *tholpavakoothu* with *wayang kulit* and restore the Ramayana's imagining of interdependence with the natural world. In line with post-humanist theory, and particularly inspired by Peter Wohlleben's *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate: Discoveries from A Secret World* (2015), we took a tree-centric view of the epic, examining and questioning the participation and agency of trees in key episodes.

The production, entitled *Ramayana: A Tale of Trees and Wood*, asks what it means to see the contest for Sinta's hand from the perspective of the bow which Rama bends and breaks or the burning of Sita from the perspective of the firewood which feeds the pyre. The tree which Rama hides behind when he surreptitiously kills Subali rightly complains in a «mon-o-log» about empty claims of valor and the discrepancy between the *kesatriya* or «knightly» ethos and Rama's actual behavior: «And did he ask my permission? No! Not even a "by your leave"».

The exile in the forest of Dendaka involves not only a deepening of the attachments between the protagonists Rama, Sinta, and Laksmana, but a growing relationship to the natural environment. Riffing off David Abram (1999) on the more-than-human world, Rama and Sita dialogue:

RAMA: We have lived in the forest of Dendaka for nearly twelve years and it feels more home than Ayodya ever did. I find it strange that the locals think of us as shamans.

SITA: That is because, like shamans, our forest exile has brought us into contact with the more-than-human world. The forest tells us where there is water to be found. We attend to the wind to know when the weather will shift. The chirping of insects alerts us to the presence of game. Through observing the grazing of forest animals, we know which plants are nutritional and medicinal, and which are poisonous. The locals call us magicians, but in truth we are but wide-awake people in a world of dreamers.

In our telling, Anoman's decision to leave Rama to become a sage is a form of protest and a recognition that the burning of Alengka and the building of the causeway were acts of environmental degradation with catastrophic impact on a garden city, the waters, and coastal forest. Anoman confronts Rama for his indifference to plants: «In past incarnations, you have been a fish, a tortoise, a boar, a lion. But what have your many incarnations and your years of exile in the forest taught you about the plant world? I worship you but cannot remain at your side».

Such an approach to the epic breathes new life into old stories and provides new opportunities for performers. The Ramayana, in the words of one spectator, becomes a “bleak” cautionary tale about single-minded obsession and ecological disengagement. But the production, if not the content, has a hopeful intention for the future of the art forms concerned. By finding common ground for the *wayang* tradition and *tholpavakoothu* we hope to surpass the inherited limitations of both forms and develop a platform for collaboration across cultures for future generations of performers.

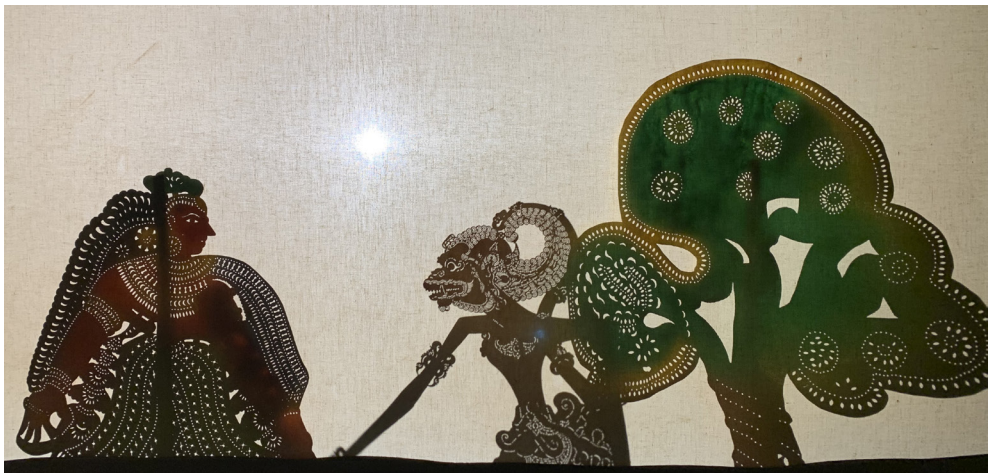


Fig. 6. Anoman (a Javanese figure in Solo style) meets Sita (a Tholpavakoothu figure) in the production *Ramayana: A Tale of Trees and Wood* (2023).

As the Indian scholar and poet A. K. Ramanujan underlines in an oft-cited essay on the variety of «tellings» of Ramayana, the epic is always «always already»: nobody in South or Southeast Asia confronts it for the first time. At the same time, the best tellings

are evergreen, cherished, and savored for differences from previous redactions.²⁶ The embedded animism of the Ramayana makes it more than just a mirror of past beliefs – it gives it currency and perspective on our troubled planet’s future.

²⁶ RAMANUJAN 2004: 157-158.

REFERENCES

- ABRAM 1999 = David Abram, *A more-than-human world*, in *An Invitation to Environmental Philosophy*, edited by Anthony Weston, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, 17-42.
- ACRI 2019 = Andrea Acri, *Becoming a "bhairava" in 19th-century Java*, in «Indonesia and the Malay World», XLVII (2019), 285-307.
- ANDERSON 1965 = Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Mythology and the Tolerance of the Javanese*, Ithaca (NY), Modern Indonesia Project, Southeast Asia Program, Department of Asian Studies, Cornell University, 1965.
- BIRD-DAVID 1999 = Nurit Bird-David, *"Animism" revisited: Personhood, environment, and relational epistemology*, in «Current Anthropology», XL (1999), S67-S91.
- CLARK 2001 = Marshall Clark, *Shadow boxing: Indonesian writers and the Ramayana in the New Order*, in «Indonesia», LXX (2001), 159-187.
- DESCOLA 2013 = Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, trans. Janet Lloyd, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- HADITJAROKO 1988 = Sunardjo Haditjarokp, *Ramayana: Indonesia Wayang Show*, Jakarta, Djambatan, 1988 [I ed. 1961].
- INGOLD 2000 = Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelibood, Dwelling and Skill*, London, Routledge, 2000.
- KIEVEN 2010 = Lydia Kieven, *Hanuman, the flying monkey: The symbolism of the Rāmāyana reliefs at the main temple of Caṇḍi Panataran*, in *From Lanka Eastwards: The Ramayana in the Literature and Visual Arts of Indonesia*, a cura di Andrea Acri - Helen Creese - Arlo Griffiths, Leiden, Brill, 2010, 209-232.
- KINNEY 2003 = Ann R. Kinney, *Worshiping Siva and Buddha: The Temple Art of East Java*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2003.
- PIEGAUD 1929 = Th. Pigeaud, *Uitvoering van Javaansche Tooneeldansen*, in *Programma van het Congres Gehouden van 27 tot en met 29 Desember 1929 in de Kapatihan Mangkoenagaran te Soerakarta, ter Gelegenheid van het Tienjarig Bestaan van het Java Instituut, 1919-1929*, Surakarta, Java Institute, 1929, 15-32.

- NURIYA nd = Nuriya, *Ramayana*, unpublished manuscript, n.d.
- RAMANUJAN 2004 = A.K. Ramanujan, *Three hundred Rāmāyanas: Five examples and three thoughts on translation*, in *The Collected Essays of A.K. Ramanujan*, ed. by Vinay Dharwadker, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 132-160, 2004 [I ed. 1991].
- RESINK 1975 = G.J. Resink, *From the old Mahabharata- to the new Ramayana order*, in «*Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*», 131 (1975), 214-235.
- RUSTOPO 1991 = *Gendhon Humardani: Pemikiran dan Kritiknya*, ed. by Rustopo, Surakarta, STSI-Press, 1991.
- SOEMANTO 1980/1981 = Soemanto, *Pakeliran Padat Lakon Alap-alapan Sukesi*, Surakarta, Proyek Pengembangan IKI sub bagian Proyek ASKI, 1980/1981.
- STENGERS 2012 = Isabelle Stengers, *Reclaiming animism*, in «*E-flux Journal*», XXXVI (2012), <<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/36/61245/reclaiming-animism/>>.
- STUTTERHEIM 1989 = Willelm F. Stutterheim, *Rama-Legends and Rama-Reliefs in Indonesia*, Delhi, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Abhinav Publications, 1989 [I ed. 1925].
- TAN ZI HAO 2019 = Tan Zi Hao, *History, Memory, and Islam through the Animal: The Zoomorphic Imaginary in Cirebon*, Unpublished PhD thesis, National University of Singapore, 2019.
- WAYANG 2020 = Tim Enabling Wayang, *Wayang sebagai Media Ekologi: Buku Pintar Kreativitas pada Masa Perubahan Iklim*, Yogyakarta, Kunci Copy Station, 2020.
- WOHLLEBEN 2015 = Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate: Discoveries from a Secret World*, trans. Jane Billingham, Vancouver, Greystone, 2015.

TRADITIONAL PUPPETRY, CHANGING TIMES: THE RAMAYANA IN INDONESIAN AND MALAY PUPPETRY

Kathy Foley

University of California Santa Cruz

ABSTRACT: The story of Rama has been known on Java and mainland Southeast Asia since before the 9th century. The strong divergences in West Java and Malaysian puppet versions from Valmiki show patterns of intensification and localization that make the narrative at home in the region. In the 1960s, the Ramayana was not seen as bearing overt religious or political implications for Muslim performers, and its trans-Southeast Asian popularity boosted its currency. In 1965 the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) held a pan-Southeast Asian Ramayana festival – spurring countries where this epic, preserved in puppetry/mask performance, was only modestly popular (e.g., Indonesia and Philippines) to increase attention to this central narrative for traditional Southeast Asian mainland puppetry. Since the 1990s, however, transnational religio-political forces, including the Hindu revival in India (which sees Rama as proto-ruler of a Hindu realm) and the Islamic revival in the Muslim world (which sees the story as *shirk*, worshipping a god other than Allah), may problematize the narrative in Indonesian and Malaysian puppetry.

KEY-WORDS: Ramayana, *wayang golek sunda*, *wayang kelantan*, Indonesian puppetry, Malay puppetry

RIASSUNTO: La storia di Rama era nota a Giava e nel Sud-Est asiatico continentale già prima del IX secolo. Le divergenze vigorose tra le versioni fantoccio di Giava Occidentale e quelle malesi di Valmiki mostrano modelli di intensificazione e localizzazione che rendono la narrazione specifica e particolare in ogni regione. Negli anni '60, il Ramayana non era associato a implicazioni religiose o politiche per gli artisti musulmani, e la sua popolarità nel Sud-Est asiatico ne aumentò il valore. Nel 1965 l'Associazione delle Nazioni del Sud-Est Asiatico (ASEAN) tenne un festival Ramayana pan-sudest asiatico, ispirando i paesi in cui questa epopea, preservata attraverso spettacoli di burattini e maschere, era solo modestamente popolare (ad esempio, Indonesia e Filippine) a coltivare l'interesse nella narrativa delle tradizionali marionette del continente sud-est asiatico. A partire da-

gli anni Novanta, tuttavia, le forze politico-religiose transnazionali, compresa la “rinascita” indù in India (che vede Rama come proto-sovrano di un regno indù), e la “rinascita” islamica nel mondo musulmano (che vede la storia come shirk, adorazione di un dio diverso da Allah), hanno imparato a problematizzare la narrativa delle marionette indonesiane e malesi.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Ramayana, *wayang golek sunda*, *wayang kelantan*, burattini indonesiani, burattini malesi

«Religion is regarded by the common people as true, by the wise as false, and by the rulers as useful»
Lucius Annaeus Seneca

Simply reporting on *wayang* (Indonesian/Malay puppetry) allows me to be an equal opportunity offender, upsetting both Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists. For example, in 1979 I presented at the East-West Center in Hawai'i, noting my Muslim teacher Dalang Ebeng Sunarya found *purwa* (Ramayana and Mahabharata) stories were the «best vehicles to teach Islamic values». An outraged Pakistani Muslim protested that Hindu iconography and heroes should be anathema «to any real Muslim». At a Ramayana conference at Northern Illinois University in 2005, I reported that the monkey general Hanuman, in Southeast Asian puppetry, is a suave lover and father of multiple offspring. A distraught Indian Hinduvtā adherent who recognized only the Valmiki version shouted that «to depict celibate Hanuman making love is blasphemy».

Even in response to my teaching at University of California Santa Cruz, a student from the Indian Student Association protested our 2014 dance drama entitled *The Ramayana, Of Monkeys and Men*. It was carefully advertised as representing Indonesian, Thai, and Malay Ramayana episodes (not Indian) and was created in collaboration with a Hindu-Balinese choreographer (Ida Oka Artha Negara) and a Muslim Sundanese music director (Undang Sumarna) from West Java. A student from the Indian-American student organization attacked the production based on only its title – he found it an insult to call Hanuman a monkey and insisted that only Indians had a right to tell this story. His position did not take into account that for a thousand years the Ramayana has been an

integral part of Southeast Asian culture and that since at least as far back as the colonial era, the tale has been produced in multiple versions world-wide.

My personal confrontations, while modest, reflect Hindu-Muslim tensions over the Ramayana that have exploded in the last decades as the political Hinduism embodied in India's Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party) has grown in India and the diaspora, and, during the same period, the Islamic revival (often espousing Sunni orthodoxy) has strengthened its hold in Muslim majority states. Indian treatment of the Valmiki text qua "Bible" has grown in India, creating strife. At the same time, strict readings of the Koran have grown stronger in Indonesia and Malaysia, where formerly Muslims had followed a moderate form of Islam.

A telling example of this new political climate involves the fate of A.K. Ramanujan's «Three Hundred Ramayanas». This essay used to be an assigned reading for a second-year honors course in the History Department at Delhi University.¹ In 2008, however, activists of the Hindu right's Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Prarishad (ABVP, All India Student Council) protested, claiming that the work insulted religion, since it pointed out the variability in what the group wants to interpret historical fact, Rama's story. Despite a university review committee's vote to keep the assignment, the reading was eliminated. The publisher, Oxford University Press (OUP), castigated for publishing, responded. «We feel concerned to learn that Ramanujan's essay has the potential to hurt Hindu religious sentiments and we thank you for pointing this out» – even as scholars around the world signed petitions supporting Ramanujan's freedom of speech (and the veracity of his assertion of multiple Ramayanas), and so Oxford stopped printing the essay, citing «minimal sales».²

Ramanujan's essay states what anyone who sees Southeast Asian puppet versions of the Ramayana knows – these are not Hindu fundamentalists' idea of Valmiki's Ramayana. As Ramanujan explains, «These various texts not only relate to prior texts directly, to borrow or refute, but they relate to each other through this common code or

¹ RAMAJUAN 1991. See also the article *There are 300 Versions of the Ramayana ABVP*, «The Hindu», 25 Oct. 2011, <thehindu.com/news/national/There-are-300-versions-of-the-Ramayana-ABVP/article13372075.ece>, accessed 30 Oct. 2022.

² RITO 2011.

common pool. Every author, if one may hazard a metaphor, dips into it and brings out a unique crystallization, a new text with a unique texture and a fresh context». ³ What is more, a written text of the Ramayana, be it Valmiki (7th C BCE-4th CE), Kamban (12th CE), or any number of other versions, is comparatively stable, but in puppet theater, the dialogue and narration are regularly improvised, allowing the performer to more easily retrofit plot points and characterizations to current understandings and issues. Oral composition using formulaic patterning in Indonesian/Malay puppetry means that the presentations morph in ways similar to those that Alfred Lord found with sung epics of eastern Europe. ⁴ The spine of the story is maintained; patterned speech, formulaic phrases and scenes, repeat; but the characterizations, details, interpretive features, and comic elements are ever malleable. Additionally, new episodes, in so far as they do not violate the core plot points, are easily interpolated. The major plot (usually called *pokok* [tree trunk]) is what we think of as “history.” These are points of the story not to be changed, accepted by all puppeteers, regardless of socio-religious background, for example, the spouse, children, and mode of death of a hero or antagonist [Figure 1].

Thus, Rama is always a handsome prince and incarnation of Wisnu (India, Vishnu) who wanders in the wilderness with his brother Laksmana and his wife Sita. ⁵ Sita is kidnapped by the



Fig. 1. *Wayang golek sunda* figures (l. to r.) of Rama, Sita, Laksmana. Photo: Kathy Foley.

³ RAMANUJAN 1991: 46.

⁴ LORD 1960.

⁵ Here I use Indonesian and later Malaysian versions of character's names. In each county names can also have variant spellings.

demon Rawana, prompting Rama to gather an army of monkeys led by Hanuman to win her back. When Sita is later cast out due to lingering suspicion about her virtue, she lives with her two sons in a forest hermitage until the arrival of Rama, who cannot defeat these youths and thereby realizes they are his sons. Other stories interpolated into the larger narrative are called *ranting* (branch) stories that grow from the trunk story but are newer inventions that still hone to the major plot points.

This paper will share brief insights into Indonesian and Malay Ramayana performances arguing that while the major incidents that puppeteers memorize correspond relatively closely to patterns found in Indian prototypes, Southeast Asian puppet masters have remolded the tale in the image and likeness of local culture. In particular, I will share selected examples of Indonesian and Malay stories (*lakon*), showing intensifying elements and localized understandings as puppeteers (*dalang*) have interpolated outside material to develop new episodes. The selected examples come from West Java's rod puppetry (*wayang golek*) and Malaysia's *wayang kelantan* shadow puppetry. Though these are only two genres out of a much larger array of Indo-Malay puppet forms with Ramayana repertoire, they give some sense of some local peculiarities.

1. INDONESIA: *WAYANG GOLEK*

My Indonesian example, Sundanese *wayang golek* rod puppetry, is a genre popular for the last two hundred years in the highlands of West Java. The form was created by puppeteers from the *pasisir* (literally 'shore' and referring to the North Coast of Java), who were trained in both *wayang kulit purwa* (leather shadow puppetry telling Ramayana and Mahabharata stories) and *wayang cepak* (rod puppetry telling a different repertoire). Most Sundanese puppeteers' ancestors migrated in the 19th century into the mountainous highlands of Sunda where Sundanese language and culture prevailed. Three-dimensional wooden doll figures from 20 to 90 cm. tall are played by a solo *dalang* (puppet master) accompanied by a gamelan orchestra and female singer on a banana log stage set on a raised outdoor platform for performances that last from about 9 pm to 3:30 am. A play is usually presented in conjunction with a circumcision, wedding, or other ceremonial event.

Popular performers can attract 500-3000 viewers who watch for free while the event is hosted by the sponsor holding the ceremony.⁶

On Java, the Ramayana was historically significant – consider the 8th century Ramayana depictions in Prambanan Temple reliefs, the 9th century *Ramayana Kakawin* (a court poem in Kawi [Old Javanese] verse),⁷ and even the naming of the royal city of Yogyakarta, in Central Java, after Rama's realm, Ayodya. The aura of divine kingship was a feature all Southeast Asian Hindu-Buddhist realms utilized as royal propaganda, and Rama as seventh avatar of the preserver god Wisnu was routinely appropriated by local leaders, since he endowed the head of state with a sense of sacred Wisnu power. The concept of religiously tied kingship endured with Islamization. The major Javanese monarchs, the Sultan of Yogyakarta or the Susuhunan of Surakarta, were thereafter seen not as a reincarnation of a Hindu deity, but as the shadow of Allah on earth. In Southeast Asia, Rama's story was useful for leaders advertising regal potency: the tale was promoted alike by Balinese Hindus; by Thai, Khmer, Lao, and Burmese Buddhists (who see in Rama a *jataka*, previous life of the Buddha); and by Indonesian and Malay Muslims.

Despite respect for the story, the Ramayana was less central than the Mahabharata to Java's puppet repertoire in the 19th and early 20th century because the reality of Javanese kingdoms made the latter epic a better metaphor of how the world worked. The Mahabharata's tale of inter-family squabbling, with the five heroic Pandawa brothers opposing their hundred conniving Kurawa cousins, was closer to the inter-family rivalries of the Javanese royal clans in the Dutch colonial era. Accordingly, the Mahabharata dominated the repertoire. However, with the founding of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Ramayana, as the favored repertoire in Mainland Southeast Asia puppetry/dance (especially Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos), gained audience share in Indonesian puppetry and dance drama, as it became a convenient common denominator of pan-Southeast Asian heritage events.⁸

⁶ For more on *wayang golek* and performing arts in Sunda (West Java), see ANDRIEU 2014; FOLEY 1979; FOLEY - JIT 1997; NALAN 2014; SOPANDI 1997; and WEINTRAUB 2004.

⁷ See ROBSON 2015.

⁸ See SEDANA - FOLEY 2020 for more on growth of the Ramayana popularity in Indonesia.

While there are differences among puppeteers' versions, I give as examples two stories from Sundanese *wayang golek* popular in Bandung, West Java, when I studied the art in the 1970s. The first, *Cupu Manik Astagina* ('Eight-sided Diamond Case'), which I learned from Dalang Otong Rasta.⁹ This is a *pokok* (trunk or "tree" story) and tells of the birth of Hanuman which is considered a prequel to the Ramayana proper. The tale is usually thought of as part of the *Arjuna Sastra Babu* ('Arjuna of a Thousand Arms') Cycle, also called *Babad Lokapala* ('Chronicle of Lokapala'). It deals with events like the birth of Rawana and the origin of the monkeys. The second tale, *Wahyu Makuta Rama* ('Power of Rama's Crown'), I learned from Dalang Nandang Barmaya. It is based on a *ranting* ('branch') story and was, in turn, borrowed from Javanese *wayang kulit* shadow puppetry.¹⁰ The story shows how Ramayana heroes have been imaginatively reincarnated in the more popular Mahabharata figures and even linked with historical Javanese kings. *Wahyu Makuta Rama* was used as the core training module for would-be puppeteers (*dalang*) at the High School of Performing arts (Sekolah Menengah Karawitan Indonesia) in Bandung in 1978-1979. It was part of a wave of *wahyu* (divine power) stories, especially popular in the post-WWII period, since such tales explore righteous self-rule, something which the young nation was working toward after centuries of colonial subjugation. The power of Rama's crown can be conceived of as a tale of good governance: the just leader is both good in himself but can also – via meditation and right action – tap into sacred justice, represented by Rama as Wisnu, the divine preserver. During my primary research on *wayang golek* in the 1970s, I rarely saw a *pokok* Ramayana presentation, but I often saw such *ranting* stories, where, as in *The Power of Rama's Crown*, the spirit of the demon Rawana might possess an ogre king who was stealing women, or Rama might, as in *Wahyu Makuta Rama*, play a passing role. The bad kings were metaphors of the corruption of the Suharto regime and the power of Rama was a trope of needed reform.

⁹ RASTA 1979.

¹⁰ BARMAYA 1978.

1.1. *Trunk Story: “Eight-sided Diamond Case”*

The *Eight-sided Diamond Case* shows Anjani, daughter of the hermit Gautama, conceiving a monkey child via semi-immaculate conception. It also prefigures her two monkey brothers Subali and Sugiwa as figures of adharmademon-allied vs. dharmadharma/Rama-allied, respectively.¹¹

Indradi, a heavenly *bidadari* (goddess), loves Surya, the sun God. But she is given as wife to the hermit Resi Gautama by the high god Siwa as a reward for Gautama’s powerful meditation. She has a love token received from Surya (the eponymous Eight-sided Diamond Case). When Indradi gives it to her daughter Anjani as a plaything, this rouses the envy of Anjani’s two brothers (Subali and Sugiwa). Resi Gautama, discovering the source of the case, curses his wife to turn to stone where she will wait on the South Sea shore until her grandson Hanuman will release her as his army heads to Alengka to save Lady Sita.

Gotama then curses his bickering children, wishing that their «outward shape [*lahir*] reflect their inward soul [*batin*]». He flings the case to the Himalaya. The children run after it as it falls and becomes Lake Nirmala where all who enter are transformed so that their outward form reflects their inward soul. Subali and Sugiwa dive in and become simians. Anjani, afraid of water, puts only her hands and face in the lake and is therefore only part monkey [Figure 2].



Fig. 2: *Wayang golek sunda* figures (l. to r.) of Subali and Sugiwa and Anjani transformed into monkeys in *Eight-sided Diamond Case*. Photo: Kathy Foley.

¹¹ See HERBERT - RAHARDJO 2002 for a more extensive discussion.

To remedy the situation, the remorseful children do a *tapa* ('meditation'). Subali does the meditation of a bat, hanging upside down in a tree all day and hunting for prey only by night. He gains great magical power (which he then unfortunately teaches to the demon king Rawana, making the demon almost invincible). Sugiwa does the meditation of a deer, eating only grass and beginning as a vegetarian the righteous path that will align him with Rama/Wisnu in the war against Rawana. Anjani undertakes the meditation of a frog, crouching nude in water, eating only what floats into her mouth. When the high god Batara Guru (Siwa/Shiva) hears of the beauty of meditating Anjani, he does a fly-by. Aroused by the vision of the maid, Batara Guru ejaculates into the lake. His semen floats into unsuspecting Anjani's mouth, miraculously begetting Hanuman. This clever monkey child immediately on being born demands of his bewildered mother his father's name. Anjani claims no one knows, except perhaps the high god who knows all. Infant Hanuman storms heaven to ask Batara Guru the name of his father, and no force can defeat this monkey boy. So Batara Guru acknowledges Hanuman as his son. Batara Guru performs a purification ceremony (*ruwatan*, literally, 'make safe') for Anjani by enacting a puppet show. As a result of this puppet show within a puppet show, her outward form (*labir*) again changes to reflect the full beauty of her now purified inward soul (*batin*). The other gods produce monkey offspring so that Hanuman has friends with whom to monkey around and later serve Rama.

1.2. Branch Story: "Power of Rama's Crown"

Wahyu Makuta Rama has the Mahabharata's divided family of Kurawas and Pandawas competing for the blessing/magical power (*wahyu*) of Rama's Crown, since whoever gains this will rule justly and long. The Kurawa king, Suyudana, sends his supporter Karna, half-sibling of the Pandawa, to win the *wahyu*. At the same time, Arjuna, third brother of the five Pandawa heroes and half-brother of Karna, likewise seeks it. The two parties converge at Hermitage Swelagiri. An old monkey (in reality, Hanuman) protects the hermit Kesaswidi ('Love', in reality Wisnu/Rama/Kresna) against Karna's attack. Kesaswidi then teaches Arjuna the *astabrata* (eight principles of divine kingship) which are the 'Crown'

and promises that Arjuna's grandson Parikesit will carry this power to Java and Rama will incarnate in him and his descendants. Hanuman goes to Kendalisodo (temple site in Java) where he will keep watch over the soul of Rawana under the mountain. Hanuman will only enter heaven at the time of the Jaya Baya (Javanese king of Kediri c. 1135-1159), who is the archetype of Java's just king (*ratu adil*) and said to be both a great-great-grandson of Parikesit and ancestor of the historical Javanese kings.

After other complicated interactions between Kurawa-Pandawa and selected Ramayana figures, the story ends. The spirits of the Ramayana era then incarnate in the Pandawa adherents: Rama enters Kresna (the Pandawa's cousin-advisor); Laksmana (Rama's brother), enters Arjuna; Sita enters Subadra (Arjuna's wife); and Kumbakara (noble giant and brother of Rawana) enters Bima (the large-bodied Pandawa hero and brother of Arjuna). Rama will later fully incarnate in Parikesit and, presumably, all the righteous Javanese rulers in the ages to come. Hanuman remains himself, but as a guardian figure in Java. Rawana (or at least his soul) is both the volcanic earth and the potential political divisiveness of the island. Only good rulers and good guardians can keep Rawana's chaos in check.

1.3. *Discussion*

Elements of intensification and localization in the *Eight-sided Diamond Case* story include making Hanuman the secret son of the high god of the universe (Batara Guru/Siwa) and Anjani Siwa's acknowledged wife. Bayu, the wind god, is the father of Hanuman in most Indian versions, but in *wayang golek*'s hierarchy, Bayu is below Siwa, so Hanuman gains status when Bayu merely teaches him fighting skills. Anjani advances from her first appearance as a spoiled brat fighting with siblings over material things (the Eight-sided Diamond Case), to mother of a great hero (Hanuman), then consort of the top god (Batara Guru). She makes this ascent by fully developing her *batin* ('spirit') and embracing her miraculously-born child despite his monkey form – as she says, «A child is

a child, whether he be handsome or plain, man or monkey. Come to my arms my beloved son».¹²

Anjani's siblings' success is more tempered: Sugiwa's deer meditation only makes him eligible for loyal service to Rama. Subali, while powerful in his bat meditation (gaining the *panca sona* that will allow one to rise from the dead if his body touches the earth), turns his power toward injustice providing it to Rawana and giving Rawana the ability to escape death unless he is killed midair. Rama will need to circumvent Rawana's touching the ground in defeating the demon king.

The *ruwatan* of Anjani from monkey to wife of the god is enacted as a play within the play. This is, likewise, a local touch, and here Batara Guru/Siwa himself performs this *wayang* within a *wayang*. The doll puppet of Batara Guru uses the *kayon* (tree of life puppet) to represent a shadow puppet screen. This flat leather figure connotes the cosmos and all its contents which the divine *dalang* (God) animates. The healing power and spiritual authority of the divine that accrue to a puppet master are represented in this scene: *dalang* and Batara Guru/Siwa are, through their ability to manipulate figures and represent truth, powerful. The mantras used in this scene are the same as in an actual *ruwatan* (healing performance done via puppet show, telling a story of Kala, God of Time, another son of Siwa born, similarly to Hanuman, from Batara Guru's premature ejaculation into a watery sea). During performance of the play within the play that Anjani watches, words of the healing formulae for *ruwatan* are chanted while musicians play the sacred tune *kidung*.¹³ While in *Eight-sided Diamond Case* the healing is fictive, the narrative highlights the local practice of healing performances by hearing the mantra of a *dalang*'s show. A *ruwatan* is a ceremony that is required for those born in certain circumstances (e.g. an only child or five children of the same sex), who have broken certain tabus (e.g. breaking a grinding stone), or who are starting a new endeavor (e.g. planting land not previously cultivated or opening a new factory). Although the tale of the *Eight-sided Diamond Case* relates to Indian versions of Hanuman's birth, the story is localized by the god cited as parent (Siwa not Bayu), the pattern of powerful son created via divine ejacula-

¹² RASTA 1979.

¹³ See SUNARYA - GIRI HARJA - FOLEY 2001 for more on *ruwatan* in West Java.

tion who storm heaven to find his father (Hanuman/Kala), and the idea that Anjani can, through spiritual progress, move from cursed monkey to a home in heaven. Moreover, this tale is linked to the local practice of using puppet shows to “heal” someone who needs purification.

Wahyu Makuta Rama, by contrast, gives a sense of the complexity with which Javanese puppeteers have interwoven the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and linked the heroes of both epics to semi-historical Java. This branch story is inset into the “facts” of the trunk story of both the Ramayana and Mahabharata by matching the character types (Kresna is to Rama, as Arjuna is to Lakshmana, as Bhima is to Kumbakarna, as Sumbadra is to Sita). The overlay of one major epic on the next allows for a kind of intensification of the themes. The Pandawa’s kingdom becomes the new Ayodya (Rama’s capital), while the Kurawa’s Astina is paired with Rawana’s Lengka (a demon realm). At the end of the tale, localization sends the descendant of Arjuna, Parikesit, to Java to embody Wisnu power there. At the same time, Hanuman, the hermit-protector, transfers to Java to meditate at a Hindu temple complex on a semi-dormant volcano, capping Rawana’s endless chaotic potential. The power of Rama’s Crown as *wahyu*, the just rule of *astabrata*, is gifted to Java’s historic and future leaders.

I have not discussed many other details which distinguish the West Java version of the Ramayana. For example, intensity is added in that Sita is the daughter of Rawana by his wife Manondari (making his pursuit of Sita incestuous): but he does not realize she is the infant he ordered set upon the waves in a basket when his soothsayer-sibling, Wibiksana, predicted the child would bring him disaster. Nor have I discussed Hanuman as romancer of the daughter of Wibiksana, Trijata, and how she gives birth to Hanuman Trigangga who after the death of Rawana will be part of the leadership of Alengka.¹⁴ Male celibacy has no place in the Javanese cultural paradigm: Hanuman needs wives and offspring to be a true Southeast Asian hero, and so he gets them. Such sons also allows for interesting additional episodes that puppeteers invent. Hanuman can meet Hanuman Trigangga in battle without knowing that the youth is his child and then wonder why this whippersnapper cannot be beat. This pattern – the unknown son who is recognized

¹⁴ Hanuman has another son Purwaganti by the daughter of a sage. Purwaganti primarily appears in Mahabharata tales.

when the father cannot subdue the youth – is, of course, borrowed from Rama’s realization late in the Ramayana trunk story that Kusa and Lawa, who are “equal in power” to Rama are his offspring. Many more examples of changes could be given. However, the two story samples outlined above show how the Indonesian puppet masters have both respected the broad outline of the Ramayana story and yet playfully tweaked the narrative for local consumption.

2. MALAYSIA: *WAYANG KELANTAN*

Wayang kelantan uses figures made of buffalo hide from 30 to 120 cm. high, carved and incised. They are now often semi-translucent, allowing the color to be seen through the screen. Performers present shows outdoors on a purposely built, enclosed, raised stage (*pangung*) made of wood, bamboo, and thatch. The solo *dalang* is accompanied by a small gong-chime and drum ensemble. Performances are today no longer paid for by a sponsor for a family celebration; rather, tickets are sold for entrance to an enclosed grassy area where viewers lounge as they watch the show [Figure 3].



Fig. 3. *Wayang kelantan* figures r. To l. Sri Laksmana, Hanuman Kera Putih, and Sri Rama, face Lakjuna (son of Rama), Siti Dewi, and Lat Palembang (son of Rama). Photo: Kathy Foley.

The *dalangs* of the Tumpat area, Kelantan, Malaysia who I interviewed in 2014 claimed the real history of *wayang kelantan* had yet to be written, while recognizing that researchers have dealt with the genre's repertoire, music, visual aspects, and ethnological features.¹⁵ My account will be largely based on the interviews I did with the puppeteer Rahim bin Hamzah (son of national artist Dalang Hamzah bin Awang) and the musician/dalang Mat Abang, as well as my own viewing of shows. I have also used story materials from Dain bin Othman (hereafter Pak Daim), who trained in the 1970s and, after retirement from his career in education, has written about what he learned during his *wayang* training. I also took information from Amin Sweeney's 1972 book which includes information from oral interviews with over twenty *dalang* in the late 1960s. These sources have informed my understanding of the trunk (*pokok*) story of the Ramayana which is called *Cherita Maharaja Wana* (The Story of Rawana). The tantric features of the story's antagonist have made Rawana more interesting and important than Rama in the Malay tale and the opening mantra of the Malay puppet play points to its hybrid roots:

With Malay annals, Thai theatre, Javanese stories
By the original puppeteer, passed
Within the *dalang* lineage
Of the first *dalang* Mak Erak¹⁶

The puppeteers of Tumpat that I interviewed hold that the first *dalang* was a Thai-Chinese woman Mak Erak from Kampung Kebakat who went to Java and studied *wayang*, then brought a puppet chest (*kotak*) back to perform. Enroute to Kelantan the winds rose and the ship floundered, so Mak Erak took out the god-clown puppet (Java's Semar / Kelantan's Pak Dogel). She held up the figure to the wind and it became her sail, bringing her home to the Kota Baru area, where she taught first her husband and later others the art of *wayang kelantan* (also called *wayang siam*). Pak Daim, as the mantra above continues,

¹⁵ For repertoire see and CUISINIER 1957, SWEENEY 1972 and OTHMAN 2011 (Pak Daim); music, MATUSKY 1997; ethnography, WRIGHT 1980; theatre, LIM 2011, OSNES 2010 and YOUSOF 1992, 1997, 2004a and 2004b, YOUSEF - KHOR 2017; politics, CONDEE 2015 and FOLEY 2015; and for manuscript antecedents see SHELLABEAR 1916 and ZIESENIS 1963.

¹⁶ OTHMAN 2011: 17.

then lists twelve generations of puppeteers between Mak Erak and himself. This *sisilab/* teaching line might imply a history of about 200 years.

However, rather than a single line of descent/learning, the flow around the gulf of Thailand has always been circular with people, stories, and cultural influences constantly flowing down from what is now southern Thailand, and up from Indonesia (and over as far as Cambodia). As a result, Malaysia's style of figures and stories is an amalgam of Thai, Javanese, and local features. Thai traits are found in figure iconography, for example, the Thai-style *chada* (crown headdress) of noble figures like Rama or Maharaja Wana, a pattern reportedly borrowed from the Thai *nang talung* shadow puppetry in the early 20th century. Stories (for example the episode of the Fish-tailed Princess, Putri Ikan, who is a daughter or granddaughter of Maharaja Wana and with whom Hanuman begets Hanuman Ikan, literally 'Fish-tail Hanuman') again shows Thai impact – this is the popular Thai Sovanna Macha with her son Machanu. The trunk plot in the Malaysian narrative is probably closest to the Thai *Ramakien* (Ramayana), which Thai Buddhists see as a *jataka* (previous life of the Buddha). Rama is an avatar of the Buddha and the *Ramakien* is a tale that Thai monarchs, especially of the Chakri dynasty from the 18th century to the present, have long supported.¹⁷ Major Thai versions of the Ramayana were written by various Thai monarchs, especially Rama I (1726-1809) and Rama II (1766-1824). Kelantan, which shares a border and many cultural features with Thailand, has gotten story material from the Thai. Javanese influences, too, are apparent in a number of characters (for example, Maharaja's Wana son Indrajit, who wears the "shrimp tail" headdress of many Javanese *wayang* figures). Stories related to Java like that of Sita Dewi [Sita, also Siti Dewi], born as the daughter of Maharaja Wana and his wife Mandudaki, abound.¹⁸

Here I will only give two tales that will be compared with the Sundanese stories discussed earlier. The trunk story is *Birth of Hanuman* (*Hanuman Labir*) in the Malay version. My branch episode is *Rama Distraught* (*Rama Bingung*). The latter shows again

¹⁷ REYNOLDS 1991.

¹⁸ Mandudaki was supposedly created from the sweat of Manondari (stepmother of Rama). Maharaja Wana supposedly attacked Rama's father kingdom and demanded Manondari as wife. Manondari then tricked the Rawana character by making a twin (Mandudaki) from her sweat to give Maharaja Wana as wife. There are even versions where Rama's father, Sultan Sirat Mahraja, goes secretly to Lengka and impregnates Mandudaki, which of course would make Sita a half-sister to Rama!

mixing and matching of one narrative repertoire with another, but here the adaptation is from a non-Indian narrative (the story of Panji, a lover-prince of East Java).

2.1. *Trunk Story: "Birth of Hanuman"*

In *Birth of Hanuman*, the misguided ejaculation that births Hanuman is not credited to Siwa (nor Bayu, the wind god), but rather to Rama himself. This Malaysian *pokok* (trunk) version comes from Dain Bin Othman, Pak Daim. After Sri Rama (with the help of Laksmana) wins Sita Dewi's hand by stringing the bow and shooting an arrow through multiple trees at Wat Tujuh Kedi Beremas (Temple of Seven Gold Towers), the couple is heading to Rama's father's (Sultan Sirat Mahraja's) realm, the Kingdom of Java:

Sri Rama drank water cursed by Rawana turning both of them [Sri Rama and Sita/Siti Dewi] into monkeys . . . Sita Dewi became pregnant. In an effort to restore Sri Rama and Sita Dewi to become human again Laksmana's arrow hits a monkey [Sita Dewi] resulting in a miscarriage. The fetus of Sita Dewi is given to Tuan Puteri Maya Angin, the daughter of Maharesi Burung Jerijit.¹⁹

Hanuman Kera Putih Hulubalang (Hanuman the White Monkey Warrior) trains in mysticism with Dewa Sinar Matahari (God of the Sun), gaining powers and sparkling garb. He asks the name of his father. When the God of the Sun acknowledges his parent is none other than Sri Rama, Hanuman seeks his missing father and finds him in the forest searching for Sita Dewi. Rama tries to avoid acknowledging this embarrassing monkey child, but is convinced by Hanuman's strength that he must be his offspring. Rama finally, recognizes Hanuman as son, eating together off the same banana leaf. Enlisted as Sri Rama's general, Hanuman leaps the ocean to seek his mother, Sita Dewi. As he enters the garden of the Asoka tree, Sita Dewi's breasts drip milk, so she recognizes that this marvel-

¹⁹ OTHMAN 2011: 142. Maya Angin is the equivalent of Anjani and Maharesi Burung Jerijit takes the role of the Resi Gotama character in the Sundanese tale discussed above.

ous monkey is her own lost fetus. Rama's vexed relationship with his son and continual reprimanding of Hanuman, even temporarily banishing him, is often on display.

2.2. *Branch Story: "Rama Distraught"*

Next consider this Kelantan *ranting*/branch tale reported by Sweeney. After Sita Dewi is saved from Maharaja Wana, Sri Rama's father will not let her live with Sri Rama, saying they must remarry. Sita Dewi runs away and takes the name of Mek Hutan (Forest Lady) in a hermitage. Rama comes hunting and makes love to Mek Hutan without recognizing that she is Sita Dewi. Rama's stepmother, hearing of this liaison, summons Mek Hutan/Sita Dewi to the palace and has her killed. The body is placed on a raft of flowers and sent down the river. Rama finds the exquisite corpse and tries to kill himself, but then retreats to the hermitage to take up meditation. Hanuman carries the corpse of Sita Dewi to Maha Babu Senam/Wibisana who calls Batara Kala (God of Time, a son of Siwa) from heaven. Kala brings milk from the breast of a virgin nymph to revive Sita Dewi. The episode ends as Rama and Sita Dewi remarry.

2.3. *Discussion*

The birth of Hanuman as the child of Sri Rama and Sita Dewi, as in the Indonesian case, elevates the monkey child, but at the same time also humanizes his parents who need Laksmana's help in covering up an embarrassing pregnancy. Laksmana lassos the errant pair (Rama and Sita in their monkey form) to catch them. Then Laksmana extracts the child from Sita Dewi's belly and safeguards him in a surrogate mother (Maya Angin). Coming of age, Hanuman seeks his missing parents as avidly as any modern adopted child using DNA evidence. The choice to make Hanuman the son of Rama is, as in the *wayang golek* version, a promotion that heightens the blood line of this monkey hero. Of course, Rama and Sita, as neglectful caregivers to their monkey son, come off (as does Batara Guru in the *wayang golek* Hanuman birth story) as careless parents.

Behind the branch story of *Rama Distraught*, as Sweeney points out, we find the popular Panji story of the commoner-maid Ken Tambulan/*Anggraeni* loved by Prince Panji. Ramayana characters are matched to Panji figures. Sita Dewi has taken the role of Ken Tambulan, a forest girl who catches the eye of Prince Panji of Kuripan while he is out hunting. In the Panji tale, Ken Tambulan is ordered murdered by the prince's royal parents since the girl is not seen as of sufficient rank for a royal spouse. The Panji role is taken here by Sri Rama. The evil stepmother represented in the Panji tale (the consort Queen of Kuripan) is now Manondari, Rama's stepmother. Other characters, like Hanuman and Maha Babu Senam/Wibiksana, are used as is appropriate to their personality from the Ramayana trunk tale, but, as Sweeney points out, «characters from *Cerita MW* [Story of Maharaja Wana], although not corresponding to any character in the Panji tale, may be introduced into the *ranting* [branch] tale to play parts in keeping with their characters in . . . the *Cherita Maharaja Wana*». ²⁰ Hanuman and Maha Babu Senam create the happy ending for the branch tale by reviving the dead female and showing she is actually Sita Dewi. The floating corpse motif, a sequence where Rama sees what he thinks is dead Sita floating on the water, comes from the Thai tale of Benyaki (*The Floating Princess*) who is in *wayang kelantan* is called Lekasari. ²¹

Sweeney suggests that interweaving of different motifs, especially from the Panji story, may have affected the overall interpretation of Rama in Kelantan – he is seen as a profligate lover in Malaysia. Sweeney quotes a noted *dalang* of the last generation, Awang Lah, as saying, «Sri Rama can never resist a woman». ²² Indeed, the Panji story is more a romance than a war epic: young people fall in love, change sex, lose each other temporarily, but usually find their way to a happy ending. The Panji story in Kelantan was the

²⁰ SWEENEY 1972: 266. Both Maha Babu Senam and Hanuman are “fixers” in the Malay Ramayana and they both serve that function in this Ken Tambulan-Panji adaptation.

²¹ The “Floating Princess” episode is shared between Thailand and Malaysia where the Thai Benyaki/Malay Lekasari is the daughter of the Wibiksana character (Thai Pibhek/Malay Maha Babu Senam). This demon daughter is sent by the Rawana character (Thai Totkasan/Malay Maharaja Wana) to Rama's camp to make Rama believe Sita is dead. Seeing the disguised demoness floating on the water, Rama despairs. But Hanuman exposes the ruse and then seduces the girl resulting in a son (Thai Asurapat/Malay Hanuman Bongsu). In the Indonesian version, this demoness daughter of Wibiksana and spouse of Hanoman is called Trijata. In the Malaysian version, however, Trijata is the wife of the Wibiksana character and the mother of Lekasari. I have not encountered the “floating princess” episode in Indonesia.

²² SWEENEY 1972: 266.

repertoire of palace *dalang* of a form called *wayang melayu* and this tale was probably borrowed from that now defunct repertoire and retrofitted to the Ramayana characters of *wayang kelantan*.

Other differences from India in the Kelantanese episodes abound. Laksmana as a celibate makes no sense in Malay society, so he is seen as a homoerotic ladyboy. Hanuman, to be a muscular Malay hero, must have multiple lady lovers and children and therefore we get Hanuman Ikan (by Puteri Ikan, the mermaid granddaughter of Maharaja Wana) and Hanuman Bongsu (by Maha Babu Senam's daughter Lekasari). Sri Rama, himself, is seldom true to Sita Dewi. When Maharaja Wana's sister, Sammanakha (India's Sarpakanaka), comes seeking Sri Rama as a husband, he pampers the demoness as his second wife, much to Laksmana's and Sita Dewi's consternation. Domestic spats of co-wives are a motif common in Muslim Malay literature and life, and so the alteration makes for appealing local drama. Rama is always loath to recognize Hanuman. In Malaysia, Laksmana, Hanuman, and Maha Babu Senam are the reliable problem solvers, while Sri Rama is often the petulant playboy who must be helped by the three. Sri Rama is far from the kingly ideal of Valmiki.

Since the 1980s, the concomitant growth of the Islamic revival in the Muslim world and India's *Bharatiya Janata Party's* Hindutva-styled politics has helped the Ramayana epic become contested ground even beyond India's borders. Malays and Indonesians have felt the impact of religious conservatism as political Islam has grown in life and politics. In the early 1990s, the Pan Malay Islamic Party (PAS) came to power in Kelantan. Seeing animist elements in the opening of *wayang kelantan* plays, healing uses of *wayang* such as *ruwatan*, Thai *chada* crowns associated with Buddhist kings on Rama, and other such features, PAS banned *wayang kelantan* along with allied arts. The Muslim teacher and important cleric Tuan Guru Nik Aziz Nik Mat, as chief minister, sought to cleanse Kelantanese culture of features he considered "un-Islamic". *Wayang*, therefore, became *haram* ('forbidden'). Whereas Sweeney found there were 300 *dalang* in the 1970s, the practice of *wayang kelantan* is in the hands of a handful of practicing puppeteers today. Dalang Nik Mat Suara Mas (Hashim Ludin, 1952- 2018) was the one most active when I was researching in 2014. He had, like others, largely abandoned the Ramayana repertoire. Trained partially in Southern Thailand, he followed the new model emphasizing come-

dy, music, and new stories rather than Rama tales. Dalang Eyo Hok Seng (1955-), as a Chinese Buddhist, is free from some of the constraints imposed on Muslim performers, but audiences are still dwindling. The youngest regularly practicing puppeteers are over fifty and full performances are few, though some younger would be *dalang* struggle to preserve the art. The near demise of *wayang kelantan* and other so-called “un-Islamic” arts in Kelantan is an extreme case, but even in Indonesia where very tolerant Islam was the norm in the 1970s, calls for more sharia-compliant Islam impact the arts in general and the Ramayana in particular.

Throughout Southeast Asia, the Ramayana was once seen as a shared narrative among Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists and was adapted according to the preferences of each group. Currently, it probably holds full ground only in Thailand, due to its association with the Chakri lineage in royal supported arts, and in Bali, the one Hindu majority site in Indonesia. But even in Bali, which had long preserved its own strain of Hinduism, one also sees a tendency to turn to India as an authority today, sometimes to the detriment of local traditions, amending the repertoire.

The fight over Babri Masjid, a Mughal era mosque supposedly built on the site where Rama was born, has long existed as a bone of contention between Indian Hindus and Muslim. In 1992, Hindus, egged on by BKJ, tore down the mosque, leading to riots across India where thousands, both Muslim and Hindu, died. The need of the Hindu right for a historical Rama to unite a political voting block remains strong in India and affects the Indian diasporas, both Muslim and Hindu, in making the tale today more sectarian than in eras past. Today, the Ramayana can land the mild-mannered performer of puppet theatre in a nest of hornets since, as Mridula Mukherjee at the Center for Historical Studies at Jawarlal Nehru University notes, «If people believe there is no one original *Ramayan* then how can they say that Ram was a historical figure, born on such and such a date. ...it undermines the Hindutva brigade’s agenda for the last 20 years».²³

The stories we find in Indonesian and Malaysian Ramayanas, while roughly following the same incidents as Valmiki, have been interpreted quite differently in Southeast Asia. These Southeast Asian traditions, of course, have been affected by the many Indi-

²³ Quoted in RITO 2011.

an variations of the Ramayana of Jains, Tamil Hindus, Thai Buddhists, Muslim syncretists, and others. But now, enmeshed in international politics, Muslim *ulama* (clerics) are prone to see Rama as being worshipped when the tale is told. In the current age as Valmiki is touted by the Hinduvta and Wahabi proscriptions on iconography grow in Southeast Asia, conservative Muslims label the Ramayana tale as *shirk* (worshipping another god than Allah). The Ramayana is, as Ramanujan states, a huge well of narrative that South-east Asians have been dipping into it for their own cultural needs for at least a thousand years, but now politics are limiting who taps this source. In Malaysia, William Condee asks of *wayang kelantan*:

So what is the future...? Will it be dead in five to ten years as many have predicted? My impression is that the wayang of the past, with its rituals, may not survive. But if, along with some dalang, one views wayang more expansively, wayang siam may endure.²⁴

Even in Indonesia, where the *wayang* tradition is much stronger, fundamentalist attacks on *wayang* have begun. Statues of the god-clown Semar and other *wayang* characters were burned by Muslim fundamentalists in Purwakarta, West Java, in 2011. There have also been instances of religious vigilantes breaking up *wayang* performance in villages. In a 2022 video, Makassar-born Ustadz Khalid Basalamamah, a popular Islamic teacher, advised a follower to burn their *wayang* figures since puppetry was not compliant with Islam.²⁵ In response, Dalang Ki Warseno (Hardiodarsono) Slenk staged a performance at a moderate Islamic School (Ora Aji in Yogyakarta) in which a puppet he had built resembling this Islamic teacher Ustadz Khalid was beaten and burnt. Fundamentalists then flooded social media with attacks on the puppet master. *Dalangs* throughout Indonesia then turned to Instagram and YouTube to protect their art.²⁶ Though the Indonesian case is nowhere near as extreme as that of Malaysia, the impacts and controversies are still real.

²⁴ CONDEE 2015: 34.

²⁵ See the article *Banyumas Dalang Will Police Khalid Basalamah About Haram Puppet Lecture*, in «World Today News», <<https://www.world-today-news.com/banyumas-dalang-will-police-khalid-basalamah-about-haram-puppet-lecture/>>, accessed 5 April 2022.

²⁶ See FOLEY 2019 and FOLEY forthcoming.

In this essay I have noted some of the features of the Ramayana in Indonesian and Malay puppetry versions, showing localizations and the interweaving of outside narrative sources like the Mahabharata or Panji stories with Rama episodes. I have also pointed out that the divisiveness that contemporary religious politics brings is not helping the Ramayana continue as a source story. *Dalangs* seek a renewal of the *wahyu*, that Power of Rama's Crown, to ensure the future of the art. A guardian like Hanuman keeping watch at Kendalisodo is once again needed in a world in which the spirit of Rawana rumbles from under the mountain.

REFERENCES

PRIMARY SOURCES

- ABANG 2014 = Abang Mat, Personal interview, 9 June 2014.
- BARMAYA 1978 = Nandang Barmaya, *Wahyu Makuta Rama*, Bandung, SMKI, 1978.
- RAHIM 2014 = Rahim bin Hamzah, Personal Interview, 11 June 2014.
- RASTA 1979 = Dalang Otong Rasta, Personal interviews, 1979.
- ROBSON 2015 = Stuart Robson, *Old Javanese Ramayana*, Tokyo, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2015.
- SHELLABEAR 1916 = W. G. Shellabear, *Hikyat Seri Rama*, in « Journal of the Straits », [Malaysian Branch Royal Asiatic Society] XVII, (1916) [Original MS1633].
- SUNARYA - GIRI HARJA - FOLEY 2001 = Abah Sunarya - Gamelan Giri Harja - Kathy Foley, *The Origin of Kala: A Sundanese Wayang Golek Purwa Play by Abah Sunarya and Gamelan Giri Harja I*, in « *Asian Theatre Journal* », XVIII, 1 (2001), 1–58, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1124263>> accessed 30 Oct. 2022.

SECONDARY SOURCES

- ANDRIEU 2014 = Sarah Anaïs Andrieu, *Corps de bois, souffle humain. Le théâtre de marionnettes wayang golek de Java Ouest*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014.
- CONDEE 2015 = William Condee, *Wayang and Political Islam in Malaysia*, in « *Puppetry International* », XXXVIII (Fall 2015), 32-34.
- CUISINIER 1957 = Jeanne Cuisinier. *Le Théâtre d'ombres à Kelantan* ('The Shadow Theatre of Kelantan'), Paris, Gallimard, 1957.
- FOLEY 1979 = Kathy Foley, *The Sundanese "Wayang" Golek, Rod Puppet Theatre of West Java*, PhD Dissertation, Honolulu, University of Hawaii, 1979.

- FOLEY 2015 = Kathy Foley, *Wayang Kelantan beyond Borders*, in «Puppetry International», XXXVIII (Fall 2015), 36-38.
- FOLEY 2019 = Kathy Foley, *Les Wali réduit au silence* (Silencing the Wali), in *Marionnettes et Pouvoir. Censures, propagandes, résistances*, ed. by Raphaële Fleury - Julie Sermon, Montpellier, Deuxieme Epoque, 2019, 150-170.
- FOLEY forthcoming = Kathy Foley, *Dakwah, Missionizing and Wayang: Hindu, Islamic, Christian, Buddhist*, in *Luce Foundation Lectures Music and Religion*, ed. by Henry Spiller - Anna Berger, Cambridge, University Press, forthcoming.
- FOLEY - JIT 1997 = Kathy Foley - Krishan Jit, *Indonesia*, in *The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre* [2nd rev. ed.], ed. by James R. Brandon, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- HERBERT - RAHARDJO 2002 = Mimi Herbert - Nur S. Rahardjo, *Voices of the Puppet Masters: The Wayang Golek Theater of Indonesia*, Jakarta and Honolulu, The Lontar Foundation - University of Hawai'i Press, 2002, 208-225.
- LIM 2011 = Lim Siew Lian, *Preservation and Practice of Wayang Kulit Kelantan in Malaysia: Interviews with Four Dalang*, 2011, <http://www.siewlianlim.com/uploads/7/1/1/3/7113499/preservation_and_practice_of_wayang_kulit_in_malaysia.pdf>, accessed 23 April 2023.
- LORD 1960 = Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales*. Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1960.
- MATUSKY 1997 = Patricia Matusky, *Malaysian Shadow Play and Music-Continuity of an Oral Tradition*, Penang, The Asian Centre, 1997.
- NALAN 2014 = Artur Nalan, *Wayang Golek: Teater Rakyat Dinamis dan Merakyat* (Wayang Golek: Dynamic and Popular Folk Theatre), Bandung, Sunan Ambu Press, 2014.
- OSNES 2010 = Mary Beth Osnes, *The Shadow Puppet Theatre of Malaysia: A Study of Wayang Kulit with Performances Scripts and Puppet Designs*, Carolina, McFarland & Company Inc., 2010.
- OTHMAN 2011 = Muhammad Dian bin Othman, *Wayang Kulit Melayu Tradisional Kelantan/The Kelantan Malay Traditional Shadow Play (Suatu Perspektif)*, Shah Alam (Malaysia), Mahmanis Enterprise - Gifawise Network Sdn. Bhd, 2011.

- RAMANUJAN 1991 = A.K. Ramanujan, *Three Hundred Rāmāyaṇas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation*, in *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, ed. by Paula Richman, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991, 22–48 <<http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft3j49n8h7/>>, accessed 23 April 2023.
- REYNOLDS 1991 = Frank E. Reynolds, *Ramayana, Rama Jataka, and Ramakien: A Comparative Study of Hindu and Buddhist Traditions*, in *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, ed. by Paula Richman, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991, 48-59 <<http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft-3j49n8h7/>>, accessed 23 April 2023.
- RITO 2011 = Paul Rito, *Who's Afraid of 300 Ramayana?*, in «DNA», 4 December 2011, <<https://www.dnaindia.com/lifestyle/report-who-s-afraid-of-300-ramayanas-1620946>>, accessed 10 April 2023.
- SEDANA - FOLEY 2020 = I Nyoman Sedana - Kathy Foley, *Report: Indonesian Ramayana Festival at Prambanan (2012)*, in «Asian Theatre Journal», XXXVII, 1 (2020), 228-245 <[10.1353/atj.2020.0002](https://doi.org/10.1353/atj.2020.0002)>, accessed 10 April 2023.
- SOPANDI 1997 = Atik Sopandi *et al.* *Peralatan Hiburan dan Kesenian Tradisional Daerah Jawa Barat* (Entertainment Equipment and Traditional Arts of West Java), Jakarta, Departemen P & K, 1997.
- SWEENEY 1972 = Amin Sweeney, *The Ramayana and the Malay Shadow Play*, Kuala Lumpur, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Press, 1972.
- WEINTRAUB 2004 = Andrew Weintraub, *Power Plays: Wayang Golek Puppet Theater of West Java*. Athens (OH) and Singapore, Ohio Univ. Press - Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004.
- WRIGHT 1980 = Barbara Wright, *Wayang Siam: An Ethnographic Study Of The Malay Shadow Play Of Kelantan*, Yale Univ. Ph.D. Dissertation 1980, <<https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/wayang-siam-ethnographic-study-malay-shadow-play/docview/303075352/se-2?accountid=14523>>, accessed 2 September 2023.
- YOUSOF 1992 = Ghulam Sawar Yousef, *Pangung Semar: Aspects of Traditional Malay Theatre*, Petaling Jaya (Malaysia), Tempo Publishing, 1992.

- YOUSOF 1997 = Ghulam Sawar Yousof. *Angin Wayang: A Biography of a Master Puppeteer*, Kuala Lumpur, Ministry of Arts, Culture and Tourism Malaysia, 1997.
- YOUSOF 2004a = Ghulam Sarwar Yousof, *Encyclopedia of Malaysia. Vol. 8: Performing Arts*, Singapore, Editions Didier Millet, 2004.
- YOUSOF 2004b = Ghulam Sawar Yousof, *Panggung Inu: Essays on Traditional Malay Theatre*, Singapore, National University of Singapore, 2004.
- YOUSOF - KHOR 2017 = Ghulam Sawar Yousof - Kheng-Kia Khor, *Wayang Kulit Kelantan: A Study of Characterization and Puppets*, in «*Asian Theatre Journal*», XXX-IV, 1 (2017), 1–25, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44630736>>, accessed 21 April 2023.
- ZIESENISS 1963 = Alexander Zieseniss, *The Rama Saga in Malaysia*, Singapore, Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1963.

TRADITION AND INNOVATION IN THE MAKING OF *ABOUT RAM*: A CONTEMPORARY INDIAN PUPPETEER AND A RAMAYANA SCHOLAR IN CONVERSATION

Anurupa Roy - Paula Richman
Katkatha Puppet Arts Trust - Oberlin College

ABSTRACT: Anurupa Roy, director of a troupe of puppeteers in Delhi, India, discusses with Paula Richman, emerita professor at Oberlin College (USA), various facets in the creation of her puppet play *About Ram*. Roy wanted the audience to experience the diversity of the Ramayana tradition as a tragic love story about a hero (first a prince and later a king) who feels duty-bound to banish his wife with the result that he remains alone for the rest of his life. The play is filled with images of the hero's past life through animation of his memories and weapons on a screen mounted on stage and music with no words but with a percussion emphasis that draws upon different musical instruments from various regions. Over the period of improvisation by which the performance developed, Roy made the war scenes very stylized and the animator contemporized the weapons to include jet propulsion and machine guns. As part of her goal to develop an embodied language for contemporary puppet practice in India, Roy incorporated dances based on martial arts, which led to a grammar of movement for the puppet performance that was contemporary and engaging.

KEYWORDS: Ramayana (India), puppet performance, contemporary puppet, animation, epic weapons; percussive soundscapes

RIASSUNTO: Anurupa Roy, direttrice di una compagnia di burattinai a Delhi, in India, discute con Paula Richman, professoressa emerita all'Oberlin College (USA), i vari aspetti della creazione del suo spettacolo di marionette *About Ram*. Roy voleva che il pubblico sperimentasse la varietà della tradizione del Ramayana nella forma della tragica storia d'amore di un eroe (prima principe e

*This conversation is an edited version of the Q&A with Anurupa Roy, in conversation with Paula Richman, moderated by John Bell, that followed the screening of *About Ram* hosted by the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry on May 25, 2022. A synopsis of the play and a medley of scenes are available on the World Epics website (at <https://edblogs.columbia.edu/worldpics/worldpicsinpuppettheater-india/>). The screening and Q&A were co-sponsored by the Humanities War and Peace Initiative, through the Division of Humanities in the Arts & Sciences, Columbia University.

AOQU – *L'epica e il teatro di figura mondiale / World Epics and Puppet Theater*, IV, 2 (2023)
<https://riviste.unimi.it/aoqu> - ISBN 9791280664747 - DOI: 10.54103/2724-3346/22210



poi re) che si sente obbligato a bandire sua moglie, rimanendo di conseguenza solo per il resto della sua vita. Lo spettacolo è pieno di immagini della vita passata dell'eroe, rese attraverso l'animazione dei suoi ricordi e delle sue armi su uno schermo montato sul palco, e musica senza parole ma con un' enfasi percussiva che attinge a strumenti musicali diversi, provenienti da varie regioni. Nel corso del periodo di improvvisazione durante il quale si è sviluppata la performance, Roy ha lavorato molto sulla stilizzazione delle scene di guerra e l'animatore ha modernizzato le armi includendo propulsione a reazione e mitragliatrici. Come parte del suo obiettivo di sviluppare un linguaggio del corpo per la pratica marionettistica indiana contemporanea, Roy ha inserito danze basate sulle arti marziali, e questo ha portato a una grammatica del movimento marionettistico contemporanea e coinvolgente.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Ramayana (India), spettacolo di marionette, marionettistica contemporanea, animazione, armi epiche, paesaggi sonori percussivi

PAULA RICHMAN: I found *About Ram* ingenious, captivating, and elegant. Thank you for agreeing to tell us more about this unique puppet performance. We'd like to hear more about how you, your puppeteers, and your collaborators came to create *About Ram*. Let me begin with an overall question: What were the most challenging parts of creating a public performance drawn from the Ramayana tradition, especially since it is such a long narrative with so many characters?

ANURUPA ROY: As you said, it's a very big narrative. Before I even begin to answer that question, first I should tell you that your writings were one of the first sources we read when we started the research for the drama. As a young person – I was quite young back then, it was 2004 when we started working on the Ramayana – it was a real mishmash of having seen the Balinese Ramayana and traditional puppet shows drawn from the Indian Ramayana, such as shadow puppetry, string puppets, and other puppet forms. They all enact stories from the most well-known pan-Indian epics, the Ramayana and

Mahabharata.¹ Then, having read both of your essays was almost like a moment of building a bridge.²

PAULA RICHMAN: I found *About Ram* ingenious, captivating, and elegant. Thank you for agreeing to tell us more about this unique puppet performance. We would like to hear how you, your puppeteers, and your collaborators came to create *About Ram*. Let me begin with an overall question: What were the most challenging parts of creating a public performance drawn from the Ramayana tradition, especially since it is such a long narrative with so many characters?

ANURUPA ROY: As you said, it's a very big narrative. Before I even begin to answer that question, first I should tell you that your writings were one of the first sources we read when we started the research for the drama. As a young person – I was quite young back then, it was 2004 when we started working on the Ramayana – it was a real mishmash of having seen the Balinese Ramayana and traditional puppet shows drawn from the Indian Ramayana, such as shadow puppetry, string puppets, and other puppet forms. They all enact stories from the most well-known pan-Indian epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Then, having read both of your essays was almost like a moment of building a bridge.

Now turning to the challenges, keep in mind that like most performers drawing from a long narrative, we overcame many of the challenges posed by our production, but not all of them. The first challenge was to consider how a contemporary Indian artist starts talking about an epic which is very strong in the public memory. You know, cricket, politics, and the epics are something every Indian has an opinion about, so the contemporary artist can never get it “right.” That was a critical challenge.

The other challenge was how to do justice to all the narratives – all the tellings – because if you compare it to the Mahabharata, you see that the Ramayana possesses a

¹ Although technically the Ramayana falls into the genre of *kavya* (an extended narrative poem) and the Mahabharata is an *itihasa* ('thus it happened'), a record of events, they are frequently referred to in English as “epics”.

² RICHMAN 1991b; and RICHMAN 2001b. Indian editions were also published by Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

much more linear narrative. Yet, once you start exploring the diversity within the Ramayana narrative tradition – for example, between the Buddhist narrative, the Tamil narrative, and puppet plays in Odisha – they are telling you quite different stories.³ For example, in one Rama is the hero, in another Hanuman is the hero. So, for us a pivotal challenge was to pay homage to this diversity, especially in the performed forms of the Ramayana (not just in the orally narrated versions).

In the performed forms, we discovered a pattern which basically brought everything together, namely, that the narrative informs the form. So, everything you see visually – the aesthetic, the colors, the type of puppet, the way it's drawn, painted, or dressed – comes from the narrative itself. We took for granted that people knew the story, and then played with the various aspects that stay in the audience's memory, because we're talking about a recurring narrative across a wide geographical area. Not just in India, but in a number of Southeast Asian countries, the Ramayana is also performed.⁴

Moreover, even just in India, there are maybe 300 oral narratives, and maybe more.⁵ If you travel every 100 kilometers in India, something will change in the story. So, the issue is how do you do justice to this? That was an enormous challenge. So, we kept the skeletal narrative and focused on the character of Rama. As the protagonist, he is possibly recalling the entire epic and everything that happened to him or possibly living through it in real time.⁶

PAULA: To follow up on the notion of Rama reflecting on his past, in the *Kutiyattam* and *Kathakali* dramas of Kerala, long before the play starts, the actor playing Rama prepares for his role. He must remain unmoving while the makeup artist meticulously applies color, texture, and designs to his face for at least two hours and usually more. This bodily preparation is paired with mental preparation; he recalls and reflects on stories from mythological texts and dramas about Rama's many deeds so he can immerse himself in

³ For Buddhist tellings, see REYNOLDS 1991. For the most well-known Tamil devotional telling, see SHULMAN 1991. For puppetry in PANI 1978.

⁴ For tellings of the Ramayana across Asia, see SRINIVASA IYENGAR 1980; and RAGHAVAN 1980. For an in-depth recent study of one Southeast Asian country, see MALINI - KHANNA 2004.

⁵ See RAMANUJAN 1991.

⁶ Thus, the production shows and affirms the open nature of the Ramayana tradition.

the character. In a somewhat similar way, the multimedia sections in *About Ram* reveal memories of past events that have consequences for the present.

ANURUPA: Yes, and one of the versions we followed, the *Krttibasa Ramayana* in Bengali, starts from the point where Ram, Sita, and Lakshmana have returned from their forest exile to the kingdom of Ayodhya and Lakshmana commissions a scroll painter to display what happened during the fourteen years that they have been in exile. I find this going back and forth a recurring theme in the Ramayana. Even in the Sanskrit *Adbhuta Ramayana*, you hear about Hanuman reminiscing, then Rama reminiscing or Sita reminiscing. The leather shadow puppet versions include this scene. For example, when Sita is asked by Shurpanakha in disguise to draw a picture of Ravana so they can see what he looked like, Sita recalls her captivity and then draws Ravana's big toe, which was all she ever saw of him because she kept her eyes modestly down on the ground.⁷ This incident is built into the narrative, which we found to be very exciting in the performance.

PAULA: Every single telling or performance of the story that I've ever heard or watched emphasizes certain episodes more than others. I'm sure you had to make many choices while conceptualizing *About Ram*. What made you pick the specific episodes on which you focused?

ANURUPA: We were looking at the Ramayana as containing features of a tragic love story and about a hero who makes choices – very human choices – that have consequences. The immediate consequence is that after he banishes Sita, he's all alone for the rest of his life.⁸ We picked episodes which would highlight such choices while maintaining the theme of everything being scraps of memory in Rama's head. For that reason, the audience doesn't see fully formed elements. The demons, monkeys, and other characters who come into his life are images that are projected onto a screen on stage. The exception is that twice he sees Sita very clearly when he makes the decision to banish her. In addition, the puppe-

⁷ The story exemplifies how Sita remained modest and aloof during her captivity in Lanka.

⁸ The court ministers advise Rama to marry again after Sita's banishment, but he refuses.

teers who constantly remain with Rama are extensions of him. Hanuman, of course, is a different kind of extension of him. We chose to think very carefully about what would stand out in Rama's memory years later.

PAULA: I found the part of *About Ram* that displayed images of military weapons visually stunning. For example, Ravana's son, Indrajit, wields a weapon called the serpent noose (*naga-pasa*). When he shoots it at Rama and Lakshmana, it transforms into serpents who coil and bind the bodies of the two princes, causing them great pain. A weapon turning into serpents is, by definition, a supernatural form of shape shifting; moreover, the animated weapons which are projected onto a screen (with no one wielding them) move energetically as if exercising agency.



Voices in Ram's head/doubts about Sita, *About Ram*, 2010. Photos by Atul Sinha/Adeep Anwar. Copyright - The Katkatha Puppet Arts Trust.



Ram looks at Sita, *About Ram*, 2010. Photos by Atul Sinha/Adeep Anwar. Copyright - The Kathakata Puppet Arts Trust



Sita dreams of Ram, *About Ram*, 2010. Photos by Atul Sinha/Adeep Anwar. Copyright - The Kathakata Puppet Arts Trust

ANURUPA: The weapons are rooted in the leather shadow puppets traditional in Andhra (southeastern India) called Tolubommalata. I worked closely with the animator on the project, Vishal K. Dhar, and with the nonagenarian master puppeteer, S. Chidambara Rao, whose family has been presenting puppet shows for generations. Essentially, the two of them sat together looking at composite images of puppets, picking them apart to remove, rebuild, or add elements. I walked into one of their discussions when they were building the Pushpaka Vimana, the aerial chariot in which Ravana captures Sita; they were installing jet propellers onto it.

All the demon puppets were built, scanned, and then animated with Maya, a computer software program used for animation. They even shaved off the demons' hair and provided them with spikes coming out of their heads. They would look at the weapons individually as well. There are a whole set of specific kinds of weapons in the narrative: the guards would carry certain weapons, the demons another kind, and the animals would carry yet another type of weapon—and these would change from story to story. We literally went with the scanner, looked at the types of shadow puppets, and worked with the puppeteer to draw out those elements. It was fantastic that he kept inventing new things. For example, he wanted to include machine guns so the story of the war would include elements found in today's wars. It was very exciting collaborating with such a talented puppet maker.

PAULA: From reading accounts of the war in texts by Valmiki and Kamban, I recognized the names of some weapons they mentioned but by just reading their names in the texts, I hadn't been able to visualize their appearance. The images in *About Ram* deepened my understanding of how they functioned. *About Ram* showed the audience images that revealed a weapon's design and how it contributed to a battle strategy.

Turning to another feature of *About Ram*, I was fascinated with how you handled the music or, more broadly, the soundscapes. Some sounds were minimalist and austere, while others echoed sounds of musical instruments characteristic of a specific region. I realized that *About Ram* was one of the few Ramayana performances that did not include lyrics in the music.

ANURUPA: For us, music was really the language of the show because lines from a single text might limit the scope of the performance to a single region or version of the story, thus undermining our homage to the diversity of the story. We stayed with music because it enabled many people to recognize various elements in it. We performed it across the country and no matter where we were located, everybody found something that appealed to them. I think the music makes that possible. We performed it in Chennai and people recognized the ghatam and in Kerala the chenda. The same recognition occurred in Kerala and Kolkata.

Abhijit Bannerji, our music composer, is well-versed in world music, as well as in various Indian music traditions, including both Karnatic and Hindustani classical music. He came from a percussion background himself, which is why the percussive elements stand out in the music so strongly. He used percussive language very well, for example, using the tabla bowl as a vocal form, instead of using words.

The composer used music from Balinese Keechak, Malay gamelan, and the ghatams and mrdangam from Tamilnadu. When you hear the chenta, you think of the Kerala puppetry. Similarly, the sarangi evokes the puppet form of Rajasthan. These instruments are strongly associated with their local forms and different versions. He was using his composition as clues for the audience to think of their local versions. His music helped us to overcome some of the obstacles of performing such a diverse, multi-faceted narrative.

PAULA: The music included many sounds that people could connect to, but it never sounded like a mishmash that would have resulted if the composer had mechanically combined “something for everyone.” That would have sounded superficial or tokenistic. Instead, the soundscape contained a style of music that fused with the puppetry in a distinctive way.

ANURUPA: Yes, the challenge for Abhijit Bannerji was huge. He was composing for puppets, yet he also had to look at the language of the epic. He is enormously skilled and remained deeply involved in the process of creating the production, staying with us through lots of the rehearsals. We also sent him lots of video recordings during a year of improvisation to create *About Ram*, which was mostly sketched instead of being fully

written. Parts were enacted through improvisation while the musician and animator were present so they could modify the music when changes developed out of the improvisation. If he had given us very tricky classical music, it would have been difficult for the puppeteers to translate it into movement.

PAULA: Also, strictly classical music would have excluded certain people. Instead, the music's sonic resonances enabled them to enter the performance's world.

What do you see as the "take-away" from *About Ram*? Were there insights that you really hoped that the viewers—many of whom already knew the core story—would recall after the performance?

ANURUPA: One of our key motivations was for the audience to realize that everybody has their favorite version of the epic, but it is just one of many, many versions. What is powerful about the epic is that everybody owns it and it's still living in the idioms and the sayings of everyday people. The fact that it travelled so far and wide was something that we really wanted people to take away. What they were watching in *About Ram* is only one version and only one rendition. On the next night, the same performer might enact it differently.

PAULA: How do you get feedback from your audience? Do people ever stay around and talk to the performers afterwards?

ANURUPA: We open the floor to our audiences at the end. They get to "meet" the puppets. It has always been very exciting. Everybody wants to meet Ravana. They see Rama and stand around and watch him for a little bit, but they really want to see the demons. They want to see the demon mask, especially children. They also want to see the backstage area, where the monkey went, what happened to him. That's always one form of feedback.

The other is they ask us what happened in the end, because the most popular televised version in the 1990s did not end with Rama sitting alone. It's hinted at, but you don't see the very tragic ending that appears in *About Ram*. Many people don't seem to

be aware of it. In fact, we also often talk about the way he dies. They don't always know that he finally walks into the Sarayu River.

PAULA: So, it sounds like the production can become an experience that generates new questions in the audience. Some of the most popular visual images of Rama show him being crowned king. At his coronation, one sees him surrounded by Sita, his three brothers, and Hanuman at his feet, but far more rarely does one see visual images of Sita bringing up her twin sons in the forest. The tragedy of the love story manifests itself when people in the kingdom suspect that Sita might not have remained faithful to Rama during her captivity. Everyone knows that Sita suffered when she was banished but *About Ram* shows that Rama suffered, too. In Indian literature, the union and separation of lovers is a major theme. Rama and Sita are lovers, but when Ravana abducts Sita, the two lovers undergo a painful separation. After Rama wins the war, the couple is reunited but when Sita becomes pregnant, Rama fears that his reign will be tainted and banishes her. That is their final separation.

ANURUPA: I'm thinking that in Bhavabhuti's *Uttararamacarita*, Rama and Sita are reunited at the end, but some people are unfamiliar with that play, so I make it a point to tell them that. The couple ends up getting reunited when Rama watches a performance of the story in which Sita is playing the role of Sita. What a fantastic reference to the power and efficacy of performance!



The coronation of Ram, *About Ram*, 2010. Photos by Atul Sinha/Adeep Anwar. Copyright - The Katkatha Puppet Arts Trust.

PAULA: How different is your use of puppets in *About Ram* from the other puppet performances you've created? It sounds as though you, your collaborators, and the puppeteers invested a lot of time in improvising this production as it developed over time.

ANURUPA: In preparing *About Ram*, I was eager to develop a language for modern Indian puppet theater. We have a short contemporary puppet history, if you can call it that. As a company, we were just finding our own contemporary language. We started in 1998 and were registered in 2006, and our early productions used a lot of table-top-inspired multiple puppeteer puppets, but there was always the question: what is the language of the body of the puppet? What does the anatomy say? How does the anatomy move? We were using a lot of what I would say is almost animation, digital animation as language, and then with *About Ram*. The company had two dancers, both trained in Mayurbhanj Chau, and we had collaborated with a couple of classical dancers, and it increasingly felt like we needed to have our own language for a contemporary Indian puppeteer company.

We started to study dance more and more. Classical dances like Bharatanatyam were not the answer. It was the martial dances, Chaau or Kalarippayattu, which seemed to have an answer for a grammar of movement for the puppets.

We took this very, very stylized approach; the entire fight scene was very stylized. The fight sequences where Rama uses exact compositions from martial dances. If you see our Rama, he doesn't use a bow and arrow, he uses a sword. Most of the epics used swords and we trained with them for almost a year. We worked 365 days that year. It was a very significant year for us. We were working with the dance trainer, a martial artist, and the puppets. In *About Ram*, we discovered the beginning of a language, which we've used or developed more fully since that time.



The fight between Ram and Ravan, *About Ram*, 2010. Photos by Atul Sinha/Adeep Anwar. Copyright - The Kathka Puppet Arts Trust.

PAULA: So, not just in the narrative sense, but also in your puppetry language, *About Ram* helped you to establish certain foundations that contributed to later productions.

Thank you for sharing your insights about how *About Ram* developed into the theatrical production that we saw. We'll be eager to see your future productions.

REFERENCES

- MALINI - KHANNA 2004 = Saran Malini - Vinod C. Khanna, *The Ramayana in Indonesia*, Delhi, Ravi Dayal, 2004.
- PANI 1978 = Jiwan Pani, *Ravana Chhaya*, New Delhi, Sangeet Natak Akademi, 1978.
- RAGHAVAN 1980 = *The Ramayana Tradition in Asia*, ed. by V. Raghavan, Delhi, Saitya Academy, 1980.
- RAMANUJAN 1991 = A.K. Ramanujan, *Three Hundred "Rāmāyaṇas": Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation*, in RICHMAN 1991a, 22-49.
- REYNOLDS 1991 = Frank Reynolds, "Rāmāyaṇa", "Rāma Jātaka" and "Ramakien": *Comparative Study of Hindu and Buddhist Traditions*, in RICHMAN 1991a, 50-66.
- RICHMAN 1991a = *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, ed. by Paula Richman, Berkley - Los Angeles - Oxford, University of California Press, 1991.
- RICHMAN 1991b = Paula Richman, *The Diversity of the "Rāmāyaṇa" Tradition*, in RICHMAN 1991a, 3-21.
- RICHMAN 2001a = *Questioning Ramayanas, A South Asian Tradition*, ed. by Paula Richman, Berkley - Los Angeles - Oxford, University of California Press, 2001.
- RICHMAN 2001b = *Questioning and Multiplicity within the Ramayana Tradition*, in RICHMAN 2001a, 1-21.
- SHULMAN 1991 = David Shulman, *Fire and Flood: The Testing of Sītā in Kamban's "Irāmāvatāram"*, in RICHMAN 1991a, 89-113.
- SRINIVASA IYENGAR 1980 = *Asian Variations on the Ramayana*, ed. by K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Delhi, Sahitya Academy, 1980.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

BRUNHILDE BIEBUYCK

Brunhilde Biebuyck has worked at Columbia University's Reid Hall in Paris since 1984. Before becoming the director of Columbia Global Centers Paris, she headed the Columbia-Penn undergraduate program in Paris and Columbia's MA Program in French Cultural Studies. After earning a PhD from the Folklore Institute at Indiana University (1981), she worked as a research associate with a team of linguists at the Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS). She is currently preparing the French translation of the Mubila epic, to be published by the Classiques africains.

ANNA CAROCCI

Anna Carocci è ricercatrice in Letteratura Italiana presso l'Università degli Studi Roma Tre. Si occupa di letteratura cavalleresca ed editoria popolare del Cinquecento. Tra i suoi lavori: *La lezione di Boiardo. Il poema cavalleresco dopo l'Inamoramento de Orlando (1483-1521)* (Vecchiarelli, 2018), *Il poema che cammina. La letteratura cavalleresca nell'opera dei pupi* (Edizioni Pasqualino, 2019) e *Stile d'autore. Forme e funzioni del Mambriano* (Viella, 2021).

JO ANN CAVALLO

Jo Ann Cavallo (PhD, Yale, 1987), Professor of Italian and Chair of the Italian Department at Columbia University, has published widely on Italian Renaissance chivalric epics and their performance traditions, especially Sicilian Opera dei Pupi and the epic Maggio of the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines. Her two latest books, *The World beyond Europe in the Romance Epics of Boiardo and Ariosto* (winner of a Modern Language Association Publication Award) and *The Sicilian Puppet Theater of Agrippino Manteo (1884-1947): The Paladins of France in America* (winner of a UNIMA-USA Nancy Staub Award), were translated into Italian, published by Bruno Mondadori and forthcoming with Edizioni Pasqualino, respectively. Among her edited volumes are *Teaching World Epics* and *Teaching the Italian Renaissance Romance Epic*. She created the websites *eBOIARDO* (<<https://edblogs.columbia.edu/eboiardo>>) and *World Epics* (<<https://edblogs.columbia.edu/worldpics>>) and edits the book series “Anthem World Epic and Romance”.

MATTHEW COHEN

Matthew Isaac Cohen is a professor in the Department of Dramatic Arts at the University of Connecticut. His current research concerns the visual history of puppetry in Indonesia with attention to the Dr. Walter Angst and Sir Henry Angst Collection of Indonesian Puppets at Yale University Art Gallery. He also performs on occasion as a *dhalang*.

KATHY FOLEY

Kathy Foley is a Research Professor and Distinguished Professor Emerita of Theatre at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and was editor of «Asian Theatre Journal» from 2005-2018. Her research has been supported by East-West Center, Fulbright, Asian Cultural Council, Institute of Sacred Music (Yale), and UCSC Arts Research Institute and Committee on Research.

YASSAMAN KHAJEHI

Yassaman Khajehi is a lecturer in theatre studies at the University of Clermont Auvergne. Her research interests include socio-political theatres in the Middle East, circulations between ancient theatre and Middle Eastern theatre in its ancient and/or contemporary form, the question of research-creation, the interaction between theory and practice in teaching and mediation through performance. She is the author of *La marionnette iranienne ou Les pouvoirs d'un objet hybride* (Classiques Garnier, 2020) and co-author of *Greek Tragedy and the Middle East: Chasing the Myth* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024).

YANNA KOR

Yanna Kor, Doktor in performing arts, is a specialist of Alfred Jarry and French puppet theatre of the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. In 2022-2023 she was a postdoctoral fellow at the RiRRA 21 laboratory, ERC project PuppetsPlays (Université Paul-Valéry, Montpellier 3). Currently, she is an associate researcher at the CEAC laboratory, research programme Lumière de spectacle (Université de Lille). She is currently working on lighting in 19th century French puppet theatre and on travelling puppet theatres in France, 1850-1950. Her dissertation, *Les Théâtres d'Alfred Jarry: l'invention de la scène "pataphysique"*, was published by editions Otrante in 2022.

FLORA MELE

Flora Mele est Docteure en Littérature française de Sorbonne Université et chercheuse associée au CELLF UMR 8599. Elle est spécialiste des Favart, sur lesquels elle a soutenu une thèse à label européen qui a été publiée sous le titre *Le Théâtre de Charles-Simon Favart, histoire et inventaire des manuscrits* (Champion, 2010). Elle a écrit une vingtaine d'articles sur les Favart et a édité le premier tome de *Théâtre de la Foire et Théâtre italien complets* de Barthélémy-Christophe Fagan (Classiques Garnier, 2020).

ALESSANDRO NAPOLI

Alessandro Napoli, nato a Palermo nel 1967, insegna Lettere nei licei. Fin da bambino ha seguito la Marionettistica dei Fratelli Napoli. Sulla base degli insegnamenti di Antonio Pasqualino e degli orientamenti metodologici della scuola antropologica palermitana, ha continuato ad approfondire lo studio scientifico dell'*Opira* catanese pubblicando diversi saggi. Ricordiamo *Il racconto e i colori* (2002), *Immaginare Ariosto in Sicilia* (2009) e *La guerra... io dico la guerra. Metafore belliche nei cartelli della Marionettistica dei fratelli Napoli* (2015). Insieme a John McCormick e Alfonso Cipolla ha curato il volume *The Italian Puppet Theater. A History* (2010). Recentemente ha curato il volume *Rerum Palatinorum Fragmenta*, che raccoglie, riordina e completa gli scritti incompiuti di Antonio Pasqualino sulle fonti narrative della *Storia dei Paladini di Francia* di Giusto Lodico. Oltre a lavorare in teatro coi fratelli Napoli, come coautore dei testi rappresentati, collabora sempre col Museo Internazionale delle Marionette Antonio Pasqualino di Palermo quale Conservatore e componente del Comitato scientifico.

CLAUDIA ORENSTEIN

Claudia Orenstein, Theatre Professor at Hunter College and the Graduate Center, CUNY, has spent nearly two decades writing on contemporary and traditional puppetry in the US and Asia. Recent publications include *Reading the Puppet Stage: Reflections on Dramaturgy and Performing Objects* and the co-edited volumes *Puppet and Spirit: Ritual Religion and Performing Objects* (in two volumes), *Women and Puppetry: Critical and Historical Investigations*, and *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance*. She is a Board Member of UNIMA-USA, Associate Editor of «Asian Theatre Journal», and Editor of the online journal «Puppetry International Research». She received a 2021-22 Fulbright Research Fellowship for research on ritual puppetry in Japan.

ELISABETH DEN OTTER

Elisabeth den Otter studied Cultural Anthropology in Leiden (1972-1979), and was curator of the Department of Ethnomusicology of the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam (1988-2003). In 1996, she curated a large exhibition of puppets from Asia and Africa. She has been doing research in Mali since 1990. Her website is <www.elisabethdenotter.nl>.

ELIZABETH OYLER

Elizabeth Oyler is Associate Professor of Japanese in the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures at the University of Pittsburgh. Her books and essays focus on the medieval war tale *Heike monogatari* and its adaptations in medieval and early modern narrative and theatre.

PAULA RICHMAN

Paula Richman is William H. Danforth Professor of South Asian Religions, Emerita, at Oberlin College, USA. She has edited and contributed to four volumes on the *Ramayana* tradition, including *Many Ramayanas* (1991), *Questioning Ramayanas, a South Asian Tradition* (2000), and *Ramayana Stories in Modern South India* (2008) and co-edited with Rustom Bharucha *Performing the Ramayana Tradition: Enactments, Interpretations, and Arguments* (2021). At present, she is completing a book on south Indian tellings of the *Ramayana*.

ANURUPA ROY

Anurupa Roy is a puppeteer, puppet theatre director, and puppet designer. She is the Founder and Managing Trustee of The Katkatha Puppet Arts Trust, a puppet theatre group based in Delhi, India, since 1998. She has received the Ustad Bismilla Khan Yuva

Puraskar award (2007) as well as several fellowships in Europe and the US. She is currently the trustee of UNIMA India, the Indian chapter of the Union Internationale de la Marionette, and a part of the UNIMA International training commission.