



Il racconto e i colori: "storie" e "cartelli" dell'Opera dei Pupi catanese by Alessandro Napoli

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Alessandro Napoli. *Il racconto e i colori: "storie" e "cartelli" dell'Opera dei Pupi catanese*. Palermo: Sellerio, 2002.

As the subtitle indicates, this volume explores two aspects of puppet theater in Catania: the illustrated *cartelli* that regularly announced puppet performances and the *storie* that comprised the episodes dramatized on stage. Yet the specificity of the title perhaps understates the breadth and scope of this study. The sources of the puppeteers' *storie*, after all, range from classical epic poems to medieval and Renaissance romance epics, encompassing as well various continuations and rewritings in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Taking us through literary traditions spanning several centuries, Napoli examines how these narratives are translated into pictorial and dramatic form.

The author of this volume is in the auspicious position of knowing the Sicilian puppet tradition as both a practitioner and a scholar: a member of one of the most illustrious families of puppeteers still practicing their art today, Alessandro Napoli pursued the study of literature and anthropology at the University of Palermo. His double perspective as participant and historian/critic/anthropologist makes this first extensive study of Catanese puppet theater an invaluable complement to the studies of Antonio Pasqualino for the Palermo tradition.

The first half of the book is dedicated to the *cartelli*, painted scenes serving as publicity posters for the individual puppet shows. Napoli addresses the function of these *cartelli*, the pictorial techniques, the process of selection and elaboration of the probable source materials, as well as the criteria for choosing particular episodes to illustrate and the corresponding compositional choices. He bases his analysis primarily on two extensive collections of *cartelli*, that of the Marionettistica dei fratelli Napoli, and that of Antonio Pasqualino conserved at Palermo's Museo Internazionale delle Marionette. This section is historical as well as analytic in nature: Napoli identifies the characteristics of artistic "schools" and individual artists, providing a profile whenever possible.

Abundant illustrations accompany the discussion of how *cartelli* painters refashioned the print engravings in nineteenth century chivalric narratives. Along with fifty-five illustrations directly relevant to Napoli's discussion of pictorial technique, there is an appendix containing 111 additional illustrations of *cartelli* that are, like the previous ones, printed in color and identified by the name of the author, the cycle, the specific episode, and the date of composition when known. This written and visual information allows for a picture to emerge, for the first time in a systematic way, not only of an essential component of puppet theater, but also of an important tradition of popular Sicilian art.

The second half of the book is devoted instead to the stories that comprise the epic repertory of the Catanese Opera dei Pupi. While much of the epic material was common to both traditions, Napoli conducted extensive interviews with puppeteers in order to identify a series of stories/cycles that were native to the Catanese tradition and scarcely known in Palermo. Napoli gives briefer notice for the stories that were dramatized throughout Sicily, since these were treated at length in Pasqualino's publications on Palermo puppet theater, and he devotes greater space to the stories/cycles that were particular to Eastern Sicily.

As he outlines the complex history of the written sources, Napoli draws attention to rewritings and continuations in popular Sicilian editions that are little known outside the puppet tradition, thus making this volume of interest to anyone seeking to follow the development of chivalric literature in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He notes, for example, that the *Storia dei Paladini di Francia* (Giusto Lo Dico's 1858–60 prose version of the romance epics of Pulci, Boiardo, Ariosto, Tasso, and others) gave rise to various sequels in the late Ottocento. The only continuation that successfully passed into the puppet tradition, however, was the *Storia di Guido Santo*, featuring the son of Ruggiero and Bradamante. Further sequels by Giuseppe Leggio eventually led to a prose version of the *Gerusalemme liberata* (1904) that included an account of the marriage of Rinaldo to Armida, and Tancredi to Erminia, as well as the adventures of a new *donna guerriera*, Goffredo's sister Ester (207). This *Gerusalemme liberata* cycle was performed for the last time in 1970, by the Marionettista dei fratelli Napoli di Catania, in Paternò (309).

In addition to providing a useful summary of the stories, Napoli examines the ways in which the various narrative elements were combined in these stories. Directing his attention to the choice of particular stories/cycles on the part of the Catanese puppeteers, he argues that the puppeteers adapted the medieval stories of war and adventure that most expressed and confirmed the cultural models and value system shared by the Opera dei Pupi's public.

Napoli's study not only follows in the line of the late Prof. Antonio Pasqualino, whom he acknowledges in the preface, but also of the positivist critics of the late eighteenth century, most notably Pio Rajna, whose source studies of medieval and Renaissance chivalric texts are frequently cited. At the same time, Napoli is familiar with a range of more recent critical and anthropological approaches. Bakhtin, Propp, Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, Albert Bates Lord, and Umberto Eco are brought to bear when relevant to the argument.

In concluding, I cannot help but register a note of sadness that the days in which *pupari* performed over three hundred episodes of the *Storia dei paladini di Francia* during consecutive evenings throughout the year are now part of an irretrievable past. For over a century, puppet theater existed as a matter of fact throughout the island and was not the object of study, with the important exception of the Sicilian ethnographer Giuseppe Pitrè, who documented many forms of popular culture. By the time the puppet tradition became a serious object of scholarly research in the 1970s, the tradition had all but disappeared. Ironically, the movie camera, which played such a large role in the demise of puppet theater, did not capture any of the cycles of puppet theater on tape. The irretrievability of this form of popular theater makes this new study all the more valuable. Conducting extensive research on the literary background, including archival material and publications at the Museo Internazionale delle Marionette in Palermo, interviewing puppeteers, drawing on the stories, scripts, and *cartelli* of his own family, Alessandro Napoli has provided a window into a world to which we can no longer return.

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Grazia Deledda. *The Church of Solitude*. Trans. E. Ann Matter. Albany, NY: SUNY, 2002.

Sardinian novelist Grazia Deledda (1871–1936) was one of the most prolific writers of her time. Her numerous novels, set for the most part in the primitive world of her island, are concerned primarily with the spiritual conflicts that ensue from the transgression of ancestral laws and traditions. In *The Church of Solitude*, the narrative focuses yet again on the paradigm of sin, remorse and expiation, as breast cancer becomes the modern punishment for the violation of an archaic and primitive code.

In an "Afterword" to her translation, Matter profiles Grazia Deledda's life and achievements, stressing that she is the only female author ever to have been awarded the Nobel prize for literature (in 1926 — eight years before Pirandello) and pointing out that, in spite of her international fame, her contributions to literature have never been fully recognized. This lack of recognition can be attributed, says Matter, to the patriarchal atmosphere that pervaded Italian letters in the early twentieth century and, at least in part, to Deledda's reclusive personality. These opening remarks are followed by three sections, each one focusing on a specific argument: illness and silence, metaphors of illness, and redemption through solitude.

In the first section, *La chiesa della solitudine*, we learn that the novel is one of the author's last books, and that it received little critical attention, possibly because it "was overshadowed by the more lighthearted, posthumously published *Cosima*," and because it "was connected to the fact of its unmentionable subject: cancer" (158). Matter sees a resemblance between Maria Concezione, the female protagonist, and the writer, pointing out that when the novel was published in 1936, Deledda was dying of breast cancer. In the novel, the words "breast cancer," although strongly implied, are never spoken by Concezione, and