



The Italian Puppet Theater: A History by John McCormick; Alfonso Cipolla; Alessandro Napoli
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child, while her widowed father has chosen a noble husband for her, planning, at the same time, to make Lucinia his new queen. Lucinia asks permission to fight first as a woman warrior in the approaching battle. She is mortally wounded by Fulco, who does not recognize his son. King Cubo, rushing to Lucinia's aid, is killed. Celinda does not heed Autilio's and his remorseful father's pleas to become queen of the two kingdoms, and stabs herself over the lifeless body of Autilio.

While the play evidences the usual weakness of its Italian genre—all actions, as well as past events, only narrated on stage in long speeches, thus lacking vivid dialogues exchanged between the characters—it nevertheless remains remarkable for the themes and structures used by Miani. First of all the prologue is pronounced by the ghost of Eusina, who, scorned by Autilio, killed herself, and now invokes vengeance and predicts doom, setting the main themes of the tragedy—vengeance, bereavement and retribution. Thus Act I starts out with a long soliloquy by Lucinia (Autilio), in which he laments his hopeless situation—he is tormented in his dreams by the fury of Eusina, does not dare to reveal his identity for fear of losing Celinda, but feels obliged to show to her his manly valor by protecting her father in battle, even while sensing only approaching death. This gloomy atmosphere is reinforced by Celinda who invokes death, the only means that will liberate her from her hopeless situation and punish her for her secret transgression. Such concentrated desire for death from the very beginning of the play (later typical of Alfieri's tragedies) ends with a double burial of the lovers in one tomb. The cross-dressing technique, common in comedies, is developed by Miani to an extreme point. Autilio, as a slave woman, serves Celinda but never takes any sexual initiatives; rather, it is Celinda who acts. The additional intrigue of King Cubo's love for Lucinia creates new obstacles and lays bare an old man's infatuation with a young, unknown slave girl, that cannot end well, as the courtiers fear. The use of choruses serves as a moral comment on the tragic, destructive results of love and war.

The tragedy *Celinda* is open to many interpretations and deserves to be read with Finucci's well-researched "Introduction." The translation by Julia Kisacky does not try to recreate the verse in English, but faithfully renders the meaning of the original text, with a poetic rhythm and alliteration where possible, which will help to expand the play's readership to those unfamiliar with Italian.

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John McCormick, with Alfonso Cipolla and Alessandro Napoli. *The Italian Puppet Theater: A History*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2010.

McCormick opens this clearly written and engaging book—the first full-length study of Italian puppet theater available in English—by acknowledging his debt to previous scholars of Italian puppet theater (1–3). Yet the author has not simply provided an English-language version of these prior works, but has undertaken a comprehensive history of Italian puppetry with due attention to the varying socio-cultural context. Indeed, to my knowledge this kind of all-inclusive treatment is lacking even in Italian language studies. McCormick's focus is not restricted to *l'opera dei pupi*, the famous Sicilian rod marionettes that staged largely chivalric narratives, but investigates all forms of puppet theater, presenting material from comic to melodramatic, in all regions of Italy, from the Renaissance to the present day. The breadth of his study is remarkable, allowing the reader to sense the pervasiveness, diversity, and power of an art form that today is all but forgotten. The research, astonishing in its thoroughness, brings to the attention of scholars largely unknown archives across Italy replete with scripts and other materials dating from various centuries. McCormick is, in fact, uniquely positioned to write this study from the point of view of both a practicing puppeteer and a university

lecturer whose previous meticulously researched volumes, *Popular Puppet Theater in Europe, 1800–1914*, co-authored with Bennie Pratasick (Cambridge UP, 1998), and *The Victorian Marionette Theatre*, with Clodagh McCormick and John Phillips (U of Iowa P, 2004), explore puppetry throughout Europe and in Victorian England.

The initial chapter focusing on the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries is brief not for the paucity of puppetry, since “passing references reveal much puppet activity in the sixteenth century” (9), but for lack of documentation. Subsequent chapters focus on the golden age of glove-puppets, marionettes, and *pupi*; the *commedia dell’arte* and the puppet stage; saints, paladins, and bandits; the creation of new repertoires; music and spectacle, as well as the changing situation in the twentieth century up to the present, with brief accounts of puppet companies currently active. His conclusion is upbeat, noting the stimulus for greater creative expression provided by festivals, international exchanges, and puppet schools in recent decades: “After 200 years of being classified as a minor distraction, today puppets have re-emerged unashamedly as a significant element of theater and it has been realized that the puppet can sometimes make a stronger impact than the live actor on the imagination of the audience” (214).

For specifically *l’opera dei pupi*, until now English-language readers not persistent enough to track down rare scholarly essays on the topic might have only found the chapter in Bil Baird’s *Art of the Puppet* (1973) entitled “*Orlando Furioso*: The Flower of Chivalry.” Baird’s misconception that the subject matter of Italian puppetry was derived exclusively from Ariosto’s epic poem is echoed by most American newspaper and magazine articles that have since mentioned the subject. Even readers who might have chanced upon references to Sicilian puppet theater in Festing Jones’s *Diversions in Sicily* (1929) would have found only a slightly expanded list that also contained the poems of Pulci, Boiardo, and Tasso. Yet as Giuseppe Pitré discussed in the late nineteenth century and Antonio Pasqualino further elaborated in the second half of the twentieth, the chivalric matter in Italian puppetry is based on a full range of medieval and Renaissance works that in 1858–1860 were rendered into a 3000 page prose version by the Sicilian Giusto Lo Dico, as well as on sequels to Lo Dico’s compilation and original chivalric novels. As a result, the narrative cycle in its entirety could extend from the Trojan War, through the late Roman Empire, across the era of Charlemagne, and into the period of the Crusades. Relying primarily on Pitré and Pasqualino, McCormick acknowledges Lo Dico’s crucial role, although perhaps going too far in the direction of oral tradition by stating simply that Lo Dico “assembled material that was being transmitted by public story-tellers” (120) rather than specifying the precise literary sources that he followed. The author also comments rather vaguely that Lo Dico’s “version subscribes heavily to popular superstition, especially in the more miraculous or magic elements of the story” (120), without providing examples for comparison or acknowledging that fantastic features already imbued the original episodes that Lo Dico was paraphrasing. Nevertheless, this work is by far the most accurate and comprehensive account of *l’opera dei pupi* available in English.

Given that the popular performance of chivalric narrative was so widespread and enduring, as McCormick eloquently shows through a wealth of examples, his occasional generalizations seem to beg questions more than provide answers. I shall mention two presuppositions that I found unconvincing, not because a more persuasive hypothesis has been posited elsewhere, but rather because they concern core issues that invite further study. The first is the assumption of a North-South divide based on the presence of humor in some late nineteenth-century northern Italian Carolingian puppet plays: “The shift towards the comic suggests that audiences in the north now regarded the heroic material as a bit old-fashioned and something that invited parody. [. . .] Unlike Sicily, there would have been little danger here of audiences believing in the reality of the characters and what they stood for” (116). If this were the case, however, how could we account for the fact that during this period audiences throughout the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines in northern Italy were assiduously following the same stories performed as

epic *Maggi*, a form of folk opera that to this day takes heroic material very seriously? Likewise in need of qualification is the suggestion that “the fire of Sicilian nationalism” during the period of Unification influenced the development of puppet theater: “For about 40 years after unification, the popular imagination, through the puppet theaters, returned to a sort of feudal tribalism and natural justice was a recurrent theme” (120). Yet these factors and themes are not particular to Sicilian *opera dei pupi* of this period, but are present as far back as the original medieval and Renaissance poems upon which the plays are based. Moreover, distinctive characteristics of *l’opera dei pupi* predate Unification and extend beyond Sicily: the elaboration of puppet armor is said to have occurred in the early part of the nineteenth century, for example, and the same source narratives incorporated into Lo Dico’s prose compilation of 1858–60 were already used in performances on the peninsula as well as Sicily earlier in the century.

The penultimate chapter, by Alfonso Cipolla, covers the puppet theater companies of the Lupi in Turin, while the final chapter by Alessandro Napoli focuses on his family’s company in Catania. Napoli opens the chapter analyzing the Catanese puppet tradition according to the grammar of staging used by Pasqualino and Janne Vibæk, i.e., eight separate but overlapping codes dealing with language, vocal quality, noises and inarticulate vocal sounds, music, lighting, movement and gesture, characters, and places. Ever conscious of the cultural and social function of the *opera*, he describes the habitual spectators as “a culturally homogenous group united by attending it and by their consciousness of sharing the stories as an important form of collective knowledge” (232). In the tradition’s heyday, therefore, the *puparo* was not just one of the group, but above it: “He was the artist, the sage, the intellectual and the repository of knowledge of social relevance” (233). Napoli goes on to explain the steps taken in order to adapt a traditional story, the *Guerin Meschino*, for contemporary audiences.

The volume is enhanced by a generous selection of illustrations, both black-and-white and in color, as well as an appendix with diagrams of eighteenth- to early twentieth-century rod marionettes, pupi, controls, and dancers (249–253). A particularly intriguing photograph shows the three faces of Alcina, as an attractive young maiden, threatening old hag, and fearsome skull, carved onto a rotating head, originally used in the Canino puppet theater and now housed at the Museo Internazionale delle Marionette Antonio Pasqualino (151).

In sum, this painstakingly researched volume is tightly packed with an abundance of information, yet structured in a way that makes it easy for individual readers to access areas of particular interest to them. The kind of perspective it affords—situating puppetry in a socio-cultural context—serves as a reminder that puppet theater, the privileged art of the subordinate classes, merits greater attention in the general field of cultural studies.

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Roberto Ludovico. *“Una farfalla chiamata Solaria” tra l’Europa e il romanzo*. Pesaro: Metauro Edizioni, 2010.

Solaria fu fondata nel 1926 da Alberto Carocci ed ebbe come condirettori, in tempi differenti, Giansiro Ferrata e Alessandro Bonsanti. All’interno della rivista coesistevano due gruppi: quello dei rondisti, come Riccardo Bacchelli e Antonio Baldini che, insieme agli stilisti lirici più giovani come Bonaventura Tecchi, Arturo Loria, Alessandro Bonsanti, era convinto di poter realizzare una civiltà letteraria autonoma al di fuori dei compromessi politici; ed il gruppo solariano del quale facevano parte, tra gli altri, Eugenio Montale, Leone Ginzburg, Aldo Garosci, Guglielmo Alberti e Giacomo Debenedetti, i quali riprendendo lo spirito intransigente di Gobetti, dichiaravano un diverso impegno